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The Institutionalization of a Gender Biased Sport Value System

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Historically and traditionally sport has evolved as a male domain, and it is clear that women and girls, as well as men and boys, have different sport participation roots.

Introduction

To develop tougher males while controlling wild ones, some school administrators experimented with an innovative plan. They co-opted the rough-and-tumble games boys played during recess and in their free time, and made these part of the official curriculum. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, pp. 214-215)

Sport has been a part of the "...official school program..." since the mid-1800s, and was originally incorporated into the curriculum to serve as "...an important line of defense..." against the potential feminization of American males by a growing female teaching profession (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 213). As a part of the curriculum, sport provided opportunities for physical fitness and competition, as well as a medium through which valued socio-cultural life skills could be learned and practiced. Grounded in ideals of masculinity, sport, more than any other part of the educational curriculum has been, and continues to be, a gender issue.

This paper will explore how school sport has served to institutionalize a gender specific and gender biased sport value system. First the socio-cultural context in which school sport emerged, and its history and evolution will be reviewed. Next the differential impact which school sport has on females and males will be examined. The paper concludes that the development of school sport has, over time, marginalized and devalued women's sport, and the women who participate.

It is suggested that because of this, sport participation by women and girls has actually been suppressed.

School Sport: A Historical Perspective

Socio-Cultural Issues

Women's sport has been defined and shaped by "...men's values, men's understanding of the world, and men's experiences-all of which suppress the development and expression of female values"(Blinde, 1989, p. 37). The history and evolution of gendered sport cultures substantiates this statement and provides evidence, not only of historic and existing gender bias in sport, but of a sport culture created and sustained to nurture that bias.

Historically, women and girls have not been provided equal opportunities in sport because of (a) perceptions relative to physiological differences between the sexes, (b) societal norms and attitudes, and (c) organizational rules and support (Lumpkin, 1984). In the early 1900s, medical doctors and female physical educators thought that vigorous activity would endanger a women's reproductive capacities as well as result in the development of "unsightly" muscle. In response to these concerns, early sport endeavors for women and girls were limited to activities such as archery, dancing, croquet, golf, swimming, and tennis. In fact, as recently as 1972:

The longest race allowed for women in the...Olympics was the 1500M a holdover from the belief that females could not physically or mentally cope with the competitive demands of longer events. (Weiss & Glenn, 1992, p. 139)

More recent and ongoing research has shown that there are no medical, mental, or emotional reasons that support the restriction of women/girls from participating and competing in sport (Lumpkin, 1984; Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998).

In addition to these physiological myths, the role of the successful competitive athlete, and the espousal of stereotypically masculine sport values, were perceived by both women and men as incompatible with the role of women in society. Although there is evidence of change, women who were/are "overly" competitive risked social stigma via non-feminine labeling (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Lumpkin, 1984). As a result, females in sport have struggled to pursue balance, acceptance, and success within a sport model characterized by the very attributes that the broader socio-cultural context discourages, and at times has even punished women and girls for exhibiting.

The educational history of sport begins as the history of sport for boys and men. Early on, school sport was seen as a "...panacea...one that would reduce the dropout problem, create a masculine environment, and give unruly males an energy outlet - and schools a public relations bonanza" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 215). According to Sadker and Sadker (1994) "It was precisely because...[sport]...intensified traditional notions of masculinity that educators found sports so attractive and incorporated them into the official school program" (p. 213). Sport was literally incorporated into the educational curriculum by men, for men, to serve men, evolving as a celebration of maleness, valuing strength, power, and competition. Hill (1993) concurred and stated:

It [sport] idealized, promoted and rewarded successful, elite athletes, established "the dream" as a professional career in sports, and viewed mass participation in sport as a tool of exclusion used to weed out the weak. The sport contest was public, the opponent was the enemy, and the winner dominated the loser. (p. 50)

Winning wasn't everything...it was the only thing; competition was war; and the athlete a warrior-hero. Introduced into the curriculum based on the rough and tumble games played by young boys, interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic programs quickly grew in both quantity and quality throughout the educational system. The end result was a large, well organized, male dominated sport culture, grounded in community and curriculum-based sport programs with an established pinnacle of professional athletics.

In contrast, women's sports originated to "...address the expressed need for healthful exercise for women..." (Huckaby, 1994, p. 48). Almost universally, women's sport programs were directed and coached by female physical educators (Festle, 1996; Uhlir, 1982). Unlike the competitive warrior model characteristic of men's sports, women's sports were rooted in philosophies of participation, cooperation and play.

The female sport culture was grounded in a physical education philosophy of participation and a belief that individuals of "...all skill levels deserved the benefits of sports programs" (Uhlir, 1982, p. 173). The female sport culture emphasized enjoyment and social competition with the ultimate contest goals being those of self-development and teamwork, as opposed to winning and individual elitism (Blinde, 1989; Festle, 1996; Hill, 1993). Interscholastic and intercollegiate competitions evolved from a tradition of play days and sport days which consisted of "...several institutions...play[ing] at the same site" (Huckaby, 1994, p. 48).

Institutional Issues

In the early 1970s, two events occurred that dramatically altered the course of sport for women and girls. In 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was created by female physical educators as a "...model of athletic governance designed for female student-athletes, which incorporated the prevailing women's sports philosophy" (Uhlir, 1982, p. 173). Shortly after, in 1972 Congress enacted Title IX of the Education Amendments. A federal civil rights statute that states:

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 education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (as cited in Vargyas, 1994, p. 6)

The Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), was founded to "...help schools extend their sports programs for women...stimulate leadership among those (mostly women) who were responsible for women's programs...[and conduct] national athletic championships for women" (Festle, 1996, pp. 110-111). The AIAW was a small organization with a limited budget. Unlike the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), both originally men's sport governing organizations, the AIAW made no distinction between revenue and non-revenue sports. In fact, fearing that with money came corruption and exploitation, it wasn't until the latter part of 1973, in response to legal pressures associated with Title IX compliance, that the AIAW allowed women who accepted athletic scholarships to compete in its national championships (Festle, 1996; McKeown, 1974).

During the 1972-73 season, the AIAW offered its first seven national championships (badminton, basketball, golf, gymnastics, swimming & diving, track & field, and volleyball), and by the 1980-81 season the AIAW national program had grown to 39 championships in 17 different sports with 6,000 women's teams and 960 member institutions (Festle, 1996; Uhlir, 1982).

Title IX impacted sport specific opportunities for women and girls as well as the ongoing

evolution of school sport governance. Relative to educational institutions and sport, this law meant that "...institutions could not discriminate on the basis of gender, in any program receiving federal funds, including athletics" (Hill, 1993, p. 51). According to Indiana Senator Birch Bayh (Democrat), the principal Senate sponsor of Title IX, the Act was put forth as:

...a strong and comprehensive measure [that would] provide women with solid legal protection from the persistent, pernicious discrimination which is serving to perpetuate second-class citizenship for American women. (Vargyas, 1994, p. 6)

In other words, Title IX was designed to proactively address historical wrongs and ensure gender equity relative to educational opportunities, including educational-athletic opportunities.

The combination of the AIAW women's school sport governance and the legislation of Title IX resulted in rapid expansion in the quantity and quality of school sport opportunities for girls and women. The results of these two events were nothing short of extraordinary. In 1966 there were approximately 16,000 women participating in intercollegiate sports nationwide; by 1976, that number had increased to 64,000, and by 1991 to 156,000 (Carpenter & Acosta, 1991). Since the early 1990's that overall number has continued to grow, albeit slowly (University of Iowa, 1997; Women's Sports Foundation, 1998; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 1999).

As sport programs for women and girls expanded and began to receive more financial support and recognition "...[the] guardians of sports education for males...[who]... feared the development of sports for girls and women because of what it might mean to their entrenched power and traditions" (Uhlir, 1982, p. 173), began to take action. The NCAA launched a series of efforts to limit the applicability of Title IX regarding intercollegiate athletics. In 1974, they unsuccessfully lobbied the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) for an exclusion of athletics from Title IX. Later that same year the NCAA supported the Tower Amendment, which sought to exclude revenue producing sports from Title IX. Congress acted instead on the Javits amendment, "...which charged HEW with preparing and publishing Title IX regulations, covering interalia, intercollegiate athletics. In formulating these regulations, HEW was required to 'consider[] the nature of particular sports'" (Vargyas, 1994, p. 7). The NCAA then turned to the courts and attempted, again unsuccessfully, to argue that the application of Title IX to athletics was unconstitutional, *NCAA v. Califano* (Carpenter & Acosta, 1991). Failing in their efforts to limit the athletic application of Title IX, the NCAA embarked on a mission of merger and acquisition to gain control of women's sport. In 1980, the NCAA offered its first women's national championships. They also provided institutional incentives of financial assistance for national travel and television rights to both women's and men's basketball championships (Carpenter & Acosta, 1991). In May, 1980 the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) passed legislation to establish intercollegiate championships for women (Henry, 1993). The AIAW, a smaller and financially weaker organization, could no longer compete, and by June of 1982, the AIAW ceased to exist (Huckaby, 1994).

In response to the merger of national intercollegiate athletic affiliations, as well as perceptions that Title IX compliance could, and would, be facilitated through departmental integration; institutions across the country combined their women's and men's athletic departments/programs. And, virtually without exception, the women's sport programs and their leadership were subsumed by the existing men's sport programs (Carpenter & Acosta, 1991). According to Uhlir (1982):

...Women lost authority over their programs...[and]... were appointed to secondary [sometimes tertiary], positions in the unified administrative structures, despite the fact that they frequently had more experience or held higher ranks and degrees than the men. (p. 174)

In 1972 more than 90% of women's programs were administered and directed by women. By 1994, less than 21% of those same programs were administered/directed by a female, and by 1999 the percent of female head athletic administrators had dropped to 17.8% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2000).

As women's sports programs expanded and began to receive more financial support and recognition, men began applying for, and getting, women's sport coaching positions. According to a 23-year longitudinal study by Acosta and Carpenter (2000): (a) in 1972, over 90% of the coaches who coached women's sports were female, by 1999, 45.6% of women's sports coaches were female; and (b) although coaching opportunities for men in women's sports have increased dramatically, there has been no correspondingly similar increase in opportunities for women coaching men. Only about 2% of NCAA men's programs have a female coach at the helm.

From its inception the impact of Title IX on women's sport has been both positive and problematic. Pre Title IX women comprised less than 7% of interscholastic (high school) athletes (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). Today more than 2.5 million women play high school sports, while the number of men has remained relatively constant (approximately 3.7 million) ("High-school athletics participation," 1996; Women's Sports Foundation, 1998). At the intercollegiate level, women constitute over half of all college undergraduates and approximately 40% of sport participants (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 1999; United States Government Accounting Office (GAO), 1996; Women's Sports Foundation, 1998). Pre Title IX women's sports garnered a mere 2% of athletic budgets (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992); presently that number is over 30% (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 1999; United States Government Accounting Office (GAO), 1996; Women's Sports Foundation, 1998). Despite these gains men and boys continue to receive the bulk of sport participation opportunities, as well as better quantity and quality of sport specific accommodations, such as operating budget allocations, scholarship dollars, access to coaching, etc. (Pemberton, 1996). Ultimately, the cost of these gains has been the loss of the traditional women's sport culture and the full and effective assimilation of women's sport "...into the existing... male [sport] model" (Hill, 1993, p. 51).

As history reveals, not only has school sport for men/boys had a significant head start on sport for women and girls, but the socio-cultural value systems in which they were and are grounded, was and is very different. Historically and traditionally sport has been defined, to virtual exclusion, by male dominated norms and values. If women and girls have gotten to play at all, they have had to adapt to and within the established male model. The price to play has been the virtual elimination of female sport administrative leadership, and a drastic reduction in the number of female sport coaches. Because of this, it isn't surprising that women and girls have not, and do not participate in school sport in the same numbers men and boys do. What's surprising is that they play as much and well as they do. Especially given the facts that: (a) playing sports for women and girls involves navigating the double-bind of conflicting sport and gender specific socio-cultural norms and values; (b) sport participation for women and girls has been dependent upon their ability to fit into the dominant male model; and (c) the very component parts upon which participation depends (i.e., participation opportunities, scholarship dollars, operating budgets, access to coaching, etc.), have been, until recently, largely denied to women and girls.

School Sport - Why It Matters and Why They Play

"Sport and fitness activities are important contributors to the mental, emotional and physical well-being of human beings" (Weiss & Glenn, 1992, p. 153). Sport is important physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially for both women and girls, as well as for men and boys. As such, it is simply too important to disproportionately benefit men and boys (Lopiano, 1994).

According to the 1985 *Miller Lite Report* (as cited in Women's Sports Foundation, 1992):

Women who are active in sports and recreational activities as girls feel greater confidence, self-esteem and pride in their physical and social selves than those who were sedentary as kids. (p. 1)

Sabo (1993) found female athletes to be more achievement oriented, independent, self-confident, and inner controlled than female non-athletes. Further, Lopiano (1994) states that girls who participate in sports experience health benefits associated with reduced risk of breast cancer and osteoporosis. Further they are 80% less likely to have an unwanted pregnancy, are 92% less likely to become involved with drugs and three times more likely to graduate from high school than their non athletic peers (Lopiano, 1994).

Sadker and Sadker (1994) reported that: "One in four elementary school boys regards athletics as the best part of being male" (p. 85). By middle school and high school boys see sports as the most prestigious of all school sponsored activities. By college, males "...basking in status and popularity..." are revered as "campus nobility" (p. 184). Historically and traditionally sport and the inherent life-skill lessons learned and practiced, have for men and boys, provided an expressway to socio-cultural access, power, prestige, and success. For men and boys,

School athletics has a long history of helping...build stamina, courage, leadership, loyalty to the team, self- confidence, and the drive to win. Educators also recognize sports as a vehicle for shaping boys into men who will lead society...What benefits boys is good for girls too -the building of character, career skills, and self-esteem. But historically females have been barred from sports; until very recently they were taught in segregated classes with poorer equipment and fewer resources. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 125)

Cantor and Bernay (1992) interviewed 25 female government leaders to determine what qualities and/or strengths enabled them to get elected and persevere in high governmental/political positions. Repeatedly women attributed their success to a combination of competence, creative aggression and woman power. They linked these qualities to sport participation as a "training ground" (p. 62) for effective participation on the "playing field of power" (p. 50). As explained by Cantor and Bernay, the women interviewed saw sport participation as important because through it girls (and boys) experience opportunities to savor winning and to deal with losing.

In the closing chapter of their work, Cantor and Bernay (1992) noted sport participation as an important vehicle to practice life-skills for leadership. A vehicle too often accessed by men and boys to the exclusion of women and girls. According to Cantor and Bernay (1992):

[Sport]...has been men's practice arena for centuries... [through sport men learn]...about creative aggression, its strengths, and limits, the rules to play by and the consequences of being aggressive. (p. 277)

Cantor and Bernay (1992) concluded this thought by stating, "Now it's our [women/girls] turn to take advantage of this learning and playing field" (p. 277). Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) agreed. "Engaging in sports, women will find the new leadership qualities they need in both politics and business, including persistence, courage and discipline - and good sports-womanship" (p. 320).

Research shows that often females participate in sports for different reasons than males. In a 5-year longitudinal study conducted by Butcher and Hall (1983), girls in grades six through ten were surveyed to determine the extent to which their participation in physical activity changed

with age, and what factors were most related to continued physical activity as girls matured. Findings related to issues of a male-dominated sport culture focused on changes in the perceived value of sport participation as girls mature. According to Butcher and Hall (1983) as girls mature they become less motivated by competition and more motivated by physical activity as a release of tension. Additionally, Butcher and Hall (1983) found that participation reinforcement by significant others declined with age, as did positive perceptions relative to the image of female athletes.

The *Wilson Report* (Wilson Sporting Goods Inc., 1988) was the first large scale nationwide and inter-generational survey of the female sport experience. The findings of this report showed that (a) 87% of the mothers and fathers surveyed valued sports as equally important for both their daughters and sons, and (b) 97% agreed that sports provide girls with valuable benefits and were not concerned with their daughters being labeled "unlady-like." The benefits cited, included: (a) positive contributions to physical well-being, (b) enhanced confidence and self-esteem, (c) the promotion of team work, and (d) the encouragement of friendships.

Of the 513 girls/young women interviewed, 58% said they participated in sports primarily because it was/is fun. Eighty-seven percent of girls ages seven to 10, and 84% of girls ages 11 to 14, said they were currently involved in sports. That number dropped to 75% for young women ages 15 to 18 years. Of the young women who did not play sports or had quit sports, 30% said their lack of participation was a result of lack of opportunity, 49% said it was because of lack of skill, and 59% said they quit or did not play sports because of lack of time. Additionally, minority girls/young women, cited participation obstacles such as transportation, lack of funds, and social peer and family pressures not to participate.

In a study designed to test the generalizability of the social-role, social systems framework, and to examine whether conceptual and methodological perspectives pertaining to sport might be gender biased, Greendorfer (1987a) surveyed 110 female intercollegiate athletes from Big 10 universities. Based on a survey response rate of 92% and comparisons with a non-athletic control group, Greendorfer substantiated her hypothesis that early sport participation research was gender biased. She based her findings on the following: (a) early sport participation research adhered to the underlying principles of a male sport model/ culture, and (b) it used male subjects. The substantiation of this underlying framework as gender biased helps explain why findings relative to female sport socialization have been considered deviations from the norm.

In a related work, Greendorfer (1987b) explained that: "...if the sport experience does not meet the participant expectations, the individual will withdraw from the activity" (p. 62). She found that female college athletes cited too much emphasis on winning, not enough playing time, and a lack of fun as primary reasons for dropping out of intercollegiate sports; that is, incompatibilities with the dominant male sport culture.

Blinde (1989) summarized data from several surveys and studies which examined reasons for, and conditions surrounding, female sport participation and sport patterns. What she found was that almost without exception, "Men's sport programs [were] used as the norm by which equal opportunity in women's sport [was] judged" (p. 33). The result was that women's sport programs and opportunities never seemed to measure up.

Sport participation can, and often does, result in positive outcomes. Physical, mental, emotional and social outcomes that benefit men and boys, as well as women and girls. In many ways the benefits of sport participation are gender neutral. However, the valuing of sport by males and females is at least somewhat gender specific. Despite the fact that sport for women and girls has been redefined by a male sport history that espoused male norms and values, and was/is operationally and structurally delimited by disparate accommodations which favor men and

boys, women and girls not only value their sport experience, but value it differently than their male counterparts. The problem is, this different valuing is not consistent with the dominant male model.

By virtue of definition, that which is dominant prevails. Despite the fact that in some instances the shoe hasn't quite fit, women/girls have been forced not only wear it if they wanted to play, but to learn to run well in it. Given this incompatibility, or lack of fit between male and female sport motives, it is not surprising that women and girls do not yet participate in sport to the same degree as men and boys. What's surprising is that given this lack of fit, women and girls have been able to run as fast and far as they have.

Concluding Thoughts

Historically and traditionally sport has evolved as a male domain, and it is clear that women and girls, as well as men and boys, have different sport participation roots. The evidence presented supports the notion that gender bias in sport is a product of not only different sport histories and traditions, but also an inherent incompatibility between female and male sport cultures and values. The dominant male sport value system has defined and delimited the parameters of sport for women and girls, especially and ironically since the passage of Title IX. Further, evidence has been presented to show that gender bias and gender discrimination are manifest in sport through differences in both the quantity and quality of the sport experiences/programs available, as well as the virtual elimination of female sport administrative leadership and dramatically reduced numbers of female sport coaches.

The apparent physical, mental, emotional, and socio-cultural benefits of sport participation, have been, until recently, largely denied to women and girls. Given these contextual realities it isn't surprising that as yet women and girls don't participate in school sport to the same degree men and boys do. It's surprising that given the long history of gender bias and discrimination, the many ways bias and discrimination have been institutionalized through male dominated norms and values, the operational structures and component parts that facilitate and/or delimit female school sport participation, and a differential valuing of the male/female sport experience, that women and girls participate in sport to the degree that they do. The question isn't how come things are as they are. The question is how could they be otherwise?

The goal of this paper has been to review some of the literature and explore how school sport has served to institutionalize a gender specific and gender biased sport value system. The result of which has been the marginalization and devaluation of sport for women and girls and the consequent suppression of their sport participation. This paper stops short of a detailed look forward to possible gender neutral and/or gender inclusive sport models, how they might be envisioned and/or operationalized, as well as how they might or might not impact sport for women/girls and men/boys. Instead, this paper has focused on the reality of what is, and tried to show how that reality defines and delimits what might be. Ultimately, instead of propagating defenses against change based on assertions that women and girls don't want to play sports as much as men and boys, we can begin to appreciate that as much and exactly the same are not synonyms. Given the history of school sport, gender based socio-cultural incompatibilities, and the many obstacles women/girls in sport have, and continue to confront, the fact that they participate in sport as much and as well as they do, suggests that perhaps they really do not want to play as much as men and boys...perhaps, they want to play more.

It takes considerable time for women to understand that getting "equal" parts will not make them equal, as long as the script, the props, the stage setting and the direction are firmly held by men. (Lerner, 1990, p. 8)

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