



Episode 515 – Is Martial Arts Inherently Sexist? | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hello everyone! Welcome, this is whistlekick martial arts radio episode 51, in today's episode we were asking is martial arts inherently sexist? My name is Jeremy Lesniak your host on the show, founder of whistlekick, and everything we do here at whistlekick is in support of the traditional martial arts. If you wanted to know more about what we do, go to whistlekick.com, it's a place to learn about all the stuff were working on. Our projects and our products, it's also a place to find our store. And if you use the code PODCAST15 on any product in that store, you're gonna save 15%. Martial arts radio gets its own website; whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, no one has ever accused me of naming things in a clever way, this show comes out two times a week with the purpose of connecting, educating, and entertaining the traditional martial artists throughout the world. If you want to support the work that we do, you can do a number of things: you could make a purchase, you could share an episode, you could follow us on social media we're @whistlekick, you could tell a friend about what we do, you could pick up one of our books on Amazon, you can leave a review somewhere Facebook, Google, Amazon, or you could support our Patreon account [PATREON.com/whistlekick](https://www.patreon.com/whistlekick) that's the place to go for that and you can support us monthly with as little as two dollars. And depending on how much you support us with, you'll get access to extra stuff. At two dollars a month you're getting blog posts, at five dollars you getting exclusive audio, \$10



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video, \$25 books, or programs that we roll out and it goes up from there. So, go ahead check that out patreon.com/whistlekick.

Today's episodes going to be a little bit different. Because in most episodes, I come to you with a topic and I assert a position and I do this with the goal of feedback and discussion and getting you to think. Today's episode's not quite that. Today's episode is a question without an answer. It still meant to elicit feedback and spark conversation but this is one of those rare times where I don't know how I feel. I have been sitting on this topic for literally years. A listener wrote in asking about this subject years ago and most of you can probably imagine I have a topic list that I keep, and when it comes time for Thursday episode, you know i'll think about what I want to talk about? What's been going on publicly? What haven't we talked about a while? And I look through that topic list and today this one jumped out at me and I said it's time. It's time to do this, but then I had to sit back and say; no wait a second. The reason that I haven't done this subject before is because my opinions on it change dramatically depending on the day, I consider it. So instead of saying; this is exactly how I feel knowing that I might change my mind tomorrow, I'm posing as a question with the hope you will consider how you feel and think about it. It is no secret that current climate in the world has it asking a lot of questions about where we are, and who we are, and how we feel. I think it's time for us in the martial arts to start asking those questions. And this is a pretty important question to ask even if it doesn't have a concrete answer. Here's why I think it might not have a concrete answer. When we look at martial arts, traditional martial arts, we see historically and statistically, even today, martial arts participants are male. That doesn't apply to every school, that doesn't apply to everything, but if we take some raw generalities, if we just look at the numbers and this occurs when I go and teach at schools, it occurs when I go to seminars, it's the same thing when I look at competitions. I see more men involved in martial arts then women. Now on the other side of that generality, I can say that I know some schools that are predominantly women. They're owned and run by women, most of your students are women, and they offer very strong programs for everyone that seemed to be undertaken by females.

Great! Anyone who's been listening for more than a few episodes knows how I feel that traditional martial arts. I love traditional martial arts, and I feel very, very strongly that martial arts are for everyone. I don't care how you slice or divide or even just look at the general population, everyone, and I truly mean everyone would benefit from six months or more of traditional martial arts training. That's one of my goals, it is one of whistlekick's goals is to foster that globally. Which means when we take a look at martial arts participation and we see that women are not represented as strongly in the traditional arts as men, I think that means that something is up. I'm not gonna go so far as to say something is wrong, I'm not going to go so far as to say that something needs to be done because the intent here with this episode, again, my mind changes on this,



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my goal here is a little different than it is in a typical episode; I want you to think, I want you to come up with your own opinion, and I want you to decide if it warrants action. It was not until I went to college that I started to realize that participation in the traditional martial arts was skewed towards male participation. I grew up learning from a husband and wife, Shihan Beth Bielat's been on this show, her husband John, hopefully will someday come on the show and when I think about the demographics of who attended classes, I don't know that it was 50-50 male-female, but it wasn't so heavily one way or the other that I noticed which tells me that there's, there was something good there. And as I started to age and travel around, I noticed wait a second, that's not typical. And there seems to be a rough correlation, i've done no scientific study on this, with the demographics of the leadership in the school. To say it another way, schools run by women tend to have more female students. I don't know if that's true across the board, but that's been my observation.

I have heard some people say that martial arts is inherently an aggressive, masculine, testosterone fueled, pursuit and I don't know that I agree but I can see the point. When we talk about combatives, we talk about fighting, when we look at that aspect of martial arts, there does seem to be something that resonates in the typical male persona. We're gonna go on a slight tangent here and say, I hope those of you who know me well enough and new listeners, will give me the trust in that I am not saying any of the things that people might be thinking at this point to criticize my statements. I'm not saying martial arts is only for men. I am not saying that women can't do certain things. If you know my history, if you know me, you know that those things are not true of me. This is a dicey topic and I'm working really hard to choose my words to make sure that I'm representing it in my beliefs accurately.

When we look at participation in the arts and the way classes are run, some schools have more aggression than others. Is there a correlation between the gender of the instructors, and the way classes are taught? Not in my observation, but maybe. And you can see as I'm working through this, I'm having a hard time and I'm having a hard time because there's a part of me that says; yeah historically, traditionally, men have engage in the more violent pursuits, they have defended the tribes, they have carried the weapons, they have biologically been more disposable for the simple fact that in terms of procreation, one man can do more "duty", I'm not gonna expand on this anymore, than a woman can. A woman can carry one child at a time, a man can father multiple children along the same period of time. And thus, human beings have evolved two allow men to be a bit more disposable when it comes to things like battle and war. I'm even a little uncomfortable saying that, though the data, the science does back this up. Yet this is not ancient history, this is not medieval times, this is today. And today I believe very, very strongly that men and women have the ability to engage in whatever roles they choose. I have always been an advocate for women in military. I have always been an



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advocate for men to raise children on their own if they so choose. There may be some physiological predispositions to certain things, but those are not preventive in terms of the way people run, live their lives. Thus, with all that being said, martial arts being a pursuit that contains some aggression that is rooted in some part in combat and war and battle, does that very nature predispose martial arts to being inherently masculine and thus sexist? As I say it, my initial reaction is absolutely it does. And now I'm gonna talk myself out of that.

As I mentioned, I have witnessed that martial arts schools run by women tend to have more women participating. Which makes me question is it a question not of masculinity, but a question of example in leadership and role model? And now I don't know. This is the inner dialogue I have with myself I don't know what the outcome is. If we had this conversation 500 years ago, I think it would be a pretty simple conversation because part B wouldn't exist. Martial arts would be about defense and war and battle and that was a job for men and end of discussion. It's not 500 years ago, it's now. So, where do we go? How do we unpack this? I'm not going to impact this further because I am conflicted in my mind. And thus, even more so today than any other episode I've ever recorded, I want to hear from you. I want to know what you think. I want the emails. I want you to write me Jeremy@whistlekick.com. I want to unpack this further in my mind and I need your help to understand how I feel. You probably have an opinion. Maybe your opinion has change slightly over time, maybe it's changed a bit in listening to me. Maybe you've reached the same fuzzy, non-conclusion that I have. Now what I know is that regardless of the inherent sexism that may or may not exist in martial arts as a fundamental practice, that does not mean that the way we implement, run schools, competitions need to be sexist. If you're a martial arts instructor, I'd like you to consider are you giving equal opportunities two men and women boys and girls in your classes? Do you run your classes in such a way that it makes one group of people more comfortable than another? If you're unsure ask people, if you're comfortable asking people, put up an anonymous survey.

My goal for this episode is to get you to think as with every single episode of ever done. But more so today I need you to think for yourself very, very strongly. I need you to go to some of those dark places that maybe you keep the door closed on. Have you been guilty of being selective? Do man or women receive more attention in your classes for any reason? Can you do better? We can all always do better but, on the subject, can you do better? If you can, I hope you will. If you are unsure, I hope you will find answer or try to find the answer, ask people. And again, for probably the 14th time, I hope you let me know your thoughts.

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