

A Feminist Perspective on Sport Psychology Practice

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Abstract:

The feminist paradigm has been advocated as an appropriate alternative framework for sport psychology theory and research. The current paper extends the feminist perspective to sport psychology practice, particularly to educational consultation. Application of a feminist perspective to sport psychology practice requires (a) an awareness of relevant gender scholarship and valuing of the female perspective, (b) a shift in focus from the personal to the social, and (c) an egalitarian, process-oriented approach. Applying the feminist perspective implies not only an awareness of relevant sport psychology scholarship but also a commitment to action to educate and empower sport participants.

Article:

Recently, several scholars (Dewar & Horn, 1992; Martens, 1987) have criticized traditional research methods and epistemological perspectives and have challenged sport psychologists to develop and use alternative frameworks and paradigms to develop a sound and useful sport psychology knowledge base. Krane (1994) takes those arguments a step further and makes a case for a feminist paradigm as an appropriate alternative perspective to guide our research and extend our understanding of sport behavior. As Krane notes, feminism is particularly appropriate for sport psychology research because it brings women's experiences from marginalized status (or "otherness") to the center, because it contextualizes sport and exercise experiences with an emphasis on social constraints and values, and because it challenges assumptions of traditional scientific research and emphasizes alternative methodologies that incorporate a wider range of methods of inquiry and forms of knowledge.

The current paper extends the feminist perspective to sport psychology practice. Like research, sport psychology practice is tied to traditional models that reflect male bias. Moreover, with the large number of women participants in competitive athletics, the focal site of much sport psychology practice, a feminist perspective is not only appropriate but essential.

Sport Psychology Practice

Feminist practice encompasses many activities. In July 1993 the American Psychological Association Division 35 (Psychology of Women) sponsored a conference on education and training in feminist practice (Michaelson, 1993). Areas of practice considered at that conference included (a) theory, research, and assessment; (b) writing and presentations; (c) curriculum, pedagogy, and supervision; (d) political action, public service; (e) therapy (clinical practice); and (f) consultation (educational practice).

Sport psychology practice includes all of those areas, and each area could benefit from a feminist analysis. The current paper is more limited, focusing on the area of consultation or educational practice for several reasons. First, applications of a feminist perspective to several other areas have been discussed elsewhere. As just noted, Krane (1994) applied a feminist perspective to research and theory in sport psychology; the feminist and educational practice literature (e.g., Lather, 1992), including literature within physical education (e.g., Bain, 1990; Dewar, 1987), contains a great deal on feminist perspectives; and the clinical practice field includes a number of feminist scholars (e.g., Brown & Root, 1990; Greenspan, 1983; Rosewater & Walker, 1985) who are actively applying a feminist perspective in their work.

Second, educational consultation is the most unique practice area in sport psychology. Although sport psychology practice could include many diverse areas, sport psychologists clearly emphasize educational consultation and often define the practice of sport psychology in those terms. For example, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) has worked to develop standards for training and certification in sport psychology practice since that organization was founded in 1985. In 1990 AAASP formally adopted a role definition and set of criteria for a certified consultant. The role definition statement clearly defined the consultant's role as educational. More specifically, the AAASP certification role definition (AAASP, 1990) reads as follows:

Conferral of the title "Certified Consultant, Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology" represents recognition by the Association of attainment of a professional level of knowledge.... The application of this knowledge is viewed primarily as an educational enterprise involving the communication of principles of sport psychology to participants in sports training and competition, exercise, and physical activity. The focus of the work in this specialty area is on the development and understanding of cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills in participants. (p. 3)

The role definition statement continues by listing specific activities that exemplify the services of AAASP consultants, including providing information on psychological factors, teaching specific psychological skills, helping participants understand and assess relevant psychological factors, and educating organizations and groups. Thus, the defined practice role for most sport psychologists is education with a focus on skill development.

Finally, this paper focuses on educational consultation because that area is a major challenge for feminists. Of all the practice areas, educational sport psychology practice seems particularly rigid in adhering to traditional male-oriented approaches. Educational sport psychology generally involves competitive athletics, which is not especially hospitable to women, let alone to feminists. In her new book, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, Mariah Burton Nelson (1994) argues that competitive athletics maintains its extreme masculine image and sexist practices partly as a reaction to feminist challenges. Certainly, competitive athletics at the intercollegiate or Olympic levels, which are model settings for educational sport psychology, emphasizes competition and hierarchy with an elite few at the top, and men hold the key roles and top administrative positions.

In this paper I will take up that challenge and focus on educational consultation (borrowing heavily from the feminist therapy literature) and attempt to develop a feminist perspective for sport psychology practice. Before specifically discussing sport psychology practice, general principles of feminist practice are presented. The first step in feminist practice is to become familiar with feminist scholarship and recognize that gender makes a difference; therefore, major trends in feminist scholarship related to sport psychology are reviewed following the overview of feminist practice. Feminist practice not only acknowledges that gender makes a difference but goes further to translate feminist scholarship into action; thus, the remainder of the paper expands the discussion to consider how sport psychologists might develop feminist sport psychology practice.

A Feminist Approach to Practice

To begin to bring a feminist perspective to sport psychology practice, consider typical cases that an educational consultant might encounter. Similar cases were introduced and discussed at greater length in a more detailed discussion of gender issues in sport psychology (Gill, in press). For purposes discussed here, consider how gender affects interpretations, responses, and the possible approaches a consultant might take for the following situations:

- A freshman soccer player lacks control and is prone to angry outbursts.
- A junior on the basketball team has talent but plays tentatively and lacks confidence.
- The coach thinks a 16-year-old figure skater may have an eating disorder, but the skater is working to keep that "line," make it to nationals, and get endorsements.

- A university tennis team member is worried about the assistant coach, who hints at wanting a relationship. The player is not interested, but leaves practice early to avoid the coach, is not concentrating, and does not know what to do.

To start taking a feminist approach, consider how gender might influence your responses. Gender influences the reactions, expectations, and options a consultant might consider. If you try to be nonsexist and assume that gender does not matter, you will probably have difficulty deciding what to do. Moreover, gender does matter. Imagine each case with a female athlete, then go back and imagine the same scenario with a male athlete. Trying to "treat everyone the same," does a disservice to the athletes. Moreover, the same advice applies for race, age, and any number of other characteristics.

No doubt most of us can think of things that we do, or do not do, because of our gender. Still, it's probably impossible to identify all the ways that gender affects us. From the time we were born, our world has been shaped by gender. Our parents, teachers, peers, and coaches reacted to us as girls or boys. Gender is such a pervasive influence in society that it is impossible to pinpoint that influence. Sport is no exception, and sport psychology consultants should be aware of gender influences in the larger society and within the sport world. Awareness of gender and women's experiences and issues is Step 1 in feminist practice.

To move from Step 1, an awareness of gender, to feminist practice, sport psychologists must take bolder steps. Judith Worell and Pam Remer (1992), in a comprehensive text on feminist therapy, note that grounding in feminist psychology provides the base for feminist therapy. Worell and Remer (pp. 14-17) then outline the major tenets of feminist psychology as follows: (a) recognizing that the politics of gender are of central concern and are reflected in women's lower social status and oppression in most societies, (b) seeking equal status and empowerment in society not only for women but for all oppressed minority groups, (c) valuing and seeking knowledge about women's experience, (d) acknowledging that values enter into all human enterprises and that neither science nor practice can be value free, and (e) maintaining a commitment to action for social and political change.

These tenets of feminist psychology are the basic framework for any feminist psychologist. Valuing women's experiences and perspectives, recognizing value influences in all our research and practice, and maintaining a commitment to empowerment and action are basic assumptions for feminist scholarship. Feminist psychology goes beyond the mere awareness of gender by emphasizing empowerment and action, and those are keys to feminist practice.

Worell and Remer (1992) explicitly put that feminist psychology groundwork into practice by listing three key principles in their empowerment model of feminist therapy: (a) valuing the female perspective, (b) the personal is political, and (c) egalitarian relationships. The first step, valuing the female perspective, implies the awareness of gender and the acceptance of the tenets of feminist psychology. Consider issues relevant to women, and adopt feminist methods and theories. For example, sexual harassment is relevant to women, and women athletes may have particular concerns that sport psychologists could address.

The next two principles address practice more directly. "The personal is political" might be interpreted as shifting the focus to social, as well as personal, sources of behavior and solutions. Psychology is defined as the study of individual behavior, and traditionally psychologists have looked to internal sources of behavior, thoughts, and feelings. But psychologists cannot understand the individual without considering the larger world. No behavior takes place in isolation, and social context is critical for feminist practice.

Feminist psychologists argue for contextualizing behavior and a more social psychology. Carolyn Sherif (1979) was a long-term advocate of both social and feminist psychology, and she extended her challenge to sport (Sherif, 1976) some time ago. As Krane (1994) notes, some sport psychology scholars adopt a similar approach, and Brenda Bredemeier's (1992) work on moral development is a

notable example. Consultants can take a more social approach by incorporating the immediate sport setting, as well as the larger societal context, in their work with athletes.

An egalitarian approach is empowering, nonhierarchical, and process oriented. Although a power structure is inherent in coach—athlete and consultant—client relationships (as well as male—female, race, class, and other relationships) sport psychologists who recognize and invite discussion of the athlete's interpretations and suggestions move toward a more egalitarian relationship. The move to social context is a big step for psychology, with its individual orientation. The move to egalitarianism is a big step for sport, with its extreme hierarchies and inherent power structures.

The Context of Sport Psychology Practice

The first step in a feminist approach to sport psychology practice is valuing the female perspective or incorporating the gender scholarship. However, incorporating gender scholarship requires an understanding of the social and historical context of sport psychology practice. With the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s, women gained a place in sport, and women now constitute about one third of the high school, college, and Olympic athletes in the United States. But one third is not one half, and in other ways women have actually lost a place. Women have not become coaches, administrators, sports writers, or sports medicine personnel in significant numbers. Before Title IX (1972) over 90% of women's athletic teams were coached by women and had a woman athletic director. Today less than half of the women's teams are coached by women, and only 16% have a woman director (for more information see Carpenter & Acosta, 1993; Gill, 1992; Nelson, 1991; Uhler, 1987). While women have moved into previously all-male competitive athletics, other programs with more emphasis on participation, skill development, and recreation have been lost to both men and women.

Perhaps the most notable loss for women is the loss of the educational perspective of the early women physical education leaders who advocated sport and physical education programs that emphasized education and empowerment of women rather than competition for an elite few. Although this traditional educational orientation lost favor as women athletes adopted the male model, we can find related themes in Dorothy Harris's work on women in sport (e.g., Harris, 1972). Carole Oglesby has contributed an educational feminist perspective to sport psychology from her early feminist book (Oglesby, 1978) to her recent work (e.g., Oglesby & Hill, 1993).

Women's losses in sport are not confined to athletic programs. Safrit (1984) noted the declining number of women in university departments, especially in research-oriented programs, and cited the continuing low percentage of women editors and authors in research journals. Duda (1991) noted that most articles in the *Journal of Sport Psychology* from 1979 to 1986 were by male authors, on male athletes, and focused on competitive sports. Even a cursory review of sport psychology conferences, journals, and organizations reveals that males dominate sport psychology research and professional practice, as well as competitive athletics. Thus, sport is male-dominated with a clear hierarchical structure that is widely accepted and communicated in so many ways that we seldom notice. Sport psychology consultants cannot practice effectively if they ignore that context.

Gender Scholarship in Sport Psychology

Given the social and historical context of women's sport, it is not surprising that our limited gender scholarship did not develop within sport science. Instead, gender scholarship in sport psychology largely follows gender scholarship within psychology. Generally, that psychology scholarship has progressed from gender differences, to an emphasis on gender role as personality, to more current social psychology models that emphasize social context and processes.

Sex Differences

The early sex difference work, exemplified by Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) review, assumed dichotomous biology-based psychological differences—male and female are opposites. In practice, dichotomous sex

differences typically are translated to mean that we should treat males one way and females another. Today, consensus holds that psychological characteristics associated with females and males are neither dichotomous nor biology-based (e.g., Bern, 1993; Deaux, 1984; Eagley, 1987; Gill, 1992; Hyde & Linn, 1986). Even most biological factors are not dichotomously divided, but are normally distributed within both females and males. For example, the average male basketball center is taller than the average female center, but the average female center is taller than most men. For social psychological characteristics such as aggressiveness or confidence, even average differences are elusive, and the evidence does not support biological dichotomous sex-linked connections. With criticisms of the sex differences approach, and with its failure to shed light on gender-related behavior, psychologists turned to personality.

Personality and Gender-Role Orientation

Psychologists have focused on gender-role orientation as the relevant personality construct—specifically, Bem's (1974, 1978) work and the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Personality is *not* a function of biology. Instead, both males and females can have masculine or feminine personalities, and androgyny is best. Advocates of androgyny argue that practitioners should treat everyone the same and encourage both masculine and feminine personalities. Although the designation of masculine and feminine characteristics is rather arbitrary, Bem's measure has been criticized, and even though Bem (1993) has progressed to a more encompassing gender perspective, most sport psychology gender research is based on her early work.

Overall, this research suggests that female athletes possess more masculine personality characteristics than do female nonathletes (see Gill, 1992, for a review of the related sport psychology literature). This is not particularly enlightening. Sport, especially competitive athletics, demands instrumental, assertive behaviors, and the higher masculine scores of female athletes probably reflect an overlap with competitiveness. Today, most psychologists recognize the limits of earlier sex differences and gender-role approaches, and they look beyond the male-female and masculine—feminine dichotomies to socialization and social cognitive models for explanations.

Gender and Social Processes

In the 1980s gender research moved away from the sex differences and personality approaches to a more social approach, emphasizing gender beliefs and stereotypes. How people *think* males and females differ is more important than how they actually differ. Although actual differences between females and males on such characteristics as independence or competitiveness are small and inconsistent, we maintain our stereotypes (e.g., Bem, 1985; Deaux, 1984; Deaux & Kite, 1987, 1993; Deaux & Major, 1987). Considerable evidence supports the existence of gender stereotypes (e.g., Bem, 1974; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Spence & Helmreich, 1978). These gender stereotypes are pervasive and influence everything, although males and females really do not differ much on these characteristics. People exaggerate minimal differences into larger perceived differences through social processes. These perceptions exert a strong influence that may elicit further gender differences. This cycle reflects the feminist position that gender is socially constructed.

Similar gendered beliefs seem alive and well in the sport world. Metheny (1965) identified gender stereotypes in her classic analysis. Acceptable sports for women (e.g., gymnastics, swimming, tennis) emphasize aesthetic qualities and tend to be individual activities rather than direct competitive and team sports. Recently, Kane and Snyder (1989) confirmed gender stereotyping and identified physicality, with the emphasis on the male's physical muscularity, strength, and power as the key feature.

Where do the persistent gender beliefs and stereotypes come from? Everywhere. Socialization pressures are pervasive, are strong, and begin early. Parents, teachers, peers, and societal institutions treat girls and boys differently from birth (American Association of University Women, 1992; Geis, 1993; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991; Unger & Crawford, 1992). Overall, differential treatment is consistent with producing independence and efficacy in boys, and emotional sensitivity, nurturance, and helplessness in girls.

One prominent source of differential treatment for sport is the media (e.g., Kane & Parks, 1992; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993). First, females receive little coverage. Women receive less than 10% of the coverage whether one considers TV air time, newspaper space, feature articles, or photographs. Moreover, female and male athletes receive *different* coverage that reflects gender hierarchy. Generally, athletic ability and accomplishments are emphasized for males, but femininity and physical attractiveness are emphasized for females.

The social aspect of gender is more than perceptions and stereotypes; it is the whole context. In *The Female World*, Jesse Bernard (1981) proposed that the social worlds for females and males are different, even when they appear similar. In earlier times people created actual separate sport worlds for females and males, with segregated physical education and sport programs. Although now there are coed activities and athletics for both women and men, the separate worlds have not disappeared. The social world differs for female and male university basketball teams, for male and female joggers, and for the girl and boy in a youth soccer game.

Why do we care about stereotypes and social context? Because we (everyone) act on them. We exaggerate [minimal] gender differences and restrict opportunities for both females and males. Gender beliefs keep many women out of sport, and moreover, gender beliefs greatly restrict the behaviors of both men and women in sport. Both girls and boys can participate in youth gymnastics or baseball, and at early ages physical characteristics and skills are similar. Yet, children see female gymnasts and male baseball players as role models, peers gravitate to sex-segregated activities, and most parents, teachers, and coaches are quicker to support gender-appropriate activities of children.

To illustrate the role of social context, consider the issue of gender and confidence in sport. Considerable earlier research suggested gender differences, with females displaying lower confidence and expectations than males did across varied settings (see Gill, 1992, for a review). Lenney (1977) concluded that the social situation was the primary source of apparent gender differences in confidence. Specifically, gender differences emerged with masculine tasks, in social comparison or competitive settings, and when clear, unambiguous feedback was missing. Several studies within sport psychology (e.g., Corbin & Nix, 1979; see Gill, 1992, for review) confirmed Lenney's propositions. However, the studies by Corbin and Nix and by other researchers were experimental studies with novel motor tasks, rather than with sport skills, conducted in controlled lab settings that purposely strip away social context. Researchers cannot ignore social context in the real world of sport. Sport tasks are (for the most part) seen as masculine, social comparison is typical, and males and females develop their confidence, along with their sport skills, through radically different experiences and opportunities.

Although sport is stereotypically masculine, feminist scholars recognize that gender stereotypes and beliefs affect men. Messner (1992) describes sport as a powerful force that socializes boys and men into a restricted masculine identity, and Messner cites the major forces as (a) the competitive hierarchical structure that enforces a "must-win" style and (b) homophobia, which leads all boys and men to conform to a narrow definition of masculinity. Real men compete and avoid anything feminine that might lead one to be branded a sissy. Messner ties this masculine identity to sport violence because using violence to achieve a goal is acceptable and encouraged within this identity. Notably, female athletes are less comfortable with aggression in sport. Messner notes that sport bonds men together as superior to women.

Sport is not only male but white, middle-class, heterosexual male. Although overt discrimination is rare, the glass ceiling, often cited in business or academia, also operates in sport to keep everyone else clustered at the bottom. The literature from this country provides much less research on stereotypes and beliefs related to race, class, sexuality, and age than on gender beliefs, especially in relation to sport, and North American sport psychologists pay little attention to international concerns. Moreover, gender stereotypes and their influence likely vary across other social categories. Duda and Allison (1990) cited the need for sport psychology research on race and ethnicity, and a recent text on racism in college athletics includes Corbett and Johnson's (1993) discussion of stereotypes and experiences of African American women in college sport. However, as Yevonne Smith (1992) concluded in her review of the scholarship on women of color, researchers have a deafening

silence on the experiences of diverse women in sport. Indeed, sport psychology is silent on most diversity issues. Pat Griffin (1992) has contributed important work on sexual orientation and homophobia. However, Griffin and Smith are not sport psychologists. Overall, we lack sport psychology scholarship on diverse women and have little information to guide educational practice with diverse women.

Some sport psychologists have called for more social and feminist approaches and have begun to put that call into action. Carole Oglesby has long advocated a more feminist approach, and her recent discussion of gender and sport relations (Oglesby & Hill, 1993) calls for more attention to diversity in sport psychology. Bredemeier's (1992) work on moral development in sport incorporates feminist theory and methodology. Moreover, Bredemeier's call for a multicultural approach advocates encompassing diversity within a feminist framework.

So, the literature does not support extreme dichotomous gender differences; males and females are not opposites. But women and men are not the same, either, and we cannot ignore gender in society. Gender is one part of a complex, dynamic social network, and a particularly salient, powerful part within sport. Clearly, recognition of gender and diversity is critical to effective sport psychology practice.

From Gender Scholarship to Feminist Practice

How can sport psychologists translate gender scholarship into feminist practice? At the least, sport psychologists must avoid sexist assumptions, standards, and practices. Counseling and clinical psychology include a sizable contingent of women and men who have moved beyond nonsexist practices to more actively feminist approaches. Feminist therapy includes many variations, but Worell and Remer's (1992) key principles are common to all. Feminist practice incorporates gender scholarship, emphasizes neglected women's experiences (e.g., sexual harassment), and takes a more nonhierarchical, empowering, process-oriented approach that shifts emphasis from personal change to social change. Given that sport is more sexist, hierarchical, and outcome-oriented than society is, sport psychology, as a field, is not likely to turn to a feminist approach. But, if some sport psychologists become feminist practitioners, sport will be better off.

First, sport psychology consultants might consider interactions with athletes and how gender influences communication. Although people tend to stereotype females as more talkative, research (e.g., Hall, 1987) indicates that men talk more, interrupt more, and take more space and dominant postures. Tannen (1990) claims that women and men speak different languages, suggesting special concern for cross-sex consulting. When a male sport psychologist is working with female athletes, the situation reflects the sexual power hierarchy of society, raising further barriers. Henschen (1991) described some potential pitfalls for male sport psychologists (including becoming a father figure, excessive bonding and emotional dependency, and inappropriate sexual relationships) and then offered guiding principles for maintaining ethical standards and effective practice. Sport psychology consultants with training in communication and interpersonal skills, as well as familiarity with gender scholarship, may adjust. Still, the larger world is different for female and male athletes, and we can go beyond the immediate consultant—athlete setting to more social, egalitarian practice.

To take a more active feminist approach, we might consider how to go beyond simple awareness of gender in the scenarios presented earlier. The first two scenarios (the aggressive soccer player and the tentative basketball player) fall within the realm of the sport consultant focusing on performance enhancement. Both could be male or female, but a male soccer player is more likely to grow up in a world that reinforces aggressive behavior, and a male athlete is more likely to continue to have such behaviors reinforced.

The less aggressive, more tentative approach is more typical of female athletes. Even talented, competitive female athletes are socialized to keep quiet, be good, and let others take the lead. Moreover, chances are that a female athlete will have a male coach, trainer, athletic director, professors, and deal with males in most other power positions. Overly aggressive, uncontrolled behavior is not exclusively male, nor tentative styles exclusively female. Still, consultants will work more effectively if they recognize gender influences in the

athlete's background and situation. Anger control or confidence building has a different context, and likely requires different strategies for female and male athletes.

A consultant working with a female basketball player who appears tentative might take a broader social perspective and listen to the athlete in assessing the situation. For example, the consultant might examine the media and public relations for the women's team, as well as the status of women's sports in general. How does basketball fit into the player's life? How do others (coach, teammates, family, spectators, close friends outside of sport) react to the player? What behaviors would be more confident and less tentative? Are confident behaviors attainable and desirable for that player? A consultant who develops a behavior change program with an athlete can recognize and incorporate the social context. Behavior is not just within the athlete but within a particular basketball context and larger social context. Both the immediate situation and larger context are gender-related. Others do not respond to male and female basketball players, or to female and male college students, the same way.

The figure skater's scenario (potential eating disorder) could involve clinical practice, as well as other professionals (e.g., physicians, nutrition specialists), but I will focus on the educational aspects here. Gender influences psychological disorders and diagnoses (e.g., Russo & Green, 1993; Travis, 1988). For example, women are more likely to present major depression and simple phobias, whereas men are more likely to present antisocial personality disorder or alcohol abuse (and this might suggest benefits of a feminist approach for male athletes, given the problems with alcohol abuse in the larger society). The largest gender gap, by far, is for eating disorders. Although the overall incidence is lower than for other psychological disorders, females are nine times more likely than males to exhibit anorexia or bulimia. Moreover, the incidence is increasing and more prominent in adolescence and early adulthood, and participants in certain activities, including dance and sport, may be at higher risk. All of this suggests concern for sport psychology consultants. The figure skater is much more likely to be female than male (as well as white, middle-upper class, and adolescent).

However, personality and gender are not the only considerations; eating disorders are social phenomena and body image plays a major role (e.g., Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985). Females in certain sports may have exaggerated body image concerns related to appearance and performance. Judges do look for a "line," and appearance does affect endorsements. For such cases, an educational approach stressing proper nutrition, without discounting the athlete's understandable concern for body image, might be effective. Perhaps most important for feminist practice is to move to social action—educate the coach and others and try to change the system that leads athletes to pursue an unhealthy body image.

The tennis player scenario reflects sexual harassment, an issue that is prevalent and likely to emerge but that is neglected in sport psychology. Research on violence toward women has expanded greatly and is a major contribution to the gender scholarship in psychology (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1993; Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Goodman, Koss, Fitzgerald, Russo, & Keita, 1993; Koss, 1990, 1993; Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Sexual harassment could occur with same-sex athletes and coaches, but such incidents are rare. Articles and books on homophobia (Griffin, 1992; Lenskyj, 1991; Nelson, 1991) reveal that fears of lesbian harassment are often invoked, but the reality is otherwise. Lesbians and gay men are far more likely to be targets than perpetrators of sexual harassment (Rotella & Murray, 1991). Overwhelmingly, sexual harassment is males harassing females (e.g., Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Lenskyj, 1992).

Some of the limited research on this topic in sport (Lenskyj, 1992; Nelson, 1991) suggests that female athletes are not immune and may have unique concerns. Given the high prevalence of sexual harassment and assault, especially for college females, female athletes are more likely to present problems related to these issues than to eating disorders or any other potentially clinical issues. About one third of college women report being harassed (over 50% with discriminatory remarks), 38 of 1,000 report rape or attempted rape each year, and 20-25% have experienced sexual assault by college years. Sexual harassment can be a barrier to educational or athletic achievement, and rape can be devastating, leading to psychological and medical problems even much later.

Female athletes share gender socialization and context with other college females, but may have particular concerns. As Lenskyj (1992) notes, female athletes in a male activity (sport) may elicit more harassing comments. Clothes are revealing, coaches are authoritarian and rule athletes lives, and in some sports merit is equated with heterosexual attractiveness. The tennis scenario is much more common than sport psychologists realize, and many athletes would not discuss the problem with anyone. Female athletes may train in isolated locations, during late hours, travel, be in more vulnerable positions, or feel they are safer than other students because of athletic skills. Some articles (Neimark, 1993) and theoretical works (Lenskyj, 1992; Messner, 1992) suggest that male bonding, privileged status, and macho image may make male athletes more likely to commit sexual assault. Thus, male athletes must also be aware of issues, and sport psychologists might offer educational programs, such as rape prevention programs, targeted at male athletes.

In addition to educating female and male athletes, sport psychology consultants can take steps to change the situations by educating coaches and administrators. Sport psychologists might use university resources from counseling or student services (e.g., refer victims, incorporate workshops) but also might develop programs for athletes. To take a stronger feminist approach, sport psychology consultants could try to change the situation, as well as educate individuals—perhaps by demanding safe lighting, secure facilities, and clear, enforceable policies.

Summary

Gender is so ingrained in our sport structure and practice that to practice effectively, sport psychology consultants must be aware of the many overt and subtle ways that gender affects everyone in the sport setting. Awareness of gender and turning that awareness into action through feminist practice can enrich all sport psychology and enhance educational consultation.

Valuing the female perspective and maintaining a familiarity with the scholarship on women and gender contributes to a thorough understanding of sport behavior. Educational sport psychology consultants can then further enrich their practice by moving beyond awareness of gender scholarship to feminist practice. The key to feminist practice, a focus on women and women's experiences, is essential for a consultant working with women. Moreover, the guiding principles of feminist practice are relevant to all sport psychology practice. Sport psychologists who contextualize their practice by considering both the immediate sport situation and larger social context can help athletes recognize constraints and options, and incorporate that social context into the athletes' psychological skills training and performance.

Several sport psychologists (e.g., Martens, 1987) advocate greater attention to the views and experiences of athletes and coaches to build the knowledge base. The logical extension of experiential knowledge to practice calls for more emphasis on the athlete's perceptions and interpretations in educational consultation, and a move to more egalitarian, feminist practice that empowers individual participants.

Finally, sport psychologists can move beyond the immediate consultant–athlete situation in their practice. In feminist practice, education and empowerment extends to the context and to social and political action. Sport psychologists can work with coaches, other sport participants, and the general public to empower women and to incorporate diversity on our university campuses, in our communities, and in the larger society. Such feminist practice ensures that the social world of sport is empowering and enriching for all who participate.

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