

Women in Society and their participation in sport (II) *

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Despite the fact that women's growing autonomy, education, and economic productivity have obliterated the once distinct identification of what is masculine and what is feminine, there are still prices to be paid for serious involvement in competitive sports. During the period from 1930 through the 1960's athletic women had few options if they wished to avoid being considered "less female" or associated with the masculine stereotype. In 1936 sportswriter Paul Gallico wrote that women looked beautiful in only eight of twenty-five sports. There was a clear distinction between feminine-appropriate sports and those that were not appropriate. The post-World War II period witnessed an improvement in the skill and ability of female athletes, but an increase in their numbers and an improvement of their image was not apparent.

During the 1970's the feminist movement had an impact upon nearly every nation and society in the world. The development of contraception provided women with the opportunity to make choices about their bodies. This, along with the fitness for health movement and the greater awareness of the contribution that exercise makes to an improved sense of well-being, has increased the participation of women in sport. At the same time, attitudinal gains lag behind knowledge and behind legal gains that have already been established in educational and professional areas. Competitive sports are still largely viewed as an expression of male power and masculinity. The prevailing attitude across all continents of the world is that participation in sports does not provide the same educational and physical benefits for women as it does for men. The world of competitive sport is still the male's domain in which females are intruders, not rightful heirs.

An historical overview has been presented to provide an understanding of how society has established sport as a masculine domain and how it has been perpetuated. Without question, it has been the prerogative of the male; the price for female intrusion has been great throughout history.

What are little girls made of?

What are little boys made of?
Frogs and snails and puppy-dogs' tails,
That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and everything nice,
That's what little girls are made of.

Expectations, biases, and assumptions begin before birth. The movements of the foetus are interpreted accordingly. If the foetus is lively and active, the assumption is that it is male; if it is passive and quiet, it is assumed that the foetus is female. The process of sex-role expectancies begins here and will go on forever. From time immemorial, boys have been conditioned to become active and aggressive while girls are directed to be passive and submissive. It is assumed that this behaviour is the result of one's biological sex.

When a girl is born, nobody rejoices; it is still the boy baby who is preferred and longed for first. According to Belotti (1976), even though the structure of society is rapidly changing, man's psychological structure changes very slowly. For thousands of years men have held the powers of decision-making and authority and cannot bear to have them relinquished. In essence, these powers must be passed on to a similar being—a son. Whoever holds these powers has immense prestige; he becomes a symbol to be valued for what he *will* be. He is expected to be an individual and it is his right and duty to maximise his potential to the fullest.

On the other hand, the female is expected to become an object to be desired and possessed. She is valued for what she will give. Thus two different roles begin to emerge. The male is allowed to make full use of his talents and abilities which promote his power and authority, while the female must learn to renounce her personal aspirations and suppress her own desires so that others may fulfil their goals.

* See "Olympic Review" N° 160.

The desire to have children of different sexes, with a clear preference for boys, would not exist if the expectations of the parents were not so radically different for each sex. If each child was regarded as a unique individual with his/her own special abilities and talents to develop, the question of preferred sex of children would disappear.

"It's a boy" or "it's a girl," the first words spoken by the doctor at delivery, will have an everlasting impact on what happens to each



baby. The baby is ignorant of the implications and will be for a long time. Yet parents' expectations of what the son or daughter must conform to are determined to such a degree by the sex of the baby that from birth, children of different sexes have completely different experiences in life. You know the pattern as well as I: pink for girls, blue for boys; dolls for girls, active toys for boys. Girls tend to be handled more gently and are talked to

in tones different from those used with boys. The list is endless. By thirteen months boys have already learned to be more curious, more independent, and more self-reliant even though girls are physically more mature. The motive appears to be cultural; most mothers believe that boys should be encouraged to explore and master their world. Society tends to see infantile behaviour as feminine and there is less parental-cultural pressure on girls to give up such behaviour and dependency on adults. While her male counterpart is building a concept of self-esteem based on accomplishments which are tangible and objective, the female learns not to gratify impulses that adults find offensive. She learns to rely on others to determine whether she has done well or poorly in any given situation. She learns to please, to defer, to wait for reinforcement. This is a part of becoming "feminine". Typically a young child can exhibit behaviour that is either masculine - or feminine-appropriate. The adults to whom the child is exposed will reinforce that behaviour which they deem proper and inhibit unwanted behaviours. The child quickly learns what will be approved and begins to develop attitudes about behaviours which are acceptable and not acceptable. Despite these subtle and not so subtle reinforcements, it is still difficult to categorise male and female behaviours under the age of two. During this time males and females resemble each other; they like to, and choose to do similar things. Differences are not very obvious, in fact, there are more differences within a sex than between the sexes. This fact will continue throughout life.

It is like a concerted attack from all sides; everything directs the child in one direction. Adult models are available which conform perfectly to the stereotyped expectations of what being masculine and what being feminine is in society. The whole process of proper socialisation revolves around this differentiation. Belotti (1976 : 68-69) summarised it nicely by saying :

We disapprove of a girl learning to whistle, boys are expected to. Girls are reprimanded if they are too noisy but it is all right for boys to be noisy. We do not tolerate untidiness in girls, but it is natural in boys. We punish girls for using rude words; when boys use them it provokes laughter. If a boy does not say please and thank you we make excuses, however, if a girl fails to we get annoyed. If a boy refuses to go and get something we regard it as exercising his rights and we go and get it ourselves. If a girl refuses, she is being rebellious. Boys are allowed to have bad table manners but girls are expected to be mannerly and polite. We ri-



dicule a boy if he is afraid but not a girl. If a girl whines we may get annoyed but we pay her attention. If the boy whines he is called a sissy. Boys are encouraged to play war games, to climb trees, and to develop physically but girls are discouraged and prevented from doing the same thing.

The list could go on forever. Adult intervention is so finely programmed that it occurs without thought. Everyone knows what is appropriate for boys and what is appropriate for girls !

Games, and the way children are directed and reinforced to play them, reflect the society in which they live. Girls who are more active, or who have been allowed more freedom, and are used to playing with boys develop entirely different play patterns than those who are restricted to stereotyped games and activities. Active girls become very good at "boy-type" games and activities such as climbing trees, playing war, playing cowboys, playing ball games, and the like. They rarely join in typical "girl-type" games unless they are around girls of their own age and wish to be accepted by them.

Young males discover early that their physical prowess and athletic accomplishments can open doors to almost universal social acceptance, while the young female finds that some groups consider her unfeminine and unacceptable if she pursues tasks that involve physical prowess, toughmindedness, assertiveness, achievement, and other behaviours considered masculine. The etiology of this negative sanctioning appears to be grounded in the notion that serious participation in activities that make strong physical and psychological demands is incongruous with what is considered appropriate feminine behaviour.

Bardwick (1971 : 143) made some pertinent comments about this identity crisis which the young active female may experience :

If a girl has had many years in which she has been permitted to participate in what will be perceived as masculine activities, and to the extent that success in these activities, especially individual competitive ones, form a core part of her self-esteem, it will be difficult for her to assume a clearly feminine sex-role identity and preference for the feminine role... the motorically active, preadolescent girl will achieve status through competitive sports. Later, in adolescence, especially when teenagers are cruel in their demands, she will undergo a deep crisis...

The crisis that Bardwick makes reference to occurs when the young female athlete perceives dissonance between what she thinks herself to be and what society expects her to be. There is dissonance between smelling of perfume and smelling of sweat, between being mentally tough and being submissive, between being physically active and being sedentary, between being athletic and being feminine. One cannot tolerate this dissonance too long-it must be resolved. Traditionally, the female resolves this conflict by withdrawing from sports participation generally during adolescence when her femaleness is being reinforced constantly through changes in her body and bodily functions. Others continue to participate in "feminine appropriate" sports like golf, tennis, swimming, and skating. Still others compensate by wearing feminine costumes, hairstyles, and make-up while performing their sports. It is as though they are trying to say, "in spite of the fact that I am highly skilled as an athlete, I am still feminine". Still others find the conflict too great and resort to stereotypical masculine behaviour and mannerisms, avoiding anything that is typically feminine because they cannot cope with that conflict. Fortunately, many can accommodate a wide range of behaviours and be "feminine" when the situation demands, yet display other behaviours in situations where they are warranted. Ideally, all human beings should have this latitude of behaviour without conflict.

Education

The influence of the school environment of sex-role socialisation is considerable, especially in the area of sports and physical education. Many other subtle and not so subtle influences also "shape" future directions, goals, and experiences that have direct implications for the leadership roles that both males and females will assume. Historically,

schools serve to reinforce ideologies and values whether they be racism, sexism, capitalism, communism, or those providing the framework for various religious positions. Parochial schools were established to insure socialisation to the dominant value system of the supporting church.

The most direct model available in the classroom, who has tremendous impact on the socialisation process, is the adult teacher. Textbooks follow closely behind in exerting influence on students. Time does not allow a discussion of how critical these influences are throughout formal education.

In general, programmes for girls have less support and school sports is the most obvious illustration. In nearly all educational systems "sports" have been synonymous with "male sports". Athletic facilities for girls and women have been decidedly inferior, if they exist at all. Consequently, very few females have retained an interest in sport.

Within co-educational institutions, boys and girls are frequently separated artificially and without any rationale other than one's sex. After months and years of this type of separation, it becomes impossible for the students to not feel categorised by sex. How can they ever feel equal, that is, as human beings with the same needs and interests, after this continual division from which they cannot escape ?

Artificial differences are compounded to a greater extent by sex-segregated schools. These schools are generally parochial, or supported in part by groups who want differences in values and socialisation, and who wish to insure that they be perpetuated through the control of the major socialiser of young people-the school. The need to categorise human beings at all cost has always been based on the most elementary and obvious classifications such as sex, race, age, and religion. First and foremost of all these categories is sex. In essence, it constitutes a prejudice that does not raise thoughts of injustice or falsehood because it seems so natural. Far from being a natural separation, division according to sex is a cultural fact that is artificially induced and enforced. This division is indispensable in maintaining certain recognised privileges which belong to those who have established and perpetuated this discrimination, namely males. They have maintained the control and the power of decision-making to insure the continuation of the system.

Separation of the sexes in the process of socialisation and education produces males

and females who have been brought up in such different manners and in ways that actually oppose one another that they have become effectively different. As a result, they cannot find a satisfactory way of being together. Only after puberty will they find common ground. The sexual tie will be the only one that will bring them together ; a thousand other ways will exist in which they will continue not to understand one another. The solution appears to lie in abolishing artificial differences. Males and females should be reared together, learning to respect one another as individuals, as opposed to seeing one another as members of opposite groups.

Whether schools are sex-segregated or co-educational, most physical education and sports environments are segregated by sex. This separation of the sexes for the purpose of teaching physical skills and enjoyment of physical activity is unnecessary and unfounded. Most girls are more mature than their male peers and consequently are frequently bigger, stronger, and better at physical tasks during early childhood. Only after puberty are there average differences in strength, speed, and the ability to generate power. Even with these differences, males and females can still learn skills together. Organised sports for both males and females should most probably be categorised in several ways, for example by maturation, size, or skill. Sex segregation should not be the single basis for separation and categorisation !

Complexity of Society

Yorburg (1974) has categorised the developmental level of societies into three major types and related the socialisation process of males and females to the complexity of the society. The three types are : nonliterate, agricultural, and industrial. Within these categories, sex-typed roles and the total experience of being born male or female differ, as do the perceptions of self that men and women hold.

Yorburg believes that understanding the economic, religious, political, educational, and recreational facts of life in nonliterate, agricultural, and industrial societies will provide a basis for explaining the variations of sexual identity that have occurred in human history. Two major periods of technological innovation, the agricultural and the industrial revolutions, have provided radical change in social life and male-female relationships. During each period social life was altered and male and female roles and relationships changed in gradual, unplanned ways that es-

caped notice but later produced a tremendous impact on society when the implications became obvious.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity, the degree of sex-typing, and the relative prestige and power of the sexes are all interrelated, according to Yorburg (1974). Where there are extreme sex-typed differences, there will also be extreme inequalities in the distribution of power and prestige between the sexes, with males assuming the dominant role. Changing economic roles of men and women in various types of societies explain sex differences in personality, power, and prestige.

Sport and sport involvement can also be explained within the framework of differences in the complexity of a society. Individuals or groups who hold the power are generally able to carry out their goals, even against resistance, if they have personal as well as economic resources. Males have developed and maintained the resources necessary to maintain the power and prestige in sport and sport organisations. Personal and economic resources, cultural values, and the principle of least interest, all interact in affecting the male-female relationship in sport environments. The ratio of male to female participants in international sports competition and the Olympics perhaps best reflects the attitudes of different nations and societies with regard to the role of women in sport. These different attitudes can be related to differences in the complexity of the society (nonliterate, agricultural, or industrial), the degree of education of males and females, the dominant religious beliefs, and who holds the personal and economic resources.

Women make up less than twenty percent of the participants in the Olympic Games and those women are representatives of the industrial nations of the world. Women are allowed to participate in only thirty-two percent of all the Olympic contests reflecting once again the notion that sport is the prerogative of the male. In 1900 only eleven women, representing four countries, took part in the Olympic Games. As the number of industrial nations increased, so did the participation of women in sport. At this point in time there is probably not a single country where women's sport is against the legal laws of the nation. However, in many nations the female's participation in highly organised and competitive sport is against the unwritten law. Almost without exception, societies fail to encourage, support, and provide equal opportunities for women.

Throughout the twentieth century, women have made gains in autonomy, education, and economic productivity. These gains, accompanied by the availability of contraception, have obliterated the once clear distinction between what is masculine and what is feminine. Changes in lifestyles, work patterns, and family relationships, begun by industrialisation in many parts of the world a century ago, have intensified during the last half of the present century. More and more females are counted among the work forces, many are choosing not to marry or to marry late, others are choosing not to have children until later, if at all, and the number of children has decreased where choices have been possible. Because of the greater number of choices being made available to and by women, the stereotypic sex-roles are declining. This decline has left many people frightened and confused.

Changes in sports participation and programmes of sports for females have also occurred. The fact that women athletes are constantly breaking old records and setting new ones is reflective of the existence of more opportunities, better coaches, technology, education, and research, as well as more enlightened attitudes about female participation in sport. Sport for women is becoming something worthwhile in its own right. It is becoming an autonomous and meaningful sphere of human experience in which girls and women can explore their own athletic potential without threat to their gender identity.

In summary, the present status of female participation in sport is a result of the socialisation practices inherent within a given culture or society. Sport merely reflects these practices. When the female is socialised in a milieu where values, norms, and expectations are not conducive to encouraging or rewarding involvement in sport, she is deprived the right to determine the role that physical activity and sport may play in her life. Despite the fact that opportunities for girls and women are increasing, there are still many problems. The role conflict that most females experience within all societies, especially during their formative years, must be resolved through the altering of attitudes and expectations, and allowing individuals to develop their own potential as they see fit.

Male dominance in sport organisations places the economic resources and the power of decision-making in their control. Women must gain entrance to these structures if they are to influence change. Equal

opportunities for personal growth and development through sports experience must be provided for both boys and girls, and men and women. The same amount of attention, effort, and expertise should be provided in programmes for all, with adequate facilities, resources, and financing to ensure the best possible experiences for both sexes.

The goal of society should be to educate all to the fact that the female does not trade off her sense of femininity when making a serious commitment to sport involvement. The values, joys and sorrows, benefits, and opportunities for personal growth and development through participation in sport are human ones. Sport is uniquely human, and is an experience to be shared equally by both males and females. That realisation is long overdue throughout the world. Now is the time to break away from unfounded biases, ignorance, and misunderstandings about what happens to males and what happens to females in sport experiences.

There is no evidence or rationale to support the fact that males stand to gain more than females from sport experiences, any more than there is evidence that he needs sports programmes more than she does. It is unforgivable for anyone, whether parent, teacher, or coach, to continue to perpetuate double standards of behaviours and expectations for males and females when there is no rationale to support the continuation of such a practice !

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