

Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies



Chapter 7

Gender and Sports:

***Does Equity Require
Ideological Changes?***



There are complex relationships between sports and the way people think about masculinity, femininity, homosexuality, heterosexuality, & other aspects of gender and sexuality in society.

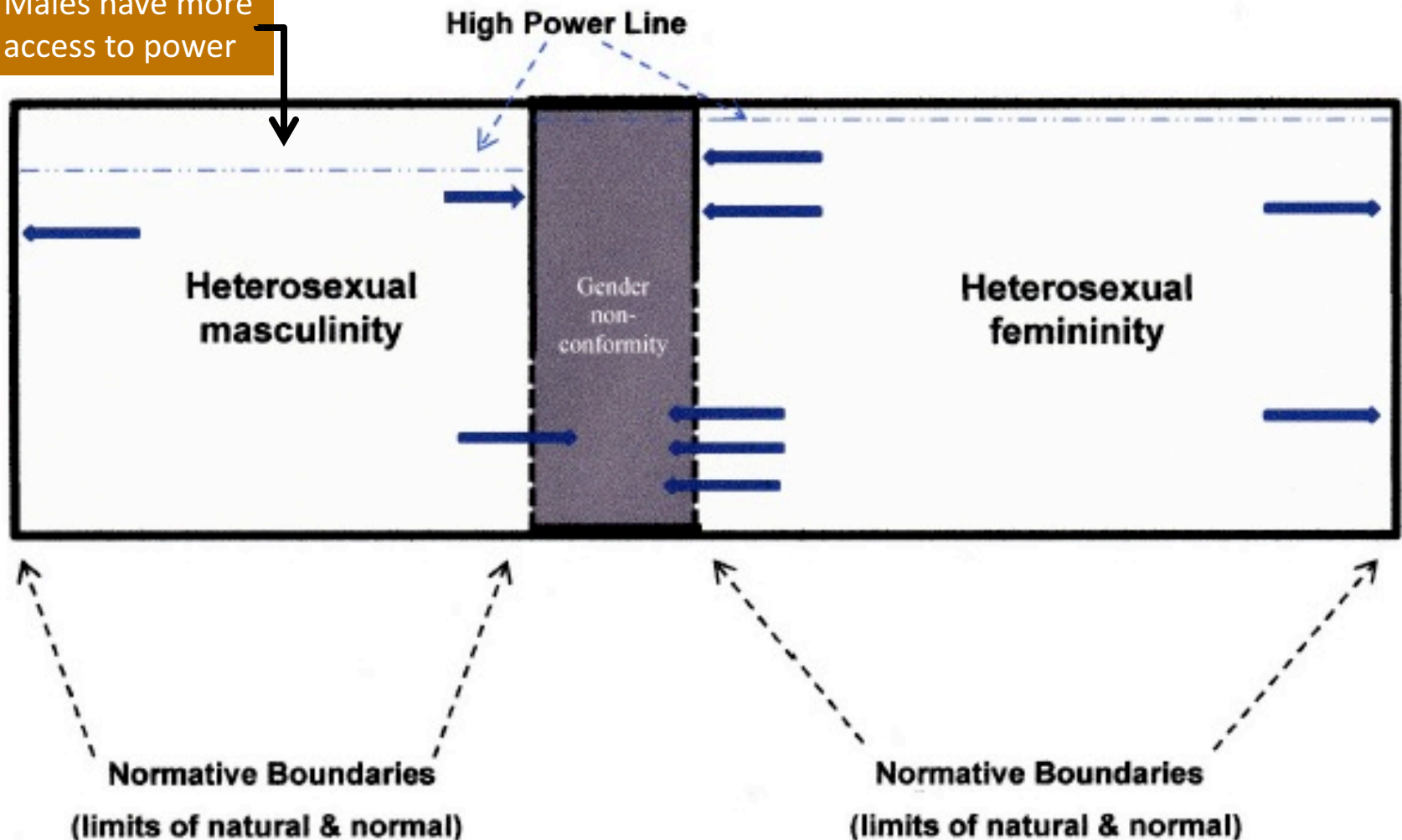
Gender ideology

- ❑ . . . interrelated ideas and beliefs widely used to define masculinity and femininity, identify people as male or female, evaluate forms of sexual expression, and organize social relationships
- ❑ **Orthodox gender ideology** = ideas and beliefs associated with this two-sex approach.
 - Using the word *orthodox* is meant to show that this view of gender represents a traditional way of thinking that many people have internalized as unchanging “truth” and often linked to their religious beliefs or an overall sense of right and wrong.
- ❑ Gender ideology resists change, but it can and often does change as other parts of society change

Gender ideology in many societies is based on a two-category classification system that

- ❑ Assumes two mutually exclusive categories: heterosexual male and heterosexual female
- ❑ Presents these categories in terms of difference—as “opposites” across physiological, psychological, and social dimensions
- ❑ Leaves no space for those who do not clearly fit into one of the two categories
- ❑ Infers the subordination of women to men when it comes to power and access to power

Males have more access to power



A two category classification system for sex & gender: who is
“natural and normal and
who is out of normative bounds?

Research across many scientific disciplines shows that

- ❑ Biological sex is not manifested in either/or male/female terms—it is manifested across many traits in terms of shades of difference
- ❑ In most societies, people are forced into one sex category or the other, and if they don't fit, they are socially marginalized
- ❑ Being classified in one or the other normative category limits possibilities for all people

Gender ideology

- ❑ A tool for maintaining the status quo
 - Males are defined as superior in terms of traits that are connected with status and power
 - Women are defined as inferior to men except in their ability to nurture
- ❑ Leads social worlds to be
 - Male-dominated
 - Male-identified
 - Male-centered

Gender (in)equity issues always exist when sport cultures are:

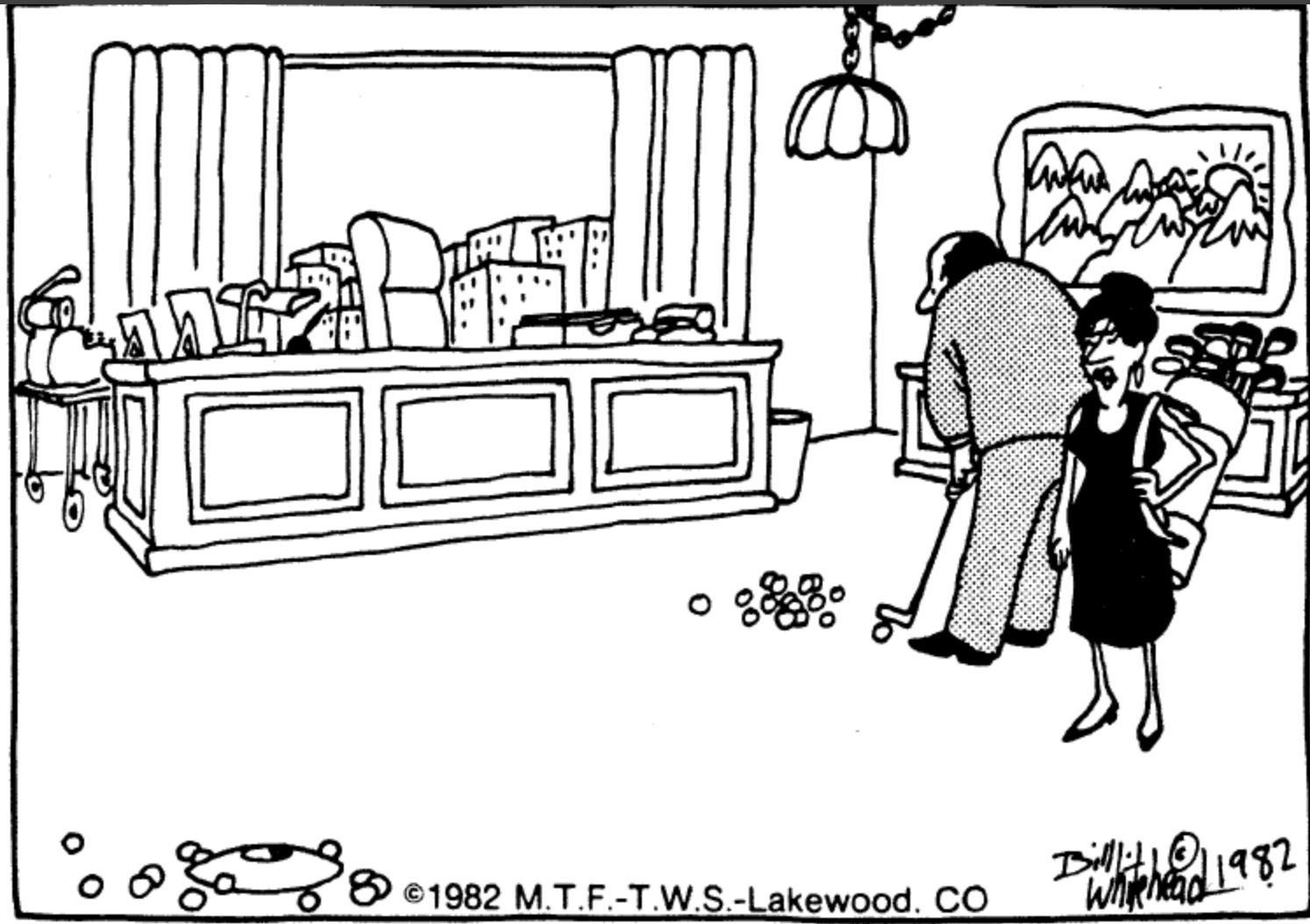
- ❑ *Male-dominated* (i.e., ability and performance qualifications are associated with masculinity)
- ❑ *Male-identified* (i.e., sports are a “man’ world” that emphasizes values associated with men and manhood)
- ❑ *Male-centered* (i.e., men and men’s lives are the expected focus of attention in stories, legends, and media coverage related to sports)

Facts about gender ideology

It is defined in ways that

- ✓ Give some men more access to power while restricting the range of behavior for all men
- ✓ Marginalize gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals by categorizing them as “out of normative bounds”
- ✓ Lead women to push gender boundaries while men are more apt to police gender boundaries for themselves and for women

Like many corporate cultures, sport cultures often are organized to make women feel that they are not fully valued for their abilities.



For women, pain and injury are simply the price of playing elite sport; for men, they are badges of masculinity . . . Sports is a gendered institution, whose values, symbols, and core audience are masculine, even with the rise of women's sports and women athletic stars.

—Judith Lorber, professor emerita,
City University of New York (2007)

Gender ideology in sports: Girls and women as invaders

- ❑ Females in certain sports may threaten traditional ideas about gender.
- ❑ Through history, myths have been used to discourage participation by girls and women.
- ❑ Encouragement varies by sport, and whether the sport emphasizes grace or power.
- ❑ Being a “tomboy” is okay as long as traditional “femininity cues” are presented.



Through most of the 20th century gender ideology led to the exclusion of girls and women in sports. Prior to the late-1970s most girls in schools had one or two “field days” each year to engage in sport activities.

For most of the twentieth century, few schools sponsored competitive teams for girls and young women. Instead, they sponsored semi-annual “field days” or “sport nights” during which girls could compete in running races and other field events or give skills demonstrations to parents. Until the 1960s there were widely believed myths that vigorous sports would harm the female body and make it difficult for a woman to conceive, carry, and give birth to children.



Photo © Lisa Larsen/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

Girls and women did engage in physical activities during the early 20th century, but those activities usually emphasized grace and beauty as the basis for “ladylike character.”



Ladies, not invaders

- When women wanted to play sports during most of the 20th century, they often named their team “Ladies this” or “Ladies that,” and referred to themselves as “ladies” to defuse the threat they presented to men and male control of sport resources
 - This was especially prevalent in southern states where men controlled women by identifying them as ladies who would always be “ladylike”—that is, subordinate to me, but taken care of by men.
 -
- Today, the term “lady” does not come with these constraints—but “lady teams” continue to receive fewer resources than the men receive

Gender ideology leads to many strategies when seeking opportunities to play certain sorts—even today.



The most certain way for women to be on a basketball court in front of a sold out stadium game after game.



Photo by Dennis Coakley



Women's professional sport leagues struggle to survive, including the professional-amateur mixed W-League supported by the USL Soccer organization. Does orthodox gender ideology undermine professional women's sports?

Mainstream Sports Reaffirm Orthodox Gender Ideology

- ❑ Because gender is not fixed in biology, sports are key sites for maintaining ideas and beliefs about male-female differences
- ❑ Sex-tests for women are used to maintain the two-sex classification system
- ❑ Sports, especially media sports, celebrate traditional masculinity and the “natural power and emotional fortitude” of males
- ❑ “Sport talk” and sport images often glorify a heroic manhood based on being a warrior
 - Some people use this to legitimize male power and dominance in gender relations

Some men's sports inspire fantasies of a heroic manhood in which masculinity is equated with being a "warrior."

Many boys find this fantasy (temporarily) empowering

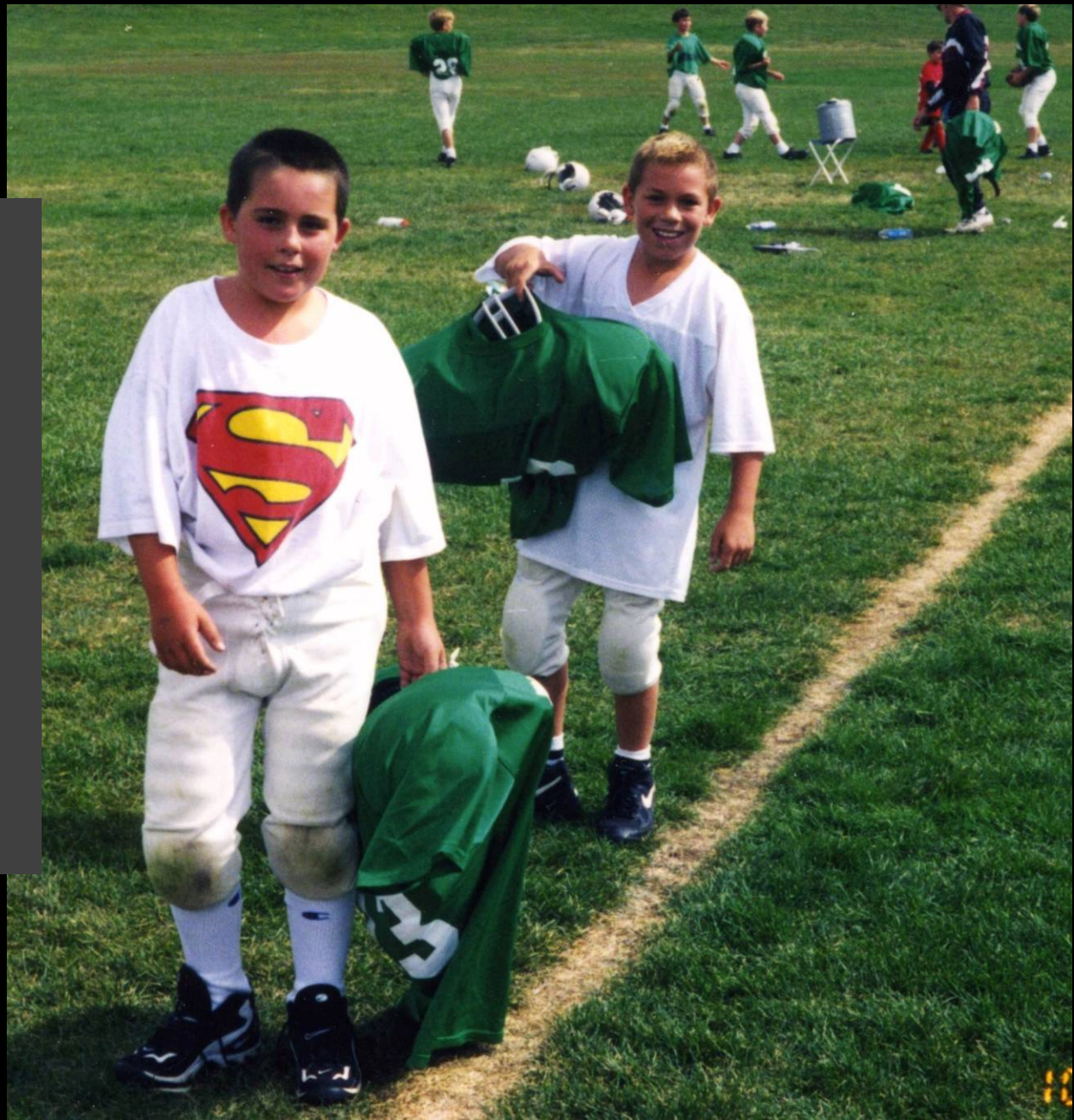


Photo by Jay Coakley

Sex testing: a legacy of the two-sex system

Sport organizations (& public toilets) remains the last bastion of enforced sex segregation in society

- This creates problems because objective distinctions between male and female cannot be made across all humans by using chromosomes, hormones, or secondary sex characteristics—all of which overlap among men and women.
 - These problems have forced sport organizations to use a succession of invalid tests to make sure women athletes are females that fit their definitions.
 - Caster Semenya was the latest of many victims of this approach.



Caster Semenya winning the 800-meters. But aren't most elite women athletes outliers when it comes to power, strength, and muscles?

The current IOC approach to sex testing is

- ❑ Invalid
- ❑ Ethnocentric
- ❑ Discriminatory
- ❑ Unfair to women
- ❑ Psychologically harmful
- ❑ Based only on testosterone level
- ❑ Anti-inclusion
- ❑ Based on a double standard and not applied to men for the sake of fairness

Gender ideology and other double standards in sports

What would happen if

- ❑ Tennis player Serena Williams beat up a man or a woman in a bar fight?
- ❑ A high-profile woman athlete bragged about having numerous sex partners?
- ❑ A WNBA player had arm tattoos expressing strength and dominance?
- ❑ The captain of the national women's soccer team was photographed with near-naked men ogling and hanging on her?

Changes in gender ideology: A prerequisite for gender equity

Changing gender ideology is crucial because

- Gender is a fundamental organizing principle of social life
- Gender ideology influences how we
 - Think about and identify ourselves and others
 - Form and evaluate relationships
 - Present ourselves to others
 - Develop expectations for ourselves and others
 - Organize and distribute rewards in social worlds

Despite orthodox gender ideology, notable progress toward gender equity has occurred since the 1970s

This progress is due to:

- ❑ Government legislation mandating equal rights (eg., Title IX in the U.S.)
- ❑ The global women's rights movement
- ❑ The global health and fitness movement
- ❑ Increased media coverage of women in sports

Fairness and equity issues revolve around

- ❑ Sport participation patterns compared by gender
- ❑ Gender inequities related to
 - Participation opportunities
 - Support for athletes
 - Jobs in coaching and administration
- ❑ Strategies for achieving equal opportunities for girls and women

Title IX

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

— a law passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972, signed by President Richard Nixon, June 23, 1972



Title IX has benefited millions of girls and women.
It remains controversial among those who say that gender equity
is unfair because more males than females want to play sports.

Title IX requires compliance with one of three tests:

- The proportionality test
 - ✓ A five percentage point deviation has been okay
- The history of progress test
 - ✓ Judged by actions and progress over past three years
- The accommodation of interest test
 - ✓ Programs and teams meet the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex

Title IX in the U.S. has

- ❑ Fostered major changes in sport participation opportunities available to girls and women
- ❑ Evoked continuous resistance since it became law in 1972
- ❑ Demonstrated that laws and law enforcement do not exist in a social and cultural vacuum
- ❑ Demonstrated that when laws challenge the ideas and lifestyles of people with power, the legitimacy and enforcement of those laws will be questioned



The global women's movement and the health and fitness movement have opened some doors to women to play sports in various regions, such as here in a village in Chiapas, Mexico

Gender inequities remain in the U.S. and worldwide

- ❑ Unfortunately, progress toward gender equity in U.S. sports seems to have stalled since the beginning of this century.
- ❑ Significant inequities remain in
 - Participation rates and absolute numbers for males and females
 - Support given to female athletes
 - Access to power positions for women in sports

Categories of support for athletes:

- ✓ Access to facilities
- ✓ Quality of facilities
- ✓ Availability of scholarships
- ✓ Program operating expenses
- ✓ Recruiting budgets
- ✓ Scheduling of games and practice times

- ✓ Travel and per diem expenses
- ✓ Academic tutoring
- ✓ Number of coaches
- ✓ Salaries for all staff and administrators
- ✓ Medical training services and facilities
- ✓ Publicity for players, teams, and events



On Brighton Beach in England, and in most other public spaces in which sports are played, men are more likely than women to claim that space. Women are also more likely to watch men than men are to watch women play sports. Gender ideology and the structure of opportunities go hand-in-hand when it comes to sports.

Facing football: A challenge for equity strategies

High-profile football teams

- ❑ Involve more players and more resources than any other sport team
- ❑ Promote a culture in which there is resistance to gender equity
- ❑ Often are supported by boosters who see gender equity as an obstacle to the way they do things



When football is the cultural and structural centerpiece of a school and community, gender inequities are likely to exist and persist over time.

Informal and alternative sports

- ❑ Organized around the values and experiences of boys and young men
- ❑ Participants say that inclusion is based on skills, guts, and aggressiveness, not gender
- ❑ Most girls and young women feel unwelcome in alternative sport cultures

Access to informal sport participation for females is usually afforded by a male—a brother or friend who serves as an advocate



Photo by Jay Coakley



Public skate parks have become male turf. To enter these spaces, a females often needs a male advocate to “explain” her presence



When males shape norms and control access to participation, “playing like a boy” becomes a prerequisite for playing at all.

Access to informal and alternative sports

Gender inequities also exist in player-controlled sports:

- ❑ Girls and women may face greater access challenges than are faced by boys and men
- ❑ Boys and men often control access to these sports, and they control access on their terms
- ❑ Title IX does not apply to these sports

Question: Do the X Games perpetuate inequities related to access in these sports?



Roller derby teams are being formed by women seeking sport experiences on their own terms. The athletes embrace many ideas and beliefs about femininity. The culture of roller derby is female-dominated, female-identified, and female-centered.

Table 7.3 Percentage of female head coaches in the ten most popular women's sports in all NCAA schools, 1977–2012

Sport	1977*	1987	1997	2008*	2012	Percentage Point Change, 1977–2012
Basketball	79.4	59.9	65.2	59.1	59.5	–19.9
Volleyball	86.6	70.2	67.8	55.0	53.3	–33.3
Cross-country	35.2	18.7	20.7	19.2	21.2	–14.0
Soccer	29.4	24.1	33.1	33.1	32.2	+2.8
Softball	83.5	67.5	65.2	64.7	62.1	–21.4
Tennis	72.9	54.9	40.9	29.8	29.9	–43.0
Track and field	52.3	20.8	16.4	18.0	19.2	–33.1
Golf	54.6	37.5	45.2	38.8	41.6	–13.0
Swimming/diving	53.6	31.2	33.7	24.3	26.2	–27.4
Lacrosse	90.7	95.1	85.2	84.6	85.1	–5.6

Source: Carpenter and Acosta (2008) and Acosta and Carpenter (2012); see <http://www.acostacarpenter.org/>.

*Data for specific sports prior to 1977 and for 2007 are not available.

In percentage terms, women have lost ground relative to men as head coaches in NCAA Division I sports. As women's sports have become more important, men are hired for a greater proportion of the jobs. At the same time, fewer than 3% of men's college teams have women as head coaches

Coaching & administration: Reasons for underrepresentation (I)

1. Women are not considered for half of all coaching jobs—that is, for men's teams
2. Women lack fully developed and effective occupational networks to compete with men.
3. Search committees often have members who use orthodox gender ideology to assess job applicants
4. Many women lack the support systems and professional development opportunities that men have had.

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Coaching & administration: Reasons for underrepresentation (II)

5. Many women avoid careers in sport organizations that are male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered
6. Women experience more sexual harassment, which sets them up to fail or discourages them from seeking upward mobility in sport organizations

Women in National Olympic Committees & International Sport Federations, 2010

Federations	National Olympic Committees	International Sport
Women in Executive Boards	18%	18%
Women Presidents	4%	3%
Women Secretaries General	9%	4%

Source: Henry & Robinson, 2010.

Note: Data are based on responses received from 110 of the 205 National Olympic Committees—a 54% response rate, and from 70% of the International Federations.

Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions in sports worldwide, and progress toward equity is very slow. Men do not give up power easily, nor do they want to change the male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered culture of sports.

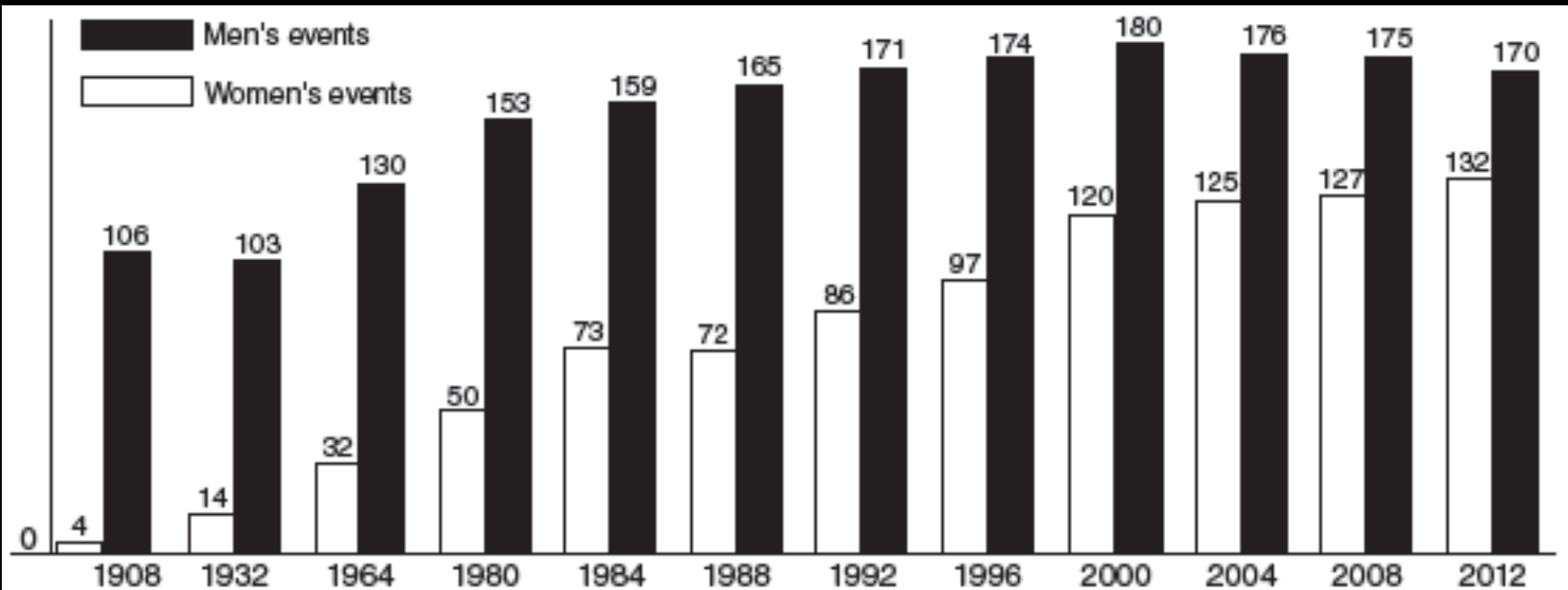
Barriers to gender equity

1. Budget cuts and privatization of sport programs
2. Resistance to government regulations
3. Few models of women in positions of power
4. A cultural emphasis on “cosmetic fitness” for women
5. Trivialization of women’s sports
6. Male-dominated/identified/centered sport organizations

Some men continue to have a difficult time taking female athletes seriously as athletes. Gender ideology appears to be deeply grounded in their psyche when it comes to sports.



Amy Wambach, captain of the U.S. Women's Soccer Team, says that teammate Alex Morgan will benefit women's soccer because she has "the mainstream popularity of being the pretty girl" and attracts attention from 15- to 25-year-old men. However, research shows that it is the skills of female athletes, not their looks, that sustain interest in women's sports.



Events for men have always outnumbered events for women in the Olympics

Year	Place	Countries Represented	Male Athletes	Female Athletes	Percent Female
1964	Tokyo	93	4473	678	13.2
1968	Mexico City	112	4735	781	14.2
1972	Munich	122	6075	1059	14.8
1976	Montreal	92	4824	1260	20.7
1980	Moscow	81	4064	1115	21.5
1984	Los Angeles	140	5263	1566	22.9
1988	Seoul	159	6197	2194	26.1
1992	Barcelona	169	6652	2704	28.9
1996	Atlanta	197	6806	3512	34.0*
2000	Sydney	199	6582	4069	38.2
2004	Athens	201	6262	4329	40.9
2008	Beijing	205	6450	4746	42.4
2012	London	205	6098	4362	41.7

The Summer Olympic Games were totally dominated by men until the 1990s when women's participation had increased due to global changes produced by the women's movement that began in the 1960s.

Recent Paralympic Games*	Number of Females (%)	Number of Males (%)	Total Number of Athletes
2012 Summer Games–London 164 nations	1513 (35%)	2756 (65%)	4269
2010 Winter Games–Vancouver 44 nations	121 (24%)	381 (76%)	502
2006 Winter Games–Turin, Italy 39 nations	99 (21%)	375 (79%)	384
2012 Summer Games–London U.S. delegation	94 (41%)	133 (59%)	227
2010 Winter Games–Vancouver U.S. delegation	13 (26%)	37 (74%)	50
2006 Winter Games–Turin, Italy U.S. delegation	11 (20%)	45 (80%)	56

Gender inequities are especially prevalent in the Paralympic Games, although there have been some positive changes in recent years.

The gendered choices faced by athletes are also faced by women who apply for cheerleading and dance teams in men's professional sports. The bodies of these women are assessed to see if they meet specific physical criteria. If they do, they will be allowed to try out. If these women had the power to choose how they are included and represented in sports, would they choose this?



Photo: © Michele Eve Sandberg/ZUMA Press/Corbis

Gender Equity and Sexuality

- ❑ Sports have long been associated with male heterosexuality & the expression of homophobia.
 - Growing rejection of orthodox gender ideology has led to a desire for changes
- ❑ Challenges for LGBTs continue to exist
 - In some sports in certain cultural areas, these challenges are extreme
- ❑ LGBTs worldwide are careful to keep identities hidden
 - If and when LGBTs come out, it is done strategically

Challenge of being gay or lesbian in sports

- ❑ Popular discourse erases gay men and lesbians from sports.
- ❑ Gay men and lesbians have less freedom than heterosexuals when expressing sexuality.
- ❑ Being “out” in sports creates challenges:
 - Women risk social acceptance
 - Men risk social acceptance and physical safety
- ❑ Most people in sports support a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about homosexuality.

When Martina Navratilova came out as a lesbian in 1981 as a 25-year old, her character was attacked. She lost millions in endorsement deals and faced challenges from other players, fans, the media, and the general public.

But she initiated a conversation that was revived in 2013 and 2014. And she continues to participate in that conversation.



Homophobia =

. . . a generalized fear or intolerance of anyone who isn't clearly classifiable as a heterosexual male or female.

- Homophobia is a powerful cultural factor that affects everyone, because it creates fears and pressures to conform to traditional gender definitions, and silences all who are not gender normative.

Intersex and Transgender Persons in Sports

- ❑ Intersex and “trans” people have been ignored or routinely excluded from organized sports
- ❑ Intersex and trans athletes push gender boundaries and create confusion for those using orthodox gender ideology to make sense of the world
- ❑ Some sport organizations have taken on the challenge of creating rules that foster the inclusion of intersex and “trans” athletes
 - The next challenge: how to include those who reject gender as an identity category

Strategies to Achieve Equity

- ❑ Using the law and engaging in grassroots activism
- ❑ Showing boys and men that they benefit from gender equity and recruiting them as allies in making changes.
- ❑ Changing the way we do sports

Strategies to promote gender equity (I)

1. Confront discrimination and be an advocate for women coaches and administrators
2. Be an advocate of fair and open employment practices
3. Keep data on gender equity
4. Learn and educate others about the history of discrimination in sports and how to identify discrimination

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Strategies to promote gender equity (II)

5. Inform media of unfair and discriminatory policies
6. Package women's sports as revenue producers
7. Recruit women athletes into coaching
8. Use women's hiring networks
9. Create a supportive climate for women in your organization



If the culture and social structure in Bangladesh are organized to prevent females from gaining power in society, this girl's joy and sense of empowerment from winning this race will be temporary and difficult to convert into the power to make needed institutional changes as an adult.

Strategies for changing ideology and culture

There is a need for

- ❖ Alternative definitions of masculinity
 - ✓ Critically question violent and destructive behavior
- ❖ Alternative definitions of femininity
 - ✓ Becoming “like men” is not the goal
- ❖ Changing the ways we do sports
 - ✓ Focus on lifetime participation, supportive vocabularies, gender equity, and bringing males and females together to share sport experiences
 - ✓ Why aren't varsity sports in schools organized around gender mixed sports that people will play in the future?

Girls and women as agents of change

Sport participation can empower women,
but

- ❑ This does not occur automatically
- ❑ Personal empowerment does not always lead to an awareness of the need for gender transformation in society as a whole
- ❑ Elite athletes seldom are active agents of change when it comes to gender ideology

Elite female athletes seldom challenge traditional gender ideology

1. Female athletes have much to lose if they are perceived as radical, feminist, or lesbian.
2. Corporation-driven “celebrity-feminism” focuses on individualism and consumption, not everyday struggles related to gender.
3. “Empowerment discourses” in sports often are tied to fitness and heterosexual attractiveness.
4. Women athletes have little control or political voice in sports or society at large.

Boys and men as agents of change

Gender equity in sports is a men's issue:

- ❑ It creates options for men to play sports that are not based only on a power and performance model.
- ❑ It emphasizes relationships based on cooperation rather than conquest and domination.
- ❑ It provides opportunities for boys and men to learn how to maintain emotionally satisfying relationships.

Achieving full gender inclusion: Where we are and where we need to go

