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Takahiro Sato
University of Tennessee - Knoxville, tsato@utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Takahiro Sato entitled "Kenshi's Experiences of Kendo: A Phenomenological Investigation." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Kinesiology and Sport Studies.

Craig A. Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Leslee A. Fisher, Joel F. Diambra, Noriko J. Horiguchi

Accepted for the Council:
Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

KENSHI’S EXPERIENCES OF KENDO: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Takahiro Sato
May 2011

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my wife, Miyako. Her optimistic and hopeful attitudes always encouraged and motivated me through the most difficult days. I also want to give many thanks to my daughter, Azusa. Her tremendous passion and dedication to achieve her goals inspired me a lot. Both of you are a source of motivation, energy, and joy in my life. I also would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad, who have always supported my dreams and believed in my success.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to extend existing literature on the martial arts by examining the experience of kendo (Japanese fencing) participants. In-depth, existential phenomenological interviews were conducted with nine (eight males and one female) currently competitive kendo practitioners (i.e., kenshi), ranging in age from 19 to 40 years. All participants were of Japanese descent but resided in the United States at the time of the interviews. Thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed several prominent aspects of the lives and performance experiences of kenshi. The most important finding was the relatively equal emphasis participants placed on the mastery of kendo technique, aesthetically elegant skill execution, and victory in competition. Other aspects of kenshi's experience included the building of strong relationships with influential *sensei* (i.e., instructors), the display of proper manners and etiquette, and the learning of life lessons.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Kendo is a Japanese martial art characterized by the use of *shinai* (i.e., bamboo sword) and classified as a *budo*. The term budo is written as 武道 in Japanese. The first character 武, that is pronounced *bu,* means military force or strategy. The character is etymologically depicted as fiercely charging forward on foot with a weapon (All Japan Kendo Federation, 2003). The second character, 道, is pronounced *dō* and can be interpreted in several ways. Most simply, the origin of the word depicts heading in a direction (Bittmann, 2002), and signifies a path or a way for pedestrians or traffic, although the character is often pronounced *michi* in the latter case. When pronounced *dō*, the connotation becomes profound. The character connotes a direction for trainees to pursue physically, technically, or mentally (Bittmann, 2002). The character also indicates a way of cultivating humanity through self-discipline (Okubo, Bittmann, & Hisamitsu, 1993) or a principle that is applicable to standards of daily life (Shishida, 2008; Tomiki, 1991). The term kendo, written 剣道 in Japanese, literally means the way of a sword. The philosophy of dō can be seen in various Japanese traditional arts and other budo such as *ka-dō* (i.e., flower arrangement), *sa-dō* (i.e., tea ceremony), *sho-dō* (i.e., calligraphy), *ju-dō*, or *karate-dō.* In each case, the formation of character is the ultimate goal while the individual is pursuing technical, physical, and psychological excellence in a particular discipline.

A *kenshi*'s (i.e., kendo practitioner) behavior demonstrates kendo's multi-faceted features as seen in the following description. When entering and exiting the *dojo* (i.e., the site of kendo training), a kenshi bows. A kenshi solemnly dons their *bogu* (i.e., gear) in the *seiza* position (i.e., sitting on one's heels with one's back straight) and, at the beginning and end of practice,

becomes absorbed in *mokuso* (i.e., composing mind and spirit while calming down the breath). A kenshi assumes *sonkyo* (i.e., squatting position with the knees opened outward) to show the opponent courtesy when a bout begins. Once a bout commences, the kenshi fights full blast and intensely crosses the shinai against the opponent while demonstrating a vigorous spirit. To dominate a bout kenshi must demonstrate optimal performance in a rapid fashion, with minimal thinking or decision-making. It is said that experienced kenshi complete a striking motion in as fast as 300-400 milliseconds (Okumura & Yoshida, 2007). After each bout of fierce fighting, kenshi calmly assume sonkyo again. In addition to engaging in vigorous combat, kenshi devotedly pursue perfection in their movements and the aesthetics of various techniques. They learn *kata* (i.e., forms), which contain various techniques that have been passed down from ancient swordsmen (Bittmann, 2004). In recognition of their mastery of these techniques, appropriate manners, and cultivation of humanity, kenshi are awarded various ranks.

In essence kendo might best be defined as “a way” or vehicle for accomplishing various purposes. The All Japan Kendo Federation (AJKF) embraces the budo’s intent by stating: “The concept of Kendo is a way to discipline the human character through the application of the principles of the *Katana* [i.e., sword]” (AJKF, 2010). The AJKF also states that the purposes of kendo is:

> To mold the mind and body, to cultivate a vigorous spirit, and through correct and rigid training, to strive for improvement in the art of Kendo, to hold in esteem human courtesy and honor, to associate with the others with sincerity, and to forever pursue the cultivation of oneself. This will make one be able: to love his/her country and society, to contribute to the development of culture and to promote peace and prosperity among all

peoples.

In the past 30 years, this Japanese-born activity has grown in popularity all over the world. Currently, memberships in or affiliations with the International Kendo Federation (FIK) can be found in 50 nations and territories. This number is considerably up from the original 17 members in 1970 (FIK, 2010). As far as competitive events are concerned, the World Kendo Championship is currently held every three years and celebrated its 14th anniversary at 2009 event in Brazil. In Japan, a national tournament has been held annually for men since 1953 and for women since 1962. Kendo's competiveness is demonstrated by the fact that only eight male kenshi have won the national championship more than twice in the 57 year history of the tournament, and only Masahiro Miyazaki achieved back-to-back championships, which had been considered impossible, until he did it (Kendo Nippon, 2003).

As can be seen in the bout's intensity and the solemn, ceremonious behavior within the dojo, kendo is a unique physical activity replete with significant cultural factors. In the field of sport psychology increasing emphasis is being given to the need for sport psychology consultants to be culturally competent to order to work with athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds (Gill, 2007). Today athletes from a variety of cultures regularly compete in Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association, the Professional Golfers' Association Tour, and numerous NCAA collegiate sports. Thus, it is increasingly important for sporting world professionals (e.g., sport psychology consultants) to be aware of multicultural perspectives when working with athletes.

Parham (2005) proposed three premises for consultants providing sport psychology services. First, they must understand the context, particularly when working with culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse athletes. Being aware of the historical, social, political, economic,

environmental, and familial context of each athlete's sport experience is a necessary prerequisite for providing effective interventions. Second, consultants must understand that culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse people are not homogeneous. Rather, they should expect to find considerable variation within and between groups with respect to a variety of features, characteristics, and belief. Finally, they must appreciate the diversity of worldviews athletes from various people groups might possess. Cultural, ethnic, and racial worldviews of athletes from Asian countries often differ from those of athletes from Euro-American countries, which have traditionally represented the "mainstream" in Western psychology.

Kendo, though boasting a long history, has received relatively little attention among scholars in the field of sport psychology. Considering the growing popularity of the sport, the intensity of competition, and the difficulty of mastering the various techniques, a greater understanding of the sport and particularly the experience of kenshi appears needed.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore kenshi's experiences of kendo. In order to accomplish this purpose, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted with experienced kenshi. The interviews were then qualitatively analyzed in order to identify the major and supporting themes of participants' experience.

Significance

Exploring kenshi's experiences of kendo should provide sport psychology scholars and practitioners with a better understanding of what participants accomplish, encounter, and pursue during their kendo participation. The results should also be informative for sport psychology consultants with an interest in working with kenshi. Among other things the findings may help

consultants build rapport with kenshi and maximize the effectiveness of their psychological training interventions.

Assumptions

There were two key assumptions in this study. First, it was assumed that the participants would be able to recall and articulate their experiences in an accurate, honest, and open fashion. Second, it was assumed that the participants' experiences would transcend the practice of kendo at the dojo and include various issues in everyday life.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, although all participants spoke English, some were not native English speakers. Therefore, the extent to which they were able to articulate details of their experience might have been limited. Second, it is possible that some participants were not completely honest and/or accurate when recalling and discussing their kendo experiences. Third, it was virtually impossible to achieve the desired level of diversity of participants with regard to race and ethnicity, skill level, age, and gender.

Delimitations

There were three delimitations in the present study. First, the participants had to be highly accomplished and currently involved in kendo competition. All participants had qualified for U.S. nationals or achieved at least runner-up status in regional tournaments in the United States. Although Japan has dominated the team matches in the World Kendo Championship (WKC) since the tournament opened in 1970, the U.S. has won medals in seven of the 14 championships that have been held, including one bronze and two silver medals at the last three Championships (FIK, 2010). Second, the participants in this study were all of Japanese descent (e.g., native Japanese who moved to the U.S., Japanese-American) but resided in the United States. Third, all

participants were native English speakers or could speak English at a level of fluency that satisfied the standards of phenomenological research.

Terminology

Since kendo terminology originated in the Japanese language, literal English translation can sometimes be difficult. With that in mind, the following list of terms with English interpretations were derived from the Japanese-English Dictionary of Kendo (AJKF, 2000).

Ashi-sabaki: Footwork.

Bogu: Equipment and gear.

Budo: Martial arts.

Debana-waza: A technique executed at the moment when the opponent is about to strike.

Dō: (1) One of the pieces of kendo gear that covers the chest and stomach areas, (2) one of the striking zones, the ribs (usually the opponent's right side), (3) the particular kendo technique of striking the opponent's ribs.

Dojo: The site of training for kendo.

Dougi: A top garment that is worn by kenshi when doing kendo.

Gyaku-dō: Hitting or striking the opposite dō (i.e., ribs).

Hasuji: The direction of the line connecting the edge of a sword and the back of a sword.

Hiki-waza: A technique executed while retreating in a situation where one is very close to the opponent.

Ippon: Making a valid point (i.e., strike).

Kaeshi-dō: Parrying the opponent's shinai with one's shinai and counterattacking the opponent's dō (i.e., ribs).

Kaeshi-men: Parrying the opponent's sword and counterattacking the opponent's *men* (i.e., head).

Kamae: Initial posture and stance.

Kangeiko: Training during the cold time of the year.

Kata: Form.

Katana: Sword(s).

Kendoka: Kendo practitioner(s).

Kensen: The tip of the sword.

Kenshi: Kendo practitioner(s).

Kiai: A state of mind that is fully focused and energized.

Kihon: Basics.

Ki-ken-tai-icchi: Three elements, spirit (i.e., ki), sword (i.e., ken), and body (i.e., tai) functioning together to produce a valid strike.

Ko-ken-chi-ai: To achieve mutual understanding and betterment of humanity through crossing swords.

Kote: (1) One piece of kendo gear that covers the hands and forearms, like gloves, (2) one of the striking zones, hands or forearms (usually right hand or forearm), (3) the particular technique of striking the opponent's hand or forearm.

Kote-men: Sequential striking of the opponent's kote (i.e., arm) and then *men* (i.e., head).

Men: (1) One piece of kendo gear that covers the head, like a helmet, (2) one of the striking zones, the top of head, (3) the technique of striking the opponent's head.

Mokuso: The act of composing one's mind and spirit while calming down the breath in the seiza position.

Motodachi: The one who takes the role of instructor when a trainee is practicing.

Nihonto: Japanese sword(s).

Oji-waza: Parrying the opponent's strike and immediately counterattacking the opponent.

Rei: (1) Courtesy, (2) bowing.

Reigi: Courtesy.

Reiho: Courtesy.

Samurai: Ancient Japanese warrior(s).

Seiza: To sit on one's heels with one's shins on the floor and back straight.

Seme: Putting the opponent off balance mentally and physically in order to prevent him/her from moving freely. There are various approaches for accomplishing seme.

Sensei: Instructor(s).

Shiai: A match.

Shiai-jo: The site of a tournament.

Shinai: Bamboo sword(s).

Shinsa: Promotional examination.

Sonkyo: Squatting position with the knees opened outward, holding the shinai around the bellybutton, and the upper body upright.

Taikai: Tournament(s).

Tai-sabaki: Body position and movements.

Tanden: The lower abdominal region below the navel.

Tare: One piece of kendo gear that covers the lower abdominal area and the thigh, like a skirt.

Tsuba : A sword guard inserted between the hilt and blade region.

Tsuka: The hilt of a sword.

Tsuki: (1) One of the striking/thrusting zones, the throat, (2) the technique of thrusting towards the opponent's throat.

Waza: Technique(s).

Yuko-datotsu: Making a valid strike.

Zanshin: Showing a body posture and state of mind after striking that demonstrates that one is alert and ready to respond instantly to any counterattacks.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The field of sport psychology has grown rapidly over the past four decades and research in the area has addressed a wide variety of topics. Recently, scholars have devoted more attention to promoting diversity in the field and shedding light on historically unrepresented areas. The Japanese martial art of kendo has to date received little attention and the experience of participants is virtually unknown. While kendo may be considered a sport from a Western perspective, practitioners in Japan prefer to use the term "budo" (i.e., martial art) to characterize the activity and show respect for its cultural heritage. The purpose of this review is to analyze existing research and scholarship associated with kendo and with the primary research question in the present study; "What is the kendo experience like?" To accomplish this purpose, literature dealing with three major topics is reviewed: a brief overview of kendo, combat sports, and culture and sports.

A Brief Overview of Kendo

In this section, a *brief history of kendo* is provided followed by discussions of *kendo in competition,* the *unique cultural aspects of kendo, and kendo in the sport psychology literature*.

A brief history of kendo. Just as society's social structure, social relations, and belief systems have influenced the development of Western sports (Coakley, 2004), kendo is a product of socio-cultural construction based on the politics, values, and religions in Japan.

It is said that *nihonto* (i.e., Japanese sword), which preceded *shinai* (i.e., bamboo sword), emerged around the late 10th century. The prevalence of nihonto on the battlefield gradually increased until the beginning of the 17th century (AJKF, 2003). During the Sengoku Era between the 15th and 16th centuries, considerable efforts were made to develop the most effective

techniques for using a sword on the battlefield. Battlefield sword-fighting techniques were then transferred to organized schools of swordsmanship. At that time, known as the Edo Era (1603-1867), the concepts and discipline that influence much of today's kendo were established. Although kendo continued to be used in a militaristic manner during World War II, the emphasis after that began to shift toward kendo as a sport (e.g., rules, organization, tournament) and it gradually became the activity that is popular throughout the world today.

The three major transitional periods in the history of kendo are roughly classified as: use of swords for battle, establishment of swordsmanship, and integration of sporting components. Although it is not easy to pinpoint exactly when kendo actually emerged in Japan, the origin of kendo seems to have coincided with the invention of *nihonto* (i.e., Japanese sword) (AJKF, 2003). The emergence of territories in Japan necessitated that landowners manage and protect their own lands, which caused an accelerated use of arms. Around the middle of the 10th century armed landowners and warriors who quelled rebellions became recognized as *samurai* (i.e., ancient warriors). The word samurai originated from the verb *saburau*, which means, "to serve" (Imamura & Nakazawa, 1992). While Japan fell into disorder and chaos during the Sengoku Era, the people seemed to support any battles that promoted the establishment of various military strategies and techniques.

When social unrest calmed under the Tokugawa shogunate, culture and arts began to emerge and continue to influence Japanese society to the present day. Although civil war was over and peace predominated, samurai that represented approximately 6 percent of the population at that time (Allinson, 1975; Ikegami, 1995; Perez, 2009) still wore swords. However, the sword-fighting techniques they had used in actual battle were eventually transformed into the techniques of swordsmanship found in modern kendo (AJKF, 2003). The emphasis of

swordsmanship gradually shifted from external to internal achievement and from self-protection to self-perfection (AJKF, 2003; Hurst, 1998). Religious precepts and the Eastern philosophies of Buddhism, Zen, Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism also contributed their influence to swordsmanship and were reflected in an emphasis on the additional purposes of moral development, character cultivation, acquisition of the appropriate mindset for training, and mental toughness (AJKF, 2003). Such values continue to be an integral component of the discipline, mindset, and rituals of modern day kendo.

The final major transition occurred after World War II. The post-war Ministry of Education, under the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, issued orders forbidding the teaching of kendo and judo since these budo were considered associated with earlier Japanese militarism (AJKF, 2003). However, kendo enthusiasts continued to practice sword fighting techniques in secret and created the term *shinai kyogi* (i.e., bamboo sword competition) (AJKF, 2003). In these competitions, practitioners no longer emphasized the warring aspects of kendo but rather stressed the sporting aspects. They also introduced athletic rules and norms (e.g., illegal actions, win-loss, and refereeing). Shinai kyogi became popular nationwide and produced a renewed enthusiasm for kendo. A hybrid combination of shinai kyogi and kendo was eventually reinstated to modern kendo and accomplish its popularization such as becoming a part of the regular curriculum of middle and high schools. In 1952, a formal governing body for the budo, the All Japan Kendo Federation, was established and today it operates on an international level (AJKF, 2003; Hurst, 1998).

Kendo in competition. Once a kendo match begins, two kenshi face each other as opponents with *shinai* (i.e., sword made up of four pieces of bamboo) and wear *bogu* (i.e., equipment and gear) to protect various body parts, including *men*, *kote*, *dō*, and *tare*. The *men* is

a head guard consisting of a metal face protector that is tied at the back of the head with cords. Kote are leather-covered gloves designed to protect the wrist, hand, and forearm. The dō is a piece of equipment that covers the chest and stomach areas. The tare is worn to protect the hips and waist. A kendo match usually lasts five minutes (AJKF, 2010) and the first competitor to score two points wins the match. However, if the time limit is reached and only one kenshi has scored one point, he or she is declared the winner. In the case of a tie, there are several options. One option, which is the most common, is to conduct an overtime session, with the first kenshi to score a point being declared the winner. Alternatively, the referees may make the decision based on the respective skills demonstrated by the two kenshi, or, if a clear decision can not be made based on this criterion, the match can be decided based on the competitors' attitude or conduct. There are three referees (i.e., a chief and two sub-referees) in a kendo match that, together, determine whether a kenshi makes *yuko-datotsu* (i.e., valid strike). When they see a yuko-datotsu, the referees award the kenshi *ippon* (i.e., valid point). According to the rules of kendo (AJKF, 2000), a yuko-datotsu is considered to be executed when the following conditions are met: the kenshi shows full spirit in both body and mind, displays appropriate posture (e.g., stable), and strikes the opponent in a striking zone (i.e., striking an opponent's *men*, kote, or dō or thrusting at the throat). In addition, the kenshi should use the cutting line during the strike, meaning that the direction of swinging the shinai and the direction of the line connecting the edge and back of the sword are the same. Finally, the kenshi has to demonstrate *zanshin*. Zanshin is the appropriate body posture and state of mind that shows the kenshi is ready to react instantly to any possible counterattack by the opponent following a strike (AJKF, 2000). The term *ki-ken-tai-icchi* (i.e., 気剣体一致) means that all three elements spirit (i.e., ki, 気), sword (i.e. ken, 剣),

and body movements (i.e., tai, 体) harmonize and function together at the same time and represents fulfillment of the requirements for yuko-datotsu.

Unique cultural aspects of kendo. Every sport has its own culture and kendo is no exception. In this section three representative and unique cultural aspects of kendo are discussed: *Dojo*, *Manners and etiquette*, and *Rank*.

Dojo. Kendo's emphasis on self-improvement includes religious precepts that play an important role. As in other budo and traditional Japanese arts, the site for kendo training is called a *dojo*. The term "dojo" comes from the Sanskrit, *bodhi-manda,* which means "where Buddha attained enlightenment" (Kiyota, 1992). Thus, places for training came to be called dojo in Buddhism (AJKF, 2003). The word "dojo" consists of two Japanese characters called kanji: 道, dō (i.e., way or path of life), and 場, jō (i.e., site). Although the term "dojo" no longer refers to the site of enlightenment, kenshi still view the dojo as a sacred site for pursuing their goals. The dojo usually contains a *kamidana*, which is an altar dedicated to a Shinto deity, or a *butsudan*, which is a Buddhist altar. Kenshi and even *sensei* (i.e., kendo instructor) bow when entering and exiting the dojo (Hurst, 1998; Kiyota, 1995).

Manners and etiquette. As with other budo and Japanese traditional arts, kendo begins and ends with *rei* (i.e., courtesy). Courtesy is also demonstrated in the ceremonial movement of crossing the shinai. Each practice session begins with a bow by the two participants while facing each other. They then take three steps toward the center of the court and assume *sonkyo*, which is a squatting position with the knees opened outward, holding the shinai around the bellybutton, and the upper body upright (AJKF, 2000). At the end of the practice session, both kenshi show sonkyo again at the center of the court. They then take five steps backward toward the edge of

the court and bow again. This same ritual procedure is also observed during a competitive match. *Rei* is rooted in one of the five tenets of Confucianism, propriety (Bittmann, 2006). Thus, showing courtesy (e.g., bow) should not only be a matter of formality but should also be accompanied by an internal, heartful expression (Bittmann, 2006). Kenshi show respect to their sensei, and sensei, in turn, show caring to their kenshi, as both agree to work together in order to foster each other's development. Although the opponent is considered a target to defeat in kendo competition, hitting the opponent without respect and manners is not done because it would degrade the budo to an act of simple brutal fighting. In addition, being struck by the opponent gives an opportunity to show appreciation because the opponent has identified something that needs to be improved in future practices (AJKF, 2010).

Rank. In addition to winning a match, a kenshi's success can be signified in another way. The AJKF certifies various levels of rank and title to kenshi that pass an examination consisting of a practical test, a written test, and/or *kata* (i.e., form) demonstration. According to the AJKF, rank indicates the kenshi's technical level, including mental elements, and is composed of a *dan* and *kyu* system. The levels of dan range from first-dan to eighth-dan (i.e., the higher the number the better), and the levels of kyu range from sixth-kyu to first-kyu (i.e., the lower the number the better) just below first-dan. Examiners grade the candidates in the lower rank promotion tests according to such aspects as appearance of uniform and equipment, propriety, posture, fundamental skills, and vigorous spirit. In higher rank promotion tests, candidates are expected to demonstrate mastery of basic skills, advanced techniques, mental control of the opponent, and efficiency and rationality in the use of techniques and body movement. It is extremely difficult to pass eighth-dan; only 19 out of 1,530 seventh-dan holders did so in 2010 (AJKF, 2010). A title indicates the level of a kenshi's achievement with respect to leadership and judgment. There are

three levels of titles, *renshi*, *kyoshi*, and *hanshi*. These titles are awarded to kenshi who have achieved sixth-dan, seventh-dan, and eighth-dan, respectively, and have also fulfilled the required levels of knowledge and experience. In the rank and title system, the eighth-dan kenshi with the hanshi title are considered the highest authority in the kendo world.

Kendo in the sport psychology literature. Although research on kendo is scarce in the field of sport psychology, some studies have been conducted on a variety of aspects of the activity, including kenshi's eye movements (Edo, Hoshikawa, Watanabe, & Ichinowatari, 1995), anticipation skills (Yagisawa, Hakamada, Shizawa, & Osada, 1996), peak performance (Arita, Muto, Tsuchiya, Nabeyama, Kouda, & Sato, 1998), and cognitive processes (Miki, Nishino, Muto, Tsuchiya, Sato, & Koda, 1998; Okumura, Nishida, Sato, Kohda, & Yoshida, 2001; Okumura, Tomori, Yoshida, & Kohda, 2005; Okumura & Yoshida, 2006; 2007; Tsuchiya, Miki, Nishino, & Sato, 1993). For example, in one study college-aged kenshi were found to visually focus more on the opponent's upper body than the lower body and the opponent's neck and shoulders more than the head, chest, and hands (Edo et al., 1995).

Most studies have compared higher skilled (e.g., starters on a college varsity kendo team) and lesser skilled (e.g., substitutes on the same team) kenshi and have, not surprisingly, shown the higher skilled to be the superior performers. The results of these studies have also shown that compared to lower skilled kenshi, higher skilled kenshi use more sources of information when rating an opponent (Tsuchiya et al., 1993); demonstrate greater accuracy when anticipating an opponent's striking motion (Yagisawa et al., 1996); possessed more plans for skill execution and display greater confidence in the techniques they use (Miki et al., 1998). Elite level kenshi (e.g., qualifiers at international tournament) and college kenshi have, however, reported similar psychological states during peak performance experiences, including being mentally relaxed,

focused on the present, and highly energized (Arita et al., 1998). Interestingly, elite kenshi did not consider confidence to be a trigger of peak performance, while college kenshi did.

Possible cognitive processes have also attracted the attention of researchers interested in kendo performance. These researchers have typically investigated the mental strategies (e.g., attentional focus) that distinguish higher skilled and lesser skilled kenshi. The results of these studies suggest that higher skilled kenshi process more information (Okumura et al., 2001; Okumura et al., 2005) and execute their skills more efficiently (Okumura et al., 2005) than their lesser skilled counterparts. Higher-level kenshi have also been found to execute their striking motions based on multiple sources of information, including their own physical movements (Okumura et al., 2001), their opponent's physical and psychological responses (Okumura et al., 2001; Okumura et al., 2005), and information derived from their past performance (Okumura et al., 2005). In contrast, lower-level kenshi are more likely to base their decision to strike simply on their own intentions (Okumura et al., 2001). In another study, the starters on a college kendo team demonstrated a more frequent and active use of skill knowledge during response selection (e.g., a series of offensive patterns with skill execution and strategic movements) compared to substitutes on the same team who were more passive in their use of information (Okumura & Yoshida, 2006; 2007). The starters also were more likely to anticipate the opponent's moves and lure the opponent, in order to make better response selection decisions. Substitutes on the other hand responded primarily on the basis of the opponent's movement. Taken together, the results of these studies suggest that higher skill kenshi use multiple sources of information in executing their own movements and in deceiving and delaying the opponent's movements compared to lower skill kenshi (Okumura & Yoshida, 2006; 2007).

Combat sports

Considering that a primary goal of kendo is to make a valid strike with a shinai on the opponent's body, it is appropriate to categorize kendo as a combat sport. While combat sports differ from each other in some aspects, they possess commonalities as well. Combat sports are physically and psychologically demanding in that combatants usually face each other within physical reach and engage in intense, direct physical contact, such as punching, kicking, holding, throwing, or tackling. Combatants also need to be able to adapt to ever-changing circumstances with tremendous speed. Given the demanding aspects of combat sports, sport psychology scholars have attempted to identify mental training interventions that might be useful for participants, determine participants' possible sources of motivation, and examine various aspects of participants' experiences of combat sports. In the following sections, research is examined that pertains to each of these themes.

Mental training interventions for combat sports. As mentioned earlier, combat sports including the martial arts share a variety of physical and psychological challenges. For example, competitors must maintain high levels of physical and mental intensity and, in some cases, adapt rapidly to constantly changing situations. Elite level kickboxers must cope with being hit and maintain emotional control in order to deal with fear, aggression, or anxiety (Davenport, 2006). Elite level *judoka* (i.e., judo practitioner) must deal with frequent mood changes from match to match during championship tournament competitions (Stevens, Lane, & Terry, 2006). In an attempt to assist participants in combat sports and the martial arts, sport psychology researchers have proposed psychological skills training for the martial arts in general (Anshel & Payne, 2006), as well as event-specific training for judo (Blumenstein, Lidor, & Tenenbaum, 2005), wrestling (Rushall, 2006), and boxing (Schinke & Ramsay, 2009).

Most systematic mental approaches include the development of a mental plan. A mental plan might involve breaking a performance bout into more manageable segments, with goal achievement being determined by the participant's total performance in all segments (Blumenstein et al., 2005; Rushall, 2006). A mental plan should also include any information or components that might contribute to performance success, such as watching video of an opponents' fights in order to determine the opponent's fighting style (Blumenstein et al., 2005; Schinke & Ramsay, 2009), or engaging in mental rehearsal of an entire bout (Schinke & Ramsay, 2009), an opponent's behavior (e.g., gamesmanship), and the possible reactions of the audience (Schinke & Ramsay, 2009). Mental plans should also include contingencies in case the original plan is disrupted by a loss of control or sudden distraction (Anshel & Payne, 2006; Rushall, 2006).

Most mental training interventions consist of a variety of psychological skills. For example, imagery might be used to rehearse precise skill execution, rapid adjustments, or decision-making during a bout (Anshel & Payne, 2006; Blumenstein et al., 2005). Imagery might also be used to rehearse a complex sequence of movements and a smooth transition from one movement to the next (Lajcik, 2008). This type of mental rehearsal might be repeated, focusing on rhythm and tempo, until the transitions finally become smooth. Once participants are able to execute their skills effectively in non-stressful circumstances, they might use imagery to see and feel themselves performing successfully under stressful situations. Relaxation techniques represent another category of psychological skill combat sport participants can use to gain emotional control (Anshel & Payne, 2006; Blumenstein et al., 2005; Rushall, 2006). Fighters might also learn avoidance coping or dissociation strategies, which are useful for managing physical pain or ignoring unfavorable events during a competition (Anshel & Payne, 2006).

Motivation and goal orientation in combat sports. Some previous research has been examined to determine the motivation and goal orientation of combat sport athletes (Gernigon & Bars, 2000; Jones, Mackay, & Peters, 2006; King & Williams, 1997; Kuan & Roy, 2007). Jones et al. (2006) examined the participation motivation of martial arts practitioners from local clubs in England. They included participants in a number of different martial arts, including tai chi, karate, kung fu, aikido, jeet kune do, British free fighting, taekwondo, and jujitsu. The four most important participation motivations identified were affiliation (e.g., liking the instructor), fitness (e.g., staying in good physical shape), skill development, and friendship. Interestingly, competition was found to be one of the least important motivational factors. Aspects of the instructors that contributed most to participation motivation were their teaching ability, communication style, and technical skills. The results also revealed that practitioners who trained more than four hours per week were more motivated by the philosophy of the martial arts than were those who practiced less than four hours.

A number of studies have examined the goal orientation of martial arts participants in different settings, particularly as it relates to psychological states and performance. In one study, college students in martial arts classes that focused on the mastery of technique instead of on competition were found to be significantly more mastery oriented than ego oriented. The results also indicated a positive relationship between a mastery orientation and both performance and enjoyment (King & Williams, 1997). More recent research on Malaysian Intervarsity Wushu Championship qualifiers revealed higher energy control for participants possessing a high task/moderate ego orientation than for those with a moderate task/low ego orientation or a moderate task/moderate ego orientation (Kuan & Roy, 2007). However, the results indicated that goal orientation did not predict performance outcomes.

Gernigon and Bars (2000) compared the goal orientation of martial arts participants from different age groups (i.e., children vs. adults), skill levels (i.e., beginners vs. experienced), and type of activity (i.e., judo vs. aikido). Although both judo and aikido emphasize mastery, judo is characterized by more intense competition and fighting than aikido. Gernigon and Bars found that while experienced *aikidoka* (i.e., aikido practitioner) were less ego-oriented than experienced judoka and beginning aikidoka, there was no significant difference in ego orientation between beginning level judoka and aikidoka. However, of particular interest was the finding that experienced level aikidoka were also less task oriented than beginning aikidoka. Taken together, these results suggest that an increased exposure to aikido may produce a diminished task as well as ego goal orientation in participants.

Phenomenological research in the martial arts. Columbus and Rice (1998) conducted phenomenological interviews with college students to examine their experiences in martial arts classes (i.e., karate, taekwondo, tai chi). The major themes identified in the participants' responses included reduced likelihood of criminal victimization, growth and discovery, life transition, and task performance. The participants felt they had gained a measure of safety and protection from victimization by learning martial arts techniques and that their experience provided them with an increased awareness of body and mind harmony, increased self-confidence, improved social support, and greater self-actualization. The participants also believed that they had obtained useful coping skills and a sense of control that would be helpful in adjusting to the difficulties of everyday life. Finally, they were confident that they could apply a number of the skills they had learned in the martial arts (e.g., centering, blocking out distractions) to other situations they encountered in daily life.

More recently, Lantz (2002) also conducted a phenomenological study to investigate the impact of participants' martial arts experiences on family and marriage life. The results obtained from their interviews revealed that martial arts training (i.e., karate, aikido, or taekwondo) holistically benefited participants' marital and family life. Specifically, they felt they had learned helpful self-defense techniques, gained physical vitality, improved themselves psychologically, deepened friendships with other club members, cultivated character, and deepened their respect for others and life as a result of their martial arts experiences. The participants also believed their instructors played a significant role in making their experiences so beneficial.

Culture and sports

Kendo has developed over the centuries in Japan under the influence of various socio-cultural components, including politics, militarism, religion, class, and popular culture. As is the case with athletes in other sports, kendo participants' cultural context might include such external factors as oppression, biases, power dynamics, moral and ethical standards, and social norms (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003; Fisher, Roper, & Butryn, 2008). Moreover, kenshi's cultural context would likely influence the way they view themselves, construct their identities, and perceive themselves from a variety of cultural and sub-cultural standpoints. In the following section two cultural themes relevant to an understanding of kenshi's experiences are briefly discussed. The themes are s*ocio-cultural constructions* and *characteristics and behavior of Asian populations*.

Socio-cultural constructions. Both culture and socio-cultural constructions are important aspects of the kendo experience. Therefore, it is important to provide basic definitions of c*ulture* as well as several influential socio-cultural constructions: *History*, *Race and ethnicity*, and *Religion*.

Culture. Culture has been broadly defined as the "shared values, beliefs, and practices of an identifiable group of people" (Gill, 2007, p. 823). Peters and Williams (2008) also added the concept of timeframe to their definition of culture by characterizing it as "a set of behaviors, attitudes, and traditions that are shared by a group of people and passed down from one generation to the next" (p. 13). From these definitions, culture might be expected to include race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical abilities, language, and religion (Day, 2008; Gill, 2007).

History. In addition to the forms, rules, and standards of sport that have evolved over time, there exists certain ways of surviving, expressing religious belief, or defending oneself in society that are considered a part of the origin of sports and/or other physical activities. Put another way, social structure, social relations, and belief systems of different societies have, over time, exerted an important influence on the development of sports and physical activities in all cultures (Coakley, 2004).

Race and ethnicity. Race is a category of identity based upon inherited physical characteristics and visible differences such as skin color. However, race is also a socially constructed phenomenon, establishing social expectation and prejudice and dictating how people act or are expected to act in accordance with their biological attributes (Day, 2008; Schinke, Hanrahan, & Catina, 2008).

Ethnicity or "ethnic group" is a more complex phenomenon to define than race, and many definitions have appeared in the field of anthropology and sociology. In some cases, blood superiority is considered an important component. Other scholars contend that "shared descent" (Keyes, 1976) and "kin selection under the principles of both biological nepotism and ethnocentrism" (van den Berghe 1978, 1981) are used to signify different ethnic groups.

Subjective components such as “self-perception” (DeVos, 1982) or “a sense of belonging” (McKay & Lewin, 1978) are also considered to be critical factors when defining an ethnic group. The subjective sense might include racial uniqueness, territoriality, economics, religion, aesthetic cultural patterns, and language (Hsieh, 1998). Gurr and Scarritt (1989) discuss ethnicity as a possible basic component of group identity, along with common historical experiences, religious beliefs, language, region of residence, and occupations.

Religion. Religion is another powerful influence on social constructions of meaning. Religion has been defined as “a socially shared set of beliefs and rituals focused on the ultimate concerns of human existence: birth, life, suffering, illness, tragedy, injustice, and death” (Coakley, 2004, p. 528). Life and death are particularly critical themes in religion and the ways people try to interpret and deal with those ultimate questions are often influenced by religion. In this sense, religion can reveal much about how people view the world and themselves within society (Coakley, 2004).

Characteristics and behavior of Asian populations. Cultural awareness and specific knowledge are prerequisites of cultural competency (Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002; Martens, Mobley, & Zizzi, 2000; Sue & Zane, 1987). Some scholars have characterized Japanese people as having a strong sense of pride and identity that entails a high expectation for conformity and little deviancy from social norms and standards (e.g., Marsella, 1993). Aspects of Japanese and/or Asian culture highlighted in this literature and included in the following sections include: *Personality*, *Communication styles and patterns*, *Establishment of relationship with others*, *Achievement motivation*, and *Self-critical motivation*.

Personality. The study of the self has been significant in the fields of personality and social psychology. Typical questions researchers have addressed include, “How do people

view/evaluate themselves?" and "How do people explain their behavior?" A cultural approach might be used to examine the question, "How does the self come to be?" (Heine, 2001). Using this approach, the self is considered to be a "cultural construction," originating from biological potentials and making adjustments to the environment and resulting in a particular "cultural meaning system" (Heine, 2001). Put another way, culture is internalized into the self over time or there is no self without culture (Heine, 2001).

Since the present study involved the experiences of individuals of Asian background being interpreted by individuals from North America (and most from European backgrounds) it is important to consider the important cultural differences of those two people groups. Of particular note here is the work of Heine (2001) who attempted to identify differences in North American (i.e., Canada and the United States) and East Asian (i.e., China, Japan, and Korea) cultures. North American culture values individualism and tends to emphasize the importance of self-determination and individual rights. The North American self can be seen as independent and autonomous, existing separately from others and the social context. East Asian culture, on the other hand, is characterized by collectivism (Heine, 2001). The self is constructed to be interdependent with the group. This interdependent view is influenced by Confucianism, which places high value on the maintenance of interpersonal harmony within cardinal relationships such as father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, emperor-subject, and friend-friend (see Su et al.'s 1999 study as cited in Heine, 2001). These relationships also contain certain roles and expectations with each party expected to fulfill his/her respective obligations. East Asians are also willing to accept new roles and obligations if circumstances change and to adjust their behavior with situational information by harmonizing with others and attending to the environment. Thus, in contrast to North American culture, East Asian culture encourages the

development of a self that is fluid and malleable within a world that is enduring and permanent (Heine, 2001).

Communication styles and patterns. Even when people's emotions and perceptions appear similar, the way they express their emotions can be different depending on their cultural backgrounds. Among other things, these differences can be seen in how people communicate with each other. East Asian people exhibit verbal non-assertiveness and an unwillingness to disclose personal problems to strangers (Gladding, 2003). They are also more likely than Europeans and North Americans to choose nonverbal expression styles (see Uba's 1994 study as cited in Kim, Liang, & Li, 2003), be reticent in their communication, restrain their emotions, and avoid expressing their feelings, especially negative feelings (Gladding, 2003; Kim, Atkinson, & Umemoto, 2001; see Uba's 1994 study as cited in Kim et al., 2003). The ability to control one's emotions is considered to be a sign of strength in Asian culture whereas in European and American cultures individuals are encouraged to openly express their feelings for each other (Kim et al., 2003).

Establishment of relationship with others. Cultural values and communication styles can also influence the ways people establish relationships with each other. As discussed earlier, Asian culture is characterized by collectivism where people tend to emphasize the importance of interdependence, harmony, and relationship with others (Peters & Williams, 2006; Schinke et al., 2008). Thus, the self is seen as flexible and changeable depending on the situation (Heine, 2001). The ways of developing trust and commitment among individuals in collectivistic societies like Japan are characterized by a tendency to be strong and enduring in-group members but a reluctance to show cooperativeness with out-group members. For example, Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) found that Japanese people were less likely than Americans to demonstrate

general trust. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that Asian communication styles and ways of establishing relationships may influence the way Asian people talk about their experiences.

Achievement motivation. Cultural factors such as one's worldview or view of the self can also influence an individuals' achievement orientation (Heine, 2001). East Asians tend to view achievement as the result of effort and hard work rather than one's innate and fixed abilities. Failure, in turn, is considered to be the result of a lack of effort and the expected response to failure is increased effort (Heine et al., 2001). Such a view is evidenced in Asian's persistence and involvement in a task. In one study, Japanese participants were found to persist longer after they experienced failure on a task whereas North Americans persisted longer only after they succeeded (Heine, et al., 2001). These results suggest that East Asians are more likely than North Americans to emphasize effort and view abilities as malleable (Heine, et al., 2001).

Cross-cultural research has also revealed differences in the way Americans of European and Asian descent respond to performance feedback. For example, Peters and Williams (2006) examined the amount of time European Americans and Asian Americans continued practicing darts after receiving positive or negative feedback about their previous dart-throwing performance. The results indicated that European Americans practiced longer following positive feedback than following negative feedback while Asian Americans practiced for the same amount of time irrespective of the type of feedback they received. These findings suggest that people's perceptions of feedback and subsequent behavior may differ depending on their view of the world (i.e., individualism, collectivism) and of the self.

Self-critical motivation. Rooted in the Confucian framework, East Asian culture consists of a coherent hierarchy within a group and emphasizes cultural obligations and roles. The group creates the standards and requires individuals to fulfill them. Thus, Asians tend to be self-critical

when they fail to meet their obligations and unaccepting of what they perceive to be any personal defects. Research has shown that Japanese people tend to evaluate themselves less positively than do North Americans (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001) and are more willing to accept negative feedback regarding their failures (Heine, 2001). In the Peters and Williams's study (2006) cited previously, East Asians were found to exhibit a higher proportion of negative to positive self-talk regardless of the quality of their dart-throwing performance than were European Americans.

Summary

In this chapter, literature was reviewed that addressed a number of aspects of kendo, including a brief history, features of competition, and distinguishing cultural characteristics (e.g., dojo, manners). In addition, studies examining the cognitive processes underlying kendo performance (Okumura & Yoshida, 2006; 2007) and the characteristics of peak performance (Arita et al.,1998) were discussed. The chapter also included literature addressing possible mental training interventions for combat sports participants (e.g., Anshel & Payne, 2006; Blumenstein et al., 2005; Schinke & Ramsay, 2009), goal orientation and motivation (e.g., Gernigon & Bars, 2000), and the distinctive features of various martial arts (e.g., karate, taekwondo, tai chi) (Columbus & Rice, 1998; Lantz, 2002). Finally, some discussion was devoted to the literature dealing with traditional aspects of Japanese and other Asian cultures, such as personality (e.g., Heine, 2001), communication styles and patterns (e.g., Gladding, 2003) and achievement motivation (Heine et al., 2001). This review revealed very little information regarding the martial art of kendo or the experiences of participants. Thus, the present study represented an attempt to address this deficiency by obtaining first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of kendo participants using an existential phenomenological interview approach. It

was hoped that the findings would contribute to the scholarly literature in sport psychology and provide helpful insights for sport psychology consultants working with kenshi as well as other martial artists.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

This study was designed to investigate the experience of *kenshi* (i.e., kendo practitioners) in kendo using a qualitative research approach. More specifically, existential phenomenological interviewing was employed to examine kenshi's experiences in-depth. The purpose of this chapter is to briefly discuss existential phenomenology and describe the participants, procedures, and data analysis process used in this study.

Existential Phenomenology

The traditional scientific method requires that three essential criteria be applied to the study of human behavior: The behavior in question must be quantifiable, observable, and replicable (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Although the scientific approach is useful for studying behaviors in some areas of psychology, the aforementioned criteria make it ill suited for addressing questions about the meaningfulness of human experience. In an attempt to examine the "what" questions instead of the "why" questions that dominate traditional behavioral research some scholars turned to an existential phenomenological research approach (Valle et al., 1989).

Existential phenomenology is a blend of two philosophical perspectives: Existentialism and phenomenology. Both philosophies have a common interest in human experience in the realm of everyday human life. The goal of existential phenomenology is to obtain a rigorous description of human experience in the world as it is lived from the first-person perspective, rather than to attempt to explain it using "objective" methods (Dale, 1996; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Existentialism originated from the thinking of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) and is, essentially, a way of studying the

struggle of human beings to apply meaning to their lives and of finding answers to such questions as "Why am I here?" and "What is the meaning of life?" A major thrust of existential philosophy is to inspire human beings to be aware of the freedom and responsibility in their own lives and encourage them to explore "who we are and how we may come to live an authentic life" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 9). As the proposition "existence precedes essence" (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p. 12) suggests human beings exist before their lives have meaning and, therefore, they are the only ones who can define the meaning of their lives. In existentialism, essence is defined as "patterns of meaning that [are] universal, unchanging over time, and absolute" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 9).

Phenomenology is a concept that was developed by two German philosophers, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Husserl is considered the founder of the phenomenological school of thought and Heidegger is known for integrating existential concerns into phenomenology (Valle et al., 1989). The focal point of phenomenology is that human beings reflect on the content (i.e., the "what" or meaning) and the process (i.e., the "how") of their experiences using their consciousness (von Eckartsberg, 1998).

Thus, the advent of phenomenology contributed to the establishment of specific methods to rigorously and systematically investigate descriptions of human consciousness and experience (Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle et al., 1989). Experience occurs at the meeting of person and world, resulting from the openness of human awareness to the world (Polkinghorne, 1989).

In phenomenology, each individual and his or her world is seen to *co-constitute* each other (Valle et al., 1989). To explain this relationship, the famous "vase and faces" drawing by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin functions well as an example (Thomas & Pollio, 2002: Valle et al., 1989). In this picture, when one focuses on the center portion (i.e., vase) as the

"figure," the outer surroundings become the "ground," whereas when one focuses on the outer surroundings (i.e., two faces) as the "figure," the center becomes the "ground." This perceptual phenomenon reveals that the concepts of the vase and the faces within the picture cannot exist without one another. If one of them is removed, the notion of the other has no meaning. In a similar fashion, human beings are contextualized by their world: It is the world that gives humans' existence meaning and each individual's existence provides his or her world with meaning. This interdependent, ongoing relationship is consistent with Heidegger's notion of human existence and the world, which he expressed as *being-in-the-world* (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; von Eckartsberg, 1998; Valle et al., 1989).

From an existential phenomenological perspective, sport psychology researchers are interested in the interdependent relationship between athletes and their particular world (e.g., practice, competition). Athletes have "situated freedom" (Dale, 1996, p. 309) to make choices in any given situation in their world. Their choices might be based on such factors as their skill levels, level of competitive achievement, relationships they have with coaches, or various forms of adversity they might face in their sport. Sport psychology consultants would be able to provide more informed assistance if they knew how athletes' experience their world from the athletes' own first-person perspectives (Dale, 1996). Such insights would allow consultants and athletes to explore psychological interventions that are cooperatively created; like "a coordinated dance" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 6) with two-way communication. Sport psychology consultants who listen carefully to their athletes and are able to grasp athletes' lived experiences would be in a better position to "customize" consultations and maximize their effects compared to the more "depersonalized" textbook approaches.

While kendo is not widely recognized in the Western sporting world, its popularity has been growing in North America. In order to provide valuable insights into kendo for Western sport psychology scholars and practitioners, existential phenomenological interviews were conducted with *kenshi* (i.e., kendo practitioners), which permitted participants to freely describe their experiences.

Participants

The final sample of participants consisted of nine elite level kenshi (eight males and one female). The participants ranged in age from 19 to 40 years. A description of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Procedures

The procedures used in this study were based on Thomas and Pollio's (2002) recommended steps in conducting an existential phenomenological study. They included the following: *Exploring Research Bias*, *Selection of Participants*, *Data Collection*, and *Data Analysis*.

Exploring research bias. The goal of existential phenomenological research is to explore a descriptive understanding of participants' experiences from the participants' perspectives (Pollio et al., 1997). In the existential phenomenological research method, researchers must acknowledge their personal biases and presuppositions that could potentially impact the way they conduct interviews (e.g., leading participants to focus on a certain area) or carry out data analysis (e.g., interpreting dialogues according to the researcher's view of a phenomenon of interest). The procedure used to identify the researcher's biases is called a bracketing interview.

Table 1.

Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Degree (*Dan*)*	Years of Kendo Experience	Highest Level of Competition in the U.S.
Araki	Male	40	3	14	Regional
Bando	Male	34	5	25	Regional
Chiba	Male	19	2	5	National
Dobashi	Male	36	6	26	National
Egawa	Male	36	5	19	National
Fujikawa	Male	38	4	24	National
Gondo	Male	40	6	34	National
Hasegawa	Male	32	3	10	Regional
Iguchi	Female	34	4	24	National
($N = 9$)		($M = 34.3$)	(M = 4.2)	(M= 20.1)	

* The highest rank issued by All United States Kendo Federation is 8th dan.

The term “bracketing,” as used in phenomenological research, refers to “an intellectual activity in which one tries to put aside theories, knowledge, and assumptions about a phenomenon” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 33). By bracketing or suspending their presuppositions researchers can acquire a *phenomenological attitude* that permits clarification of the essential structures of participants’ experiences as they appear. The concept of phenomenological attitude is that of an attitude that permits the perceiver’s (i.e., participant’s) awareness of an experience to emerge exactly as it presents itself, consistent with the starting point of phenomenology, which is “back to the things themselves” (von Eckartsberg, 1998. p. 6). In the present study the researcher participated in a bracketing interview and recorded field notes in order to achieve and maintain an awareness of his biases.

Bracketing interview. Prior to conducting actual interviews, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview to determine his personal biases and presuppositions about kenshi’s experience of kendo (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). A person with extensive experience in qualitative research but not involved in the study conducted the bracketing interview. The purpose of the bracketing interview was to identify any presuppositions the researcher might have about the nature and meaning of the phenomenon of the kendo experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

During the interview, the researcher discussed his own kendo experiences, his previous experience of interviewing Japanese elite kenshi, his perception of Japanese culture, and various other topics. The audio recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed to determine primary themes. The analysis revealed that the investigator had several potential biases. They included the belief that kenshi would see kendo as *budo* (i.e, martial arts) instead of as a sport and that they would try to maintain the Japanese tradition in kendo. The investigator also expressed a desire and an eagerness to be connected with Japanese culture in various ways,

including practicing and investigating kendo. He also presumed there were distinct differences between American and Japanese cultures and that kenshi would emphasize the importance of showing appropriate manners and etiquette, rather than just pursuing victory. However, he recalled previous interviews conducted with Japanese elite kenshi in which they revealed that their primary goal was to win. Thus, he expected to hear that kenshi pursue winning but that they also try to go beyond only the pursuit of winning.

Field notes. Field notes were made immediately following each interview. These notes included descriptions of the physical setting, other verbal and nonverbal communication that occurred during the interview, the researcher's personal reactions, and any other unusual events, such as an interruption during an interview session.

Selection of participants. Upon receiving approval to conduct the study from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board, the researcher began contacting kendo clubs in the United States via email. The email included a description of the purpose of the study, procedures, and criteria for participation. The investigator also recruited possible participants at a workshop and summer camp for kenshi and sensei held at a major university in the Midwestern U.S. For the purpose of this study, three criteria were considered necessary for inclusion. First, participants had to be competing at the elite level (e.g., qualifying for U.S. Nationals or achieving at least runner-up status in regional tournaments) at the time of the interviews. Second, participants had to be of Japanese descent. Considering the origin and history of kendo in Japan, it was assumed that interviewing kenshi of Japanese descent would provide a cultural perspective to the experience of participation in this unique physical activity. Finally, English fluency was required of all prospective participants. In addition to these criteria, the participants had to have a first-person experience of the phenomenon of interest (i.e., kendo) and a willingness to share

their experiences in the interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Given these relatively restrictive criteria and the limited availability of potential participants, the investigator had to travel to various places in the United States to obtain the interviews.

Data collection. The opening question in a phenomenological interview is “worded to allow for a broad range of descriptive responses from each participant” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 32). Subsequent questions are then asked only to gain clarification and/or examples of the phenomenon. Although a researcher should not lead or guide a participant during an interview, the researcher may “help the participant focus on unfolding themes and details” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 26) by asking “what” questions that help participants deliver rich, descriptive responses, rather than “why” questions that concern causal factors (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The researcher also needs to treat the participants as “the real authority” (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 24) and show modesty and a willingness to learn about the participants’ experiences. Before terminating an interview session the researcher should summarize the major points of the participant’s responses and ask the participant if he or she has anything else to add or any more experiences to share (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). For the purpose of this study, kenshi were asked the following open-ended question: “When you think about your kendo experiences, what stands out for you?” Follow-up questions were then asked to obtain as “rich and thick” a description as possible of the experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Pilot interviews. Prior to conducting actual interviews with participants the investigator conducted two pilot interviews. The purposes of these interviews were to determine whether the phenomenological question was appropriate for obtaining sufficiently detailed descriptions of kenshi’s experiences of kendo and to obtain feedback from the pilot participants about the researcher’s interviewing skills (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The first pilot interview was conducted

in English with a male kenshi who was competing in kendo and was of Japanese descent. The interview was audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. The transcript was also shared and discussed with members of an interpretive research group, all of whom had signed a confidentiality agreement prior to doing so. Based on the considerable depth of information obtained in the interview and feedback from interpretive group members, the primary investigator made the decision to include the pilot interview in the actual study. In order to obtain additional interviewing experience and the confidence that he was capable of beginning actual data collection, the researcher conducted a final pilot interview with a male kenshi having no Japanese background.

Participant interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by the primary investigator at a variety of locations of convenience to the participants. They included participants' offices, a meeting room, one participant's home, a bench at a park, a hotel room, and a sandwich shop. Before conducting the interviews, the investigator reminded the kenshi of the purpose of the study, obtained their written informed consent (Appendix A), and requested demographic information (Appendix B) such as age, rank, length of kendo careers, and ethnicity. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and lasted between 20 and 110 minutes. The researcher replaced all identifying information concerning participants' names, the name of *dojo* (i.e., local kendo club), and the names of other people mentioned by the participants with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality as much as possible during the transcription and data analysis process.

Data analysis. The researcher and professional transcribers transcribed the interviews verbatim and the former read and re-read each interview for accuracy and clarity. The interpretive process in phenomenological research involves connecting a certain part of text with

the whole picture (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). This "part-to-whole process" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 35) helps phenomenological researchers understand text from the viewpoint of the relationship of the experience to the whole world of participants. To accomplish this purpose, the investigator read each transcript in its entirety and then singled out specific statements that seemed significant and represented potential meaning units.

Utilizing the assistance of qualitative research groups. The researcher utilized an interpretive research group at the University of Tennessee to assist in data analysis. The group was comprised of professors and graduate students from various fields such as nursing, psychology, counseling psychology, and sport psychology. Each member brought his or her disciplinary expertise, cultural background, and personal experiences to the data analysis process. Four of the nine transcripts were analyzed with the assistance of this group and a fifth with the assistance of members of a sport psychology research methods class consisting of professor and ten graduate students.

At the beginning of each of these meeting, group members were given copies of a transcript and signed a confidentiality pledge. Two volunteers (one serving as the voice of the interviewer and the other as the voice of the participant) read the transcript aloud while the others followed along. Group members were encouraged to identify significant statements that the researcher may have overlooked during his initial reading and call the group's attention to any word, phrase, or metaphor that might require additional discussion or clarification. Group members sometimes challenged the primary researcher's and/or other members' interpretation, and if consensus was not reached, discussion ensued until the group agreed that the interpretation could be at least supported by the text of the interview (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The atmosphere of the group meetings was respectful but critical in order to assure the necessary rigor of the

interpretation process. During one of the first meetings the researcher showed group members a video clip of a kendo match and real *shinai* (i.e., bamboo sword) in order to familiarize them with the salient features of the activity. This enhanced group members' understanding of kendo and of participants' descriptions of various aspects of their experience (e.g., descriptions of physical movements, mental aspects, and the intensity of kendo matches). Having obtained sufficient feedback that his interpretations were largely consistent with those of the interpretive group and the research class, the investigator analyzed the remaining transcripts individually.

Developing/confirming the thematic structure. After completing analysis of all interview transcripts, the researcher created a thematic structure based on the themes and sub-themes derived from the analysis. This was accomplished by first sending a summary of the themes and sub-themes emerging from each participant's interview to the respective participant for review and feedback. Seven of nine participants provided confirming feedback that the summary of accurately depicted their kendo experience. The other two participants did not respond to the initial email or to additional follow-up emails.

The overall thematic structure (as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter 4) was then derived and sent to the interpretive group for inspection and feedback. The structure consisted of the major grounds and figural aspects of the phenomenon, as well as the respective themes and sub-themes for each. Upon reviewing the structure, the interpretive group agreed that it was an appropriate depiction of the participants' experience of kendo.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

The purpose of existential phenomenology is to obtain a descriptive understanding of a participant's experiences from his or her first-person perspective (Pollio et al., 1997). Thus, the key criterion of validity in existential phenomenology becomes "whether a reader, adopting the

world view articulated by the researcher, would be able to see textual evidence supporting the interpretation, and whether the goal of providing a first-person understanding was attained" (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 53). This criteria, however, does not mean that the interpretation derived from the researcher is solely, the best one. From this perspective it is important that the description of the participants' world be a convincing fit rather than absolutely coinciding with reality (Pollio et al., 1997).

In phenomenological research, evidential support can be accomplished in two ways: Methodologically and experientially (Pollio et al., 1997). Methodological criteria are employed to determine whether the research procedures are rigorous and appropriate whereas experiential criteria are applied to evaluate whether the interpretation provides readers with illuminating and plausible insight regarding the participants' world. Plausibility refers to "whether the reader is able to see the relation between the interpretation and the data" (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 54). Illumination can help the reader see the phenomenon in the new, different perspective (Pollio et al., 1997). Methodological and experiential issues are reciprocally related when establishing the validity of a study. That is, the more rigorous and appropriate the methodology is the more plausible and illuminating the results appear; and the more plausible and illuminating the description of participants' worlds is, the more rigorous and appropriate the procedural structures tend to be considered (Pollio et al., 1997).

In general, the issue of reliability concerns the consistency of research findings. Considering the nature and structure of phenomenological research, however, it is impossible for the exact same interview to take place on two separate occasions since the description and meanings of a phenomenon experienced by a participant can change over the course of his or her life (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Also, not every researcher interprets a particular data set

identically. These facts make it unrealistic to expect that the exact same description of a phenomenon of interest will emerge between the original and any subsequent studies. It is possible, however, that researchers can identify general structures and processes of a targeted phenomenon across studies in different data sets. Therefore, the aim of reliability in phenomenological research is to broaden the themes without changing their essential thematic patterns from the original study (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

CHAPTER 4

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to explore kenshi's experiences of kendo. To accomplish this purpose, in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted with nine competitive kenshi. A qualitative analysis of transcripts revealed a total of 835 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and major themes. The final thematic structure contained seven major themes, *Kendo Components*, *Kendo as Competition*, *Kendo as Art*, *Relationship/Bond*, *The Way/Path*, *Values of Kendo*, and *World of Everyday Life* (See Table 2). A visual depiction of the thematic structure and interactions among the major themes are shown in Figure 1.

In the present study, *World of Everyday Life* was the most prominent aspect and served as the primary ground. In addition, a secondary ground, *Values of Kendo,* was identified. Five figural dimensions emerged against these two grounds, *Kendo Components*, *Kendo as Competition*, *Kendo as Art*, *Relationship/Bond*, and *The Way/Path*. All of these major themes were interrelated and comprised the kendo experience of these kenshi. In the following sections, each of the major themes and their respective sub-themes and elements are discussed and representative quotes supporting each theme and sub-theme are presented. Pseudonyms are provided with each quote to indicate which participant made the statement.

Kendo Components

Once a kendo match begins, kenshi face each other with swords and try to complete a valid strike or thrust, called yuko-datotsu. The major theme *Kendo Components* was comprised of five sub-themes dealing with the physical, technical and psychological aspects of the match:

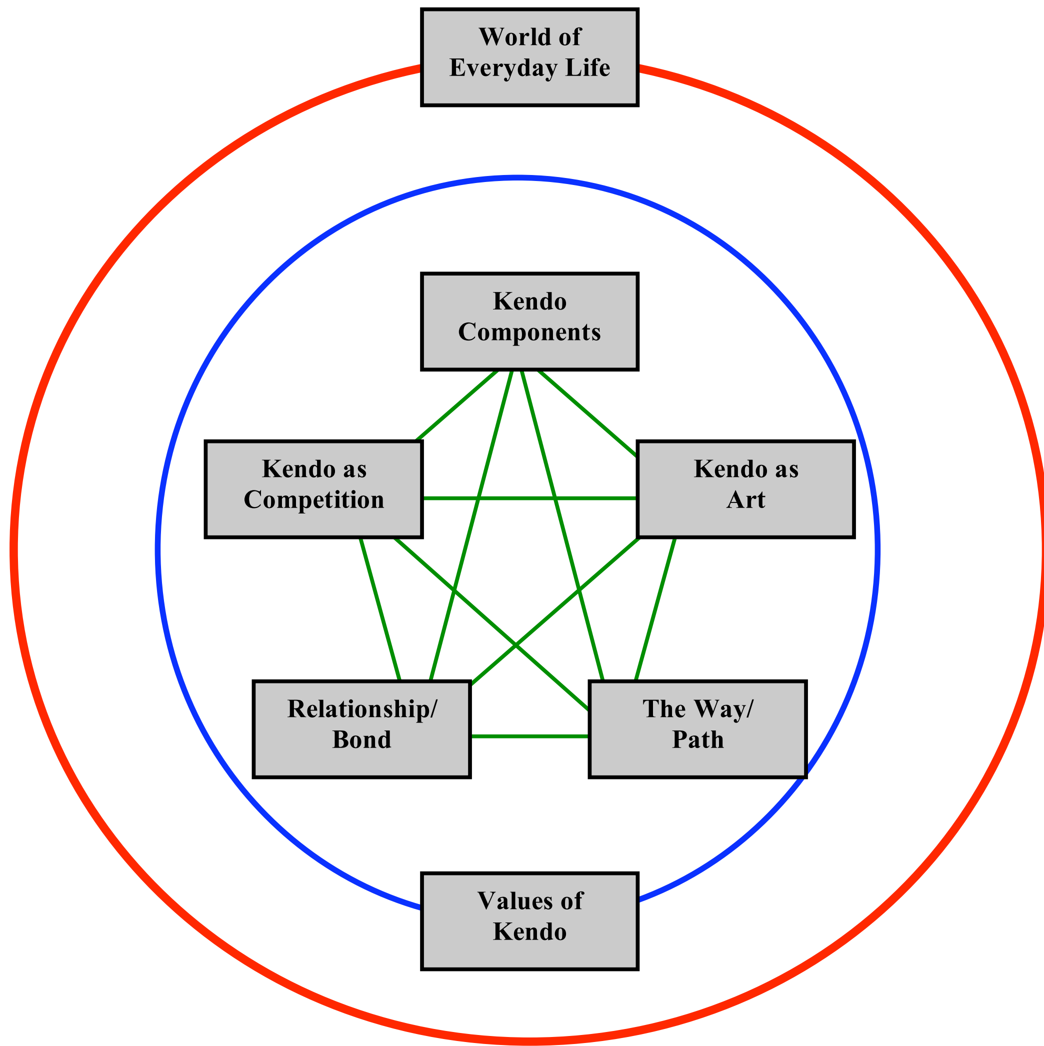

Figure 1: Diagram of Kenshi's Experiences of Kendo

Table 2.

Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Major Themes	Sub-Themes	Elements
Kendo Components	Using physical abilities	
	Executing *waza*/tecniques	
	Facing fear	
	Controlling self	
	Using *seme*	
Kendo as Competition	Victory	
	Emphasis on "scoring"	
	Ego motivation	
Kendo as Art	Beauty	
	Emphasis on *ippon*	
	Mastery motivation	
Relationship/Bond	*Sensei*	Role model
		Trust
		Guidance
		Discipline
	Parents	
	"Big family"	
The Way/Path	Satisfaction/fulfillment	Pride
		Confidence
		Enjoyment/fun
	Life-long endeavor	Periodic transition
		Pivotal moments
		Consistent effort
		Passing it on
		Delayed gratification
Values of Kendo	Manners/etiquette/reigi	
	"Kill or be killed"	
	Expectations of rank	
World of Everyday Life	Identity clarification	
	Life lessons	

Using Physical Abilities, Executing Waza/Techniques, Facing Fear, Controlling Self, and Using Seme.

Using physical abilities. Simply put, kendo can be characterized as a physical activity with a bamboo sword. As with any traditional Western sports and exercises, proper performance of kendo requires a command of the essential body movements. As one of the participants indicated, "you really have to focus first on the physical aspect of ken… how to move feet, what would be the proper foot arrangement and hand position and how you, uh, [are] using sword, how you cut opponent, has to be know[n]" (Bando). To achieve an advanced skill requires much practice. Hasegawa reported that he has devoted many hours of practice on proper body movement in order to "try to improve my footwork."

Muscular strength is another important physical component of kendo. Bando emphasized the role of strength in the development of striking skills. "Your feet, your arms, your chest, your abs – the muscle has to be there to have a proper strike." The continuous motion involved in a striking movement requires a forward stamping of the right foot prior to the strike. Considering the importance of this mechanical aspect of striking, Hasegawa said he works on improving his jumping ability by increasing the distance of each foot stamp. "I'll probably want to increase my distance, my jumping skills."

Executing waza/techniques. *Waza* means "a technique" or "a skill" in Japanese. During a match the purpose of kendo is to complete *yuko-datotsu*. Yuko-datotsu consists of striking or thrusting at datotsu-bui (i.e., striking zones), such as the opponent's head or arm. To accomplish this purpose, kenshi need to "come into the distance and throw a strike" (Egawa) to execute the striking waza. More complicated strategies are necessary, however, at the higher competition

levels. As Egawa said, "It's never, almost never the case that I can just move in and throw in *men*. I haven't done that in probably two years."

Once kenshi are able to execute the basic striking waza, they must learn how to execute successful counterattacks to opponents' moves. Egawa described his experience of a particular counterattack called *kaeshi-men*, (i.e., parrying the opponent's sword and counterattacking the opponent's *men*) in the following way: "They were deliberately coming into the distance and luring me into going for *men* strike and then he'd execute kaeshi-men." Egawa also provided an example of *kote-men* (i.e., sequential striking of the opponent's arm and then the head). "I try to go for kote and then he does kote-men." Mastering counterattacks give kenshi more options for waza execution and match strategy, which is a necessary prerequisite for advancing to higher levels of competition.

Facing fear. When kenshi face each other in close proximity, holding shinai, they are simultaneously in a position to strike and to be struck. This situation, in which offense and defense are inseparably combined, can create fear in kenshi. If a kenshi is facing a higher ranked opponent or even an opponent the kenshi thinks is better, fear can become overwhelming. Araki described the fear of being struck when he faced more experienced opponents. "When you're fighting with somebody who has more experience in kendo, you tend to think you're gonna get hit, chances are high that you're gonna get hit."

External factors such as the prestige of a tournament can also create fear in some kenshi. Chiba recalled the fear he felt when facing an opponent at an important tournament in the United States. "When I was at the national championship, I probably had so much hesitation, just because there's so much pressure, you know. There's a lot of people watching and stuff, and it's just like a really big level of competition." In addition to the prestige of the tournament, the

opponent's reputation exacerbated Chiba's fear, and that fear escalated as he crossed shinai with this opponent:

> This person was well known, and I knew that he was pretty good, so already, I [had] a kind of fear, "He's good. I don't know." I tried to break his posture, get him to break, but I couldn't. I was like, "Why? Why?" I [was] trying everything… but nothing was working against him. … I had the doubt. I doubted myself. "I don't know if I can beat him. He's pretty good."

Once kenshi face each other with swords, it seems that they create their own world. If the kenshi on one side demonstrates power - whether visible or perceived - it can be scary to the kenshi on the other side. Chiba described such an encounter he had with Matsui who was also a sensei:

> When I fight Matsui sensei, just Matsui sensei, for some reason, my mouth gets really dry. And like, I become weak. I don't know what it is. He just has this aura of incredible power and it makes me scared. It's so bad… And you know you can't do anything. It's impossible to hit him, because he's [makes sword swishing sounds]… I think that he has an aura around him all the time when he's in bogu. You can just tell. You just know. Wow, what's going to happen? There's always fear in my mind when I fight him (Chiba).

In addition to the fear kenshi experience when facing opponents who have higher ranks or good reputations, there is the fear of a particular waza, which is tsuki (i.e. thrust to the throat). Once kenshi receive thrusts to the throat, those thrusts can be frightening. As Fujikawa related, "you can't breath, you have a bruise on your neck." Fujikawa recalled one particularly terrifying experience when he received a tsuki:

> He did a tsuki on me so hard my jaw came off [i.e., became dislocated]. So, after that I was a little bit afraid of tsuki because once your jaw comes out it's not a pleasant experience where somebody has to jam it back in.

Controlling self. As mentioned earlier, fear or pressure is an ever-present possibility for kenshi. However, they also realize that a feeling of fear can debilitate their performance. "If you get upset or get scared, chance is you're gonna lose the match because your muscle[s] get, uh, stiff" (Araki). Therefore, the kenshi in this study stressed the importance of coping with and controlling their fear as well as any other negative emotions. "During the practice… or even before the match, you need to be ready, you need to adjust your mental tension, you need to control your mental tension so that you can do your best performance" (Araki). Araki was also aware that it is important to find an optimal psychological level for his best performance: "You need to find the right position of your mentality… [if] you're feeling too much stress, tension, or you're too relaxed, then your performance would not be the best that you can do."

While these kenshi sometimes felt fear or pressure during practices and competitions they also realized the importance of controlling their emotions and employed a variety of psychological approaches to control themselves. For example, Araki said he sometimes tried to convince himself that he was ready for a match in the following way:

> The mentality I'm trying to have during [a] match is that whatever my opponent does, I have… experience to respond [to] any of the technique[s] the opponent would try on me… that may not be truth but I try to pretend that I'm ready for any kind of attack from my opponent.

Chiba used a simple yet effective psychological strategy during his pre-competition routine. "What I normally do, I just always take deep breaths. I'm really focused. And I just want it so

bad. I want to win so bad. The key is just to stay focused and [keep a] clean, clean mind." Regardless of the psychological approaches these kenshi used to manage their emotions, they were all aware of the importance of self-control. Interestingly, Bando exercised self-control by fully concentrating on observing his opponent.

> When I [took] a promotion [and faced an opponent], I, uh, tried to understand the opponent a little bit more… So it became two person[s], uh, communication. Uhm, so, in that way, if you started to understand the opponent, you [would] lose this fear that… you are going to lose or win, or you can make a strike or make a point… [when] you concentrate[d] on the opponent… and you start[ed] to see and observe [the opponent]… [you could] become more calm.

The kenshi also handled fear or pressure by applying aspects of traditional kendo culture in their practice. For instance, Fujikawa recalled a former experience he had of overcoming fear of his sensei by explaining the kendo term, *fudoshin*:

> It's almost like trying to gather a power within yourself… fudoshin to me was not being moved by fear of my old sensei. I [was] very scared of him, very scared of him… I refused to have fear and only concentrated on not having fear, facing myself and attaining ippon [i.e., valid point].

Araki mentioned another aspect of kendo culture, vocalizing, that he used to enhance his self-control. He realized that shouting could help to "relax [the] muscle[s]" and "boost your self-confidence."

Using seme. *Seme* is another term used in kendo. The word, seme, is a noun (i.e., 攻め) conjugated from the verb *semeru* (i.e., 攻める) in Japanese; although seme and semeru are often

used interchangeably in kendo. Seme in kendo means “to take initiative to close the distance with the opponent with full spirit” (AJKF, 2000, p. 83). Kenshi use seme to “put the opponent off balance mentally and physically and prevent him/her from moving freely” (AJKF, 2000, p. 83). How kenshi interpret seme and put it into practice can differ considerably depending on the individual. For Egawa, seme was like “hav[ing] a conversation with the opponent.” He revealed how he “talked” with the opponent:

> “Look I’m coming in what are you going to do?” And he doesn’t come in instantly. He may step back and he may you know pressure me back and see how I react. And if I react instantly then he may think “this guy’s nothing. He may not be good.” So I would pressure him back and say, “look your seme is not that strong.”

For these kenshi learning seme involved making oneself more aware of the opponent. They all acknowledged the need to interpret the opponent’s feeling, intention, and features. Sample comments included “how to read, kind [of] like understand a person, just by how they’re moving and what they’re going to do” (Chiba) or “how to communicate with the opponent – not only the physical fighting, but more like mentally” (Bando).

The importance of seme was not simply limited to an interaction with opponents for the kenshi in this study but was also used for the purpose of taking the initiative in a match. A confident mental attitude was required before actually striking the opponent. “You really have to exert pressure first and dominate mentally first before you initiate a strike” (Egawa). Chiba also placed an emphasis on mentally pressuring and confining the opponent, which he felt gave him an advantage in his sword fights:

> It’s really all in the head. If you can put fear and doubt in someone’s mind, then you have an advantage already. If the person’s scared, you’ll know they’re scared. If you do

something, they'll go, "Oh!" and flinch and hesitate. Then you know you've already won. You've really just got to keep [applying] pressure and [more] pressure, and get them to break. That's what I call it. Get them to just crack, break. Break their posture. It's kind of what seme is to me.

Although psychological battles are an important aspect of seme, physical responses and interactions are essential as well:

It's not just mental game but kendo is after all a physical game as well so interaction includes not just reading the opponent but for example… I can just come in, step in, close the distance and see how the opponent reacts. If he just sits there idly then I can go for *men*. If he reacts, if he tries to think of it as a good opportunity and tries to strike me then I can block at that time and I can do that again and draw his *men* the next time and do *kaeshi-dō* [i.e., parrying the opponent shinai with one's shinai and counterattack the opponent's dō]. So again it's both physical and mental (Egawa).

For these kenshi, seme consisted of strategic and tactical maneuvering, physical probing, and the use of shinai, so they would know "how to draw the opponent, how to lure the opponent into doing what I want him to do" (Egawa). However, some found seme difficult to describe. As Bando expressed, "it's very hard to explain." He then used the metaphor of a "chemical reaction" to describe the way that seme works for him:

It becomes a chemical reaction [between you and] the opponent, how the opponent feel[s], [or] the movement[s] of the opponent…[trigger your] reaction [to] the opponent.

Dobashi, however, talked about seme in yet another way:

Seme, people say it's very difficult to explain. I think it's easy to explain but hard to do it. Seme is basically, always being prepared. If you're attacked, you counter. If the

> opponent is open, you hit him. That's it… or, in Japanese, there's a term *en wo kiranai*, unbroken string, that's seme. So no matter what, if they're close to me, *hiki-waza* [i.e., striking while retreating in a situation where one is very close to the opponent], you know, if they're far and if they're coming slowly, you know, *debana-waza* [i.e., striking at the moment when the opponent is about to strike], they want to have a little sloppy attack, *ōji-waza* [i.e., parrying the opponent's striking and counterattacking the opponent], you're ready to do all of those at any given moment. That's seme.

Based on the responses of the kenshi in this study, it appears that seme is a key component of the kendo match, particularly at the higher levels of competition. Egawa said, "At my level or higher you really have to read the opponent's mind, anticipate the opponent's movement when you try to strike or when you initiate something." Bando indicated that it is difficult to strike the opponent when he or she has solid kamae and said it was necessary to use seme to remain patient. "If the opponent has a nice kamae, posture, you cannot strike the opponent. So you cannot be rushed… You have to be very calm and find opportunity. That's where the communication, eh, comes in."

Kendo as Competition

All of the participants in this study had been actively competing in tournaments at regional or national levels in the United States and/or Japan for a number of years. Their goals for participation, however, varied. In addition, several individuals said their ideas of what it meant to be involved in kendo competition differed at different stages of their experience of kendo. Some stated that their present motivation for competing sometimes differed from their motivation for practicing. Despite these inconsistencies, competition for these kenshi was a

critical part of their kendo experience. The major theme *Kendo as Competition* consisted of three sub-themes: *Victory*, *Emphasis on "Scoring*," and *Ego Motivation*.

Victory. For any kenshi involved in competition, winning is the primary aspiration. However, the relative emphasis placed on victory depends on the skill level of the individual and/or the stage they have reached in their kendo experience. Interestingly, less experienced kenshi tend to emphasize winning to a greater extent than do more experienced kenshi; and this emphasis leads to sloppy technique. For example, Araki indicated that, when he was on his high school kendo team, "our priority was more on winning the match than doing good kendo."

These kenshi suggested that a relationship existed between participants' emphasis on victory and the quality of their technique, especially from an aesthetic perspective. As Araki further elaborated. "At the high school level, speed is very important and avoiding getting hit is important. So posture tends to be wrong sometimes." Egawa indicated that younger kenshi tend to rely on speed, just coming in and striking the opponent, and that their kendo style "is not going to look good," while confessing that he used to do that type of kendo when he was young.

A focus on winning can also have an impact on one's strategy during competition, and the psychological reaction to opponents' strategies. As Egawa noted,

> In competition… I feel as though the opponent can get lucky – you know *men* strike – and he can run away for the rest of the time and he can win. So that can be frustrating. I've done that [too] so (laughing) I can't blame a lot of people for doing that.

Dobashi admitted that he purposely adopted a "win however you can" approach when trying to win some of his tournaments:

> I knew if I won two matches and tied two matches, I win. Get ippon. I'm not some young kid, I'm not going to fight, young kid. Just take ippon and wait till time, time up. Then in

> second winners' pool, same thing, I scored two points. Ran away from a really strong player, I won… even in a difficult situation, I knew what I had to do. It's *shiai* [i.e., match], I'm not there to lose. I don't have to beat everybody two-nothing, right?

Emphasis on "scoring." The term *ippon* (i.e., valid point) is defined as "the act of striking with *ki-ken-tai-[icchi]* (AJKF, 2001, p. 36)" and completing yuko-datotsu. Ki-ken-tai-icchi represents all three components, *ki* (i.e., spirit), *ken* (i.e., shinai), and *tai* (i.e., body movement) functioning simultaneously. Yuko-datotsu is considered to be successfully executed when a kenshi puts a fullness of spirit and appropriate posture into his or her striking motion. More specifically, the kenshi strikes a datotsu-bui on the opponent while using correct *hasuji* (i.e., the direction of the line connecting the edge of a sword and the back of a sword) and expressing *zanshin* (i.e., showing body posture and state of mind that demonstrates, after striking, one is alert and ready to respond instantly to any counterattacks) (AJKF, 2001). For the kenshi interviewed for this study, however, achieving ippon in tournaments was sometimes determined by factors other than those contained in the foregoing traditional definition.

One of the main factors is the referee. As in some Western sports, referees are responsible for controlling a match in kendo. There are three referees at a kendo competition, one chief referee and two sub referees. When referees perceive that a valid waza is completed with yuko-datotsu, they raise their flags. For the kenshi in this study, impressing the referees was as an essential part of earning a valid point. According to Gondo, a kenshi "has to show your scoring attack to the judges. If they don't see it then you don't get a point even though it was a good point." The fact that a valid point is a matter of the referees' judgment can cause problems in kendo matches. According to Dobashi, differences in referees' judgments suggest that "there is no clear definition of what ippon is." Referees are "somewhat subjective" (Gondo) and "make

mistakes many times" (Dobashi). Fujikawa also pointed out the lack of some referees' judging skills:

> Let's say somebody does a good dō ki-ken-tai icchi with the dō, they won't score it. Why? Because they don't know how to do dō… I see that as a problem within kendo. Bad judging. That's a pretty big problem.

Dobashi noted that ippon in competition is sometimes different from the rule definition of ippon. "Sometimes ippon is not yuko-datotsu. But sometimes the yuko-datotsu is not an ippon."

According to these kenshi, the definition of ippon can also be distorted when the focus is winning. What becomes important is striking to "score" rather than completing waza with yuko-datotsu. Fujikawa described the emphasis on "scoring" by any means as follows:

> Scoring I think gets to more sports kendo. Now, when I say sports kendo I don't mean anything bad against sports, but sports is how should I say, a point. You score it, and that could be, okay technically somebody hit you at the right spot even though there is not much ki. That should be a score because technically that's where [a] valid target [is and] in fact technically you hit there. There's no need for zanshin, nothing. That's a score.

Ego motivation. Achievement is an integral part of competition. However, the emphasis these kenshi placed on winning seemed to differ among individuals and/or the the length of time they had participated in competition. For instance, Fujikawa recalled how important winning was earlier in his career, "when I was fighting a lot in Japan and (a place in the U.S.), [I] just wanted to win." Gondo made winning competitions a goal that also provided meaning to his intense practices. "Competition at the time it was a goal of the hard practice because you wanted to win. You don't want to lose… Then when you win,… everything meant something. You know that all the hard practice meant something."

Some of the kenshi emphasized winning as the major motivation whenever they competed. For instance, Dobashi set specific goals to win particular tournaments. "I still have the dream of maybe going to world championships. Another goal I have is to become the senior All United States Champion when I turn 50." Dobashi stated the belief that kenshi who compete should always want to win:

> You don't go to just say, "I'm going to do kendo. I don't care if I lose." If you don't care if you lose, stay home, you know. That's excuse, you know, you go to taikai [i.e., tournament] to win. That doesn't mean do dirty things or cheat.

Competitive achievement was also important to Iguchi; however, she talked about it in a more self-deprecating manner than did Dobashi. She expressed embarrassment over making winning a medal so important:

> My bad part is, I think, always, any competition I like to get a place. That is kind of aggressive feeling, you know. I like to get at least third place. I like to get back, get some medal or trophy or something… Oh, I shamed, [if] I couldn't get some medals. That kind of stupid thing [i.e., making winning so important] I start thinking. Yeah, I shouldn't think that way… I was thinking too much, like stupid things.

Kendo as Art

While competing and winning was important to the kenshi in this study they also spoke about the aesthetic dimension of kendo and its affect on their lives. They particularly emphasized the value of proficient and elegant execution of waza. Sub-themes associated with the theme, *Kendo as Art*, included *Beauty*, *Emphasis on Ippon*, and *Mastery Motivation*.

Beauty. Demonstrating beautiful movements was a primary focus for some of the kenshi in this study. Araki stressed that, "beauty of your movement is one of the most important thing in

kendo.” The criteria for judging body movements as “beautiful” are a subjective matter and these kenshi had their own respective standards. Some targeted certain body parts in an attempt to achieve beauty. For instance, Araki described his standard of beautiful kendo in the following way:

> Keep your left hand always in the center of your body.… your back should always be straight… you need to make very good zanshin… Sometimes, it’s easy for you to hit having your left hand to left side of your body or right side of your body, rather than center. But we don’t consider that [to be] beautiful kendo.

Egawa emphasized the importance of left hand position as well:

> Now I was taught that if your left hand, left fist, moves away from your sort of bellybutton area too far then you already lost. Your mind is not there. You’re just off the center. You’ve already lost. So my sensei used to tell me “okay, if your left fist goes off too much you know, don’t bother doing kendo.” So I try very hard not to do this. But I try to do everything around, within this square. I try to make this square area smaller and smaller all the time to pursue what Oshima sensei thinks is beautiful kendo.

Although body position and elegant movement are important for making kendo performance beautiful, these kenshi also talked about a deeper meaning of beautiful than what can be observed in external actions. Kendo as art also emphasizes the mind and body connection as a prerequisite for beautiful kendo. Egawa described beautiful movement from this perspective when describing the relationship between a left hand position and the structure of ki (i.e., spirit):

> Why raising [the] left hand above too much [is] considered bad is that we think of the sword as an extension of our body… So this [i.e., left hand] is the lifeline that connects your body with a sword. And a sword is a weapon as well as a shield because you try to

> use the sword to block and to parry the opponent's attack. So this [i.e., position of the left hand] is really the most important. And we think of our spirit or ki we think of that being aligned around this bellybutton or below area *tanden* so we think that in order for the sword to have any strength you have to lower the ki from shoulders down and feel the ki here just below the bellybutton and bring the ki and project that ki through you know the left fist, through the sword, and through the *kensen* [i.e., a tip of shinai] toward the opponent. So if this [i.e., left hand position] goes off then there is no connection you know. So I can't exert a lot of pressure or this sword cannot have much strength if this [i.e., left hand] is off the center. So it's critical that whatever I do my left fist stays around this [bellybutton] area.

Araki believed that another component of kendo from a mind and body connection standpoint that made kenshi's movements look beautiful was confidence: "One of the things that makes movement beautiful is that confidence… If you are confident, you can stay in the right posture and hold your back straight, [which] is very important."

No matter how one defines "beautiful kendo," the naturally existing tension these kenshi felt between showing beautiful body movement and winning a match was apparent in several of their remarks. Egawa acknowledged the similarities between competitive and artistic kendo as well as the conflict between these two aspects:

> I think there are two aspects of kendo – competitive kendo and kendo that is an art… they are not two separate things. They are somehow intertwined in the sense that if you can exhibit strong and beautiful kendo it positively influences your competitive kendo as well to some extent. Now to some extent… if you exhibit beautiful kendo that doesn't necessarily mean that you're strong in competition. So that's sort of the conflict.

Emphasis on Ippon. The definition of yuko-datotsu can be distorted if too much focus is devoted to winning a match or scoring a point, instead of completing waza. These kenshi emphasized the significance of yuko-datotsu, which can only be accomplished by exhibiting a strong mind and proper posture, facing a striking region of shinai, and expressing zanshin. Gondo talked about the proper way to accomplish ippon. "To get a point in kendo, we say ki-ken-tai-itchi – the sword, the spirit, and the body has to come together. It's very important."

Fujikawa emphasized the prominence of ki while explaining the structure of the preceding phrase:

> Now, ki always comes first. Without ki your body is not there, your sword is not there, so that's why [in] ki-ken-tai-icchi the ki always comes first so you have good ki. Then your sword is very, how should I say, becomes alive. Then your body that moves with you and strikes with your ki-ken-tai-icchi and if it's a valid hit on that target with the right distance, hitting the right part of the shinai, it is ippon.

Some of these kenshi considered ki-ken-tai-icchi essential for accomplishing ippon and were critical of any strikes falling short of this standard:

> [There are] some people that'll just hit it. They'll hit it, there's no ki, just hit the target. I don't consider that ippon. Your ki, your ken tai, the whole, the soul, the sword, and the body has to be as one. Once it's one and strike as one in unison, then it is ippon. Only then [is it] truly ippon. Other than that, no, no. I don't think it's ippon (Fujikawa).

Bando also distinguished ippon from a substandard strike. "In order to make an ippon you are not just hitting the opponent's *men* or kote or dō, not touching… if you lack any of the component[s], it's not ippon."

The importance of accomplishing ki-ken-tai-icchi is a staple of kendo culture. However, the ways these kenshi interpreted and actually practiced ki-ken-tai-icchi seemed to differ across participants. This was particularly evident in the way the kenshi understood each component of ki-ken-tai,icchi. The word ki generally has several meanings in Japanese, including energy, spirit, mind, and atmosphere. When discussing the role of ki-ken-tai-icchi in kendo, Fujikawa interpreted ki as “the inner energy of a person.” Gondo expressed ki as “your force, your inner force, your spirit, your intention to score, to attack.” For Iguchi, ki meant “showing kiai.” Kiai is a term used to that the phenomenon of “spirits com[ing] out from inside… that mean[s] showing how serious he is, or she is…how much they are concentrat[ing] right now kind of things” (Iguchi).

The word ken in Japanese stands for sword. Thus, ken in the phrase ki-ken-tai-icchi pertains to the use of shinai in the striking motion. Ken is necessary for striking “in the correct area” (Gondo) and in the “correct direction” (Gondo). Iguchi similarly interpreted ken as “hitting the right spot, [the] right way.”

Tai represents the body in Japanese. Considering the specialized body movements involved in kendo, the “body [has] to move forward when you hit” (Iguchi). Therefore, “how you move your feet” (Bando) is important. Dobashi also emphasized the significance of footwork: “The most important part of the tai is the feet. Like our *ashi-sabaki* [i.e., footwork] is what we need to train.” Fujikawa described footwork in greater detail:

> Tai, body is *tai-sabaki* [i.e., the act of changing the position and direction of the body]. Tai-sabaki, what’s most important, a lot of people think it’s [the] hand. Actually, [it’s] footwork. Footwork is far more important than, uh, the hands because you create distance. You can run… people can’t strike you if you have good footwork. So footwork

is the portion that moves the body. Footwork and then your body moves. So I would emphasize more footwork for tai than hand.

The kenshi also talked about how they actually felt ki and how they controlled or generated ki. Fujikawa stated that he had physically experienced ki in his body:

> First time I really felt ki I was fighting hard, I was winning, and I felt undefeatable. Then I took my kote [i.e., armor to protect wrists] off and I felt like there's like liquid energy tingling through my hands and I can feel like a different type of energy. So then I'm like "what is this?" That is physically when I first felt ki.

Fujikawa's also expressed the feeling that ki can be present in the atmosphere as well as in the body. "The air that's around you feels like it is filled with electricity. It's really, really crisp. You can tell like there's so much energy that's going between the two people" (Fujikawa). He further described the sensations he felt when ki emanated from his body:

> Ki comes from your stomach… it comes from the bottom of your stomach. So, you concentrate your energy there, having good kiai. That also helps. But, you're building and building it. It's not like you're physically making your body stiff. Your body should be completely relaxed, but yet be able to generate energy. Your breath becomes more efficient. Breathe in quick and you can maintain that outwards breath for a little bit longer [He then demonstrated an elongated exhalation].

Another aspect of ki for these kenshi was that it is learnable. Fujikawa stated "ki is an extraordinary energy that everybody has but has to learn how to tap into it." He then described how he invokes ki:

> I concentrate my energy, my ki and bring it to my lower abdominal section and "Wooooooooaaaaaaa!!" You breathe in but you're extending yourself [He inhaled here].

> So you're almost like you're going outwards, then when you breathe out [Exhaled] you're concentrating your energy in. So it's almost [like] you're doing something that's opposite. So when you breathe in, extend out, and when you breathe out, you concentrate the energy in.

Although ki-ken-tai-icchi emphasizes the importance of putting all three components together in a striking motion, these kenshi placed a relatively greater significance on the concept of ki , which for them made the kendo experience special as budo. Fujikawa stated that learning ki was one of the goals of budo: "I think budo you train yourself to be able to tap into your ki power." Dobashi further stressed that ki is what makes kendo distinctive: "ki is obviously the most important. Because without spirit, focus, it's not budo."

Mastery motivation. In kendo as art, kenshi are motivated more by mastery incentives, such as learning waza or improving themselves, than by winning. Although the kenshi in this study had experienced successful careers for a long time, they still expressed strong motivations to improve themselves. Dobashi constantly works to improve his waza. "Just hitting *men*, it takes years of training. It's very difficult. You know, and my *men* is good but I still practice. I want it to get much better."

For some of these kenshi a mastery motivation took precedence over winning even in competition. Several of the participants had competed for a long time and said that the ways they viewed kendo in competition had changed. Egawa now saw competition as an opportunity to demonstrate what he had developed against an opponent:

> I can still participate in tournaments but I'll just be there to compete but not worry about the outcome. Because tournaments are the occasions usually where people you know from all over the region gather up and that's where I can actually practice with a lot of

> other kenshi. Uh, so the way I approach tournaments from now on would be to not… not to win but really show what I can do with my, with the kendo that I have developed so far. How effective I can be with younger guys.

As competition became an opportunity to demonstrate their kendo skills rather than winning referees' points, these kenshi viewed winning and losing differently as well. Fujikawa described "winning" from a different perspective in the following quote:

> I have one rival where even [though] he won in overtime he told me "you did a *gyaku-dō* [i.e., hitting other side of dō]," which is a very difficult technique, and he said that I was perfect. "You won." But the judges - one of them scored – the two of them they don't know how to score gyakudo, so they erase [sic] it… but to me I've won that match because in the real life I would have cut him in half. So, even if I've lost, to me mentally okay I scored. That's good enough.

As a win-loss record became only part of their goals the kenshi began to view success more from a mastery perspective. Interestingly enough, a mastery perspective also seemed to influence the way they interpreted losing. Gondo stated that losing became a source of motivation for him:

> When you lose I guess I don't like it but I enjoy it a lot to lose because I think about the matches which I lost and I try to find a solution. And it gives me a lot of energy to think about little things when I look back [on] those matches that I lost. But of course I want to win better. Winning is better than [losing] but I think either way you want to get a lot out of it [whether] you win or you lose.

Gondo then described how losing a match motivated him more than winning one:

> I will think of a few ways to prevent that problem and practice and think more about how to prevent that you know problem and then practice. It seems like I get more motivated after a [losing] tournament than a winning tournament.

Although some kenshi's motivation had shifted to the mastery side, others had become both mastery- and achievement-motivated. For instance, Dobashi was motivated to become "the senior All United States Champion" as well as to demonstrate his kendo skill and his ki:

> *Taikai* [i.e., tournament] is a very difficult situation… Most of the time the *shiai-jo* [i.e., place for competition] or the gym is strange… You have to go against somebody you don't know… you have to deal with referees… there are all kinds of factors you have to deal with. And in that situation you still have to make yuko-datotsu point with ki-ken-tai. And if you can do that, you've trained very hard. You know I think I don't understand why that is not a test of your kendo. I think that is a test of kendo. Those who can do well in that situation, you know you have strong ki.

Relationship/Bond

The kenshi in this study had met a wide variety of people since they began practicing kendo. They felt their relationships with these people were essential, influential, and valuable to their progress and that they could not have achieved what they did without these people. This figural dimension of *Relationship/Bond* included three sub-themes. One of these sub-themes, *Sensei,* consisted of four additional elements. The other two sub-themes were *Parents* and "*Big Family*."

Sensei. Sensei means teacher, instructor, and/or master in Japanese. In kendo, instructors are usually called "sensei," even in the United States. Sensei were very influential people for the

kenshi in this study at various points in their kendo lives. The sub-theme sensei contained of four elements: *Role model*, *Trust*, *Guidance*, and *Discipline*.

Role model. Some of the kenshi were fortunate enough to meet, even if only for a short time, sensei who had made a lasting impact on their kendo lives. These kenshi aspired to be like the special sensei yet seemed to feel that such a goal was too great to attain. Sample statements to this effect included, "I'm nowhere close to him" (Fujikawa) and "I'd never be his equal" (Dobashi). Egawa felt that the best he could do is to come a little closer to the sensei's kendo. He said, "My motivation for right now is I try to, you know, solidify my kendo and I try to be closer to Oshima sensei's kendo. Only closer. I won't be able to reach his, his height."

Although some kenshi had maintained a relationship with their influential sensei others had not. Dobashi lamented the loss of the great sensei that he had worked with since his childhood. Nevertheless, Dobashi still pursued his sensei's way by integrating the sensei's approach into his own teaching methods. "Basically the way the class flows, I try to keep the same way he did things, you know, the way he did things." More specifically, Dobashi said he gave "lots of kihon [i.e., basic techniques]" at the beginning of the class. Dobashi also put on kendo gear and practiced with his students in order to "do everything with everybody." He said his sensei had "always put *men* on, and at least *motodachi* [i.e., the one who takes the role of instructor for the trainee practicing] and--he wasn't just standing and teaching when he came in." Dobashi said he still believed his sensei's words: "You can't see their improvement if you don't receive them" and tried to create a favorable, positive atmosphere in his dojo, as indicated in the following comment:

> I try not to be too strict. I try to be more like him, sometimes say jokes, you know, sometimes tell story… I try to keep the atmosphere serious but I don't want students to be afraid of me. That's [the way] he was.

Not only had special sensei influenced these kenshi's kendo lives, they had also played an important role in the kenshi's daily lives. Chiba did not see any way his life could have happened without his sensei. "[He is] an idol. He's always been there for me. I love him. I really would hate to think where I would be without him." Egawa also admitted that he had devoted himself to his sensei and stated, "his influence… wasn't limited to kendo only but he has influenced the way I think, the way I approach things in general."

While these kenshi felt fortunate to have encountered and worked with influential sensei early in their career, they also realized they might encounter impressive sensei outside of their regular dojo. Bando commented on such an experience he had with an 8th dan sensei outside his dojo. He stated, ,"[all] 8th dan teachers, they have their own style." Interacting with these sensei had further inspired Bando to set his life-time goal of achieving the level of 8th dan sensei. "I am hoping [in] the future, uh, when I become 7th dan, 8th dan, [I] would like to create my own style of kendo."

Trust. The more these kenshi worked with sensei, the stronger their relationship became. These sensei possessed several qualities that built rapport with the kenshi and cultivated their trust. Egawa was enthralled by his sensei's expertise and said:

> Underlying my trust in Oshima sensei's teaching lays the fact that I believe that his kendo is really superior, is really top notch... I listen to him. I do whatever he tells me to do in terms of improving kendo. So I just blindly follow his advice. That's what I've been doing so far.

Interestingly, Egawa occasionally received the advice of other sensei but only trusted it when he felt the advice was similar to what he had received from his former great sensei. “I find great similarities between what Oshima sensei [told] me and what Matsui sensei tells me so I can trust this Matsui sensei’s guidance.”

Egawa’s trust in his sensei resulted from the fact that he had spent many years working with the sensei. However, Gondo was also open to the advice given by sensei with whom he had not worked on a regular basis:

> Whatever the sensei tells me to [do], that’s what I practice. If somebody says the completely opposite then I’ll start doing the completely opposite you know for awhile until it makes sense. Because every sensei may say something conflicting but they all have reason to say it.”

Gondo’s determination to follow the advice of different sensei was based on a trust he had in sensei’s teaching and openness to trying what they suggested. “I don’t really need to understand why exactly I’m doing this or… what they really mean by it. You just have to trust and do it. And if you’re lucky it makes sense later.”

In addition to their sensei’s expertise in kendo, these kenshi appreciated their sensei’s involvement in their lives. Chiba said his sensei had cared about him both in and out of the dojo. He stated, “every time, he would just give me the right advice and stuff and it would always keep my head clear.” Chiba placed full confidence in his sensei’s advice:

> I always have to believe what he says, because he’s an adult now. He’s an adult, he has a good life and he’s just a really smart person… I really appreciate what he’s done for me.

Guidance. The kenshi in this study appreciated sensei’s guidance as well as their advice. Guidance was often experienced in the flexibility with which sensei provided instruction. Bando

was impressed with the way 8th dan kenshi, who are the highest ranked in the Kendo Federation, demonstrated flexibility in their teaching approach:

> Many 8th dan teachers are surprisingly flexible in their thinking. They never say…"This is bad" or "This is good." Not only, uh, yes or no answer, but "You can do better this way," "Why don't you try this," "You might [be able to] do, find a different result this way, why don't you try it?" It's more like that.

Araki also pointed out, "Except for kendo practice for kids, [the] instructor tends not to teach details about technique of kendo." Thus, as kenshi mature and gain experience, their sensei shift their instructional approach from a command style to one of modeling and guidance. Egawa's experience with most influential sensei, Oshima sensei, supported this shift. "His teaching is more like, you know, "Look at me. Do it the way I do it" instead of micromanaging what I do or what I don't do right. He says, you know, "Think on your own." Egawa recalled a time when he visited Oshima sensei after a long interval of not having seen him to ask for his advice:

> I had great expectations that he would tell me all about, you know, fancy waza, all about secrets of kendo and that [would] dramatically, um, improve my kendo. That was my expectation. But…the first thing he told me – after watching my kendo at that time – was, "Okay, Egawa your *kamae* [i.e., initial posture and stance] is wrong. You have to kamae in a stronger way… Everything has to, has to be based on good solid kamae and you're not doing that." And that's all he said. He didn't tell me any waza [to do]. He didn't tell me any sort of you know mental skills that I have to have in order to compete at a next level or anything like that… I remember vividly that that was the same thing that he told me [years earlier] when I was a freshman in college.

Egawa described how Oshima sensei's instructional approach did not include "fixing" his problems for him:

> I tried my best to correct my kamae. The next year I came back and I said, "Is my kamae okay?" "No" he said. Work on it more. The next year it was the same deal. So I really worked on my kamae [and] he saw how I worked hard to correct my kamae. [Then] he started to give me some other advice… how to spar against sensei; how to improve my kendo.

These kenshi were motivated more by sensei's guidance than by detailed advice. For example, Bando said he focused much of his practice on discovering for himself the meaning of his sensei's words, "kokoro wo utsunda [i.e., striking the opponent's heart]."

> I had no idea what he meant; I was like "What?" (laughing) He asked me, "Where you strike?" You would say "Kote or *men* or tsuki or dō" and he said "No" (laughing). So I had no idea. I am still on the way to really understand that.

Discipline. Another important role these kenshi's sensei played in their lives was that of instilling discipline. Since manners and etiquette are critical aspects of kendo, the sensei emphasized appropriate manners and etiquette when working with their kenshi, especially the youngsters. Araki remembered the methods his sensei used when he was young: "Their focus was to teach kids discipline and politeness and working hard on something. And [the] process is very important… they [did] not overly applaud one who won the match. They didn't put priority there." He also mentioned how strictly his sensei inculcated the idea of discipline.

> If we did not behave well during practice, the teachers, the instructors force [sic] us to sit on the floor, wooden floor in the *seiza* [i.e., sitting on one's heels with one's back straight], in seiza for like one hour. So whole practice was just seiza. So they gave us

> very hard time to tell us how important discipline is in kendo. And also they repeatedly told us that kendo start[s] with *rei* (i.e., bow) and end[s] with rei.

Fujikawa also mentioned how severely his sensei had reinforced the importance of proper manners in working with him:

> He was strictest not kendo, but *reiho* [i.e., courtesy]. He was strictest in reiho. Reiho if you go out of line that was the end. I mean that was the end. I mean you would get, I mean physically beat up. Reiho was absolutely no room for any marginal reiho. Has to be perfect.

Fujikawa talked about the respect his sensei expected of his students if parents visited practice. ”When a parent come[s] in we'll all say '*Konnichiwa'* [i.e., hello] real loud, every single parent, anybody comes in because that's part of reiho.”

Some of these kenshi learned their work ethic from sensei who used extreme methods. Bando described a terrifying experience he had with his sensei when he was a child:

> I was in kindergarten… [at] that time the teachers, the kendo was very harsh. They put shinai against your back and slam you into the wall (laughing) and they [were] on top of you and take your *men* off. Or they, kind of, uh, take your shinai off, throw your shinai off, and when you trying to pick it up, they try, uh, throw your shinai more, so you have to run. And, so I kind of have to grapple the teacher's shinai, which is much heavier than my shinai and fight against him. Uhm, maybe we call it kendo training in Japan, but here you call it early child abuse (laughing).

Fujikawa also related a story about how much his sensei scared him:

> He [would] pick us up by our heads and throw us against the walls (laughing). I mean he was rough. I mean really rough. And every time I fought him I was so scared, and I

> would cry in class. Everybody cried in class because it was so scary and our hands [were] black and blue. It was scary.

For these kenshi, relationships with sensei were multi-faceted and were characterized by a range of emotions from reverence to fear.

Parents. A second sub-theme of the major theme of Relationship/Bond was parents. While sensei played a key role in these kenshi's development parents provided them with unconditional support throughout their lives. When the kenshi were young, their parents helped them adapt to their kendo lives smoothly. For example, Araki talked about his father's early influence:

> My father had armors, kendo armors, *bogu* [i.e., kendo armors] in my house and… he brought me to some kendo practice and that people wearing kendo bogu looked cool, very cool to me. So that was a major motivation.

Once the kenshi started kendo, they faced unexpected difficulties. Kendo practice was so harsh that it would have been easy to quit, but they learned how to manage adversity and continued to practice kendo with the support of their parents. However, they acknowledged that such support was not necessarily recognized as such at that time. For instance, Bando said that every time he wanted to quit kendo, his father refused to let him. "Many times I wanted to quit kendo. Uh, but, uh, my parents, my father actually said, you know, 'This is the thing that you said you want[ed] to do, so continue.'" Fujikawa also remembered his parents being unwilling to accept his excuses to miss practice:

> Before I went to kendo I would put a thermometer next to a light and put it in my arm and say I have a fever, try to make sickness (laughing). I did everything I [could]… My

parents, they were rough, you go, you have a fever but if you do kendo it will go down (laughing).

The support the previous kenshi mentioned appeared to resemble discipline. However, Dobashi's experience of parental support was a bit different. He was born and raised outside Japan by Japanese parents. "Thankfully my parents being Japanese and my grandparents being Japanese, I knew from a young age that this man is sensei. What he says, you do." Dobashi's father stressed the importance of respecting sensei and being committed to following through on what he decided to do: "My father told me 'If you're going to do this, do it. Don't quit.' He said, 'If you want to do budo, you do it. And if sensei says, do this, you do it. You don't ask him why.'"

"Big family." The kenshi interviewed in this study met sensei and other kenshi through their kendo lives and felt close to all of these people. In particular, their dojo members made them feel like members of a close-knit family. In speaking of her dojo members Iguchi said: "They are like my family. They are like my best friend[s]. They are like my brother[s]." Even their sensei felt like family members to these kenshi. Their comments included remarks like, "He's like my grandpa" (Iguchi); "Nishi sensei was like my grandfather" (Dobashi); and "He's kind of been like my big brother" (Chiba).

The kenshi also enjoyed meeting new people through kendo outside of their own dojo. It was not unusual for kenshi to meet various people from outside the dojo for joint practice, workshops, or summer camps. Some of these experiences led to the development of a close relationship:

> It's a great thing that through kendo you meet different people of different ages – you know even different sexes, different backgrounds – and you can be friends just like that … it's more like *ko-ken-chi-ai,* Cross swords and find love in people. (Egawa)

Egawa mentioned a practice session with alumni from his college team in Japan where kenshi from a wide range of generations actually practiced together.

> Twice every week – Tuesdays and Fridays – there's a practice session where… a lot of OBs [i.e., old boys = alumni] would come and practice with [the] young guys. It's amazing. And if you go to a *kangeiko*, keiko in the winter, 7:00 in the morning these guys that are 70 years old or older they would show up and they would keiko with you know 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds.

Bando said he had practiced with kenshi outside of his dojo but still viewed them as his "family." He stated, "it's like a big family. Through kendo you can create your own family and you can learn a lot from it."

This close relationship extended even to rivals. Fujikawa described a friendly rivalry between his dojo and another dojo: "Like (dojo in the U.S.), they defeated us and we haven't lost in forever, and (dojo in the U.S.) defeated us in the last two or three years. But, we have probably one of the best relationships with (dojo in the U.S.)." These friendly rivalries sometimes extended to practicing together. As Fujikawa stated,

> I'll bring two or three of my guys to (dojo in the U.S.) and practice, and (dojo in the U.S.) loves us. They're like "We can't believe you came, thank you for coming," and we'll fight hard, joke around, have dinner together, drink, talk about kendo, talk about life, and they know that I'm very sincere saying, "I will try to defeat you this year," and they're like "Please try to."

Regardless of where or when they meet them, these kenshi said they have a strong emotional connection to other kenshi. Chiba spoke of the appreciation he felt for meeting new kenshi:

> I get to travel a lot also. I've been to California, Las Vegas. I've been to Canada, Japan, just for kendo, specifically, just for kendo, and that's cool. And I've just met a lot of people, a lot of different people from around the world. I just…I love it.

Iguchi admitted she held strong emotions for other kenshi and struggled to express the almost indescribable feeling she shared with them: "We have something special, like a more strong connection or strong [spirit] or something inside. But I don't know if I can find exactly [a] word for that."

The Way/Path

The term kendo is comprised of two *kanji* (i.e., Chinese characters used in Japanese writing), 剣道. The first kanji 剣 (ken) represents a sword, and the second one 道 usually signifies a road or a path when pronounced as *michi*. Apart from the meaning of a road on which vehicles or pedestrians may travel, the letter 道 in Japanese signifies a standard of behavior or life, such as "the correct way." The letter also connotes a journey or a process of pursuing a goal. The kenshi who participated in this study strived to find "correct ways," where to go and what to do in order to get there. They also believed that they were on the correct path to finally reach their goals. This fifth figural dimension of kenshi's experience of kendo, *The Way/Path*, consisted two sub-themes, *Satisfaction/Fulfillment* and *Life-Long Endeavor*, each of which consisted of several additional elements.

Satisfaction/Fulfillment. These kenshi had experienced a great deal of accomplishment in the pursuit of their goals. Whenever they achieved their goals, they gained a feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment. Three elements associated with this feeling were *Pride*, *Confidence*, and *Enjoyment/Fun*.

Pride. The kenshi took greater pride in the way they achieved a goal than mere achievement of the goal. For instance, Dobashi was prouder of the ways he defeated opponents than of the number of medals or tournaments he won:

> I really believe that maybe, if I did kendo to raise flags, I would have won more medals but I'm proud that all my medals came with yuko-datotsu because if I had a sword in my hand, all my opponents would be dead.

Egawa found his sensei's way to be the one he wanted to pursue and was proud of the way he had been pursuing it: "I take great pride in the fact that I, you know, my path is pretty well grounded. I try to follow Oshima sensei's path."

No matter how much these kenshi were satisfied with the way they were involved in kendo, they did not forget the significance of kendo itself and of their lives as kenshi. Araki took pride in kendo and distinguished it from Western sports:

> There may be a difference because [in] boxing or baseball, soccer, fencing, tennis, winning is [more] important than how beautiful your style is. But kendo, beauty of your movement is one of the most important thing[s]… So that may be a difference, something special about kendo.

Araki also felt special pride in the ferocity of kendo compared to other budo:

> When we practice kendo I think it's very special compared to other budo. Like karate, if you get hit, beat, beaten by others, you may still survive. But kendo, you may lose your arms, legs, or you get cut your belly, or you get killed or beheaded so it's very serious.

Confidence. These kenshi were highly accomplished and confident as a result of their successes in kendo. Dobashi remembered how his confidence increased after surviving an extremely intense summer camp in Japan that made him feel that he "came here to suffer." He said he stayed focused on one short-term goal in order to cope with the adversity - "I'm not going to take a break. Oh, they give you breaks but, you know, how a lot of people on the side, rest as--I am not going to be one of those people" When he finally completed the camp and realized that his strong ki had carried him through, his confidence grew immensely. "I did it. You know, I did it. That's the ki that you need. And because I did it I think that made me stronger. I flew back to America stronger than [before]."

Fujikawa gained confidence by getting over his fear of tsuki and likened the relationship between confidence and fear as "almost like a Ying and Yang." Although one tsuki terribly injured him so badly that "my jaw came off," Fujikawa knew he needed to be able to handle it:

> In order to say "I am no longer afraid," people had to do tsuki on me so many times, and then I'm like, "Okay, I know tsuki." Somebody does tsuki, I know how to block it, I know the timing, I know how to receive it better as well, to take less impact as well. So, that's one example of fear turning back into confidence. But at the end you have to face fear, because if you don't face fear, if you run away you will never overcome it.

These kenshi also realized that gaining confidence came only after many hours of studying kendo under the watchful eyes of wise sensei. Until he met Oshima sensei, Egawa had gone through a period of crushing uncertainty regarding his kendo path. However, under Oshima

sensei's guidance, he had experienced significant gains in confidence. He stated, "I'm very happy that… the way I learn kendo, is, is a correct way. I think that. So I have great confidence in what I'm doing so that gives me great pleasure."

Enjoyment/fun. Although the kenshi faced fear, severe discipline, and challenging practices, they also enjoyed many pleasant experiences in their kendo lives. Those who had embraced a mastery motivation enjoyed the learning process itself. Bando took pleasure in learning "communication" with the opponent, such as observing the opponent's mannerisms and creating opportunities to strike. He commented, "Once you get into that level of kendo, it becomes fun. You started to see [an]other side of kendo, you are draw[n] into it." Bando also appreciated how he had learned self-control when facing opponents by watching the way highly ranked sensei showed no emotion when in "communication" with their opponents:

> The teacher has immovable mind, it doesn't move, the mind doesn't react easily. And, they don't make any reaction. They [are] able to stand and can control [themselves]. So, I thought that was one of the most enjoyable, or most interesting things in martial art, or kendo.

Egawa also talked about how the many experiences he had had with opponents and the way he had learned how to integrate mental and strategic approaches into his kendo had made the budo more interesting to him. "You have this perceptiveness that you can apply to kendo through reading the opponent, anticipating the opponent's movements. Those things don't come like that when you're young… so kendo gets more interesting over time."

Other aspects of kendo life beyond sword fighting brought pleasure to these kenshi. Those who had grown up in Japan and moved to the United States found that interacting with

American kenshi offered a fresh perspective. Gondo talked about teaching kendo in his dojo and the enjoyable experience he had teaching Americans:

> It's a lot of fun. The American people come to kendo obviously they have some interest in Japanese culture or martial arts. I tell them or explain to them the concept or the way we do things. It's very exciting to those people because it's very new, very different. Their eyes go wide open and you know like stars starting to shine in their eyes and trying to listen to everything.

American-born kenshi found it enlightening to visit their budo's country of origin. Chiba had traveled to Japan as a member of "twenty selected kendo practitioners in America" in his age group. He experienced Japanese culture firsthand through this trip and remembered many eye-opening experiences. He stated that "it was completely different from the U.S.," and "it was kind of like a cultural exchange" The trip also gave Chiba precious time with young Japanese kenshi:

> I got to practice kendo with a lot of high school students, which was really fun, because then I could kind of compare. They're my age, so now how can I practice, or how can I do against a Japanese *kendoka* [i.e., kendo practitioner]. So it was just really fun…a lot of good times.

Chiba also had opportunities to practice with higher-level kenshi during his trip. He visited a college team and received inspiring instruction from an 8th dan sensei. He commented that it was "like my most educational practice ever… he focused more like on seme and seme… It was a really hard practice, but it was really educational. I consider that [the] best practice that I've had."

Life-long endeavor. The kenshi in this study also valued another aspect of the letter 道, a journey for a goal. They realized during their journey that it would take a certain amount of time until they finally reached their goals and would be able to view their attainment from a long-term perspective. This second sub-theme of the major dimension of *The Way/Path*, consisted of five elements: *Periodic Transition*, *Pivotal Moments*, *Consistent Effort*, *Passing it on*, and *Delayed Gratification*.

Periodic transition. These kenshi had faced periodic transitions throughout their kendo lives. They had learned the importance of manners and courtesy from sensei in the early stage of kendo life and had then shifted their focus to the competitive side. Araki reflected on his transition from youth kendo to high school kendo when he said: “When I was an elementary school student, then my focus… was not about winning match, but [in] high school, winning match was a priority” He also noted how the sensei’s guidance shifted when he transitioned to high school, placing a greater emphasis on competition Araki said his high school “teachers believed that everybody went through the process already about discipline and politeness stuff. So now they focused more on winning [the] match.”

Fujikawa remembered a stage in his kendo life where winning was his primary goal: “There’s stages. I was once more [interested in] scoring than ippon long time ago. When I was fighting a lot in Japan and (place in the U.S.), [I] just wanted to win.” When winning was their sole focus the kenshi focused only on the brute physical aspects of kendo competition. Bando said, “I just striked [sic] with my maximum strength and, uh, with my maximum speed.”

With greater experience these kenshi transitioned from focusing only on winning a competition to a deeper mental understanding of the budo. Their focus reached beyond physical domination of the opponent. Egawa talked about this transition saying:

> When I was in high school or college I didn't use my mind very, very much… it was purely a physical activity for me… [However, kendo] becomes much more than competition after a certain point… [My] kendo changed very much from a really competitive sort of student-like kendo to a more mature adult, sophisticated kendo."

Fujikawa described his transition in the following way:

> The mental aspects of kendo started to come into play as in some people call *fudoshin*, or *mushin*, or no mind, or immovable mind… that was my transition from one sector of kendo to the next sector that involved more mental training than physical training.

Kenshi who advance to the level of dan while cultivating their skills and aesthetic mastery reached another stage: teaching. A few of the kenshi in this study had already started teaching. This transition seemed to be more difficult and demanding compared to their experiences in earlier stages. Dobashi said he still missed his younger days under his great sensei and found the responsibility of teaching rather daunting:

> I sometimes now still miss just being [Dobashi's first name], you know? [His first name], just another guy in the dojo under sensei. I miss having him here. You know, I didn't want to be sensei myself, you know. I just wanted to be [his first name] in the dojo, you know, that was what I love[d] the most. When I was *sho-dan* [i.e., first degree], *ni-dan* [i.e., second degree], sensei was always there. I didn't have to worry about what was I to do next or what, you know, he was always in charge of the class, so it was a comfortable place for me where I could learn, you know.

Despite the challenges of teaching, Dobashi felt he had achieved the transition by following his great sensei's way, enabling him to show his face to his great sensei:

> I'm doing it based it on what I learned. So I think I did well going from student to teacher. And I think if he was able to see my students now, he'd probably yell at me but, you know, I think deep down he['d] be proud. I think he['d] say well, "Good," you know.

Pivotal moments. The kenshi associated the transitions in their kendo experience with pivotal moments. While these turning points were usually bitter moments for the kenshi at the time they eventually came to understand their importance. Bando mentioned that failing his promotion test for 5th dan was very disappointing yet the experience led to important changes in his kendo style:

> It was very hard for me to admit I fail [sic] 5th dan test. But I didn't know why, uhm, so I started to look at my video [clip] – how I actually did in promotion, and studied how to pass 5th dan… I really didn't think about the communication of, between me and the opponent… I started to see not only myself, but see the opponent. How you can communicate with the opponent, how [you can learn] to see the change in the opponent's heart, or opponent's mind.

Egawa remembered when he first started kendo, his agility was superior to other children's and he did not really have to think about anything but striking the opponent. The time came, however, when he needed to work harder on developing his kendo. He said, "I was fast but … there's a point where I couldn't just throw my *men* strike… That started not to work. So that was about when I was [*He spoke Japanese* (i.e., 2nd year in high school)]." More specifically, Egawa realized he had to learn more dynamic strategies to deal with stronger opponents:

> That's when the opponents started to learn a counterstrike… that's when I learned how to draw the opponent, make him want what I want him to do. That's when I learned… kendo is not just athletic abilities but it's a mental sport.

It took awhile until Egawa faced another pivotal point in his kendo life. He grew up with kendo in Japan but stopped practicing it during his college years. He then resumed it after a long time living in the United States. However, he soon realized he needed to overhaul his kendo. In one competition he was severely defeated by a former national level kenshi from Japan. Egawa remembered, "He really, uh, kicked my butt." This piercing defeat brought him back to his old sensei, Oshima sensei. When Egawa "asked for advice in terms of how to improve [his] kendo," all Oshima sensei said was "the same thing that he told me when I was a freshman in college."

While Egawa had feared that changing his kendo would not have allowed him to compete at as high a level as he could, he decided to finally take Oshima sensei's advice. "When I was in college I never followed his advice but [years later] he said that again and… in order to learn kendo the correct way… okay let's change my kendo. Let's overhaul my kendo completely." – As a result, Egawa has come to experience a "more mature adult, sophisticated kendo."

The most pivotal turning point for Dobashi came with the loss of his great sensei. He realized how difficult it was to confront a promotion test without his mentor.

> I took *go-dan* [i.e., 5th dan] test in [year]. And that was the first time I took *shinsa* [i.e., promotion test] without my sensei… when I realized that I was alone it was a very, very sad moment for me. Probably the saddest day in my Kendo life was my go-dan shinsa.

Dobashi eventually passed 5th dan and decided to start his own dojo to teach kendo. Transitioning to this stage represented a move forward to the next stage in his kendo life and greater independence from his "grandfather":

> It also made me say, you know, time to grow up. People need me, especially in America. If I pass go-dan there's not a lot of go-dan in America. If I want to teach what my sensei taught, I have to pass this test… when I started the (place in the U.S.) dojo, that's when I got my go-dan… and that was when I really said goodbye to Nishi sensei.

Pivotal moments were not all big steps in these kenshi's lives. Fujikawa talked about a small but dramatically life-changing step in his childhood that enabled him to move up to the next level. The step involved overcoming a fear of his sensei. Fujikawa had always run away from his sensei, but one day he decided to stand up and fight him:

> Everybody that fought [him] tried to run away, tried to hide from him, cried… one day I decided, I ran toward him first and bowed at him and went at him full blast… [I] went and said "*Onegaishimasu,*" went to him first and fought him hard, hard, hard and he's like "boom" it's over. It felt like five minutes where if I ran away and [was] scared [of] him it felt like 20 minutes… Then that was my initial growth. Then I started getting better at kendo, I started fighting everybody real well.

Consistent effort. Another element of these kenshi's lifelong endeavor was consistent effort. When they looked back at their own careers, they reflected on how long and hard they had practiced to get to where they were. Araki began his interview by talking about his early experiences of hard practice. He said, "When I think about kendo… uh, I still remember the very hard practice when I was an elementary school student." Things were no different when he moved to his high school kendo team where "they had very hard practice[s]."

In addition to daily practice, Dobashi spoke of one particularly pivotal and painful practice he had during a summer camp in Japan.

> For seven days, six hours a day, every minute, there's a sensei teaching. I will be out there. By the third day, I said, "What am I doing here?" This is so stupid. Suffering. I want to cry, my feet hurt. But I said, "No, no break."

Gondo also referred to the physical pain that accompanied his daily practice:

> Around my neck was always red with a bruise from *tsuki*… your feet will be covered with the blisters and you know a lot of cuts constantly, when you have [a blister], you'll have about three, two or three, blisters on top of each other so that when it breaks it's already one or two underneath of the blister.

No matter how physically and mentally painful practice sessions were, these kenshi just kept coming to the dojo. They realized that there were no short cuts to reaching their goals. Fujikawa mentioned how he built confidence with consistent effort in a certain waza: "This technique will work. I can score this technique. This is a very good technique, but that is with years and years and years of practice. And accumulation based on hard work, mental state, experiment, and freestyle" (Fujikawa). For Egawa consistent effort in "communicating with the opponent" helped him progress in kendo:

> That's just experience. You have to have enough sword fighting to accumulate all these experiences and that is why in kendo you learn by getting hit… So you know, you learn, naturally when to strike, when not to strike. When the opponent does this movement that's usually the sign of a counter attack or come forward…. So those things have to be learned by sweat and blood unfortunately.

Passing it on. The kenshi in this study had also established close-knit relationships with supportive, influential people through kendo. As a result they were very conscious of the

importance of bequeathing what they had gained through kendo to others. Dobashi said he was strongly committed to passing on his sensei's way to his students. As he explained,

> Even if I don't want to be sensei, these people want to learn kendo. If they want to learn, I want them to learn his (i.e., former sensei) way, you know. And the only way they can learn his way is through me.

As a renshi (i.e., title given to 6th dan kenshi in kendo) Dobashi felt additional responsibility to impart the kendo tradition to the next generation of kenshi: "Renshi is now, you know, somebody who must begin on the path to not just being good at kendo themselves but to be able to pass on kendo." Gondo expressed a similar sentiment when he stated: "I think importance is that… what you do is carried on to the next generations and what you're learning is coming from your sensei and their sensei and their sensei." Hasegawa also felt the responsibility to "pass it on" in his role as a senior member of his dojo:

> Since I'm a senior member of the dojo, I try to help out all their kohais [*sic*]. If there's any problem with the form, or if there's any questions regarding what to do, I try to help out as much as possible. Then in turn, all my senpais [*sic*] will advise me if I'm doing something wrong or not. I'm trying to pass the torch.

Delayed gratification. These kenshi eventually developed an appreciation of how the earlier training they had endured, especially during their younger years, contributed to their eventual mastery of the budo. Bando said he had wanted to quit kendo many times and now appreciated his father not allowing him to do so. He stated, "I['m] just really glad that my father didn't let me quit (laughing). Now I kind of appreciate, I can appreciate that he kind of forced me to pursue one thing." Dobashi also remembered how his first experience of kendo had been so boring:

> When I started kendo I was 10… kendo was very boring in the beginning. First--and he told me too, "Don't be eager to put *bogu* [i.e., armor] on." He said, "Do kihon without bogu you are kid, you have time."… Yes, over the year, 13 months, he made me do it (i.e., kihon). Literally, just *ichi* [i.e., one in Japanese], *ni* [i.e., two in Japanese] footwork, ichi, ni, just, ichi, ni, ichi, ni. That's all I did. But he said, "Trust me. Someday you will become something special, if you do this now and wait to put bogu on because your kihon will forever be with you… he actually said, "Maybe someday you'll become *go-dan* [i.e., 5th degree] at least."… He was right. I did become go-dan. He was right. I did.

Although he faced a difficult time handling the failure of his 5th promotion test Bando said he appreciated now what the experience had taught him. He remarked, "now I'm very [appreciative], I kind of appreciate the judge [giving] me a[n] opportunity for one year, to find… that I can develop, or I can improve."

Values of Kendo

The figural themes that emerged from these kenshi's experience of kendo were all encompassed by a larger framework, *Values of Kendo,* which served as a near ground. This ground consisted of three sub-themes: *Manners/Etiquette/Reigi*, *"Kill or be killed,"* and *Expectations of Rank.*

Manners/etiquette/reigi. There is a strong standard of manners, etiquette, and *reigi* (i.e., courtesy) in kendo as well as in other budo. As Fujikawa stated, it "start[s] with a bow, *rei* [i.e., bow] and… end[s] with the rei." Dobashi said, "I can't stress the importance of it (i.e., manners and etiquette) enough," and viewed them as "things anybody can do" no matter what his or her skill level. Kenshi are expected to show appropriate manners and etiquette in a number of ways. For instance, when kenshi learn from sensei, they "do rei, thank you very much" (Fujikawa),

which conveys the message "thank you for taking your time to teach me all these valuable lessons" (Fujikawa). In additions to showing respect to sensei, kenshi also show respect for other kenshi who rank higher in the hierarchy. As Araki stated, "hierarchy of different age [is] very strong."

Proper manners and etiquette are also expected in the training facility (i.e., dojo): "Before we enter the practice place in dojo we bow" (Iguchi). Kenshi also bow when before leaving the dojo after practice. Iguchi said that kenshi need to "respect and appreciate the dojo" and show their gratitude with a bow that means, "thank you so much for letting us practice tonight" (Iguchi).

These kenshi also singled out the shinai as an object demanding great respect. Dobashi emphasized the importance of treating shinai respectfully, as if it were a real sword and viewed it as a representation of Japanese culture:

> This is a *ken* [i.e., sword], it's a *nihonto* [i.e., Japanese sword], one of the treasures of Japan. It's something that needs to be treated--I mean, it's treated with so much respect that the entire art was developed. Not only for it to use but for the smithing, you know, for making the katana. Polishing the katana is an art. Sharpening it is an art. Putting the *tsuka* [i.e., hilt of a sword; the region or a sword which is gripped with hands] on it is an art. Even making *tsuba* [i.e., a sword guard inserted between the hilt and blade region of a sword]. All these things are, you know, national treasures. These are things that must be respected when treating the shinai as a real sword. If you treat it as four pieces of bamboo, there's no respect.

In fact, kenshi have to be committed to showing appropriate etiquette regarding shinai. Dobashi remarked further:

> Don't just throw it (i.e., shinai) on the ground or--or if it's on the ground, don't step on it. You know, when you're going to seiza, tip down, handle down, you know, in order--not to just on the ground. So you always lower properly.

Araki also expressed a commitment to strictly following the proper etiquette regarding the shinai:

> We treat shinai like we are dealing with real sword… when we commit, uh, commit a fight, then sword is only way to protect your life… it's your life itself. So, uh, we never touch shinai using a foot… When we pick up shinai, we sit down and hold it with using both hands. And if you pass shinai to others, also you use both hands to hand it to other person.

As seen in these testimonials, the participants in this study placed great importance on the manners and etiquette of the kendo life: "Even though he practice for 10 years, if he doesn't mature as a person, I think it's just a half of kendo" (Bando). Dobashi emphasized that any deviation from the standard of appropriate manners was not acceptable:

> Without that (manners and etiquette), it's not kendo anymore. It's stick fighting. When I explain to students, you know, there's a difference between hitting *men* and hitting somebody on the head with a stick, you know. There's a big difference. One--anybody can do that, but to hit *men*, only special people who train hard can do it. And without proper etiquette, without proper manners, you know, it's very difficult to achieve that.

"Kill or be killed." These kenshi were very cognizant of the origin of kendo, a real sword fight in the context of battle. Araki stated that the "basic movement [of kendo] is established based on real fight[ing]." He respected the reality of putting himself into that situation where "if you get cut, you'll get serious[ly] injured or die, [in] most case[s] you die or

you kill somebody." Dobashi connected the importance of learning the basic swing skills of kendo to a real fight situation:

> You have to develop the ability to cut. You can't forget that shinai represents *katana* or a real sword. And to be able to cut with it, you have to be able to not just swing it back and forth. You have to swing it properly.

Fujikawa discussed his own philosophical approach to kendo and, more broadly, to budo, in the following comment:

> In Japanese it's call *Ichi-go-ichi-e* [i.e, Treasure every encounter, for it will never recur]. That moment will never come again. So, you're at the moment, within this moment you're facing an opponent and it's life and death. With life and death within your hands. With I think, you're able to face life and death with a heart of, "Okay, I will die and strike, not fearing to lose, not fearing death." To me that's budo.

Fujikawa even viewed the learning of kata (i.e., form) as an opportunity to understand the dynamics of a real sword fight:

> You have to treat it like a real live blade sword and strike your opponent like a real live blade sword. Then the kata comes alive, then it becomes budo, life or death… I think truly to get really good it's best to do kata because that was what all the old Japanese sword schools came together and created the ultimate, ultimate sword techniques, became the katas [*sic*] of kendo, and within that contains a lot of secrets and techniques.

Expectations of rank. All kenshi must pass a promotion test to be certified at a certain rank. The promotion test usually includes taking a skill test, demonstrating kata and/or freestyle practice, and/or writing an essay, depending on the level of the rank. The test helps kenshi appreciate the appropriate skills and concepts of kendo as well as being necessary for

certification. For example, essay questions deal with fundamental kendo concepts kenshi are expected to know. Chiba remembered the essay question "What are the *shikai* (i.e., four undesirable mental states: surprise, fear, doubt, confusion)?" when he took *shodan* (i.e., 1st dan). Dobashi remembered an essay question from a 5th dan test: "What is the importance of the fundamentals of *kihon* [i.e., foundation, basics].'" Chiba said his understanding of the four "diseases" helped him appreciate the mental games in a kendo match. He stated, "Basically, if you can give your opponent any one of these four sicknesses, then you have an advantage, really big advantage."

Taking promotion tests also provides kenshi with a better understanding of where they need to improve in pursuit of the kendo life. During a test, the judges assess kenshi's skills, kata demonstrations, and freestyle practices. Bando realized judges' expectations more clearly after failing his initial 5th dan test: "Even though you have a strong strike speed, judges looking for a little bit more than that: How you can create opportunity [to strike], and it was what the judges were looking for in 5th dan." Egawa described judges' expectations more specifically when talking about his test for roku-dan or *go-dan* [i.e., 5th degree]: "What judges are looking for is how, how you come into the distance, how patient you can be, and how dominant you are. How much control you can exert over the opponent" (Egawa).

Once kenshi achieve a certain rank, they feel a great responsibility for representing the rank in the proper way. Dobashi felt this responsibility when promoted from 4th to 5th dan. He stated, "Especially in United Sates, up to *yon-dan* [i.e., 4th dan] is all regional. Go-dan, you have to go to all U.S. to test for it. It's much harder. That's why in America there's lots of yon-dan, very few go-dan." Achievement of 5th dan also marks a major shift in kenshi's identity in the kendo world: "Once become 5th dan, in United States, 5th dan is the level you can instruct, is

very hard line from the student to teacher" (Bando). Considering the prestige and importance of 5th dan, Dobashi felt a great burden of responsibility when he passed the 5th dan test:

> Just like the little boy I was, watching the go-dan and I go, "Oh, that's what I want to be." So, I realized, "Wow, I have to be that person to those young kids now"… So, if I'm not doing everything correctly, I'm showing kids poor examples. That's a big responsibility in kendo. That's why I realized go-dan isn't just about he can--his *men* is really fast or his kote is really – it's more about what example you lead… Your go-dan has to be good but you also have to show the younger people that [you] do everything well including the respect and effort.

When Dobashi was promoted to 6th dan he felt the additional pressure of expectations from higher-ranked sensei:

> Now, like roku-dan and that seeking in responsibility became double. Now, not only am I example for kids. I'm an example for kendo… So [with] roku-dan their expectation[s] became higher, yeah… I asked Matsui sensei why. "Because next year you can get renshi." He said, "Don't take renshi title lightly."… Even in Japan he said people will go "Ohh." So you have to represent it. There's a lot of pressure, a lot of pressure. It's not fun. It hasn't been fun.

World of Everyday Life

The kenshi in this study realized that their kendo participation had considerably influenced their daily lives. In this far ground dimension, *World of Everyday Life*, the kenshi discussed their daily lives through the filter of their kendo experiences. Two sub-themes emerged within this dimension: *Identity Clarification* and *Life Lessons*.

Identity clarification. All of the kenshi interviewed in this study had Japanese backgrounds, although their life experiences varied. For those who were born and grew up in Japan and then moved to the United States, kendo remind them of their cultural backgrounds. Gondo started practicing kendo in Japan during his childhood but had spent almost half of his life in the United States. Being a kenshi and practicing kendo constantly reminded him of his cultural identity, as expressed in the following comment:

> Especially because I'm in the US… it's important for me to feel who I am and where I'm from and being Japanese… I think for Japanese people to practice kendo, in that perspective I feel like it helps [to realize] your identity as a Japanese person.

Araki had spent almost three quarters of his life in Japan and now practices kendo in the United States. He also viewed practicing kendo as an essential opportunity to connect himself with his origins when he stated:

> Doing kendo is to, is a way of appreciating Japanese people's way of thinking… That may be reason why I'm very happy doing kendo in the United States that give me a chance to think about Japan and Japanese people.

Some of the kenshi in this study, though of Japanese ancestry, had spent almost their entire lives outside of Japan. Hasegawa was born in Japan to Japanese parents but had spent most of his life in the United States. He said the kendo participation was a way for him to stay in touch with Japanese culture:

> Since I was born in Japan and lived over here for pretty much most of the time, I try to improve my Japanese culture, in one sense… I guess kendo's something you won't be able to learn in school, with the gestures and the postures.

Dobashi was raised by Japanese parents yet had never resided in Japan. He felt that an appreciation of his own Japanese background and understanding of Japanese culture helped his kendo career. Practicing kendo also reminded him of the ways he was raised by his family:

> Two words that they don't have in English that I think separates why somebody like myself was successful at kendo (Researcher comment: The context in which Dobashi uses the word "gaman" in the remainder of this quote suggests its meaning may be similar to the Western expression "It is what it is"). First one was *gaman*. There really is no equivalent word… I think knowing the meaning of that word from the Japanese culture can help you be good at budo because when you think about it, it's always gaman. I'm tired, gaman, boring, gaman, oh it hurts, gaman. You know this guy's too strong. No one--you know, these people don't listen to me, gaman. Every time there's a gaman, you have to somehow defeat it. I think that's one of the biggest concepts that we do not have in Western culture that you must learn to be successful in kendo.

He went on to discuss the second word/concept that kendo had reinforced in him:

> Second word is *enryo*. enryo is, you know, just the humility to pass your own desires for the good of the whole. I think many people who do kendo, especially in the United States, think themselves, you know, they don't say no, you know, I'll pass up for this so that everybody can practice… They don't think of their team, you know, think of their dojo… I think those are two concepts that are missing in the (American) culture but is present in Japanese culture… being from a Japanese background, you know, these are concepts I already know from childhood.

In addition to kendo reminding these kenshi of their cultural background, some participants talked about how practicing kendo had changed their life. Chiba realized that kendo had helped him discover who he was as a person:

> I don't know why, but it seems like kendo is just like my second nature. It's almost like I was born to do kendo, it's how I look at it. I'm only 19 years old, and people know who I am kind of. It's just a really good feeling to be able to do what you want with a shinai... It's like, I can really show who I am just through kendo.

Other than reminding them of their ethnic background and helping some of them clarify their individual identity, kendo had also made the one female kenshi more aware of the concept of gender identity. Iguchi sometimes fought male kenshi and on those occasions felt frustrated by being seen as a woman. Instead, she saw herself only as kenshi at the dojo:

> Anytime I come into the dojo, just, I didn't think, "Oh my teammate[s] are male," or "I'm a woman." I didn't think that way, I'm, I'm kenshi for (place in the U.S.) kendo dojo, that's it. So, I never ever thought, "I'm a woman" like that, I never, I hate that idea… I want to be their equal, yeah, during the kendo.

Interestingly, she chose to identify her gender when practicing kendo by choosing the color of outfit that she wore (Researcher comment: In kendo men wear blue but women can choose to wear blue or white, the latter signifying the female gender): "Always I wear the white color *dougi* [i.e., kendo uniform] so everybody could tell that I'm woman."

Life lessons. Because most of these kenshi had been involved in kendo for a long period of time, they had discovered that what they learned from kendo was applicable to their daily lives. Dobashi stated: "The reason we still do kendo today is to apply the lessons to daily life. Otherwise, you know, there's really not much use." Fujikawa concurred that kendo experiences

is valuable to daily life when he mentioned: I think, "Why do you do kendo? Become a better person." He went on to say that he tries to cultivate his humanity through kendo participation by being "a productive person within society. So, to me that's my bigger goal." In response to a follow-up probe question, he indicated that he was more sensitive to his colleagues at work since he began practicing kendo than he had been prior to that time.

Bando felt that his long-term participation and accomplishments in kendo had given him confidence in general. "Now I realize that pursuing one thing, and continuing one thing [gives] you [confidence]" and that "pursuing one thing will take you to a certain level over the years." Araki also found that he could apply the hard-working mindset he learned from kendo in achieving different goals in his daily life: "If I work hard, then I can achieve something. So that was, uh, very good lesson that still affect[s] my daily life at work, especially at work." More specifically, Araki believed that kendo practice helped him in handling high-pressure situations he encountered in his daily life:

> I wanna put myself into the serious fight even though it's not killing each other. But, uh, if I feel that I'm committing a real fight, that would give me a good experience to improve my mentality that I can use in daily life at work - how to calm myself down or how to think well even under strong, very strong pressure… So actually that help me a lot. When I was in a difficult time at work, I always think about kendo practice. So, uh, problem at work is not as serious as fighting using real sword. So pressure should be less than what I try to imagine in kendo practice.

These kenshi also felt that learning the manners and etiquette of kendo helped them become successful members of society. Dobashi said that, "The etiquette and reiho, reigi that not only helps you in kendo, but helps you in life." He even associated his learning manners from

kendo with job security, as seen in the following comment: "That's why I believe that I've never been fired from a job." As an employee of a Japanese company, Dobashi felt: "It's not very difficult because kendo sensei are much more strict than, you know, any Japanese manager, you know. So for me by putting myself through a difficult situation in kendo, everyday situation is easier to deal with."

Finally, some of the younger participants in this study felt that kendo had helped them keep their lives on a positive track. As Chiba shared,

> [From] when I started to now, it seems like my life has been so stable, consistent… [even if] you have a bad day or something, or your girlfriend breaks up with you or anything like that, you just know, like you can still go to kendo practice. You can still practice kendo. It's a really good way to just kind of remind yourself, "It's not so bad. Everything's okay." I feel good [when] I'm at practice. It's kind of uplifting. The whole atmosphere of kendo, going to practices and stuff and enjoying time with the senseis [*sic*] and just being able to talk to everyone, you know, it's just fun experiences.
>
> Taken together, the present results suggest that the kendo experiences of these kenshi consisted of both performance-related outcomes and enhanced personal growth. In the next chapter, a more comprehensive discussion of these findings is presented.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

In the current study, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine elite level *kenshi* (i.e., kendo practitioners) of Japanese background living in the United States. Utilizing an existential phenomenological paradigm, the researcher asked participants to respond to the following open-ended question: "When you think about your kendo experiences, what stands out for you?" The results revealed a number of key themes associated with these kenshi's world and their kendo experience. This chapter includes discussion of the major findings that emerged from the qualitative data analysis and connections to previous research; recommendations for practitioners and future researchers, and conclusions.

In the following sections, discussion of the major findings of this study and connections to previous research is provided. This discussion is, for the most, part organized according to themes emerging from the participants' interviews.

Major Findings

Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed seven major themes: *Kendo Components, Kendo as Competition, Kendo as Art, Relationship/Bond, The Way/Path, Values of Kendo,* and *World of Everyday Life*. The inter-relationships among these themes are shown in Figure 1. First and foremost, the kenshi acknowledged that kendo is characterized as a physical activity using shinai (as shown at the top of pentagon in the diagram of thematic structure). As with most combat sports kendo demands physical strength (i.e., *Using physical abilities*), precise technique (i.e., *Executing waza/techniques*), mental toughness (i.e., *Controlling self, Using seme*), and complex tactics (i.e., *Using seme*). For these kenshi participation in kendo included the pursuit of competitive achievements as well as the fulfillment of mastery standards (e.g., earning true

ippon). Some of the kenshi encountered *sensei* (i.e., instructors) that decisively influenced their careers. Their kendo lives were centered in pursuit of *the Way/Path,* which in turn shaped their life-long perspectives. The figural dimensions of these kenshi's experiences were co-constituted against a background of two themes: *Values of Kendo* and *World of Everyday Life*. The kenshi embraced various values of their kendo world. They were conscious of the importance of showing appropriate manners and etiquette as had been practiced by other kenshi over the centuries. At the same time, they showed respect for the origin of kendo by imagining themselves in a "kill or be killed" situation each time they practiced or competed. The kenshi also stressed that their goals of kendo participation include enhancing their quality of life. They realized that participating in kendo helped clarify their identity and that what they learned from kendo (e.g., handling pressure or stress) was applicable to their daily life. Throughout the interviews these kenshi repeatedly emphasized the following aspects of their kendo experience: *Respecting the origin, Pursuing mastery, Sensei-kenshi relationship, Manners and etiquette*, and *Concept of dō*. Discussion of each of these themes is provided next.

Respecting the origin. The prominent feature of kendo is that two kenshi face each other within striking distance and holding shinai. This situation continually reminded the kenshi in this study of the origin of kendo. As a result, they tried to achieve a mindset in which they saw themselves in a real sword fighting situation. They viewed shinai as a real live blade sword, instead of only a bamboo sword, and swinging shinai in such a way as to "kill" the opponent. At the same time they took pride in the respect they showed for kendo and the opponent and in the exchange of life symbolized in the crossing of the swords.

Pursuing mastery. All of the kenshi in the current study had experienced success in their competitive kendo careers. While winning a match was always a primary goal for them, they

also emphasized a mastery perspective in order to accomplish “real” *ippon* (i.e., valid point). Although they lamented the fact that there were inconsistencies and a lack of precision in existing definitions of ippon, especially ippon in competition, the kenshi in this study were committed to achieving “real” ippon whenever they performed kendo. They interpreted real ippon as completion of *yuko-datotsu* (i.e., valid strike) with *ki-ken-tai-icchi* (i.e., three components, mind, sword, and body, that represent ki, ken, and tai, respectively, function simultaneously). Although ki-ken-tai-icchi reminded these kenshi of the significance of harmonizing all three of these components in a striking motion, they felt that ki played a particularly critical role in the actualization of ki-ken-tai-icchi because ki preceded the other two components (i.e., ken and tai). For them it was not enough to strike the opponent with appropriate body movements and techniques if there was a lack of ki. Without ki there could be no real ippon.

In addition to its importance for striking, ki also seemed to be an important aspect of these kenshi’s mental approach to sword fighting. They felt that mental and physical domination of the opponent required *seme* (i.e., taking the *initiative* to close the distance and prevent the opponent from moving freely). Taking time before initiating a striking motion did not mean these kenshi were passive. Rather they would take this time to apply mental pressure to the opponent or read the opponent’s mind. Due to the advance skill level of the kenshi in this study, they seemed to be more aware of the importance of seme, not only for achieving a strategic advantage but also as source of enjoyment.

In addition to accomplishing real ippon and integrating seme into their sword fighting, these kenshi were concerned about how their performance looked from an aesthetic perspective. For these kenshi the “beauty of kendo” was actualized primarily in the positioning of their left

hand. They viewed the left hand as the “lifeline” that connected kenshi’s body with their shinai, which allowed them to use shinai as a weapon to strike the opponent and as a shield to block the opponent. The left hand was also considered to be essential for transmitting the ki that was generated in the bellybutton area into shinai and toward the opponent. Thus, they were careful to avoid moving the left hand away from the bellybutton area during a battle, which would make the use of ki difficult in striking and would likely result in the “loss” of a match.

These kenshi’s commitment to the interaction of technical (i.e., real ippon), tactical (i.e., seme), and aesthetic (i.e., left hand position) mastery seems suggests that a mind-body connection was a primary concern for them. Some spoke of ki as something that “boiled up” from inside them like “inner energy” (Fujikawa), “inner force” (Gondo), or “spirits com[ing] out from inside” (Iguchi). Clearly, these kenshi believed that the effective use of ki--the perception and exertion of their inner energy--was crucial for successful skill execution, dominating the opponent, and enjoying the beauty of kendo.

Sensei-kenshi relationship. The kenshi in this study met and built strong trust with sensei that, in turn, had enormously influenced their kendo lives. The strength of their relationship resulted not only from the sensei’s kendo expertise but also the sensei’s thoughts, behavior, and personality. These kenshi appreciated the fact that their great sensei had always watched over them and kept them on the right track in learning essential kendo skills and proper manners. The kenshi thought so much of their sensei that they attempted to emulate characteristics of the sensei’s personality such as being modest, intelligent, and caring. Their great sensei’s advice extended to concrete, practical life mentoring that touched on issues such as how to make a payment plan for buying a car or how to manage a romance. Experiences these kenshi shared with their sensei in and out of the dojo created a level of reverential respect that

made some kenshi feel they could never reach the heights achieve by their sensei. For some, this respect produced unconditional obedience or even an attitude of worship. For example, Egawa commented that, “I just blindly follow his advice” and Chiba referred to his great sensei as an “idol” or an “angel.”

In kendo, sensei usually put on the full *bogu* (i.e., kendo armor) and practice one-on-one with their kenshi. From the sensei’s perspective such practice is a means of identifying those aspects of the kenshi’s performance in need of the most improvement. However, for the kenshi, there may be some period of familiarization needed in order to take full advantage of this type of practice. By finally crossing shinai with his sensei, Fujikawa realized a breakthrough in his own personal growth. The breakthrough came when he finally mustered the courage to strike his stern sensei from whom Fujikawa had always shrunk and run prior to that moment. He reflected that, “that was [the moment of] my initial growth. Then I started getting better at kendo.”

Although sensei put on bogu and practice with their kenshi, the kenshi in this study pointed out that their sensei did not always give them concrete, step-by-step instruction. Rather, their sensei encouraged the kenshi to only “observe and learn” (Araki). Egawa stated that his great sensei’s approach was primarily that of modeling the desired behavior. “Look at me. Do it the way I do it.” Araki’s high school kendo sensei also employed non-verbal instruction because “he wanted students to go through the process of thinking about it and getting… their own answers.” Araki further commented on his sensei’s belief that “each individual has… difference so that the best way to learn is to think by themselves, rather than giving each detail.”

The kenshi in this study emphasized the point that non-verbal instruction is not unusual in the kendo world. Egawa likened learning kendo under the guidance of sensei to a word in Japanese that means, “stealing.”

> Kendo is something you have to build on yourself so on your own. I hear that older teachers wouldn't say much, wouldn't give them--give out any advice--so disciples or students they really have to almost *steal* – that's the word that they use in Japanese. They (kenshi) really imitate what sensei's [*sic*] do because sensei's [*sic*] don't verbally teach you.

The word *steal* in English is similar to the Japanese word 盗む (i.e., *nusumu*), which means taking something from people or a shop without permission. The word nusumu also has the additional meanings "ひそかに学ぶ [i.e., to secretly learn]," and "まねをする [i.e., imitate]." In mentioning how she learned from her *senpai* (i.e., senior members) Iguchi stated:

> I always look at them [i.e., senpai]... How they behave, how they act, how they play, how they respond to others. Everything I am watching. Then I try to *steal* something from them… even like a kendo waza, or even like a little simple manner to others, or ideas in general… so just I'm like a copycat.

Iguchi's comment suggests that kenshi imitate many aspects of their sensei's behavior besides their demonstration of kendo skills.

Manners and etiquette. A Japanese proverb associated with the martial and traditional arts states that "礼に始まり、礼に終わる (i.e., it begins and ends with a bow)." Consistent with this notion, the kenshi in this study viewed the manners and etiquette of kendo as an essential component of their kendo experience. The nature of the relationship they had with sensei was both hierarchical and respectful. In Japan "*kohai* (i.e., junior members) must demonstrate "good manners" (Iguchi) when around elders ("senpai'). Egawa associated the seniority system in kendo with one of the precepts of Confucianism. "In kendo, in this Confucius

environment, when you get older, people pay respect to you, you know, automatically." Dobashi further pointed out that age precedes rank when it comes to showing respect. He said that when he went back to his old dojo he showed respect to his senpai by sitting behind them, even though they had lower ranks than him and kenshi usually sit in order by their ranks.

Although seniority system was strict and even oppressive for some of the kenshi in this study, two-way communication between senpai and kouhai made the relationship smooth. The participants realized that senpai usually "have [more] experience" (Iguchi) and thus, "give us really nice advice" (Iguchi). Dobashi remembered how caring his senpai was when he competed. "When I went to *shiai* (i.e., tournament) they all watched me." The example of some senpai gave was encouraging for these kenshi and gave them the feeling that they, too, would be able to find the right direction for their kendo future. These kenshi also appreciated the way some senpai also looked after kouhai away from the dojo, such as "mak[ing] [kouhai] feel welcome" (Chiba) at a party. As such, senpai-kouhai relationships function well by senpai taking care of kouhai and kouhai showing respect to senpai. When respectful two-way communication exists between senpai and kouhai the relationship is "one of the nice things about kendo" and a "bond…that will last a lifetime" (Egawa).

According to the kenshi in this study, manners and etiquette in kendo also extend to showing respect for equipment (e.g., shinai) and for the training facility (i.e., dojo). These kenshi gave their own shinai the same respect they would a real blade Japanese sword (i.e., *nihonto*), which is an ancient symbol of Japanese culture. In a similar fashioin these kenshi stressed the importance of bowing to dojo when entering and leaving. Araki pointed out that respect is not restricted to kendo but that "Japanese people believe that there is a spirit in everything." Therefore, everything (even shinai and dojo) deserve to be respected.

Concept of dō. The kenshi in the current study were highly successful kendo practitioners and had achieved considerable success during their entire careers. Not surprisingly, they took pride in and had gained confidence from their accomplishments. However, what made them the most proud and confident was not so much the recognition of others (i.e., competitive achievements) but rather the satisfaction of achieving success based on mastery-oriented standards (i.e., completing real ippon, showing beautiful kendo). Effective execution of their kendo skills made them feel proud that they had engaged in kendo in the correct way.

The concept of pursuing things in the correct way is consistent with the concept of dō, which is a prominent feature of many Japanese traditional arts and budo. Thus, it is no surprise that "*dō*" is a defining component of many Japanese words, including ju-*do*, aiki-*do*, karate-*do*, sa-*do* (i.e., Japanese tea ceremony), or ka-*do* (i.e., Japanese flower arrangement). The *kanji* (i.e., Chinese characters used in Japanese writing) dō (i.e., 道) signifies behavioral or moral standards that Japanese people sometimes call "the correct way" or "the human way." Furthermore, "the correct way" extends to one's accomplishment of excellence in the correct way in a certain field. The kanji also connotes a path or a way of journey where a seeker keeps taking steps forward to a goal. Since the pursuit of the correct way is always challenging, a journey of this nature is expected to last a long time and demand a life-long commitment. The kenshi in this study were committed to embodying the concept of dō, which makes more detailed discussion of this concept appropriate. In the following sections *Dō* is further discussed as *the correct way, a journey,* and *in everyday life*.

Dō as the correct way. Interviews with the kenshi in this study revealed that the participants respected the origin of kendo and were motivated to learn the proper techniques.

They were also dedicated to pursuing an actualization of real, genuine kendo. Thus, they set their goals and defined their successes from an internal, mastery perspective rather than an external, statistical (e.g., win-loss record) perspective. Their philosophy of success in kendo was finding "the correct way" in the pursuit of dō.

Dō in everyday life. For the kenshi in this study practicing kendo gave them more than the things they gained at the dojo. As they became more devoted to kendo, they learned lessons they could transfer to their daily lives. For example, they worked as hard in their daily activities as they had practiced at the dojo, they showed proper manners around others as they had shown to kendo sensei and senpai, and they coped with pressure or stress in their jobs the way they had learned to do so through kendo. For these kenshi, the pursuit of dō in their kendo lives extended to finding "the correct way" in their everyday lives.

In dedicating themselves to gaining physical strength, mental toughness, technical mastery, and philosophical expression through kendo, these kenshi seemed to have found a measure of understanding regarding a fundamental question of human existence: "Who am I?" Kendo reminded the kenshi that had moved from Japan of the culture they had grown up with and the significance of being a Japanese person in the United States. For the kenshi born and raised in the United States, kendo offered a glimpse of what it meant to be of Japanese descent; something they might have never experienced apart from their kendo participation.

Dō as a journey. The kenshi also realized that their kendo lives had evolved as a sequence of developmental stages. In childhood they had learned the importance of discipline, such as showing diligence or acquiring appropriate manners and etiquette. During adolescence they had primarily focused on success in competition and making every effort to defeat the opponent at any cost. As more mature adults the kenshi had experienced a shift of emphasis to

the achievement of inner satisfaction and the pursuit of philosophical, mastery-oriented excellence. Transitions from one stage to the next sometimes came with bitter disappointments, such as failing a promotion exam or losing a match badly. No matter how disappointed these kenshi might become, however, they seemed to maintain a mindset of continuous effort in the pursuit of their goals. Coming full circle, a number of the participants had begun to realize to the responsibility they had as sensei or senpai of bequeathing what they had learned to kohai in the next generation. Dobashi seemed particularly conscious of the changes in awareness that come with persistent pursuit of the kendo life:

> I'm sure if I'm interviewed again, when I am *Nana-dan* (i.e, 7th dan)… my answers will be very different because, you know, it's a dō, right? You're not in the same place all the time. If you interviewed me when I was 20, my answers would have been different. If you had interviewed me when I'm 50 - when I can test for *hachi-dan* (i.e., 8th-dan), you know, when I'm 52, if all goes well, my answers will be different… Just stay on the dō, you know. If you don't have balance, you fall off, you know. So I want to stay on that dō, the *michi*, the road, the path.

Dobashi also expressed the sentiments of many of the other participant that the serious pursuit of dō, which is part of the kendo experience, is an ongoing discipline:

> It's a path that you can never stop. You have to keep. If you stop and you're satisfied with where you are, you'll never grow. You have to keep walking. So to me that's what that is. Once you stop, you should leave the path. So you have to keep going and keep improving. You can never say, I am a *roku-dan* (i.e., 6th dan) now. I'm good. I don't need to learn anymore. Then the path ended. So you have to keep moving.

Connections to Previous Research

In the following sections, the findings of this study are compared to and contrasted with previous research and scholarship in three areas: *Achievement goal orientation*, *Holistic approaches to sport training*, and *Coaching*.

Achievement goal orientation. An individual's goal orientation can be seen in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors the person engages in during participation (Roberts, Treasure, & Conroy, 2007). The findings of this study showed that the kenshi were motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors during their careers. They evaluated their success in terms of the achievement of mastery goals (i.e., task-oriented) as well as outcome goals (i.e., ego-oriented), such as outperforming the opponent. During competition some tended to emphasize mastery or task-oriented goals to a greater extent than outcome goals. As Egawa put it, each tournament is an opportunity "not to win but [to] really show what I can do." He admitted however that he would be "too frustrated to competing… if [he] keep[s] losing one after another." For others like Dobashi, competition was "all about winning or losing" (i.e., ego-oriented motivation), although they also regarded a match as "a test of ki" or "a test of kendo" to demonstrate what they had practiced (i.e., task-oriented motivation). These findings parallel those of an earlier study with elite Australian track and field athletes that revealed that performers were driven both by the desire to improve their technique (i.e., task-oriented motivation) and to compete against and beat opponents (i.e., ego-oriented motivation) (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004).

Other similarities between the findings of the present study and those of Mallett and Hanrahan (2004) are that both sets of participants obtained enjoyment from the pursuit and accomplishment of personal goals. For the kenshi these included mastering seme or practicing with better kenshi and for the Australian track and field athletes it meant improved technique or

running times (e.g., achieving personal best). The participants in both studies also experienced enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy with improvements in performance or, for the kenshi, pursuing kendo in the correct way. Finally, social recognition was a source of motivation for the athletes in both studies, whether it meant the praise of spectators, other competitors, or the media (Australian athletes), or for the kenshi being recognized for winning or for achieving a higher rank.

Although the kenshi in this study showed both task and ego goal orientations, they seemed to have become more task-involved over time. With more years of kendo experience, the kenshi achieved greater satisfaction from the accomplishment of real ippon and increased enjoyment from their more sophisticated tactical approach (i.e., seme). This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies showing changes in participation motivation across developmental stages for competitive swimmers (Brodkin & Weiss, 1990) and tennis players (Harwood & Swain, 2001). In the latter study, older British tennis players were found to be more motivated by the achievement of mastery goals and more focused on continued skill development compared to younger players who were primarily motivated by winning matches (Harwood & Swain, 2001). Another similarity in the results of the present study and those of Harwood and Swain (2001) is that the participants in both studies used the examples of more experienced individuals in their respective activities (e.g., sensei, senior kenshi, professional tennis players) to shape their own mastery pursuits.

The present findings also appear to differ in one respect from some previous research. Specifically, earlier studies have not demonstrated a trend toward an increased task orientation in participants over age or experience as found in this study. The results of one study on judo and aikido participants revealed little or no changes in goal orientation as a function of experience in

the sport (Gernigon & Bar, 2001). It was assumed that judo participants would exhibit both ego- (i.e., competition) and task-oriented (i.e., belt ranks) motivation because success in judo includes both form and fighting components. For Aikido participants, it was assumed that a mastery goal orientation would be evidenced because aikido focuses primarily on the execution of precise technique with no actual fighting. The results indicated no significant differences in the task-orientation of experienced (i.e., at least seven years in the sport) and beginning (i.e., less than three months) judo practitioners; however, contrary to the findings of the present study, more experienced aikido practitioners exhibited a lower task orientation than beginners. The findings of other research (Steinberg, Grieve, & Glass, 2001) also revealed no difference in task-oriented motivation for athletes from a variety of Western sports (e.g., track and field, golf, softball, basketball, and volleyball) representing different competitive levels and age groups (e.g., NCAA Division I athletes and National Senior Game competitors). Taken together, the results of these studies and the current one suggest that changes in goal orientation with increased experience may differ for participants in different activities. Thus, it appears that further investigation of the relationship between goal orientation (particularly task-oriented motivation) and experience is needed.

Holistic approaches to sport training. The findings of this study revealed that these kenshi used their kendo experience to enhance their quality of life in addition to their kendo skills. They did this primarily by transferring lessons they learned at the dojo to their everyday lives. The kenshi viewed themselves as whole persons that pursued excellence in kendo and sought to become “a productive person within society” (Fujikawa). The kendo experience of participants represented a combination of physical, psychological, humanistic, spiritual, philosophical, and religious components. They learned appropriate manners and respected their

sensei, peers, the facility (e.g., dojo), and the equipment; they observed a strong standard of discipline; they evoked a "kill or be killed" mentality when competing against opposing kenshi; they strived for true mastery; they appreciated the aesthetic qualities of kendo; and they believed that success and fulfillment in kendo required complete synchronization of mind, body, spirit, and technique.

Theory of budo. Since the period of modernization, the theory of budo has been examined by scholars representing a number of disciplines, including history, philosophy, culture, physical education, and sports (e.g., Abe, 1986; Fujiwara, 2006; Hotta, 1969; Murayama & Yokoyama, 1984; Tomiki, 1991). Although the concept of budo continues to attract investigation and discussion, most research to date suggests that the goals of practicing budo include the cultivation of humanity and the training of self-discipline through a quest for mastery of techniques and aesthetic accomplishment. The All Japan Kendo Federation (AJKF) has affirmed that an essential aspect of kendo is "to discipline the human character through the application of the principles of the Katana [i.e., sword]" (AJKF, 2010). The AJKF (2010) also emphasizes a number of "character" goals for the practice of kendo, including "striving for improvement in the art of kendo," "holding in esteem human courtesy and honor," and "forever pursuing the cultivation of oneself." Consistent with these goals, the kenshi in this study seemed devoted to putting their kendo experience into their life practice. Their mindset and attitudes toward kendo were similar to those obtained in earlier research from high school and college kenshi in Japan (Asami, Ota, Otsuka, Kihara, Kusama, & Yamagami, 1995). In that investigation young kenshi expressed strong support for maintaining kendo tradition and custom, being committed to continuous participation, and the importance of manners between *senpai* (i.e.,

senior) and *kohai* (i.e., junior). Consistent with the sentiments of kenshi in the present study the younger kenshi in that study also supported the view of kendo as budo rather than as sport.

Concept of dō. The dedication, commitment, and enthusiasm for accomplishment discussed by the kenshi in the present study have been described elsewhere as practicing the concept of dō (Hotta, 1969; Murayama & Yokoyama, 1984). The concept of dō is an important characteristic of many traditional arts and budo in Japan (e.g., judo, kado, sado). The concept emphasizes standards for the correct way of behaving and performing, a continuous commitment to a quest for excellence, and a step-by-step approach for goal achievement (Bittmann, 2002; Okubo, Bittmann, & Hisamitsu, 1993). In budo, the concept of dō was introduced during the transitional period when the learning of brutal, martial techniques was no longer considered acceptable in Japan (Tomiki, 1991). Practitioners needed to sublimate the intent to kill people when learning the techniques of kendo and replace that intent with an emphasis on advancing humanity while pursuing mastery of the techniques. Thus, kenshi began combining the learning of martial arts techniques with philosophical and ethical principles that were transferable to everyday life. The pursuit of dō became a holistic venture as kenshi began striving for psychological, technical, physical, ethical, and philosophical excellence in their kendo experience. Based on the interviews obtained from the kenshi in this study it is clear that their kendo experiences consisted of all of the preceding elements.

Religious influence. Religion has contributed to the development of today's kendo in two ways. First, considering the origins of kendo, samurai were constantly confronted with the issues of life and death and attempted to find ways (including religious ones) of transcending the fear of death and maintaining a focus on life (Omori, 1997; Tomiki, 1991). Second, although actual swords are no longer used in kendo, kenshi still utilize many of the mental strategies of

ancient samurai when attempting to defeat an opponent. Many rely on religious doctrines to help them actualize their cultivation of humanity and moral development while pursuing excellence in swordsmanship (Omori 1997; Tomiki, 1991). For example, a number of Confucian principles---such as the showing of mutual respect between sensei and kenshi, holding sincerity for a commitment to learning and effort, being sensitive to the ethical responsibility of using their kendo skills in an appropriate manner, and maintaining an infinite, step-wise commitment to true mastery---appeared to be aspects of the kendo experience for the participants in this study (Bittmann, 2006; Simpkins & Simpkins, 2007).

Of all the Confucian principles, propriety has perhaps influenced kendo practice the most, as seen in the precept that budo begins with *rei* (i.e., courtesy, bow) and ends with a rei (Bittmann, 2006). Confucianism expounds mutual respect in human relationships: the inferior is expected to show loyalty and obedience to the superior, whereas the superior is expected to demonstrate benevolence and protection to the inferior (Imamura & Nakazawa, 1992). How kenshi in the present study dealt with win-lose situations can also be explained from the perspective of a Confucian principle: A one-time victory is not a life-long victory and a one-time defeat is not a life-long defeat. The only life-long victory is found in the discipline of daily practice for life. All defeats on the other hand are something kenshi are always expected to accept and learn from (Imamura & Nakazawa, 1992). Although none of the kenshi in the present study had risked their lives in kendo matches, they had pictured themselves in “kill or be killed” duels, treated their shinai as a real blade sword, tried to make a real “cut” on the opponent, and developed mental skills for handling the corresponding “issues of life and death” at the dojo. Their reverential respect for the kendo life encouraged them to pursue self-actualization through kendo practice. As seen in the findings, these kenshi were committed to embracing the concept

of dō, including a number of religious principles associated with the practice of kendo. In so doing they seemed to embody the etymology of the term dojo, which originated from the Sanskrit term, *bodhi-manda,* meaning, “where Buddha attained enlightenment” (Kiyota, 1992).

Holistic approaches in sport psychology. The field of sport psychology consists of various approaches for providing mental and emotional assistance for athletes in their efforts to manage the demands of competition. More recently, Western sport psychology scholars and practitioners have begun to emphasize the additional benefits of mental techniques for athletes’ daily lives (Curry & Maniar, 2003; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005; Watson & Nesti, 2005). Some have developed concrete programs emphasizing that purpose. Examples include the GOAL (i.e., Going for the Goal) Program and the SUPER (i.e., Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation) Program, both of which have been successfully implemented with various athlete populations (Danish & Nellen, 1997). Programs such as these are intended to help participants realize that life skills are learnable and transferable from one domain to another (e.g., from an athletic setting to daily life). Support for this notion was recently obtained in one study involving the implementation of the SUPER Program into regular practice sessions for an experimental group of youth volleyball and soccer players aged 10 to 12 years (Papacharisis et al., 2005). At the end of the season the experimental group of participants in both sports demonstrated greater knowledge of life skills, higher self-efficacy for goal setting, more effective problem solving, more positive thinking, and superior sport performance than players in the respective control groups.

Miller and Kerr (2002) proposed the Athlete-Centered Sport Model, which emphasizes sport participation as “a vehicle through which personal excellence occurs alongside performance excellence” (p. 150). The model is based on the assumption that sport, when

properly administered and supervised, can provide participants with opportunities for learning moral values, citizenship, and life skills and contribute to their overall well-being. Some scholars have also developed academic courses for athletes, designed to teach them important life skills they can use in both sport and non-sport situations. The results of one study revealed that one such course, consisting of a combination of psychological skills training, instruction in sport nutrition, and life-skills education, was effective in improving university athletes' self-perceptions (e.g., self-confidence) and coaches' ratings of athletes' performance under pressure and coping skills (Curry & Maniar, 2003). Studies such as these suggest yet another approach to merging athletes' pursuit of performance excellence with the learning of essential life skills. Based on the interviews obtained in the present study, it appears that the integration of sport and life is an intrinsic component of kendo. While not evidenced to such an extent so far in Western sport, the use of sport as a vehicle for developing life skills would appear to have similar potential as attested by the results of these recent studies (Curry & Maniar, 2003; Danish & Nellen, 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005).

In a slightly different vein, Watson and Nesti (2005) have suggested the possible addition of a spiritual dimension to sport psychology interventions. They propose that spirituality is another aspect of many athletes' sport experience and that an athlete-centered approach to sport psychology interventions might include this dimension. This approach is based on the assumption that spirituality can play an important role in athletes' learning of life skills, help them find purpose and meaning in their lives, and handle adversity or pressure often associated with sports. Research consistent with this notion revealed that spirituality and religion were important contributors to American Olympic track and field athletes' discovery of a deeper meaning of various aspects of their athletic experience, such as success, failure, hardship, and

adversity (Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000). Consistent with the findings of the present study, it appears that religion and spirituality in a variety of forms may be integral components of the sport experience of athletes representing different sports and cultures.

Identity formation. In addition to the useful life skills acquired during their kendo experience, the kenshi in this study talked about the ways kendo had activated or reinforced their ethnic identity. Whether they had moved to the United States or were born and raised there, kendo participation clarified and reinforced their ethnic identity and the strong cultural standards of Japanese people. Historical research indicates that budo (e.g., kendo, judo) was initially introduced to young Japanese immigrants to the United States and Canada as a vehicle for linking them to their cultural heritage and instilling pride and self-confidence as people of Japanese descent (Azuma, 2003; Doré, 2002). Such an approach has also been attempted with Korean children adopted by Americans (Song & Lee, 2009). The children were introduced to various cultural activities, such as practicing the Korean martial arts (i.e., Tae Kwon Do), and to Korean people living in the U.S. While they continued to interact with Korean-born people as they grew from childhood to adulthood, relatively few continued to participate in Tae Kwon Do but rather chose other cultural activities that conformed more to their personal interests (e.g., Korean art, music, etc.). While not statistically significant, higher levels of martial arts experience were found to be negatively related to the formation of a strong ethnic identity. Such was clearly not the case for the kenshi in the current study, suggesting that the kendo experience strengthened their ethnic identity regardless of how, when, or the circumstances in which they were introduced to the activity.

Coaching. All of the kenshi in the present study had met and studied with influential sensei. In many ways their accounts of their experiences with sensei are similar to those of

Western athletes that have had the experience of working with a great coach (Becker, 2009). For these kenshi, the sensei was more than just an instructor in much the same sense as Western athletes felt their great coach was "more than just a coach" (Becker, 2009, p. 99). Several qualities kenshi said their great sensei possessed are similar to the ones mentioned by Western athletes when talking about their experiences with great coaches. Such characteristics include the coach's expertise in the sport or activity, personality style (e.g., passionate, enthusiastic), and communication style (e.g., open-minded, athlete-centered). The kenshi in the present study talked about how their sensei demonstrated caring and support by showing interest in the kenshi's daily life and teaching the kenshi important life skills. Such expressions of consideration shown by coaches are also important to Western athletes (Becker, 2009; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004). Finally, the current results and those of studies with Western athletes suggest that both great sensei and great Western coaches can have a lasting influence on the lives of their protégés and in many cases make them better people as well as better kenshi or athletes (Becker, 2009; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004).

How their sensei influenced the kenshi's learning of kendo skills was another interesting finding of the present study. Some kenshi said they often received vague instructions or silence from their sensei. This approach to providing instruction appears to contrast sharply with that of elite coaches in the West (Becker, 2009; Gallimore & Tharp, 2004). However, as the kenshi pointed out, the sensei method of teaching is consistent with the way instruction is provided in many traditional Japanese arts and other budo. Bittmann (2002) has pointed out that the pursuit of mastery and the concept of dō involves an intuitive transmission of concepts and information from sensei to disciples rather than the more typical top-down, analytic instruction seen in the West. Disciples (e.g., kenshi) observe models (e.g., sensei's demonstration), repeat what they see

by themselves, engage in self-reflection, and use what they learn in a variety of situations (both in and out of the budo). Although sensei are responsible for supervising disciples, they do not usually provide them with direct, step-by-step instruction (Takayama, 2000). One aikido practitioner (i.e., *aikidoka*) maintains that there are several advantages to the "look-do method" of learning (Taylor, 2002, p.2), including the development of "stealing techniques" (by carefully watching the sensei's demonstration), greater attention to the feeling of the movement in the muscles, and the overt act of "replaying it." The instructor also contends that listening to verbal instruction produces "an extra layer of complication" (Taylor, 2002, p. 1). Overuse of the brain (e.g., paralysis by analysis) is seen as an obstacle to the accurate transmission of information from the eyes to the body (Taylor, 2002).

The extensive use of nonverbal instruction by sensei also appears to contrast sharply with traditional Western approaches to skill acquisition which emphasize verbal methods (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2008). Perhaps this is due to the strong emphasis on using *kata* (i.e., form) in budo, which represents the ideal state of mind, body, and technique during practice" (AJKF, 2000). Historically, experienced swordsmen taught trainees individual skills they had learned in real battlefield situations during the late medieval period. The kata they had developed was systematically organized and beneficial not only for learning the necessary skills but also for quickly transmitting them from master to student in totality (Hurst, 1998). Most importantly, the learning of kata is optimized through repeated imitation, intuitive transmission, and experiential practice (Bittmann, 2004; Hurst, 1998).

According to Japanese tradition, the learning of kata occurs in three stages: *shu* (i.e., 守), *ha* (i.e., 破), and *ri* (i.e., 離). The first stage (Shu) means, "to preserve" (Bittmann, 2004; Friday,

1995; Hurst, 1998). In this stage, students repeatedly imitate kata until they can automatically execute the techniques (Hurst, 1998). The second stage (Ha) means, "breaking down" or "destroying" (Bittmann, 2004; Friday, 1995; Hurst, 1998). In this stage, students are likely to experience the limits of kata or of their own physical or technical capabilities, at which point they must strive to improve their understanding of the principles underlying the kata (Bittmann, 2004). The third and final stage (Ri) refers to "leaving" or "liberating" (Hurst, 1998, p. 195) or "detaching" (Bittmann, 2004). In this stage students move beyond their teachers' instruction, add their own creativity to the delivery, yet keep their movements and instincts in harmony with elements and principles of the original kata (Bittmann, 2004; Friday, 1995; Hurst, 1998).

According to the kenshi in the current study, their sensei provided little verbal instruction as they progressed through their kendo lives. Moreover, the amount of verbal instruction diminished sharply from one stage to the next and was virtually non-existent in Ri. Since these kenshi appeared to have already acquired the fundamental skills of kendo and were making extended efforts to reach an advanced level, it is not surprising that they described their sensei's instructional assistance as almost exclusively non-verbal. Thus, it is likely that their sensei expected the kenshi to pursue further improvement by themselves in order to reach the next level.

Unlike the sensei mentioned by the current participants, coaches in the West tend to use top-down approaches to instruction more often than not. However, several lines of recent research suggests that giving athletes more control of the learning process can be a productive way of facilitating skill acquisition and transfer (see Wrisberg, 2009, for a review). Further research on the relative merits of various (and successful) coaching techniques would appear to be a potentially fruitful line of inquiry.

Recommendations

In the following sections, recommendations based on the findings of this study are suggested for sport psychology practitioners interested in working with kenshi and for future researchers, respectively. In the first section, a brief discussion of kendo practice and culture is followed by a bulleted list of recommendations.

Sport Psychology Practitioners

The findings of this study suggest several possible applications for sport psychology consultants interested in working with kendo participants. First of all, it is important to realize that kendo is an activity characterized by intense physical and mental demands. Fear is a constant factor that can easily seize kenshi whenever they are in reach of striking or being struck by the opponent. At the same time, kenshi are constantly encouraged to practice seme (i.e., taking the initiative in a match by putting the opponent off balance mentally and physically), which requires them to learn how to read the opponent's mind, anticipate the opponent's movements, and generally control the opponent. Therefore, kenshi face the constant challenge of maintaining an aggressive approach in a potentially dangerous combat activity. Second, consultants should keep in mind that kenshi are committed to executing the proper technique as well as to winning a match. Therefore, they pursue a level of mastery of execution that both conforms to the traditions of kendo and maximizes their chances of success. Third, consultants need to be prepared for the possibility of working with kenshi for an extended time period because the world of kendo encourages continuous involvement in the budo throughout the kenshi's life. It is not unusual to see kenshi in their 70's or 80's still actively practicing kendo. Fourth, it is absolutely essential for consultants to show respect for the strong cultural values and standards of kendo. Kenshi are expected to show appropriate manners and practice etiquette on a regular basis, particularly by

showing respect to sensei, senpai, kendo equipment, and dojo. They are also enthusiastic about the philosophical quest that characterizes their kendo experience. The quest includes mentally putting themselves into a real sword fighting situation and pursuing "beautiful kendo" that reminds them of the concept of dō. Finally, consultants need to realize that kenshi view their kendo participation as opportunities to learn important life lessons. Over many years of experience, kenshi almost habitually transfer what they learn at the dojo to their everyday world. Given the multi-faceted nature of kendo and values of kenshi it is possible that sport psychology consultants may be more effective if they embrace a holistic approach (Ravizza, 2002), engage in reflective practice (Anderson, Knowles, & Gilbourne, 2004), or consider their own personal core beliefs and values when developing consulting relationships with athletes (Poczwardowski, Sherman, & Ravizza, 2004).

As when working with athletes in any sport or physical activity, sport psychology consultants need to tailor their interventions to each individual kenshi they work with. However, based on the findings of this study, the following additional recommendations are offered, particularly for consultants who are not of Japanese descent:

- Become familiar with the cultural values, standards, history, and terminology of kendo and encourage young kenshi to learn them.
- Use a holistic approach that encourages each kenshi to focus on enhancing his or her quality of life and the lives of others. Themes such as cultivating humanity, learning appropriate manners and etiquette, showing a strong work ethic, and acquiring coping skills are just a few consultants might emphasize with kendo participants.

- Encourage kenshi to take a mastery-oriented approach to kendo by setting task-oriented goals and using skill acquisition imagery.
- Provide mental strategies that encourage kenshi to focus on seme, such as gathering ki (i.e., inner energy) to apply pressure to the opponent, concentrating ki on a striking motion, and observing the opponent's behaviors in order to anticipate when/what/how to execute a technique.
- Provide mental strategies that help kenshi develop self-control and manage pressure or fear.
- Tailor interventions for kenshi that are appropriate for his or her developmental stage.
- Encourage kenshi to integrate philosophical components into their kendo practice, such as learning the concept of dō or defining success by achieving a performance standard (e.g., accomplishing real ippon).
- Encourage kenshi to consider kendo as a life-long pursuit and emphasize the concept of delayed gratification, especially for young kenshi.
- Encourage kenshi to interact with sensei and peers in appropriate and respectful ways and seek out life-long mentors both at the dojo and in everyday life.
- Respect the nature of the human relationship of kenshi's with sensei or senpai. While the seniority system may appear too authoritative or ”old school” for Western sport psychology consultants it is an essential feature of the traditional kendo experience.

Future Researchers

The results of the current study depicted kenshi's experiences of kendo. The kenshi interviewed were highly accomplished and had practiced kendo in the United States. All were of Japanese descent although some had grown up in Japan and moved to the United States while the others had never resided in Japan. Further investigation of the experiences of a wider group of kenshi would likely extend the present results. Considering the recent popularity of kendo in international society, kenshi of different ethnicities or races might be interviewed. Although one female kenshi was interviewed in the present study, further investigation of the experiences of female kenshi is also needed. For kenshi in Japan their win-loss records in kendo often dictate their occupational status. Thus, it would be informative to learn more about the approaches to kendo of individuals for whom competition outcomes are more essential to the quality of their lives.

The current study also revealed that kenshi's experiences changed across developmental stages from childhood to adulthood. Therefore, further examination of the kendo experience of kenshi at various stages of life (particularly the young and very old) is recommended. Given the importance of sensei in these kenshi's lives it would also be beneficial to learn more about the experiences of sensei particularly with respect to mentoring/leadership style and approaches to teaching.

The findings of this study suggest that the kenshi used a variety of mental approaches in their kendo practice, such as self-control techniques or ki. More detailed investigation of the ways kenshi integrate mental strategies into their practice or competition would be a nice addition to the Western sport psychology literature. In addition, such research might shed further

light on the possible similarities and differences in Eastern and Western approaches to mental preparation for competition.

Finally, the kenshi in the current study were enthusiastic about the philosophical quest that characterized their kendo experience. Therefore, it might be intriguing to further examine this aspect of kendo participation. Particularly intriguing was the comment of one kenshi that "what's interesting is usually people with poor etiquette, their kendo is not that good… if you scientifically researched, [you would] probably draw a graph of correlation between, you know, poor *reiho*, *reigi* [i.e., manners] [and] poor kendo" (Dobashi). Such a remark may represent just the "tip of the iceberg" with respect to the symbiotic relationship of philosophy and technique in the "total" kendo experience.

Conclusions

The results of the present study suggest the following conclusions about these kenshi's experience of kendo:

1. They were devoted to the achievement of both mastery (i.e., task-oriented) and outcome (i.e., ego-oriented) goals. That is, both proper technique and victory in competition were important to them.
2. Their kendo goal orientation became more mastery oriented during the later stages of their careers.
3. Their kendo lives included significant relationships with sensei, senpai, kouhai, and parents.
4. They were exposed to strong, cultural values in the world of kendo and believed that their kendo experiences taught them many valuable life lessons.
5. To some extent, they felt that their kendo experience clarified the meaning of life for them.

6. Their dedication to kendo may be comparable to that of other individuals pursuing the concept of dō in Japanese culture (i.e., they possessed a life-long commitment to finding “the correct way”).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent

My name is Takahiro Sato. I am presently a doctoral student in the Department of Exercise, Sport, and Leisure Studies specializing in sport psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The purpose of this study is to investigate kenshi's experiences of kendo. To accomplish this purpose, I am inviting you to participate in an interview in order to learn more about your experiences of kendo. The interview should take about 30-60 minutes to complete.
I will be using a voice recorder to obtain an accurate description of your experience. This will allow me to identify the key themes associated with your experiences of kendo.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to respond to any questions you do not want to answer.

The information in the study will be kept confidential. A pseudonym (i.e., fake name) will be substituted for your name to protect your identity. Your data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Your voice recordings will be destroyed after your interview has been transcribed and your transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the University of Tennessee. The consent form will be stored in a separate locked file for three years past the completion of the study and then destroyed.

You can ask questions regarding the study at any time. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the Office of Research at 974-3466.

CONSENT
I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study. I understand I will be given a copy of this form for my records.

Participant's name (please print) ____

Participant's signature___________________________________ Date:___/___/_____

Takahiro Sato, M.S.
University of Tennessee
865-974-3340 (office)
Email: tsato@utk.edu

Craig A. Wrisberg, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor
344 HPER
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
865-974-1283 (office)
865-974-8981 (fax)
Email: caw@utk.edu

Appendix B

Demographic Information

Age:

Native Language:

Years participating in kendo:

Years living in the U.S.:

Dan (i.e., degree):

Frequency of practicing kendo:

Level of competition qualified in the U.S.:

Japanese background:

Appendix C

Confidentiality Agreement

As a participating member of the interdisciplinary phenomenology research colloquy under the direction of Drs. Sandra Thomas and Howard Pollio at the University of Tennessee, I agree to guarantee confidentiality to all participants whose transcripts are read aloud in the group meeting. This means that I will not repeat any words, phrases, or other excerpts from the audio taped interviews outside of the meeting room. I will not publicly divulge the nature of any information learned or discussion that has taken place, during the group meeting.

Signatures Date:

Vita

Takahiro Sato was born October 8, 1973 in Tokyo, Japan to Tomiho and Chizuko Sato. He attended Keio University in Tokyo where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business and Commerce and played baseball on the varsity team. He worked for Sumitomo Metal Industries for five years and was involved in the pipeline business before moving to the United States. He completed a Master of Science degree in Kinesiology at Western Illinois University. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology and Sport Studies with a concentration in Kinesiology and a specialization in Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior. He practices kendo and has attained the level of 3-kyu.