

# MANHOOD, WOMANHOOD, GENDER, AND WOMEN IN SPORT

## *Of Permanent Benefit to Women Students:* The Herculean Task of Constructing a Women's Gymnasium at the University of Texas

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This paper focuses on the history of the creation of a large, multi-purpose, carefully planned facility for women's sports at the University of Texas at Austin. It considers the history of the building, the philosophy of the physical educator who built it, and its after its completion in 1931. Understanding female-designed physical spaces for womens physical activities is essential to understanding the place of womens sports and physical culture within and institution.

Creating a new womens gymnasium on the University of Texas campus evoked a drama that intertwined history and architecture, gender and power, and form and function. Once completed, this Spanish Renaissance structure represented a huge leap forward for womens sports on the campus, and also allowed the womens athletic program to move into national prominence. Behind the construction, physical educator Anna Hiss combined precise research endeavors, unshakable philosophical direction, astute political moves, and symbolic statements about the place of womens sport on a large, co-educational southern university campus. While meeting the needs of women students in precise and imaginative ways, the structure also served as a mechanism for power and control for Hiss, and it allowed her to battle successfully against marginalization of her all-female department on the large Texas campus. Incorporating connection, inclusiveness, a responsibility to the needs of its occupants, a recognition of the value of everyday living, and an awareness of the need for change and flexibility, this building and its planner reflected characteristics of feminist ways of knowing and learning.

Anna Hiss anticipated a permanent building that could evolve to meet the capacity of vital, growing sports program throughout, and perhaps beyond, the twentieth century. While she expected reevaluation, readoption, and perhaps new construction to supplement her 1931 centerpiece, she did not anticipate and would not have approved of a womens physical activity program that was completely merged with mens programs in its administration and physical arrangement. No doubt she also would have disapproved and fought against late twentieth-century administrators who have deemed her building an outdated structure and have moved to reduce it to a shell of its former self; its purpose largely removed and its aesthetic sense severely compromised.