

Gender bias in sports

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Gender Bias in Sports Athletics is one field where non-traditional roles are both applauded and derided by society. The lines that separate the sexes in sport have been historically rooted in society's way of thinking, and though these lines have lately begun to fade, they are still embedded in the attitudes of the majority of the public. Women and men alike have been and still are seated in their respective sports without much room or access to cross that gender line. These limitations take various forms, such as the availability of opportunities that are given to those that wish to enter certain sports to the media portrayals of athletes crossing these gender boundaries. Female body-builders and male ice-skaters push the boundaries of what is socially acceptable in our society, and while there are many rewards for such activity, there are also many costs, both to society and to the individual. There are many cultural and personal costs to engaging in non-traditional sport. Women and men face personal humiliation and the derision of friends, family, and society. They can be denied advancement in the work force, be ostracized by society, and suffer a multitude of slights and slurs. Women who body build or play rough sports like rugby or hockey are often looked at as butch and thus characterized as lesbians. Similarly, men who ice skate or are cheerleaders are considered feminine or gay. In a sociological study in 2003, male ballet dancers reported stereotypes they had been confronted with including: "feminine, homosexual, wimp, spoiled, gay, dainty, fragile, weak, fluffy, woosy, prissy, artsy and sissy". On the same note, the strengths of men in these non-traditionally male sports are often doubted; it is speculated that the male might be weak and cannot handle "manlier" sports even though these sports often require great amounts of strength, balance, and

agility. Even women who enter male dominated sports are considered to be too weak to play. These athletes are constantly dodging one generalization after another, whether it is a question of sexuality or physical abilities. Mere personal humiliation is not the only cost of non-traditional participation in sport. Some people may see it as a lessening of the game. For example, there are slightly different rules for women's basketball than for male basketball. By allowing women to play and compete in a supposedly "weaker" version of the game, we lessen the value of the game and the competition in which the players are engaged. Such difference also reinforces cultural beliefs that men and women cannot compete on a level playing field. Supposedly, women must have easier rules, because otherwise, they would not be able to play. D. L. Gill uses the term "gender marking" to describe how women's sports are often labeled as women's sports. For example, there is the National Basketball Association and then there is the Women's National Basketball Association; the Professional Golf Association and the Ladies Professional Golf Association. Despite the sacrifices and struggles of these athletes, the benefits of breaking the gender barriers in athletics outweigh the costs. Both sexes contribute something to their respective sport, and challenge the other to accept new ideas and change. Society may have some predetermined social rules, but they are bent and broken everyday by courageous people who do not fear difference. Women can become body-builders and men can perform the ballet, but everyday they face the challenges and rewards that come from engaging in non-traditional sports. It pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable in our society, paving the way for future athletes.