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BASICS OF WOMEN'S SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Sports development initiatives may include creating or strengthening: opportunities to participate in sport, volunteer, coaching and coach education frameworks, school and community engagement programs, projects targeting specific demographics, event management and fundraising strategies, entry level to elite. women in sport and development should sensitize us to the gendered implications of any and all work related to sport and development, not just to that focused on females. This article will examine the dilemma, recount a bit of the history of activism, and suggest some specific programmatic issues researchers and practitioners should bear in mind. The participation of women and girls in sports, physical fitness and exercise, has been recorded to have existed throughout history. However, participation rates and activities vary in accordance with nation, era, geography and stage of economic development. While initially occurring informally, the modern era of organized sports did not begin to emerge either for men or women until the late industrial age.

Key words: development, opportunities, physical fitness, physical possibilities, femininity, specific benefits.

Introduction. Women's involvement in sports is more visible in well-developed countries and today their level of participation and performance still varies greatly by country and by sport. Despite an increase in women's participation in sport, the male demographic is still the larger of the two. These demographic differences are observed globally. Female dominated sports are the one exception. Girls' participation in sports tend to be higher than in other parts of the world. Girls' participation in more violent contact sports is far less than that of their male counterparts. At essence, sport involves disciplined body practices, which are rooted in systems of beliefs about physical possibilities, including those of sexual difference. If sexual difference is translated into gender distinctions and unequal power relations through socially infused body practices, these distinctions and inequalities will be magnified in sporting practice and ideology as they are reproduced or transgressed. Emerging from a particular historical trajectory beginning in the West, the dominant modern practice of sport has largely been a hegemonic masculine enterprise. It is not that women and girls are unfamiliar with physical labor, nor that women and girls have not participated in what constitutes sport, leisure and play in their particular communities, especially in the “modern” era. Yet, for many, sport still exemplifies and upholds essential masculine traits, and becomes a code for heterosexual male superiority and domination over the feminine. Female participants in the world of sport put their “femininity” at risk and threaten the social order. Hence, female involvement in sport is often a transgression that needs to be explained, encouraged, prevented, or managed, but somehow is not ‘natural.”

Advocates for female involvement in sport often approach first from a rights perspective, i.e., the sporting world provides benefits both large and small, and girls and women should have access to that world just as boys and men do. Outcomes may have consequences for developmental goals, but the effort to secure access to sport can be an end in itself. Yet, equal opportunities, if they can be achieved, do not necessarily result in equal outcomes. As Michael Messner notes, even if there are greater possibilities then ever for women in sport, and those possibilities do pose a challenge, the center of sport still retains “its conservative role in gender relations,” with the multibillion dollar “sport-media-commercial complex” ever focused on the central men’s sports Alternative sport, including modifiers such women’s, indigenous, gay, extreme, etc., have their niches, but do not radically change the institutional core. If they do

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approach the "limelight," Messner argues they may simply be reinforcing white, male hegemony, such as in extreme sports.

For those who envision an alternative gender regime, a liberal approach which secures a niche does not go far enough, given that certain outcomes associated with modern sport – violence to others and one's own body, misogyny, and homophobia – can make the world of sport uninviting. There is a further caution to embracing the emancipatory power of sport for women: While acknowledging the global influence of the western sporting trajectory and its gendered forms, the relationship between sport, body practices and gender vary across space and time. For instance, the success of female elite athletes from China in international competition might be greeted as a sign of a progressive sport environment for women. It may be, but it may also reflect gender disparities in which males are encouraged towards more valued intellectual pursuits, while females are 'relegated' to the less culturally valued physical endeavors. Scholars have also noted that cultural expectations may make females more compliant and less able to resist potentially abusive aspects of state organized sport development programs.

A primary goal expressed in the Platform is to remove "all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. Advocating just this, an international women in sport (WIS) movement emerged in the 1990s. WIS movement sought through international collaboration and activism to raise the profile of women in sport. Like the WID movement, there were conferences, declarations and new organizations, all of which had influence, but were only part of the story. Similarly to the larger global women's movement, the internationally organized and visible WIS movement and its agenda initially represented the interests, experiences and desires of elite women in the North. Over time, punctuated by the international conferences, the WIS movement has become more inclusive, yet still retains an elite veneer whether through direct or indirect influence of the WIS movement or in completely unrelated nodes of activity, advocates for women and girl's in sport have been active all over the women developing programs, class es, teams, leagues and opportunities.

Both movements exhibit tensions between liberal equality, i.e., assuring that women have access to the establishment as it is, and a more radical transformation that seeks equity and justice, and incorporates diversity. Both movements have produced declarations or platforms for action that have confronted much of the establishment and forced some discussion, much lip-service, and some backlash, as well as some really change both along the liberal axis of more opportunities, but also in the axis of transformation. Change has occurred. And the declarations and activities have alerted, inspired and reassured many who were or became active in these areas. However, these movements have been dominated by western feminist perspective s and have only slowly become more inclusive. Even when there are representatives from the South at these meetings, they often represent the elite in their own countries. Rarely do grassroots activists get much say. Casting these movements as evidence that "sisterhood is global" masks layers of hierarchies and privileges, inequalities and inequities, and the diversity of women's and girl's realities. Paying attention to these realities can help lay the positive foundation for what is not a movement, but an emerging interest in the nexus of women, sport and development (WSD). Knowledge of the links and causal factors involved in sport and development is still in its infancy, especially as it applies to females. Still enthusiasm for sport and the pressing needs of development mean that programs and projects are going forward. A major reason to assure participation of girls and women in sport and physical education programs is simply to extend known and presumed benefits of sport to girls and women. General physical health benefits are best known, but there are also the social and psychological benefits both for individuals and groups. It is argued that participation in sport teaches discipline, self-control, self confidence,

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independence, leadership skills, and the value of working within rules and structure. Individuals also can gain a sense of physical and psychological efficacy and power through mastery of skills and accomplishment of sporting objectives. Socially, participants gain experience in teamwork, negotiating, winning, losing and planning. Their social networks increase and horizons broaden.

They learn more about their community and the world beyond, and thus see possibilities for themselves that they might not have imaginedotherwise.14 Such outcomes, enhanced life skills all around, apply to males as well as females. Involvement in sport may also provide specific benefits to young women, such a greater control of their fertility and a lowered risk of teen pregnancy. In combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, this may be a valuable intervention. Hence, in multiple ways, sport presents itself as a viable tool in the development tool chest. Given the presumption that women and girls are often disadvantaged relative to males in their societies on many factors (education, social status, physical mobility, freedom and range of choices, etc), if sport offers a means of empowerment, then it makes sense to support opportunities for girls and women to participate. Positive and successful experiences in sport may encourage girls and women in other areas of society. Safety is key and has multiple dimensions. As with any sporting activity, the participants should not be exposed to undue physical risk from the equipment, the facility, the training regimen, the play or other participants. Organizers must be aware of and seek to prevent negative outcomes such as permanent injuries from over- or under training (e.g. ACL injuries), and eating disorders.

Because of the authority, knowledge and power relationships involved, there is also potential for abuse from teachers, coaches, trainers or club representatives. This should be acknowledged, with clear preventative protocols instituted. For women, avoiding physical and social violence is a major safety concern and takes on particular meanings in relationship to sport. Just getting to and from sporting event s may expose women to the risk of violence. Hence, affordable and reliable transportation, reasonable hours for events, and safe sporting locations all loom large for female participants. Social reputation is also a safety issue. Sporting activities often takes place in the public realm, outside the control – and possible protection – of family or community. As well, sport in general, or more likely, a specific sport, such as boxing or football, is often coded in a society as highly masculine. A women or girl seen to dishonor her referent group or overstep gender boundaries may face physical and social punishment by the family or retribution from elements within the community. Convincing families, parents and communities to endorse the participation of girls and even involving them in more concrete ways (administer action, logistic) may be essential. There is one final consideration for those working to promote WSD – the question of confronting gender and sexuality norms.

Whatever sort of program, sport or activity that one develops, it will be situated within a socio-culture system of gender and sexuality. How much does one want to confront this system, and in what ways? For instance, it might be radical to suggest a boxing program for women. It may be more radical to suggest co-ed football forunder-10 children. An all-female netball or volleyball program may conform to certain gendered norms concerning sport, but within it may teach girls skills to challenge the larger system.

Conclusion. Addressing safety is not the only issue at hand for women. Other obligations and time constraints are major obstacles to increased female participation in sport. Particular economic circumstances and systems of sexual division of labor mean that women and girls through much of the world have heavy demands on their time and energy with little leisure time available. For many women, sport will not be a primary concern, especially where basic needs such as food, shelter, safety, health care and education are far from adequate. And while sporting opportunities are often linked with education, the two can be in tension on an individual and

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institutional level, especially with limited resources. Creative and collective solutions will be necessary to allow space and time for sporting activity. For instance, linking sporting opportunities with other activities, such as music and literacy programs, visit to health clinics, market days, etc., may help. Provision of childcare also may enormously increase opportunities. Without doubt, participants – current and prospective – will be able to identify time and resource constraints and possible solutions. Eliciting their views and incorporating them in the planning, execution and evaluation should be an early and regular part of any program**.**

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