

CHAPTER 14

GENDER ISSUES IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY¹

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

1. Define the terms “sex” and “gender,” and discuss how gender influences participation and discourses in sport, physical activity, and physical education.
2. Summarize the gendered physical body and the concept of hegemonic masculinity within the contexts of sport, physical activity, and physical education.
3. Define “sport ideology” and “gender ideology” and discuss how they intertwine.
4. Paraphrase the significance of Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
5. Summarize the relationship between gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, 18-year old South African middle-distance runner, Caster Semenya won the gold medal in the Women’s 800 meters at the World Championships in Athletics with a time of 1:55.45. Shortly after her win, questions arose concerning her sex because of her exceptional performance and “masculine” physical features. In response, the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) ordered Semenya to undergo a battery of, what the organization refers to as “gender” verification tests to determine whether or not the medal should be revoked. After making Semenya wait nearly a year for a decision, the IAAF finally ruled that Semenya would be allowed to keep her medal and continue competing as a female. Semenya went on to win Olympic gold in 2012 and 2016 and become the 800-meter World Champion in 2017.

New eligibility regulations, implemented in 2018, by the IAAF have made Semenya’s future eligibility questionable. A recent ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) determined that the IAAF can restrict the level of testosterone a female competitor possesses. Specifically, in order for an individual to compete as a female in select restricted events (e.g., 400 meters and 800 meters), she must have testosterone concentrations lower than 5 nmol/L. This is a sizable reduction from the 10 nmol/L threshold established in 2012. In a statement made by IAAF President, Sebastian Cole, this policy change has been made to “ensure fair and meaningful competition in the sport of athletics where success is determined by talent, dedication, and hard work rather than other contributing factors.” In actuality, however, the policy discriminates against intersex women and women possessing disorders of sex development (DSD). CAS judges commented on this type of discrimination by stating that it is “necessary, reasonable, and proportionate means” of preserving the integrity of female athletes. Because Semenya is one of these athletes, as she has been diagnosed with hyperandrogenism, a condition that results in her possessing elevated testosterone levels, she and her lawyers appealed these new regulations. As a result of this appeal, the implementation of these new regulations have been suspended and Semenya is allowed to compete without having to take hormone suppressants. This decision may be overturned however, still leaving Semenya’s future in question.

Caster Semenya identifies as a woman. Despite this identification, however, her sex continues to be scrutinized because of her incredible athletic ability and the gendered beliefs that surround athleticism. Likewise, she is chastised because her physical characteristics fail to fall within the confines of traditional gendered

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beliefs. In fact, many people have made allegations that she was born a man and should therefore be categorized as such in the realm of sport or not compete. Because of this scrutiny, Semenya has been forced to undergo “gender verification tests” and has had her eligibility revoked and given back numerous times (Schultz, 2011).

Taken together, Semenya’s nontraditional abilities and features are being questioned on the basis of socially constructed gender ideologies (Young, 2015). While many assume that all persons can be neatly categorized as being female or male, this is not the case. Likewise, it is presumptuous to believe that all men are masculine and all women are feminine. Such ideological beliefs, however, are so deeply embedded in both mainstream society and the contexts of sport and physical activity that they inform the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes of individuals, groups, teams, organizations, and the like.

In this chapter, I define and discuss various terms surrounding the topics of sex and gender, discuss the hegemonic nature of gender in relation to the physical body is next related to the physical body, and explain how the acquisition of gendered meanings influences one’s own understanding of gender within physical activity and sport throughout one’s lifetime. The chapter next includes a brief section on the gendered discourse within the context of sport organizations and concludes with a discussion of how gender intersects with other social structures.

CONCEPTUALIZING SEX AND GENDER

What is gender? While the answer to this question is presumably straightforward, discussions of gender are often misinformed, as the terms sex and gender are oftentimes used synonymously. While the concepts are indeed overlapping (West & Zimmerman, 1987), it is important to individually define the two for the purposes of clarity. Sex and sex differences refer to the biological and anatomical characteristics (e.g., chromosomes, hormones levels, and genitalia) assigned to women and men. Gender and gender differences refer to the societal and contextual implications of sex characteristics (Deaux, 1985; Lorber, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Specifically, and as discussed by Butler (1990), gender exists in the form of gendered norms and gender practices that have been accorded women and men over time, stereotypes that have emerged as a result of such traditional norms, individual gender identity or the extent to which one feels they belong to a gender category (i.e., masculine or feminine), and the degree to which one is attracted and aroused by the opposite or same sex (i.e., sexual orientation). Lorber (1996) identified gender beliefs and displays, marital and procreation status, and work and family roles as additional components of gender.

The conventional understanding of gender is that following one’s assignment to a dichotomous sex category (i.e., female or male), an individual possesses congruent gender roles, beliefs, identity, and displays, and sexual orientation (Lorber, 1996). A man would therefore have congruous masculine roles, beliefs, displays and a congruent masculine identity. Likewise, he would be attracted only to the opposite sex. Correspondingly, women possess femininity and congruent feminine roles, beliefs, and so on. This conceptualization strengthened the polarization of the sexes by conveying that what women are, what men are not, and vice versa. As Lorber noted, however, it is naïve to believe that all of the components of one’s gender will “line up neatly on one side of the binary divide” (p. 147). Thus, the assumption that females are feminine, males are masculine, and both are heterosexual, lacks meaning and overlooks individuals who fall beyond these boundaries such as the intersexed, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and the transgendered. Further, the gender binary ignores the blatant similarities and differences that exist between men and women. For instance, female and male bodies possess the same bones, muscles, and, with the exception of reproductive systems, organs. Despite possessing different sex organs, however, male and female genitalia are developed from the same fetal tissue (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Thus, male and female bodies possess the same tissue, cells, bones, and so on, as well as move in the same manner and perform the same physiological functions. Despite similarities such as these, Western cultures’ rigid construction of two and only two sexes has led to the negation of similarities such as these and the reinforcement of dichotomous sex and gender differences (Fausto-Sterling, 1993).

Like sex, gender has traditionally been conceptualized as two opposite, yet complementary, one-dimensional constructs. On one end of the binary there are males and masculinity, and on the opposite end are females and femininity (Spence, 1993). Over time, however, researchers have identified masculinity and femininity as multidimensional and unrelated facets. First challenged by Constantinople (1973) and later by Lewin (1984), the assumptions that masculinity and femininity were a-theoretical, simplistic, and fixed began to be abandoned. As such, researchers like Bem (1974, 1981a, 1981b) and Spence (1993; Spence & Helmreich, 1972) began to offer theoretical explanations of gender and measures by which gender could be assessed. While many of these measures continue to be used today, others view femininity as both sociological and psychological constructs, thus representing gender as behavioral differences between the sexes and the differences in masculinity and femininity within individuals (Hoffman, 2001; Lippa, 2005). These differences have received considerable theoretical attention.

Broadly speaking, there are those who study the biological determinants (i.e., nature) of similarities and differences, those who study the social and environmental determinants (i.e., nurture), and those who study both. Lips (2017) identified six general theoretical realms through which sex and gender are studied: psychoanalytic, structural, evolutionary, environmental, developmental, and interactional. While several theories are housed within these realms, the predominance of their underpinnings include things such as personality, identification, genetic adaptation, cognition, and social and cultural influences, as ways to understand sex and gender. Lips also identified several methods, ranging from the use of case histories and narratives to constructing experiments on both humans and animals, by which these theoretical perspectives have been and can be employed. As such, there exists a considerable amount of literature, operating from various theoretical perspectives and paradigms, exploring the topics of sex and gender. Despite the abundance of research attention paid to the topics, there are few, if any, definitive answers with regard to the why and how of sex and gender. Thus, the nature-versus-nurture debate persists between some researchers, while others explore the roles of both nature and nurture in the complex relationship between the two concepts. Recognizing the profound impact of both nature and nurture on cognition and behavior, I adopt the latter approach so that the term gender can be better contextually understood.

Gender, when understood as both sociological and psychological constructs, does not take the form of truth, but rather takes the form of a social category and an individual identity. Gender is constructed, performed, understood, and reproduced through everyday interactions and behaviors (Potter, 1996). Discursive practices are collaborative, regularly occurring interactions whereby uniform talk, thoughts, interactions, and actions are produced and reproduced (Potter, 1996). They are reflective of a discourse, or a societal structuring principle, that accepts certain societal aspects as unquestionable givens (Foucault, 1984). The discursive practices that construct gender have shaped it as an institution whereby women and men are accorded different levels of social status and power and thus differential access to resources and opportunities (e.g., Connell, 1987; Lorber, 1996). Such gendered practices embody traditional gender beliefs and gender stereotypes that, in turn, perpetuate gender as an institution (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Within this institution, women are to be compassionate, emotional, gentle, and passive (i.e., feminine), whereas men are to be confident, assertive, strong, and independent (i.e., masculine). As Connell (2005a) contended, it is only within a gendered institution where hegemonic gendered order is pronounced that results in gendered behavior. This latter notion is particularly pertinent to the sport and physical activities domains.

Sport, physical activity, and physical education can be viewed as institutionalized domains where gendered discourses surround the physical body, inform identities and interactions, dictate behaviors, work or otherwise, and influence the structures of organizations (Althoff et al., 2017; Burton, 2015; Evans, 2017; Hargreaves, 1986). As a society, we are inundated with powerful messages of what is gender appropriate within these domains, the likes of which contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and appropriateness. While women have experienced profound increases in the number of sport and physical activity opportunities afforded to them (e.g., Carpenter & Acosta, 2005), and while there has been some progress in deconstructing the gendered order over the past few decades, the assumption remains that “there are two, and

only two, mutually exclusive sexes that necessarily correspond to stable gender identity and gendered behavior” (Birrell & Cole, 1990, p. 3). For men this assumption confirms their natural occupancy within the masculine contexts of sport and physical activity. For women, this assumption has long labeled them as outsiders and intruders. As Messner (1990) pointed out, however, gender identity, and to some extent gendered behavior, is a developmental process that is never completed and always influenced by social context. This contradiction is explained below.

GENDER AND THE BODY

Female and male bodies are not only expected to behave a certain way, but they are also expected to look and be presented in a certain manner. Physically, the sex organs with which one is born should match socially constructed gender beliefs associate with each sex. Beyond sex organs, the current (Western) cultural body ideals of women and men are such that women are to be demurely slender yet slightly toned, while men are to be athletically muscular. This contrast is indicative of three interrelated effects (Choi, 2003; Krane, 2001). First, it reinforces the placement of women as weaker than and subordinate to men, thus securing a social position that accords them lower societal power and status. Second, it presents a dilemma for women who wish to be recreationally and competitively physically active (Bennett, Scarlett, Clarke, & Crocker, 2017; Krane et al., 2004a). Third, as both ideals do involve some degree of muscularity, the opportunity is presented for both men and women to challenge the notion of various hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005a).

Hegemony refers to how the ideas of one social group within a system are used to exert power and dominance over another social group (Bates, 1975). Hegemonic power is thus an institutionalized form of dominance that is accepted by subordinates and dominants as self-explanatory and rational (Connell, 2005a). In his discussion of the gender system, Connell defined hegemonic masculinity as, “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). Simply put, it is the process by which the most dominant form of masculinity exerts power and control over other masculinities and femininity. In general, hegemonic masculinity takes form in White, middle-class, heterosexual men, thus rendering contrasting masculinities and femininity, or as subordinate (Connell, 1987; Messerschmidt, 2018). In contexts where the body is of significance, muscularity is included as a component of hegemonic masculinity, as bodies are vital to the social construction of gender and gendered order (Connell, 1987; Bourdieu, 1984). This process has clear implications for, above all else, body image within the contexts of sport and physical activity (Schneider, Rollitz, Voracek, & Hennig-Fast, 2016).

According to Krane et al., (2004b), exercise and competitive sport environments are settings where participants feel an extraordinary amount of pressure to conform to Western society’s gendered ideal body shapes. Indeed, several authors have argued that the contexts of sport, physical activity, and physical education augment such gendered body standards (e.g., Azzarito & Katzew, 2010; Messner, 1988). For women, the ideal body epitomizes feminine beauty, a concept that has become synonymous with toned thinness (Choi, 2003). Men, on the other hand, have come to learn that muscularity is tantamount to masculinity, and as such, the ideal body is big, strong, and lean (Lavender, Brown, & Murray, 2017; Luciano, 2007). While both ideals suggest that attaining the optimal body is as simple as leading a healthy and active lifestyle, there are several other issues involved when the body is put on display in exercise and sport settings. These issues revolve around the performance of gender.

Today’s athlete is more visible than ever before. However, across all sport media outlets male and female athletes are presented differently, both in type and frequency (Cooky, 2017; Fink, 2015; Trolan, 2013). Male athletes are prominently displayed in the media and are almost always depicted as brave, strong, and powerful – the personification of masculinity. Female athletes, on the other hand, are underrepresented in the media and when they do receive attention, are often trivialized or sexualized. These profound messages not only reproduce gender order, but also communicate unrealistic expectations to society (Connell, 2005a;

Messner et al., 2003). For instance, working from the lens of self-objectification theory, Daniels (2009) found that images of female athletes performing their sport had an empowering effect on females, as they were more likely to describe themselves in terms of what their bodies can do versus what their bodies looked like. Conversely, participants who viewed images of female athletes in sexualized poses experienced dissatisfaction with their bodies, as they negatively evaluated both their appearance and physicality. Some men have also been found to exhibit body dissatisfaction related to the media portrayal of the muscular male body ideal (Lavender et al., 2017).

Self-objectification theory posits that individuals not occupying the dominant physical ideal within a culture will negatively evaluate themselves, the result of which can be detrimental to one's physical and psychological health (e.g., Daniels, 2009; Martins et al., 2007; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). As the physical ideal within the contexts of sport and physical activity has been constructed through the gaze of hegemonic masculinity (Azzarito, 2009), the bodies of women and subordinate men are particularly susceptible to objectification and its negative consequences. This is particularly the case for athletes involved in objectified and traditionally feminine sports such as gymnastics and tennis (Varnes et al., 2015). At one extreme, objectification may lead to avoiding all or specific sport and physical activities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). At the other extreme, objectification can lead to a negative body image and subsequent harmful behaviors (Martins et al., 2007). The gendered nature of body image suggests that for men these behaviors often include going to great lengths to achieve muscularity. An example would be the use of steroids. Women, on the other hand, are more inclined to develop dangerous exercise and eating behaviors, such as anorexia nervosa, to attain thinness. Such behaviors have not only been linked to the endorsement of traditional gender norms (Smolak & Murnen, 2008), but Azzarito noted that, as a result of institutional practices determined to establish a hierarchy of normalized bodies, "individuals police and discipline themselves to achieve or maintain a specific shape, size and muscularity to perform ideals of masculinity and/or ideals of femininity" (p. 21). Thus, the social sanctions experienced and the self-regulatory behaviors learned from early exposure to these institutional practices continue to inform one's gender development throughout one's lifetime (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Further, there is evidence to indicate that these practices impact the physical activities in which one participates (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011).

GENDER, YOUTH, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Children learn to negotiate their bodies and construct their identities in accordance with sex and gender at a very young age. As many researchers have illustrated, gender identities are neither passively constructed, nor are they fixed across contexts (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005a). Rather, gender identities take the forms of many masculinities and femininities that are numerous, diverse, and contextual. The contexts of sport and physical activity are of particular importance, as within these contexts gender identities are performed, constructed, and reproduced through social practice such that the illusions of proper, natural, and fixed gender identities act to inform how young children construct their gendered selves (Butler, 1990; Messner, 2002).

In a study of nursery school children, Bussey and Bandura (1992) found that children as young as four abided by the gender stereotypes placed upon themselves and others. Specifically, children sanctioned themselves and others to play with toys that were congruent with their perceived genders. Research also suggests similar sanctioning occurs when children engage in physical activities and sport, the likes of which have led to differing perceptions of both appropriateness and competence between young girls and boys (Messner, 2002). This is not to suggest children do not play an active part in gendering activities; however, even at this young age, they are performing gender (Messner, 2002). Drawing from his observations of children playing soccer in the American Youth Soccer Organization, Messner explained how gender performances were evident within and between a young girls' team and a young boys' team. Specifically, the girls performed femininity by first naming their team "The Barbie Girls" and subsequently dancing and singing while the boys performed masculinity by naming their team "The Sea Monsters" and subsequently acting aggressively, particularly toward "The Barbie Girls." These names and actions clearly defined the

two oppositional categories of boys vs. girls. They also highlighted the manner in which boys and girls reconstructed sex and gender binaries by “doing gender” in the sport context.

The social construction of gender is a multileveled ideological construct that permeates interactions, institutional structures, and cultures (Messner, 2002). This is perhaps most true within the context of sport and physical activity where children learn which activities are gender-appropriate from parents, peers, schools, media outlets, the community, and contextual practices and observations (Azzarito, 2009, 2010; Messner, 2002). Activities are consequently classified on the basis of gender characteristics and expectations. Based on the original classification by Metheny (1965), several researchers have demonstrated that activities such as football, ice hockey, wrestling, and boxing require a great deal of strength and power and are dangerous, risky, and violent; therefore, they continue to be considered male-appropriate and masculine (Koivula, 2001; Riemer & Visio, 2003). Activities such as gymnastics, aerobics, volleyball, and figure skating involve aesthetics, grace, and beauty and/or are dominated by women and, thus, remain feminine and female-appropriate (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Hardin & Greer, 2009). Other activities and sports, such as tennis and swimming are generally identified as gender neutral and are appropriate for the participation of both girls and boys. While there is increasing acceptance of girls and women in activities deemed masculine, boys and men who cross the gender boundary and partake in feminine activities risk harsh consequences, particularly as they enter adolescence (Alley & Hicks, 2005).

Many researchers have identified adolescence as a time where the social worlds of young boys and girls begin to expand (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Leszczynski & Strough, 2008). It is during this time that adolescents gravitate toward their peers, form social identities, and begin to make their own choices. It is also during this time that the saliency of gendered understandings becomes highly pronounced and gender boundaries become increasingly enforced (Laberge & Albert, 1999). While several biological and psychosocial factors influence the formation of one’s gender identity (Steensma, Kreukels, de Vries, & Cohen-Kettenis, 2013), contextual gender beliefs and stereotypes are factors that influence the decisions that adolescents make regarding physical activity and sport participation. A recent systematic review of the literature performed by Somerset and Hoare (2018) identified gender stereotypes as a barrier for sport participation. This was most often the case for girls and young women. Girls and young women who did participate in sport were still influenced by gender stereotypes, as they experienced apprehension to participate when boys were present and felt as though they had to prove themselves to boys and young men (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). As Elling and Knoppers (2005) noted, choices and experiences such as these uphold ideologies, further marginalize subordinate groups, and subsequently result in a gendered pattern of attrition.

In general, the most cited factors contributing to the attrition of both girls and boys in sport and physical activity are a result of a lack of time and lack of enjoyment for specific activities (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Higher instances of withdrawal amongst adolescent girls have been attributed to gendered expectations of body performances. For example, Butcher et al. (2002) found that young girls were more likely than boys to cite perceived performance and ability deficiencies as primary reasons for withdrawal from sport. Slater and Tiggemann’s (2011) findings identify teasing and body image concerns as contributors to sport and physical activity attrition amongst girls. Lastly, Fiset (2013) employed focus groups and interviews to explore self-identified barriers to enjoying physical education. The three primary reasons were all related to gender, as they included boys dominating sport, conforming to traditional gender stereotypes, and risking embarrassment in front of boys. Taken together, and consistent with Lenskyj (1990), these perceptions manifested within the young girls as a result of receiving continuous cues of gender appropriateness. Adolescent boys also suffer as a result of gendered cues, as any indication of a gender transgression (i.e., taking part in a so-called women’s sport or physical activity) is indicative of possessing less masculinity and being less than a man (Laberge & Albert, 1999). These cues are found in various contexts throughout one’s childhood and adolescence. Within the physical education setting, cues are present in the gendered discourse that surrounds the physical body (Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Gerdin, 2017). Within the competitive sport setting, gendered cues become more and more prevalent and augmented as one moves through early

to late adolescence and into adulthood, as they are endorsed by the media, parents, siblings, peers, and coaches (Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2003).

SPORT IDEOLOGY

It is not uncommon to hear a physical education teacher, coach, parent, and so on use the phrases, “throw like a girl” or “play like a girl.” Both phrases have profound meaning, as they exemplify male superiority within the contexts of sport and physical activity. As Azzarito and Solomon (2005) pointed out, young boys and men are often told that they throw like girls as a way to communicate inferior athletic skill and prowess – tantamount to the skills and prowess of girls. Constructing the female body as inferior has been a common occurrence throughout history (Messner, 2011). In fact, during the Victorian age, the female body was viewed as so frail that for fear of incurring irreparable damage to their reproductive systems, doctor’s discouraged women from engaging in strenuous activity (Cahn, 1994). Gendered understandings like this have shaped the sport realm as solely masculine, thus paving the way for the exclusion of women. They have also created males as active, females as passive, and perpetuated the tendency for women to underestimate their athletic abilities (Connell, 2005a; Kauer & Krane, 2013; Young, 1980). Finally, gendered understandings have created the fear that women who do engage in sport and physical activity and possess skills and abilities equivalent to or better than those of men, will become masculinized (Cahn, 1994).

Over time and despite the oppressive connotation of the aforementioned phrases, women have become empowered by the notion of throwing or playing like a girl and they want to be portrayed as possessing strength and power (Krane et al., 2010). The newfound athleticism and strength of women has fostered action, power, autonomy, and resistance hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 2011). Arguably, the source of this empowerment is the passing of Title IX. Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act (P.L. 92-318, 20 U.S.C.S § 1681) mandated that “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 educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance.” Despite not possessing the words, “sport,” “athlete,” or “physical education,” Title IX has had a profound impact on the sport experiences of young women at the high school and collegiate levels. According to the Women’s Sport Foundation, female participation rates have increased 990% and 595% within interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic programs, respectively. This progress has not come easily, however, as even after 1978, the year in which all federally funded educational institutions were required to comply with Title IX, gender equity remained elusive at best due to the variable interpretations of the law. Subsequent letters of clarification in 1996, 1998, and 2003, a manual, and case law were necessary to further define the true meaning of Title IX (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005).

The passing of Title IX has provided the young women and girls of today and tomorrow vast amounts of participation opportunities in sport and physical education. This is not to say, however, that women did not partake in sport or organize sport leagues prior to this time. Several female-driven sport organizations were present from as early as 1899 (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). The significance of Title IX rests in how its passage reflected social change within American society-at-large. Driven by the civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s and the women’s movement of the 1970’s, Title IX provided women access to a domain where they were once forbidden. As Birrell (1988) noted, “Title IX ushered in an era of participation unequalled in women’s sport history” (p. 472). As such, the experiences of sporting and physically active girls and women within the pre-Title IX era would presumably be different than those of the post-Title IX era, particularly amongst those within institutions directly affected by the law. Blinde’s (1986) findings support this rationale, as the post-Title IX female intercollegiate athletes and pre-Title IX male intercollegiate athletes in her study exhibited similar orientations and reactions to their sport experiences.

Whereas a clear trend of increased sport participation amongst females has been identified since its passing (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Sartore & Sagas, 2007), Title IX has had little, if any, impact on the hegemonic masculinity that remains endemic in sport and physical activity settings. In fact, the inclusion of women and consequently, femininity, into these realms prompted men to assert their superordinate position in two

primary ways. The first way is through the physical use of their bodies (Messner, 1990). The second way is through institutionalized organizational practices (Cunningham, 2008; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003; Shaw, 2006). Both ways are discussed in detail below.

Physicality and Masculinity

Coupled with the muscular physique of the male body, the violent and aggressive behaviors performed by the male body have become the exemplification of masculinity and ‘natural superiority’ within American society (Connell, 1987, 2005a). Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt’s (2000) study of sport media substantiates this, as the predominant themes within sport commentary, programming, and commercials conform to and perpetuate the ideals of hegemonic masculinity by focusing on White males and aggressive performances. As they point out, these themes present messages that discipline the bodies, minds, and choices of boys and men such that they strive to display exemplary muscularity, aggression and violent behaviors (Connell, 2005a). Women, on the other hand, are expected to display the opposite, an expectation that the media perpetuates through the underrepresentation and persistent portrayal of female athletes in (hetero)sexualized poses (Fink, 2015; Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Krane, et al., 2004b). These messages can be problematic, as sport and physical activity are contexts where bodies are gazed upon, harshly compared, policed through gendered discourse, and sexually objectified (Fink, 2015; Butler, 1990; Daniels, 2009).

In their study of intercollegiate female athletes, Krane and colleagues (Krane et al., 2004a) identified physically active women as facing a gendered dilemma whereby they are expected to exude femininity, both in physicality and behavior, within a context that values masculinity and muscularity. The same dilemma was found amongst college-aged female recreational exercisers as well (Krane et al., 2004b). Indeed, female athletes, coaches, fitness instructors, and recreational exercisers, just to name a few, are likely to encounter expectations of stereotypically feminine behaviors and appearance (Krane & Barber, 2005; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007a). Further, and to the extent that women do not represent the feminine ideal, they represent an “image problem” and face negative consequences as a result (Harris, 2005). As such, physically active women and female athletes often “...perform femininity to protect themselves from prejudice and discrimination” (i.e., hegemonic femininity; Krane, 2001, p. 120). Specifically, women often perform apologetic behaviors such as wearing make-up and ribbons in their hair when competing in sport or being physically active, apologizing for aggressive behavior, and marking themselves as heterosexual by seeking to be seen with a boyfriend and avoiding physical contact with other women in public (Davis-Delano, Pollock, Vose, 2009). These outcomes and behaviors are a result of the inextricable link between gender and (hetero)sexuality (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005a).

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, there is a socially constructed dichotomy of two sexes and two corresponding genders, the likes of which are expected to be attracted to one another only. As such, heterosexuality is proclaimed to be natural, normal, and a characteristic of “real men and women” (Elling & Janssens, 2009, p. 72). Thus, heteronormativity has been established and subsequently serves as a fundamental aspect of hegemonic masculinity and used as an organizing principle within sport (Connell, 2005a; Elling & Janssens, 2009). On the basis of heteronormativity, women who exhibit less than the epitome of femininity and (subordinate) forms of masculinity are often perceived to be lesbians, as lesbians are suspected to be more masculine than heterosexual women (Harris, 2005). Likewise, heterosexual men who exhibit femininity or subordinate masculinities are believed to be gay, as gay men stereotypically possess more femininity than heterosexual men. Thus, lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual men who possess subordinate masculinities have historically experienced prejudice and discrimination and been relegated to the out-group (Anderson, 2002; Krane & Barber, 2005; Plummer, 2006). Some research does suggest, however, more and more gay and lesbian athletes are coming out in supportive and inclusive sport environments (Krane, 2016).

Sport Organizations

While not the norm, inclusive environments within the sport context are attainable. To date, however, efforts to create these environments have created additional exclusion for some. For example, whereas the

passage of Title IX has provided exponential gains in participation opportunities to girls and women, the exact opposite has occurred for leadership opportunities (Burton, 2017; Sartore & Sagas, 2007). Women at all levels of sport are underrepresented as administrators, head coaches, assistant coaches, and managers. Further, women in these leadership positions often receive lower pay than their male counterparts and are ascribed traditional gender stereotypes (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007b).

A recent review of the literature identified various perspectives from which this issue has been studied and explained. Burton (2017) identified macro (e.g., institutionalized gendered practices), meso (e.g., gender stereotypes and discrimination), and micro levels (e.g., self-limiting behavior), all of which relate to hegemonic masculinity's gendered discourse (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Cunningham & Sagas, 2008; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Indeed, "hegemonic masculinity serves as an operating principle within sport organizations that restricts women's access to leadership positions within sport" (Burton, 2017, p. 157).

Cunningham (2008) identified that various pressures and tools are necessary to deconstruct the gender inequities that are endemic in sport organizations. These pressures and tools are of use to managers and researchers as means to undo gendered processes, challenge existing ideologies, regain gender-neutral organizational logic, and provide women more power in sport organizations (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). To date, however, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, as de-gendering the sport and sport organization practices that embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity can be difficult in a patriarchal society. The de-gendering process is even more difficult when other organizing principles such as race, class, ability, and so on are present.

GENDER AND OTHER SOCIAL STRUCTURES

The discussion of gender thus far has revolved around the topic of hegemonic masculinity. What has not been discussed, however, is the assumption that the epitome of hegemonic power is a White, able-bodied, young, middle-class, heterosexual male (Connell, 2005a). This is consistent with what Messner et al. (2000) found to dominate the sport media, as well as what Fink et al. (2001) identified as the prototypical employee in intercollegiate athletic departments. Thus, when discussing gender in sport, one must also examine other social categories that rival this template. The gendered discourse surrounding members of these social groups is unique, particularly within the sport media where racializing bodies have been used to naturalize differences between groups (Butler, 1990).

The most prevalent racialized beliefs in sport and physical activity revolve around Black participants and athletes. For instance, the belief that Black male athletes are naturally physically superior, yet intellectually inferior, to their White male counterparts is repeatedly communicated through sport media outlets (Hardin et al., 2004; Harrison et al., 2004). The effects of these messages can be quite impactful (see Ash & Cranmer, 2019). Black female athletes, relative to their White female athlete counterparts, suffer harsh scrutiny within the media, as they are both racially and sexually different from the feminine ideal imposed upon sport bodies by hegemonic masculinity (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Cooky et al., 2010; Cahn, 1994). The case of Caster Semenya, a non-white gender transgressor exemplifies this point (Gunter, 2016). Further influencing their disparate treatment, black women are often affected by the implications of occupying lower levels of social class. Thus, the experiences of Black female athletes are influenced by race, gender, and social class (Bruening et al., 2005). Indeed, Black women of all ages, as well as women occupying other racial and ethnic minority groups, are influenced by these social structures in nearly every physical activity and sport context (e.g., McDowell & Carter – Francique, 2017; Flintoff, 2015;).

It is important to note that the social construction of gender and constraints of patriarchy can vary from culture to culture (Johnston & Weatherington, 2018). That is, cultural understandings of gender can be imposed upon and carried out by women (e.g., With-Nielsen & Pfister, 2011). Simply put, beyond the strict definitions of femininity imposed upon all women, racialized femininities may be imposed upon women of color and varied ethnic backgrounds. Women within the sport and physical activity context seemingly must "do" their respective gender performances in order to participate, just as boys and men seemingly

must also adhere to their assigned masculinities. Such is not the case; however, gender transgressions have been occurring more frequently, and as a result, they subsequently inform the process of deconstructing the discourse of hegemonic masculinity (McGrath & Chananie-Hill, 2009).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of how sex and gender affect sport and physical activity. As one can see from the case of Caster Semenya, sex and gender binaries are still enforced and gender transgressors often punished in some fashion. In this chapter, I discussed how the gendered practices responsible for gender binaries have materialized and why they persist. Likewise, I outlined how gendered meanings inform our understanding of the body and how the body performs gender within the sport and physical activity contexts. Special attention was paid to the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity and its effects on participants, athletes, sport organizations, and racial and ethnic minorities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably. What are the definitions of these terms and how are they intertwined?
2. What are some stereotypical feminine characteristics? What are some stereotypical masculine characteristics? How do these relate to sport and physical activity?
3. What is meant by the terms hegemony and hegemonic masculinity?
4. How do girls, boys, men, and women “do” or “perform” gender in the contexts of sport and physical activity?
5. What impact did Title IX have in the context of sport and physical activity?

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