

# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls

by Dr. Robyn J. A. Silverman



# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls

**IT USED** to be that “sugar and spice and everything nice” came in one color, pink. But times are changing. Girls aren’t just donning frilly tutus anymore. They’re joining martial arts. And why shouldn’t they? Benefits can range from physical strength to powerful confidence. Let child development expert, Dr. Robyn Silverman tell you why yesterday’s pink-clad girls look so great in black belts.

Not too long ago, the division was clear. Mom dropped John off at his martial arts school and Jane off at her ballet class. John learned about power and focus; Jane learned about grace and poise.

But somewhere along the line, Jane got curious. Parents became more open-minded. Media began to shift their focus, albeit slowly, to girls in “unconventional,” male-dominated activities. Whatever the order of the events, an increasing number of girls started asking their parents if they could join martial arts too. And more parents began to answer “yes.”

While girls still participate in what are called the “aesthetic activities,” those which focus on appearance, gracefulness and physique, the martial arts can provide a refreshing option for girls who want to get physical. A martial arts academy can be a place where girls aren’t judged on aesthetics, but rather, by what they can personally accomplish through focus, perseverance, practice, and strength of character.

Don’t get me wrong; all martial arts schools are not created equal. Some still stress competition over character, winning over effort, and boys over girls. These aren’t the

martial arts schools I’m advocating for here.

The martial arts academies that are great for girls are typically great for *all* kids. They are what I like to call, “self-paced, individual-based, confidence-raisers.” These academies provide girls with goals, role models, and the

discipline they need to achieve in every area of their lives.



A strong, character-based, martial arts program shouldn’t favor girls, but rather, give every student a fair chance to succeed. Favoritism and coddling doesn’t help girls reach their potential; overcoming obstacles does. Appropriately challenging academies can be the place where girls cultivate the confidence that breeds lifelong success.

You will likely sense my passion for this topic since I’ve worked with many girls and have seen firsthand how martial arts has benefited them. In this article, I’ll share with you why I believe martial arts is so great for girls and what you need to know in order to bring out the best in them.

### Martial Arts Is a Body Positive Activity

Girls have to contend with countless messages each day which tell them that they’re not “good enough,” “smart enough” or “thin enough” to succeed. Magazines feature impossibly skinny supermodels next to “back-to-school” diet plans and tips for getting their bodies into “bikini-bearing” shape. It’s enough to make even the most secure girls crack.

So how does martial arts offer a safe haven to girls in a society that tells them “thinner is the winner?”

### The Uniform Issue.

Research has shown that attire and uniforms in aesthetic sports influence how the girls feel about their bodies. Given the barrage of advertisements that tell girls that they’re fat, it’s not surprising that girls pay close attention to how their body shape

and size look in clothes. So, when instructors ask them to put on a tiny costume that exposes every bump and curve, many girls become self-conscious. Worse yet, over time, some begin to diet or develop poor body image, eating issues, and full-blown eating disorders.

### The Martial Arts Uniform Solution.

Martial arts uniforms, no matter what color a school might offer, are typically loose-fitting and practical rather than revealing and tight. Girls of all

---

**“While girls still participate in what are called the ‘aesthetic’ activities, those which focus on appearance, gracefulness, and physique, the martial arts can provide a refreshing option for girls who want to get physical. A martial arts academy can be a place where girls aren’t judged on aesthetics, but rather, by what they can personally accomplish through focus, perseverance, practice, and strength of character.”**

---

shapes and sizes can easily fit into these uniforms. They cover the entire body, draw attention away from “perceived flaws” and developing body parts (a source of insecurity for many girls), and highlight symbols of achievement like colored belts and patches.

Martial arts uniforms also look the same whether the child’s a boy or a girl. Visually, this puts everyone on the same playing field. If you think about it, there aren’t too many activities in which boys and girls participate together and wear

the exact same thing. Gender-free uniforms send the subliminal message that being a girl doesn’t deter anyone from becoming a top martial artist. The process and the “prize” is the same for everyone. Anyone can achieve, as long as they commit and persevere.

### The Judging Problem.

Many aesthetic sports factor appearance into the scores of competitive participants. It’s common to hear about coaches directly or indirectly pressuring their students

to maintain a very slim figure or lose weight in order to excel in these activities.

Appearance factors into the “line” of figure skaters, the beauty of a dancer, and the appeal of some gymnasts and swimmers. It’s not surprising, then, that, historically, thinner, more feminine-looking competitors have had a larger fan base in aesthetic arenas. These sports aren’t only considered “aesthetic” and “judged” (evaluated subjectively) but also “lean” (emphasizing low body fat to succeed). Interestingly, many

# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls

“feminine” sports tend to emphasize all three of these descriptors, which can certainly challenge body image and self-confidence.

**The Martial Arts Judging Solution.** Whether a girl is sparring in class or competing in a forms or grappling tournament, rest assured that the outcome *won't* be based on appearance.

In martial arts, high scores in competition and sparring, if integrated into the school's curriculum at all, are based on technical points and domination.

Supermodels don't have the advantage. Winners can be tall and thin or short and stout. Body appearance doesn't factor into the judging whatsoever.

This takes the pressure off girls who may worry about unhealthy dieting. While health is stressed in any physical activity and, occasionally, a lower-weight class might give some competitors an edge, the fact remains that success in the martial arts isn't contingent on appearance. In a phrase, any “body” can win.

### Martial Arts Encourages Personal Best

In the gossipy, sometimes cutthroat, competitive world of school-age and adolescent girls, many martial arts schools provide a non-competitive haven. Even for those schools that do offer competitive opportunities to students, rising up through the ranks of the school remains noncompetitive.

So how does martial arts specifically foster personal achievement in girls rather than a competitive throw-down?

### The Ranking Problem.

In aesthetic sports, ranking structure either doesn't exist or exists only in the competitive world. There's really no recognized ranking system for noncompetitive gymnastics, figure skating, dancing or cheerleading. You're either on a recreational track or an elite track. There's often no middle ground.

On the one hand, this creates a natural separation among students, since there lacks a common goal or set of goals for all students. On the other hand, it doesn't provide benchmarks for noncompetitive or nonperforming girls, since medals and performances aren't part of their experiences.

### The Martial Arts Ranking Solution.

The martial arts ranking system is typically unrelated to competition or winning. Since martial arts academies attract many different types of students, moving up through the ranks is based on effort, technique and personal improvement.

Someone else's success doesn't lead to another person's failure, as in many other sports. Everyone can be “tied for first” if they're determined to cross the proverbial finish line. The absence of internal competition can foster a sense of teamwork, where girls are able to support one another.

While ranking structure may be different depending on the art, location, age or school of thought, it still promotes personal goal-setting and goal-getting. Whether it takes a girl three months or nine months to

master a skill, she's still on track to succeed and she has just as much of an opportunity as any other student to achieve the highest rank.

Martial arts provides neat benchmarks through its ranking structure. Each time a rank is nearly achieved, there is a test, a ceremony, and often, a celebration. Self-worth is gained through overcoming challenges and celebrating successes on the way to achieving

On the other hand, as mentioned above, no other goal besides elite or competitive status is available for “typical” girls who would like to achieve in these aesthetic sports. Sadly, if they're not the best, many eventually drop out without reaching their goal. After all, who wants to continually work at an activity in which the agreed upon purpose (Olympic, performance, or elite status) is unachievable for most of its participants?

**“There's nothing particularly ‘ladylike’ about martial arts. Girls aren't told to be dainty, gentle, fragile or demure. And while they can still be ‘girly’ if they want to, they can be so much more than that, too. With new female role models continually emerging and TV shows like *Fight Girls* and *American Gladiators* still in recent play, girls are able to see that females can hold their ground.”**

black belt. Don't get me wrong: These intermediary ranks aren't merely stepping stones, but rather, achievements within themselves.

### The Achievement Problem.

In many aesthetic arenas, only the star athletes can survive. On the one hand, moving through the ranks from “recreation” to “elite” status is only for the most capable and most promising contenders. Many coaches and instructors spend the most time, energy and money with these top-performing athletes. This undercurrent can breed resentment and feelings of low self-worth among girls.

### The Martial Arts Achievement Solution.

Plenty of us have had students, whether girls or boys, in our schools who have special needs. We have also had the star athletes. I've even had the pleasure of working with a girl with dwarfism who was able to progress through the ranks without having to worry that her skills didn't look exactly the same as those of her classmates. She could still become a black belt, make modifications that work with her stature, and achieve her personal best.

When martial arts instructors subjectively evaluate their black belts, they're unlikely to see perfect little clones. That's not the point. There's variation in skill. Some are



# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls

### 7 Ways to Help Little Ladies Become Powerful Leaders



- 1 Give them the opportunity to step in front of the class. When girls are put in front of class to demonstrate a skill or teach a technique, they not only learn that you have confidence in them, but they learn to have confidence in themselves.
- 2 Develop their voice. Girls sometimes need help learning to be assertive and sticking up for what they believe is the right thing to do. Show them how to offer suggestions and provide good support for why an idea could benefit everyone.
- 3 Allow them to teach a Power Chat. This can be a place of privilege in many martial arts academies, since parents as well as students are listening in to these conversations. When a girl is allowed to take the lead, she can be seen as a leader and a mentor to others.

- 4 Help them to stand tall. Leaders stand with their heads up, shoulders back, and their eyes on the person to whom they're talking. When it comes to stance, small changes can make a big difference in the way a girl is perceived.
- 5 Get them involved. Allow them to help organize events, work at birthday parties, and assist in younger kids' classes. Through experience, they develop confidence and character.
- 6 Model positive leadership. Your students look to you to see how a good leader behaves. Show these girls that a positive leader finds the good in others, helps out, commands attention, shows confidence and has strength of character.



- 7 Praise leadership behavior. Girls look to you for approval and praise. When you see them demonstrating positive leadership, be sure to recognize it.



more precise. Others are more flexible or powerful. Girls can therefore achieve black belt status (and beyond) even if they're not "perfect." Everyone can achieve a top rank and everyone can be recognized for her personal best.

#### Martial Arts Develops Physical Confidence

There's nothing particularly "ladylike" about martial arts. Girls aren't told to be dainty, gentle, fragile or demure. Thank goodness. And while they can still be "girly" if they want to, they can be so much more than that, too.

With new female role models continually emerging and TV shows like *Fight Girls* and *American Gladiators* still in recent play, girls are able to see that females can hold

their ground. Martial arts academies can give young girls a place to develop their physical self-confidence as well as their self-control, posture, and belief that they can take care of themselves if the situation arises.

So, how can martial arts help girls develop confidence in one's physical abilities and physical self-worth?

**The Power vs. Pretty Problem.** Many aesthetic or traditionally feminine activities play down power, or must balance power, with grace and poise. So, it's not surprising that, for many, channeling power into a punch, standing tall and commanding physical attention, might not come naturally—or at least the tendencies to do so may have been squashed by societal messages that say "girls don't do that."

When you think about it, there are plenty of positive messages conveying strength, power and courage when someone says, "Be a man!" But have you ever even heard someone say, "Be a woman" or "Be ladylike" when they're encouraging girls to step up to the plate? I didn't think so. Even female vocabulary needs an overhaul.

**The Martial Arts Power vs. Pretty Solution.** When Gina "Conviction" Carano steps into the mixed martial arts ring, as beautiful and feminine as she is, nobody's expecting pointed toes and ballet fingers. Lauren Kearney isn't using her bo to do a "demi-plie." Martial arts gives girls permission to be powerful.

Whether your academy is competitive or not, girls, just like



Photographer Erin Gilmore

# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls



boys, can stand up tall, crawl down low, and yell as loud as they want. Power isn't only allowed, but encouraged. Whether power is harnessed into a punch, a lock or a kick, girls can show that they can mix it up with the boys any day.

While other activities can showcase power in different ways, martial arts is unique in that it allows girls to employ dominance and assertiveness, and even release aggression. Girls can make direct contact when punching a bag, breaking a board, pinning an opponent or sparring.

Physical power gives girls permission to get in touch with their most natural primal roots – a door that's usually closed to girls in many

other popular sports and activities. Exploration of their more dominant and authoritative sides can help them to become confident leaders at school, and later, in the community and at work.

**The Practicality Problem.** Nobody's going to stop a girl in the street and challenge her to a pirouette contest unless she's on the set of one of the latest bad teen movies. Aesthetic sports offer many benefits, but they don't typically translate to real-life necessity.

**The Martial Arts Practicality Solution.** Martial arts teaches girls both the

fundamentals of self-defense as well as the ability to avoid potentially dangerous situations. Movements are designed to evade, block and, if need be, fight one's way to safety. Martial arts prepares girls for real dangers.

One parent once told me at our academy, "There's something very comforting about the fact that my daughter can put a two-hundred-pound man on his back." Well said.

Aside from pure combative self-defense, it shows girls how to stand to portray a sense of confidence. This kind of stance tends to send the messages, "I come from a place of strength." Such a stance can be the difference between getting bullied or befriended in today's world.

### Martial Arts Provides Character Education

The best martial arts schools know that, in order to help their students, they have to use both physical and mental martial arts. It's not enough to have the best physical curriculum, great students and strong girls are built from the inside out.

At a time when many academic school systems are having to cut out moral education from their lesson plans, and dual-working-parent families barely have time to ensure the dinner's on the table, professional martial arts schools are picking up the slack. All across the world, these schools are offering professional character-education programs, equipped with information for students and their parents, as an integral part of their curriculum.

So how does martial arts teach strength of character while providing a strong, physical program?

**The No "Power-Chat" Problem.** The problem is simple. Schools no longer have time to do it. Parents are busy. Other sports haven't caught up yet. When girls receive no character education, they learn it from their peers and from television. *Yikes!*

### The Martial Arts "Power-Chat" Solution.

Professional martial arts academies offer a "Mat Chat" or "Power Chat" during every class. These conversations give girls the ability to speak up, speak their mind, and connect with their instructor.

Through Power Chats, girls can learn respect for themselves as well as respect for others. A strong character-education program can help to counter negative media messages that tell them that it's what's on the outside that counts. It tells them that they can be worthy even if they're not the most popular, confident without being conceited, and courteous without being a pushover. It reinforces positive messages that being one's best depends on strong values, a kind heart and a persevering mind.

**The "Only Physical" Problem.** Other activities are often "one-note" or executed on just one level. The students come to do their physical curriculum and leave.

### The Martial Arts "More-than-Physical" Solution.

Many martial arts skills take perseverance, determination, focus and discipline to master. Instructors help their students identify the internal strength it takes to execute the skills properly. Through these physical skills, girls can put what they're learning in their Power Chats into action. But putting character into action doesn't end with the physical curriculum. That's where martial arts has a unique edge.

Since strength of character is fortified through experience, great martial arts academies provide girls (and boys) with unique opportunities to put their words into action to help others. Many martial arts schools don't just talk about character, but

**"In martial arts, high scores in competition and sparring, if integrated into the school's curriculum at all, are based on technical points and domination. Supermodels don't have the advantage. Winners can be tall and thin or short and stout. Success in the martial arts isn't contingent on appearance. This takes the pressure off girls who may worry about unhealthy dieting."**

Extra events that engage students in giving back to the community aren't typically incorporated or even mentioned. That's not their purpose. And while no one can argue that aesthetic activities require focus and determination to learn, instructors aren't asking their students to exercise these qualities in nonphysical ways.

provide events such as charity drives and teacher-appreciation weeks that allow all children to "walk the walk," not just "talk the talk."

As you know, gratitude is learned through giving and citizenship is learned through doing one's part. So, anytime instructors provide opportunities for service and

# Hang Up the Pink Tights!

## Why Martial Arts Is So Great for Girls

connection, character is strengthened. It allows girls to see firsthand that their contribution matters. When girls see that they fill a useful and worthwhile role, they thrive.

### Conclusion

Martial arts provides girls with the opportunity to achieve, connect, develop and thrive in several unique ways. Any girl, of any shape or size, can rise through a host of colored-belt ranks while building physical and mental assuredness. She can become strong in body as well as

in character. These lessons can be applied to every area of her life.

Martial arts helps girls realize that they can be well-rounded. It doesn't pigeonhole them into being any one thing. They can be girly, assertive, tough, kind and strong all rolled into one. They can access their power that may have been previously squelched in order to appease others, fit into a more predictable gender role, or cope with feelings of insecurity. This power can help girls cope with everyday challenges, stand up to possible dangers, and become an assertive leader.

So, in a world where, at one time, sugar and spice only came in pink, it's nice to know that martial arts has provided girls with a host of other colors for which

to strive. And ya know what? They never looked so good.

*Dr Robyn J.A. Silverman is the martial arts industry's leading child development expert. She originally developed the POWERful Words Character Toolkit, a systemized, easy-to-use, age-appropriate character-education program for her own martial arts school and saw wonderful success. The Toolkit is currently being used in over 500 large and small martial arts academies worldwide. She has also received consistent accolades for her Staff Training Audio Series and her no-nonsense 1 on 1 private success coaching. For further information, contact Dr. Robyn at 1-877-769-3799 or visit her website at [www.powerfulwordsonline.com](http://www.powerfulwordsonline.com) to take advantage of her special free trial offer.*



# Millennium X Training

## UNLIMITED CURRICULUM

**Millennium Curriculum 1**  
 Bo Staff  
 Kamas  
 Champion Forms  
 (1-3-Personal Development Forms)  
 Open Forms Training  
 Sais  
 Tonfas  
 Sword (Boken)  
 Nunchaku  
 Double Nunchaku  
 Competition Sparring  
 Explosive Jump Kicks  
 Competition Training

**Millennium Curriculum 2**  
 Ju-Jitsu  
 Competition Chinese Broadsword  
 Competition Wushu Form  
 Speed Plyometrics  
 Power Plyometrics  
 Muay Thai Kickboxing  
 Samurai Sword  
 Capoeira  
 Traditional Competition Forms  
 Competition Fan Form  
 Escrima  
 Competition Training 2

**Millennium Curriculum 3**  
 Nunchaku Training Level 2  
 Test Your Power(Board Breaking) 1  
 Test Your Power(Board Breaking) 2  
 Plyometrics 3 Speed Kicking  
 Plyometrics 4 Power Kicking  
 Air Force Camp 1  
 Air Force Camp 2  
 Chinese Spear  
 Chinese Straight Sword  
 Sai Training 2  
 Sport Sword Sparring  
 Dynamic Partner Team Forms

**Plus these complete programs**



[rolandosborne.com](http://rolandosborne.com)

Enroll Today and Receive a FREE DVD Valued at \$49.99

Taking it to the **NextLevel.com**

**Taking it to the Next Level is your Next Step Towards Being Successful!**  
 We can help you achieve your maximum potential. No "Gimmicks," No "Tricks," No "Catch."  
 Just Solid Systems and Time Tested Business Strategies that Work!

- A Complete Business Curriculum, Spelled out Step-by-Step!
- We Provide Proven Systems to Build Your School From the Ground Floor to an Empire!
- Our Curriculum is Easy to Understand, Fully Downloadable, and Ready to Use!
- We Monitor Your Progress, & Help to Guide You... EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!

*"I stand behind my products 100%. My ultimate goal is to help school owners. No gimmicks. Simply, I am doing this because I want to see school owners develop what it takes to produce the best students, while securing a financial future for themselves."*

-Allie Alberigo  
 Founder

5 Schools Internationally

