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**CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**  
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**DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS)**

**SPORT & PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

**SHOULD MEN AND WOMEN COMPETE AGAINST EACH OTHER IN  
SPORT?: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MIXED COMPETITION**

**(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of:  
SOCIO-CULTURAL)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although a widely accepted phenomenon in sport, sex categories are problematic since they have the potential to exclude females from sport and reinforce sexist gender stereotypes. Much debate therefore surrounds the legitimacy and necessity of single sex competitions as national governing bodies exercise their right to legally sexually discriminate. This dissertation aims to contribute to the debate by determining whether there are any good philosophical reasons for sex categories to exist in sport through critically evaluating the arguments currently offered in support of them. The arguments for sex segregation in sport surround three key themes: (i) the prevention of harm; (ii) the prevention of predictable results; and (iii) the need to achieve a level playing field. Biological assumptions underpin the development of these arguments. Therefore in showing the falsity of these assumptions I also show that even the most persuasive arguments for sex categories are flawed. Although the logic behind sex integration may appear to make sense, it is important to recognise that we cannot make decisions detached from reality. In today's society women would face a significant and systematic loss in mixed sport, not because of physiological differences but because of society's inherent male bias. Since sex integration would only disadvantage women further in sport, I do not propose enforcing sex categories. Instead I propose simply lifting the ban on mixed competition to challenge the gender bias and to encourage mixed competition in sports where there are no good reasons to maintain sex segregation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of gender equality has featured relatively infrequently in the philosophy of sport literature. Philosophers that have addressed gender and women's place in sport have, in most cases, focused on the relevance of sex difference (English, 1995, Boxill, 1993, Tannsjo, 2000 and Schneider 2000). Tannsjo's (2000) work features heavily in these cases as his arguments against sexual discrimination in sport have been subject to critical examination by other philosophers, in particular Schneider (2000) and Coggon et al (2008). Tannsjo (2000) argues that there is no good reason for sex segregation to occur in sport despite feminists insisting on the necessity of sex segregation to allow women access to elite competition (English, 1995; Schneider, 2000 and Coggon et al, 2008). In an attempt to critically assess the debate over sexual discrimination in sport, this thesis will examine closely the work of the central contributors previously mentioned, namely Tannsjo (2000) and Schneider (2000). Despite the strengths of Tannsjo's (2000) criticisms for sex segregation, it seems that there are still grounds for separate competitions for male and female athletes in certain sports. Nonetheless, it is clear that some of Tannsjo's (2000) critiques challenge current policy in a number of cases that still insist on sex segregation in sport.

This dissertation aims to determine whether sex segregation is necessary in sport. This thesis will contain four chapters plus a conclusion which will offer a summary of the key points raised. Chapter one will provide a brief overview of sex segregation and sport. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sport enjoyed an exclusively male following because women were considered too weak to withstand the basic rigours of sport. The feminist movement in the 1970's, broke down sexist stereotypes and challenged women's exclusion in sport through the development of equal opportunity legislation. Sex segregation is problematic since it reduces girls sporting participation rates and reinforces gender stereotypes. However sporting organisations exercise the right to legally discriminate against women due to a clause in the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975. This chapter therefore concludes by suggesting that there is a need to debate the legitimacy and necessity of sex categories in sport.

In chapter two, I will identify the key arguments for sex segregation in sport that are prominent throughout the philosophy of sport literature. The necessity of sex categories will be discussed surrounding the prevention of harm, prevention of predictable results and the need to create a level playing field. Tannsjo (2000) offers

the greatest contribution to this chapter having himself identified several possible responses to mixed competition. Yet despite these responses, Tannsjo (2000) continues to argue that there is no good reason for sex segregation to exist in sport, despite English (1995); Coggon et al (2008) and Schneider (2000) suggesting otherwise. For sex categories to be considered legitimate in sport, at least one argument for sex segregation must appear convincing under critical evaluation.

In light of the above, chapter three will critically evaluate each argument to determine if there are any legitimate reasons for continuing sex segregation in sport. I will largely draw on Coggon et al (2008) and Schneider's (2000) critique of Tannsjo's (2000) work in this chapter to show which arguments for sex segregation are flawed. I will also draw on a wealth of empirical evidence in the form of court proceedings and women's performance records to determine the persuasiveness of each argument. This chapter concludes by stating that there are only two potentially convincing policy arguments for continuing sex segregation in sport: (i) to create a level playing field; and (ii) to rebalance the male bias in sport. The strength of these two arguments relies on their ability to be successfully applied to a number of sporting examples.

Chapter four will illustrate, through the use of case study examples, sports in which the potentially convincing arguments for sex segregation can and cannot be used to defend sex categories. According to the fairness rationale, mixed competition is appropriate in youth sports and at an elite level in sports where performance is not influenced systematically by sex. Therefore regulations which limit the age that boys and girls can compete together in sport are problematic. With regards to the male bias argument, I propose in this chapter to lift the ban on mixed competition to allow women who can defeat men to do so. This would challenge society's sexist attitudes about women in sport and would rebalance the male bias in society, thus no longer providing a convincing reason for sex categories in sport. Within this chapter I will argue that the legitimacy and necessity of sex categories is very sport specific and so should be decided on a case by case basis.

The conclusion will emphasise the problematic nature of sex segregation and will reiterate my position to abandon sex categories in sport. I will summarise supporting evidence to prove that, in the majority of sports, there is no good reason for sex

segregation to occur and so the ban on mixed competition should be lifted to challenge the belief that women are naturally inferior to men in sport. I propose that removing the ban will rebalance society's male bias, thus providing girls with increased opportunities to excel in sport, narrowing the gap between men and women's standards of performance. Ultimately I argue that if women were able to perform as well as men in sports that are influenced by sex, sex categories would no longer be required to achieve a level playing field and so would not play a legitimate part in sport.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**SEX DISCRIMINATION AND SPORT: A BRIEF HISTORY**



## **1.1 Sexual discrimination in sport: a brief history**

Sexual discrimination in employment and education is today prohibited by legislation such as the Sexual Discrimination Act, 1975 (Burke, 2010) and in the USA, Title IX, 1972 (Fields, 2003 and Boxill, 1995). While such legislations appear a triumph for the feminist movement and a breakthrough in sex equality, there still exists what Tannsjo (2000) identifies as “taken for granted” sexual discrimination in sport. According to George (2002, p.1) sport is the only context in society where we “accept, expect and even defend sex segregation as the status quo”. Even in the military, sexual discrimination is no longer justified. The arguments for sexual discrimination that were once used to prevent women from engaging in combat, now only exist to prevent women from participating in sport<sup>3</sup> (Rogers, 1990).

Throughout history women have struggled to overcome oppression, subordination and resistance in sport. Today there is “a vast disparity between men’s and women’s sports in the provisions of training facilities, adequate equipment, training staff, trainers, playing fields, recruitment for sport and adequate funding” (Thornton, 2010, p.489). At college level “only 24 percent of athletic operating budgets are spent on female sports hence why male athletes get \$179 million more in athletic scholarships each year” (Cassell, 2011, p.1). Women are denied opportunities in sport not only as athletes but also as referees and coaches. A series of court proceedings document the level of discrimination that women involved in sport have had to face. Vanessa Hardwick for example filed a sexual discrimination law suit against the Football Association after they denied her obtaining a top coaching qualification because she was assessed on her ability to play football in the men’s style (The Independent, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1997). Likewise, “exclusion policies of female referees’ in judo and rugby league” have also been challenged in court (Hargreaves, 1994, p.117).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, 1948, only two percent of those that served in each branch of the armed forces could be women because their physical, physiological and social inferiority meant they were poor soldiers (Rogers, 1990). This legislation was lifted in 1967 which allowed 17 percent of the 2004 naval academy graduating class and 18 percent of the Air Force graduating class to be female (Americans for Democratic Action, 2012).

The discrimination of women in sport dates back to the times of ancient Greece when sport was “exclusively a male domain” (English, 2000, p.217). During this time women were not allowed to spectate, let alone compete in sport (Cavanagh and Skyes, 2006). Women are discriminated against in sport because societal discourse and gendered stereotypes classify them as the “other” sex. Women are seen as inferior to men in the sporting world because comparatively women naturally lack strength, speed and size, qualities which are decisive to winning in most sports. This position is reflected in a statement made by the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896 which read; "no matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks." (Cashmore, 2010, p.208).

It is the biological differences between the sexes that give weight to the arguments that if mixed competition was to exist, the risk of harm that would befall women would be too great and the playing field too uneven. Paternalistic attitudes from national governing bodies are responsible for implementing regulations that enforce sex segregation in sport. On numerous occasions girls have felt discriminated against by their respective sports organisation due to regulations that prevent them from participating in mixed competition. Theresa Bennet, 12 and Donna Hoover, 16 for example filed individual law suits against their sporting organisations (the Football Association and Colorado High School Activity Association, respectively) after they were both prevented from playing in mixed soccer competitions, on the understanding that the risk of harm was too great (Fields, 2003, Burke 2010 and McArdle, 1999). Tracy Chapman, a 35 year old MP was also prevented, on the same grounds, from participating in a parliamentary football team, because at that time FIFA<sup>4</sup> rules stated that only girls aged 11 or under could play in mixed teams (FA, 2010). Also in rugby, ice hockey and field hockey, the age that participants can play in mixed competitions is limited past the age of 12 (IRB, online; McArdle, 1999).

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<sup>4</sup> FIFA stands for Football International Federation Association and is Footballs highest governing body.

## **1.2 Why sex segregation is problematic in sport**

Although scholars argue the necessity of sex segregation and national governing bodies enforce sex categories, sexual discrimination is problematic and harmful to women in sport because it reinforces gender stereotypes and the view that men are 'naturally' more suited to sport. If women are not seen to compete against men, society is likely to believe that women are physically incapable of doing so; a belief which reinforces society's sexist stereotypes (Burke, 2010). Sex segregation is also problematic because it can reduce sporting participation rates for girls as they are prevented from joining boys' teams, even when there may not be an existing girls' team. For example, Brooke Robertson, 15, was prevented from playing mixed sex ice hockey despite there being no other club for her to participate in in her home town (Burke, 2010).

Sex segregation also has the potential to exclude women from elite sport entirely. Ski jumping is an Olympic sport that still holds a male-only competition. Despite the world record holder of the 300 foot ski jump being female, the International Olympic Committee continues to prevent women from competing in the event. In 2009 women's Ski Jumping was credited with a world championship. Up until this point, women were unable to compete at an elite level in ski jumping, despite having proven in similar contests that they were superior in ability to men. The Olympic sport of swimming also holds a male only contest, the 1500m freestyle. Women are prevented from swimming this distance due to the biological assumption that women lack stamina, the same assumption that is used to prevent women from playing the same number of sets in tennis as men<sup>5</sup>. The legitimacy of this argument seems doubtful given that in the triathlon women are required to swim 1500m and that is only one third of the race.

This chapter has touched upon some of the key concepts that surround sex discrimination in sport. The notion that women lack the strength, stamina and size to compete alongside men is embedded in and derived from the history of sport. Society's belief that men are naturally superior to women in sport is responsible for the development of legislations and regulations that enforce sex segregation. Within

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<sup>5</sup> In Tennis women play the best of three sets, while men play the best of five

this chapter I have identified why sex segregation in sport is problematic and therefore why there is a need to debate the legitimacy and necessity of sex categories. In the next chapter I will highlight the main arguments for sex segregation in sport. In doing so, I lay the foundations to later debate the convincing nature of these arguments and to answer the question: should sex segregation be allowed in sport?

**CHAPTER 2**  
**A DESCRIPTION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR SEXUAL DISCRIMINATION IN**  
**SPORT**

## **2.1 The impact of the Sexual Discrimination Act (1975) on sport**

Historically women have been excluded from sport. Female participation rates in sport have increased significantly since the 1970's when a "growing awareness of the role of women around the world" (Olympics Organisation, 2009) led to the development of equal opportunities legislation. In the UK, the Sexual Discrimination Act, 1975, prohibits sex discrimination from occurring within employment and education (McArdle, 1999), marking a significant moment in women's emancipation in society and, to some degree, in sport. However, parliament made sex discrimination in sport exempt from the provisions of the Act (McArdle, 1999). Section 44 of the Sexual Discrimination Act, 1975, otherwise labelled by Burke (2010) as the Anatomical Exclusion Clause (AEC), "provides opportunities for sporting organizations to exclude people of one sex from participating in competitive sporting activities against members of the other sex where the strength, stamina or physique of competitors is relevant" (Burke, 2010, p.12). The question of whether sport ought to be exempt from the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act is a significant moral issue as sporting organisations exercise their right to legally sexually discriminate. A number of high profile cases, specifically in football, have challenged the exemption.

Section 44 allows sporting organisations "to adopt discriminatory practices that would be unacceptable in virtually every other area of employment" (McArdle, 1999, p.44). This chapter will examine the arguments for sex segregation in sport that are often used by sporting organisations to legally sexually discriminate in an attempt to later on assess the legitimacy and necessity of sex categories in sport.

## **2.2 A description of the arguments for sex segregation in sport**

The reasons offered in defence of sex segregation in sport are varied. According to Tannsjo (2000) there are four principle justifications in favour of maintaining sex categories. The first argument that Tannsjo (2000) makes reference to, states that sex categories are used in a similar way to that of weight and height categories, in order to prevent the predictability of results. Loland (2002, p.54) identifies several sports where "body size (in terms of both weight and height) exerts both a significant and a systematic influence" over the outcome of performance. In sports where body size is a decisive factor of performance, such as boxing, wrestling and weight lifting,

weight categories exist to achieve, what Loland (2002, p.149) terms, “the sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome”. So in the same way that weight categories serve to make the result less predictable in boxing, sex categories might be justifiable in sports where men are highly likely to defeat a female opponent. This argument is most likely to be effective in respect to events where sex has a significant influence. In track events for example “the best males outperform the best females by between 9 and 14% in events ranging from the 100m sprint to a 90km ultra-marathon” (Tucker and Collins, 2005. P.134). In the 100m sprint the men’s world record is 0.91 seconds faster than the best female competitor and “in the marathon the current women’s world record of 2h 15mins does not feature in a listing of the top 400 times for men” (Tucker and Collins, 2005, p134). By allowing men and women to compete together in sports where sex is a significant influence, the result would be all too predictable, or so the argument goes.

With reference to the first justification outlined above, Coggon et al (2008) point out that weight categories serve another purpose in sport. They suggest that weight categories do not only provide unpredictability of results but also “permit a wider range of athletes to take part in sport” (Coggon et al, 2008, p.9). In boxing, for example, there would be fewer featherweight professionals competing in the sport if weight classes did not exist because the majority would lose against heavy weights. As noted above, in sports where body size is a decisive factor of performance, the lesser advantaged group of competitors would nearly always lose and would therefore be excluded from their sport. The consequence of which, according to Coggon et al (2008) is that a range of skills used by lighter boxers would be lost. Sex discrimination might be permissible since it allows a broader range of skills to be developed among athletes and spectators are able to enjoy watching a richer range of skills, “for example the markedly different style of men’s and women’ tennis” (Coggen et al, 2008, p.9).

The second argument which may be offered against mixed competition is that if women are successful and beat men at a particular sport, it will trigger a violent response by men. Tannsjo (2000, p.104) derisively sums up this argument: “in order to protect women against such outbursts of male aggressiveness, we had better let women and men compete apart from each other”. Though seeming to be an unconvincing at first, there does seem to be evidence to suggest that Tannsjo (2000)

is right to include it in his discussion. Tamburrini (2000) recalls an incident in 1992, when Zhang Shan, a Chinese shooter won the Olympic gold medal in a mixed shooting event. She was the first female ever to do so. Her superior shooting ability over men “directly preceded the events return to a single sex sport” at the next Olympic Games (Coggon et al, 2008, p.9). Although not violent, this example illustrates intolerance towards female victories over male opponents. Social studies have also documented instances in which women in traditionally male occupations have experienced hostile and sometimes violent responses from men. A sporting example is when female linesman Sian Massey was subject to sexist remarks from male commentators after running the line in a premiership game. Female soldiers in combat positions within the military have also been met with similar hostile reactions from their male colleagues as they are deemed less able soldiers (Rogers, 1990). The argument therefore goes that men and women should continue to compete in single sexed sports in order to protect women from male intolerance that is not only evident in sport but also in society.

The third possible response to mixed competition that Tannsjo (2000, p) makes reference to, relies on the fact that in most sports “all women find that they are always defeated by most men because on average they perform poorly in comparison”. This argument has been described as the “advantage thesis” (Sullivan, 2011, p.401). The advantage thesis suggests that sex segregation is “in keeping with the ethic of fair play” and is founded on the idea that “all males have a physical advantage over any females” (Sullivan, 2011, p.402). Bennett, an 11 year old girl, was prevented from joining a boy’s local league football team by the Football Association because in football the strength of the average woman puts her at an unfair disadvantage against the strength of the average man (Burke, 2010). Under Section 44 of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, the court ruled that in football, mixed competition for those over the age of 11, would prevent fair competition, which is disadvantageous to either sex (Burke, 2010). This argument is based on the biological differences between the sexes. Naturally women are “smaller to men, have a higher percentage of fat, lack the hormones necessary for massive muscle development, have a different hip structure and possess a lower oxygenation rate” (English, 2001, p216). It is these physiological differences that determine women’s inferior ability in sport and creates discourse about females’ rights to compete



against men. Arguably, in order to achieve fair competition women should play against each other. All female competition would prevent women from an inevitable defeat, therefore preventing them from consequently dropping out of sport (Tannsjo, 2000).

The fourth argument against sexual discrimination to which Tannsjo (2000) makes reference states that female sports are different from male sports and so they represent a unique value of feminine qualities that would be lost if mixed competition occurred. According to Tannsjo (2000, p.109) feminine qualities are “less to do with mere physical strength and more to do with inventiveness, sensibility, co-operation, strategy, playfulness, wit and so forth”. Tannsjo (2000, p.110) suspects that “feminine qualities are more frequent in female sports than in male sports”. When Tannsjo (2000) refers to female sports I presume that he means those sports in which female qualities exist more than male qualities, therefore sports in which women dominate. In synchronised swimming, ultra-marathons and extreme long distance swimming for example women currently hold the world records (Schneider, 2000). Separation of the sexes arguably allows women the freedom to create sport based on the unique values that they possess such as “sharing, giving, nurturing, sympathising and emphasising” (Shneider, 2000, p.129). This argument for sex segregation states that feminine qualities and values are likely to be lost in sport if mixed participation is allowed and female sports are removed (Tannsjo, 2000). “To give up sexual discrimination would therefore be like giving up valuable existing sports” (Tannsjo, 2000, p.108).

A fifth argument for sexual discrimination in sport is offered by Coggon et al (2008) as an expansion to Tannsjo’s (2000) third principle. According to Coggon et al (2008) the most convincing defence for sexual discrimination in sport is that if sexual discrimination did not exist, women would be prevented from participation in elite competition altogether. This argument is convincing because it is based on empirical evidence about today’s society. Evidence suggests that social discrimination currently restricts female’s opportunities to achieve their full potential in sport through being given “less chances and encouragement to pursue athletic excellence in school and so on” (Coggon et al, 2008, p.8). A vast disparity exists between “men and women’s sports in the provisions of training facilities, adequate equipment, training staff, trainers, playing fields, recruitment for sport and adequate funding”

(Thornton, 2010, p.489). According to Brake (2001, p.60) female athletes receive 42% of the athletic scholarships awarded to college students". Unsurprisingly therefore, in 2001 only 40% of all interscholastic and intercollegiate sport participants were female (Cooky and Lavoie, 2012). In a different society where women were given as many opportunities as men to excel in sport, mixed competition could occur because "women as well as men would be motivated to strive for the common good" (Schneider, 2000, p135). Currently sports which males dominate include the majority of the elite sports at the Olympic Games. Therefore, to say that men and women should compete against each other in these sports would be a way of excluding women from elite competition altogether. It is only when social discrimination is removed that sexual discrimination in sport can also be, or so the argument goes.

There is also an additional paternalistic argument that might be offered in favour of sex segregation which is that mixed competition is considered too dangerous for females. Section 44 of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, which allows for sex segregation in sport, is often defended on the grounds that mixed competition will result in physical injury for females. Brooke Robertson, 15 and Donna Hoover, 16 were banned from playing in mixed full contact ice hockey and football respectively, because it is deemed too dangerous for girls beyond the age of 12 to do so (Burke, 2010 and Fields, 2003). The Ice Hockey Federation and the Colorado High School Athletics Association's position were based on the belief that the average female's body composition meant that in the event of a collision Robertson and Hoover were at a greater risk of injury than males because they are biologically smaller and weaker (Burke, 2010). In mixed competition "where mismatches in physicality are most apparent" risk of injury is greatest (Burke, 2010, p.14). Sex discrimination in contact sports such as "boxing, wrestling, rugby, ice hockey, football and basketball" is arguably permissible "because inordinate injury risk jeopardizes the health and safety of the female athlete" (Fields, 2003, p313). Since "protecting girl's safety is a legitimate governmental interest" so too should be sex segregation (Fields, 2003, p.314).

Having outlined all of the grounds in favour of sex segregation in sport, chapter three will critically examine each argument to determine whether there are any morally legitimate arguments for sexual discrimination in sport.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR SEX SEGRGEATION IN SPORT**

### **3.1 A critical evaluation of the arguments for sex segregation in sport**

In the previous chapter I outlined the arguments offered in favour of sex segregation in sport. Although most sporting organisations argue that sex categories are necessary to protect and support female athletes, there remains significant opposition to the enforcement of sex categories in sport. Within the sport sociology literature, some sports feminists, for example Hargreaves (1994), argue that rules which prevent mixed competitions have disadvantaged women. Similarly, Burke (2010, p.12) argues that a clause in the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, has helped to limit women's opportunities in sport rather than to "achieve the goal of equitable respect for female participation".

Despite the prevalence of sex categories, scholars in the sports studies community continue to debate the legitimacy and necessity of discriminating on the basis of sex. This chapter aims to critically evaluate the arguments described in chapter one in an effort to determine whether there are any reasonable arguments in defence of the current view that sex segregation is necessary. This chapter concludes by suggesting that two of the traditional arguments require further discussion, namely the argument that (i) sex categories are necessary to create a level playing field and (ii) sex categories help to rebalance the "biases in favour of male dominance" (Coggon et al 2008, p.9).

Each of the arguments for sexual segregation in sport will be critically evaluated in the order outlined below:

1. Predictability
2. Loss of feminine qualities
3. Discouraging to women
4. Men's responses
5. Male bias
6. Damage to women's bodies

### **3.1.1 Predictability**

Argument one is that sex segregation in sport is no different to weight classes in that they make competition less predictable. According to Tannsjo (2000) this argument is less than persuasive. As Tannsjo (2000) notes, weight classification is justified since weight is directly related to the ability of an athlete to perform well in a specific sport. Weight categories exist in sports where body size is a decisive influence to performance, such as boxing and weight lifting (Loland, 2002). Unlike weight categories however sex is indirectly related to performance, “in the sense that it predisposes statistically, for more or less of a certain characteristic, crucial to performing well in a certain sport” (Tannsjo, 2000, p.103). The problem with classifying groups based on statistical difference is that it can lead to injustice in individual cases (Loland, 2002). The vast difference between men and women’s performances in the 100m sprint for example is not a direct influence of sex but instead a direct influence of the number of fast twitch muscles that an individual’s sex predisposes them too. According to Tannsjo (2000, p.103) discrimination should therefore happen “in terms of this characteristic itself and not in terms of sex”. Sex may be a significant influence of performance but it is not a systematic influence (Loland, 2002). Grouping individuals based on physiological characteristics which directly affect performance, such as height classes in basketball and weight classes in running for example would achieve the same goal as sexual discrimination which is to guarantee an unpredictable outcome of results.

Sexual discrimination takes place on the grounds that the average female athlete performs less well than the average male athlete in most sports. Yet this is only a statistical difference; one that should not be generalised to all individuals of one sex (Tannsjo, 2000). According to Tannsjo (2000), it is by definition, discriminatory for those female athletes who can and wish to outperform male athletes to be prevented from mixed competition on the grounds that women generally perform less well than men.

In fact Loland (2002) and English (1995) state that in order for athletes to perform at their best they ought to perform against those at a similar level of athletic ability. Female athletes who are bigger, stronger and more skilled than their female peers should be permitted to play against men of a similar ability in order for them to

improve their skill development level (Theberge, 1997). This view is supported by Aristotle's definition of equality which is to "treat like cases as like" (Nicomachean Ethics, V.3. 1131a10-b15). To achieve equality in sport, Aristotle's definition suggests that those who are similar in athletic ability should receive equal treatment, i.e. the opportunity to compete against one another. As previously mentioned, Tannsjo (2000) argues that sex segregation does not group athletes equally according to athletic ability because sex is a characteristic that does not directly affect performance.

The persuasiveness of the argument that sex categories are no different to weight classes in their ability to make sport unpredictable is clearly questionable. However Coggon et al (2008) suggest another purpose for weight categories in sport which they believe successfully defends sex segregation. Coggon et al (2008, p.9) state that weight categories "permit a wider range of athletes to take part in sport". Professional light weight boxers for example exist because they do not compete against heavy weight boxers whose greater size is a significant indicator of performance. The argument goes therefore that if not for sex segregation there would be fewer women in sport as most women would lose to men in mixed competition.

However it isn't clear whether Tannsjo is suggesting that we abandon all sex segregation in sport or simply abandon the exclusion of women who are able to compete in men's competitions. In either case, Coggon et al's defence of sex segregation is objectionable. In the latter event, Tannsjo argues that women who can defeat men should be provided with the opportunity to do so. In this instance, there would be more women in sport because those that compete against men will be capable of defeating them, thus proving Coggon et al's (2008) argument invalid.

In the event that sex segregation is abandoned completely and women who perform less well than men are allowed to compete in mixed competition, Coggon et al's argument is once more proved unconvincing. In sports where women happen to be the lesser advantaged group, Boxill (2001) and Burke (2010) argue for desegregation of the sexes based on the fact that "in almost all other sporting categories, permission is given for the subordinate group to participate amongst the superordinate group" (Burke, 2010, p.16). For example "light weight boxers are

allowed to compete against middle weight boxers and under 12 footballers of one gender are allowed to compete against the under 14's of the same gender" (Burke, 2010, p.16). Women ought to therefore be allowed to "move up" a category in order to compete against men if they wish and vice versa (Boxill, 2001 and Burke, 2010).

There is an additional argument for sex segregation, offered by Coggon et al (2008), which I believe is highly persuasive. This argument is that sexual discrimination, like weight categories, facilitates a richer range of skills. Bigger, stronger boxers for example use different skills than lighter ones. As do heavier, larger wrestlers. Sex segregation in sport ultimately allows noticeable viewing of the different skills that female athletes use in comparison to male athletes. Similarly it is the variety of skills that increases the enjoyment level of spectators. Particularly in single sex sports such as tennis and golf, differences in playing styles between the sexes increases the level of enjoyment that can be gained by spectators (Coggon et al, 2008). It is this variety of subtle enjoyments, according to Coggon et al (2008) that permit the use of sexual discrimination in sport.

### **3.1.2 Loss of feminine qualities**

According to Coggon et al (2008, p.9) this defence for segregation in sport is weak because it is "question begging and may set us up for some circularity". Coggon et al (2008) also regard this argument to be morally illegitimate since it suggests that typical male and female sports require differing skills and attributes that are not natural to both sexes. Assuming for sake of argument that this is true Coggon et al (2008) state that sports which males are typically suited to, need not prohibit female participation. Based on this view there seems to be good reason to reject this argument outright. In J. S. Mills words "what women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. If women have a greater natural inclination for something's than for others, there is no need of laws or social inculcation to make the majority of them do the former in preference to the latter" (J. S. Mill, 1869, p.243). In other words there is no need for sexual discrimination to occur in sport if women are naturally athletically inferior to men. It is unnecessary to prevent mixed competition therefore as women need not be prevented from something that they are naturally determined to lose.

In sports where unique female qualities arguably do exist; Tannsjo (2000) states that sexual discrimination is not required to retain them. A “more obvious and better way” of doing so involves a moderated approach (Tannsjo, 2000, p.110) whereby feminine qualities are introduced to all sorts of sports by being added on to and exchanged for many other existing qualities. Typical male qualities such as “arrogant outbursts of aggression and strength” should be exchanged for female ones such as “wit, strategy, cooperation, sensibility, playfulness and inventiveness” (Tannsjo, 2000, p.110). In introducing female qualities to all sports, male qualities are moderated proving that neither female nor male qualities need to be lost. Female qualities are morally valuable as they can be learned and used in the outside world, therefore there is good reason to learn and moderate them more into sport (Tannsjo, 2000). “Sports without moderation means competition in aspects such as mere strength” (Tannsjo, 2000, p.111). The problem with this is that our admiration for strength becomes fascist as we admire winners who have simply won the genetic lottery through luck. If instead of admiring winners who are genetically predisposed to win, we admire those that have had to learn values that are decisive to winning, i.e. the winners of moderated sports, our admiration for winners will become less fascist. It is therefore important to moderate morally valuable female qualities into all sports in exchange for potentially fascist masculine qualities.

### **3.1.3 Discouraging to women**

Argument three proposes that in mixed sport women would always lose against men which could potentially discourage all women from sport, thereby losing sports female role models altogether. Although Coggon et al (2008) considers this argument persuasive in permitting sex categories in sport, Tannsjo (2000) suggests otherwise. According to Tannsjo (2000) the idea that women would always lose to men is based on general biological assumptions. Hence it is unlikely that in most sports all women will face inevitable defeat by most men and will consequently resign from sport. The problem with classifying groups by sex based on statistical biological differences is that it can lead to injustice in individual cases (Loland, 2002). There is significant empirical research to show that certain women are superior to most men in a wide variety of sports. In extreme endurance running, extreme endurance swimming and synchronised swimming for example women currently hold all the world records (Schneider, 2000). In diving, riflery and equestrian women also



frequently outperform men on a world stage (Boxill, 2001). It is the falsity of the belief that it is impossible for any female to defeat most males which proves problematic. It creates a rule for all women in all sports which empirical research, clearly demonstrates is untrue. According to Tannsjo (2000), the foundation of this false belief lies not in the sexual differences themselves, but in the socially constructed ones. Therefore because it is not physically impossible to beat men, women may see it as a challenge and may become motivated towards changing sports sexual biases (Tannsjo, 2000).

According to Schneider (2000) it is not until adolescence that our acceptance of gender roles become fixed, as girls become self-conscious around boys while boys feel that they need to display aggression in order to attract the girl's attention. Therefore up until adolescence it is unlikely for any established gender stereotypes to occur and for girls to feel that boys are superior to them in sport. Constantinou et al (2009) found that as long as female athletes view themselves as athletically equal to their male peers, their participation rates in and attitudes towards sport will not drop. Girls are highly likely to view themselves as athletically equal to boys because there are few physiological differences between them. It therefore seems unfair to prevent girls from competing against boys due to the worry that they may become disengaged in sport. After all, the objective of youth sports is to provide enjoyment for all participants, an objective which should alone prevent boys and girl's participation rates and attitudes towards sport from dropping (Tymowski, 2001).

According to Anderson (2008), men and women are also likely to view themselves as athletically equal in co-ed sport. Anderson interviewed 68 male cheerleaders who were once ex-footballers to investigate the restructuring of gender norms in sport. He found that nearly all of the participants valued orthodox masculinity less as a cheerleader because they could appreciate the female cheerleader's athleticism. This study shows that integration of the sexes can change men's attitudes towards women in sport. It also proves that mixed competition can challenge traditional biological assumptions that are largely responsible for men believing that they are athletically superior to women. Ultimately mixed competition can therefore encourage men and women to view themselves as athletically equal in sport. In this instance neither sex is likely to become discouraged from sport thus sex categories need not exist.

### **3.1.4 Men's Responses**

While there may be some truth in this argument, (illustrated through the examples in chapter one), there is no empirical evidence to prove that men's violence towards women is a direct consequence of defeat in sport. Had there been evidence to suggest this, male violence would still remain an ethical issue and therefore a morally reprehensible argument for sexual discrimination in sport (Coggon et al 2008). Although the Zhang Shan example shows that there is some truth behind the claim that men might respond negatively if defeated by women, this argument remains illegitimate according to Ayim and Houstons (1985) in the sense that one group (male players) cannot choose who they wish to compete against based on their own views about who they do and do not want to defeat. Intolerance amongst male players, does not enjoy any moral legitimacy for causing sexual discrimination in sport and so can be rejected wholesale (Coggon et al 2008).

Tannsjo (2000) offers an alternative approach to sexual discrimination in sport that would equally discourage men from engaging in violent reactions. This approach is to enforce specific measures in sport that would prevent male aggression. One measure involves changing the rules of sport to implement the threat of harsher punishments. For example, removing the yellow card in football and having the red card carry with it a harsher punishment than it already does. Changing the rules of sport would also make violent assaults more difficult to be performed in the first place, causing little need for punishments altogether. Another measure offered by Tannsjo (2000) to prevent male violence towards women is the moderation of aggression as a whole in sport. In making aggression less rewarding and decisive in decision making in sport, male violence will become unnecessary in sport, and will therefore be prevented.

### **3.1.5 Male bias**

The fifth and arguably the most convincing defence for sex segregation in sport is developed by Coggon et al (2008) as an expansion to Tannsjo's (2000) third argument. This argument states that if sexual discrimination did not exist in sport, women would be prevented from participation in elite competition altogether. To prove the convincing nature of this argument, the type of society we live in must first be recognised. We live in a sporting culture whereby male dominated sports are the

most funded, most powerful and most watched (Schneider cited in Tannsjo, 2000). In today's society all forms of excellence are not treated equally. Men dominate the popular sports of society which test strength, speed and power. These sports are more cherished, valued and rewarded than the sports which women dominate such as extreme endurance sports and synchronised swimming (Coggon et al, 2008).

In a society where all sports are valued equally and men and women receive equal power and income, a society whereby our gender roles are not what they are today, sexual discrimination could be abandoned as women would excel in sport just as much as men. Sports in which women excel would be just as popular as those in which men excel because people would learn to appreciate grace and extreme endurance as much as power and speed. In this society desegregating the sexes would not disadvantage women as their accomplishments would occur in the newly recognisable popular elite sports (those that women currently dominate) in which their achievements would be as equally respected as men's achievement in other sports. However we do not live in this type of society.

In today's society, social discrimination means that the sports in which women excel at are barely noticed. The sports which males dominate are the majority of the elite sports at the Olympic Games. In all of the Olympic athletic tracks events for example "the best female performances in history lie outside of the top 400 men's performances every year" (Tucker and Collins, 2005, p.134). By allowing men and women to compete against each other in all of today's popular elite sports, women would find themselves excluded from elite competition because they would face a systematic loss. By women failing to outperform men, male achievements would act as role models for boys while girls would struggle to find female role models who could display what is possible for women to achieve. It is important to see strong athletic women win in elite competitions not only to provide role models for young girls but to also change our social views of what is right and appropriate for women to do. Excluding women from elite sport through desegregation would be limiting the realm of what is possible for women to achieve (Coggon et al, 2008). Ultimately sexual discrimination should therefore be encouraged in elite sport in order to include female athletes in elite competition.

### **3.1.6 Damage to women's bodies**

The paternalistic approach of the final argument for sex segregation states that sexual discrimination protects women from physical injury against men. A number of sports bodies, have offered this argument to legally prevent girls from participating in mostly mixed football competitions. In her comprehensive account of title IX and the impact of legislation on girl's participation in mixed sports, Fields (2001) examines a number of legal cases. In one case, Donna Hoover, 16 was banned from participating in a mixed varsity football competition due to the belief that in the event of a collision she would be at considerable risk of harm, because on average women are biologically smaller and weaker than men. The court dismissed this claim and ruled in favour of Hoover stating that "on average a greater difference in physical size exists within genders than between genders" (Fields, 2003, p.314). Likewise in a similar court case where three female footballers, aged between 14 and 16 were also banned from participating in a mixed football competition, evidence was found to suggest that "football injuries are not related to the size or physique (of athletes), but are related to the centrality and risk taking behaviours" (Burke, 2010, p.15). In both court cases, the respective sporting organisations were advised by the courts to concentrate their paternalistic efforts on protecting individuals that are physically small and weak instead of a single sex (Burke, 2010 and Fields, 2003). The defences for sex segregation given by these sports governing bodies suggest that their paternalistic concerns lie only with older girls, and not with boys or pre-pubertal girls. Their attitudes therefore reflect a need to protect sport against athletically superior females instead of protecting the health of their athletes.

Paternalistic attitudes that enforce sexual discrimination in sport are based on assertions that physical activity only harms women. Pre-pubertal girls are often of the same size and strength of boys their own age which fails to make one sex more at risk of physical harm than the other. For pre-pubertal girls this argument therefore does not stand as they are at no greater risk of injury competing against boys than they are girls. Although for women, men may be greater in size and strength, it is important for women as rational agents "to have the right, just as men do, to decide what risks of harm they will run" (Schneider, 2000, p.126). Even in "equal opportunity case law that deals with employment of women in non-traditional occupations, paternalism is not a reasonable basis for discrimination" (Burke, 2010, p16).

Ultimately it is sexist to presume that “women need protecting from the decisions they make” (Burke, 2010, p15).

So far the government and sporting organisations determine the level of harm that girls and women should be open to through the provisions of equal opportunity legislation and the enforcement of sporting regulations, respectively. Yet protecting the safety of their athlete is one of any coach’s key responsibilities (Lowes, 2009), so why should it not be the coaches’ decision to decide if teams should be mixed, as it is their knowledge and experience within the sport that makes them the best predictors of harm.

### **3.2 An identification of the arguments that require further discussion**

Despite Tannsjo’s (2000) claim that there is no good reason for sexual discrimination to occur in sport, Coggon et al (2008) believe that arguments one (when related to weight classes additional purposes), three and five potentially provide good policy reasons for continuing sex segregation. Tannsjo’s proposal for mixed competition in sport is dangerous according to Schneider (2000, p.136) because it “masquerades as a genuine proposal for changing sport as it is currently practiced”. For mixed competition to prevail, changes in society must first occur. Until these changes are made mixed competition it seems will only disadvantage women further in sport.

Having outlined the key arguments for sex segregation in chapter one, this chapter has offered a critical review of each. I have shown that there are only two potentially convincing arguments for sex segregation (i) to create a level playing field and (ii) to rebalance the “biases in favour of male dominance” (Coggon et al 2008, p.9). Further discussion is required to determine whether or not these arguments are good policy reasons for continuing sex segregation in sport. Chapter three will discuss the legitimacy of these arguments in an application process as their persuasiveness depends on how well they can be applied to a number of specific sporting examples.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE APPLICATION OF POTENTIALLY CONVINCING ARGUMENTS FOR SEX  
SEGREGATION TO SPORTING EXAMPLES**

Having critically evaluated each of the arguments for sex segregation in sport, chapter two found that most arguments were flawed in their application to sport as it is currently practised. There are however two potentially good policy reasons for continuing sex segregation in sport (i) sex categories are necessary to create a level playing field and (ii) sex categories help to rebalance the “biases in favour of male dominance” (Coggon et al 2008, p.9). There is a need to further explore the potentially convincing nature of these two arguments by applying them to a variety of sporting situations. In doing so, the remainder of this chapter will determine in which sports, if any, sex segregation should occur. In light of these findings I will also make some suggestions for future practices. Like Loland (2002) I will be working along a continuum in my discussion of sex categories in sport. At one end of the continuum I will identify sports in which it is appropriate to allow for integration, while at the other end I will identify sports in which it is not appropriate to do so. Along the continuum, I will also identify sports in which it is appropriate to allow for some integration, as long as certain conditions are met.

#### **4.1 The practical application of the fairness rationale to sport**

First I will determine under what conditions and in which sports, the fairness argument might justify sex segregation. According to Loland (2002) there are several norms that must be met to achieve fairness in sport. The most important norm is that “relevantly equal cases ought to be treated equally” (Loland, 200, p.46). Sex categories exist to achieve fairness in sport because “men and women are considered unequal when it comes to predispositions of performance” (Loland, 2002, p.57). Men enjoy a significant performance advantage over women in most sports (Tucker and Collins, 2005) because men are physiological predisposed to “possess more or less of certain qualities that are decisive to winning” (Tannsjo, 2000, p.103). For example in all athletic track events, the women’s world record is beaten each year by the 400th and sometimes even 1000th male performance (Tucker and Collins, 2005). In long jump the women’s world record is half a meter shorter than the top 500 men’s performances (IAAF, 2012). Similarly in pole vault the women’s world record remains over half a meter shorter than that of the top 200 men’s performances (IAAF, 2012). Also in throwing events world record analysis shows that despite men using heavier weights in most cases, the majority of men continue to throw further than the very best woman. For example in shot put women throw a

weight of 4kg's of which the world record is 22.63m (IAAF, 2012). Men throw a weight of 7.26kg's yet still the men's world record is nearly half a meter further than that of women's at a distance of 23.12m (IAAF, 2012).

In athletics, it is evident that sex influences performance. Significant empirical evidence proves that based on women's current performances in athletics women would systematically lose out to men in mixed athletic events. Sex segregation is therefore crucial in athletics and indeed in other sports, where physiological differences determine winners, to create a level playing field. I believe that sex segregation should remain in all sports where one sex would ultimately face a systemic disadvantage if mixed competition were to exist because in these sports sex categories would play an important role in achieving fairness in sport. This argument however is contingent, and in the event that society's attitudes towards women in sport change, sex categories are no longer necessary to create a level playing field because women would no longer face a systematic disadvantage in sport.

In sports where there are few physiological differences between men and women in ways relevant to performance, English (2001) and Loland (2002) state that integration of the sexes should occur. In sports such as archery, football, riflery, car racing, pistol shooting, golf and dressage, neither sex holds an advantage over the other because sex is not relevant to performance. These sports do not require the use of "basic bio motor abilities such as speed, endurance and strength" to win, nor do they require the use of flexibility or small body size, qualities which men and women are respectively biologically predisposed to possess more of (Loland, 2002, p.58). Instead winning in these sports is decisive on technique, tactics and mental skills, qualities which both sexes are equally capable of possessing (Loland, 2002).

As well as sex, age affects the basic bio motor abilities of an individual. Yet only sex categories exist to ensure a level playing field for groups of individuals who differ in basic bio motor abilities. Beyond the age of 35 our basic bio motor skills start to decrease (Loland, 2002). Hence it becomes important for athletes such as premiership footballer Ryan Giggs, 40, to possess extraordinary technical ability to compensate for his lack of basic bio motor abilities. According to this logic, why then should women who like those aged over 35, also naturally possess a lack of basic



bio motor abilities, not be permitted to play against men in sports where technique is decisive to winning. Women who possess exceptional technical abilities will be able to compete on a level playing field against men in sports that are not influenced by sex.

In sports where sex does not influence performance, men and women often produce a similar result. In sports where physiological differences do not determine a winner, women have often outperformed men. For example female golfer Michelle Wie proved that she was capable of playing in a men's tournament by winning the Virginia Group AAA boys gold championship in 2002 (Kriegshauser, 2011). Likewise, Alexis Thompson beat 76 professional male golfers to claim gold in the TPC eagle trace tournament (Kriegshauser, 2011). Furthermore, in shooting, 14 year old Chinese pistol shooter Zhan Shang, won the 1992 Olympics mixed sex skeet shooting competition (Tamburrini, 2000). Margret Murdock also drew joint first in the 1976 Olympic rifle shooting contest, drawing with her own male team captain (Kriegshauser, 2011). In car racing Danica Patrick won in 2008 the Japan Indy 300, becoming the first woman ever to win a major auto race. In 2009, Danica also came third in the Japan Indy 500, an equally worthy achievement considering she was only the fourth woman ever to compete in this race (Kovalchik, 2009). In sailing, Ellen MacArthur also holds the solo around-the-world world title after breaking the previously assumed untouchable world record held by a man, by more than a day (BBC, 2005).

As I have documented, women are highly capable of defeating men in sports where sex does not have a systematic influence on performance. Based on current performances in these sports, there is significant empirical evidence to suggest that one sex will not face a systematic disadvantage if men and women were to compete against each other. To achieve a level playing field in sport there must be equality amongst athletes. According to Aristotle, equality requires equal cases to be treated equally. Therefore to achieve a fair contest, athletes who are similar in ability, irrespective of sex, should be permitted to compete against each other. In sports where winning is not determined by physiological differences between the sexes, the ban on sex integration should therefore be lifted because a level playing field would exist even in mixed competition. Neither sex would be unfairly disadvantaged in mixed competition because both sexes are equally likely to defeat each other.

Ultimately Loland (2002, p.58) believes that “classification according to sex, contradicts the norm for equal opportunity in sport” which is to treat those similar in ability similarly. Thus sex categories do not achieve fairness and so the fairness rationale for banning mixed competition fails in sports where men and women are equally capable of defeating each other, i.e. in sports where sex does not influence performance.

The argument that sex segregation is necessary to create a level playing field in sport is only deemed convincing when applied to sports where sex is a significant indicator of performance. However even in these sports where sex segregation is permissible, I argue that sex segregation ought to still be abandoned in youth sport. Sex categories are justified in sports where physiological differences between men and women would result in either sex facing a significant and systematic disadvantage. However, unlike men and women, boys and girls do not possess vast differences in basic bio motor qualities that are decisive to winning in these sports. In fact before puberty boys and girls hardly differ in height, weight, girth, muscle mass (Schenck, 1999) and aerobic capacity (Borms, 1986). On average girls start puberty at 11 years, while boys start on average at 12 years (NHS, 2012). Due to the earlier age that girls start puberty it is possible that some girls may be slightly bigger and stronger than their male peers. However these differences in basic bio motor qualities between boys and girls are not significant and so do not influence performance in sport. Ultimately before puberty there are no significant physiological differences between boys and girls that are decisive to winning. Therefore neither sex would face a systematic lose if boys and girls were to compete against each other. For that reason sex segregation should be abandoned in sports where sex is relevant to performance for youths, because unlike in elite sport, sex categories are not necessary for a fair competition.

So far I have shown that although the fairness rationale for sex segregation in sport may appear convincing at first, there are a number of cases in which it appears doubtful. Sex categories in their ability to achieve a level playing field are only convincing when applied to sports in which physiological differences between the sexes would systematically disadvantage one sex. I have also proven that sex categories are not convincing when applied to sports in which sex is not a significant indicator of performance. This is because men and women are predisposed to

possess equal measures of qualities that are decisive to winning in these sports. Certain regulations that limit the age that mixed competition should occur in sports that are not influenced by sex, such as those in football, are therefore problematic. Not only is it the nature of the sport that determines whether or not the sexes should be integrated, but it is also the nature of the participants. I argue that sex categories are not permissible in youth sport since few physiological differences exist between boys and girls that would make competition unfair for either sex. Ultimately sex categories ought to therefore be abandoned in youth sport.

#### **4.2 The practical application of the male bias rationale to sport**

I will now determine in which sports the rebalancing of male biases argument can be offered to successfully defend sex segregation. To begin I must make clear that there is significant weight to this argument. In today's society the "most popular sports are developed around distinctly male abilities" (Sherwin and Schwartz, 2005, p.201). The sports that men dominate are the most funded, powerful and watched (Schneider, 2000). They are also the majority of the elite sports at the Olympic Games. Allowing men and women to compete together in these sports would therefore systematically disadvantage women, ultimately excluding them from elite competition altogether.

Although this argument is legitimate; it is important to note that this is a contingent argument, fully dependant on the type of society that we live in (Coggon et al, 2008). There is obviously a significant issue here but there are also some possible solutions. Today the reason why women would not be able to defeat men at an elite level is not because they are physiologically inferior to men, but because in most sports "social prejudice and sports systems create biases massively in favour of male dominance" (Coggon et al, 2008, p.9). In chapter two I made light of the fact that social discrimination currently limits the opportunities given to girls to pursue athletic excellence in school and so on. If girls are not given the same chances and encouragement to participate and improve in sport as boys, how can female athletes be expected to achieve the same performance standard as male athletes?

Today women face social discrimination in sport because society is sexist towards them. Male traits such as "strength, speed, muscle volume and height, are more valued than female traits such as balance, rhythm and resistance" (Sherwin and

Schwartz, 2005, p.201). The undervaluation of female talents reflects the sexist attitudes of society that are responsible for women's inferiority in sport. If society were to change, this argument would no longer stand. A male bias would not exist if there were "as many sports we really cared about where women tend to excel as there were sports where men tend to excel" (Schneider, 2000, p.137). If male and female traits were valued equally, and girls did not face the level of social discrimination that they face now, women would not be systematically disadvantaged in elite mixed competitions and so desegregation of the sexes could occur. According to Sherwin and Schwartz (2005, p.201) "to change society in this way would require eliminating sexism in general". Although change may be time consuming and difficult, it is preferable to excluding women from elite sport altogether.

Having taken into account the world in which we live, I do not propose that mixed sports ought to be enforced in sport entirely. Instead I propose that section 44 of the sex discrimination act and any regulation that limits the age of mixed competition be removed. This would allow those women who perform above that of the average female who are capable of defeating most men to do so. As a result, each of these women would help break down socially constructed gender biases, contributing significantly to changing today's society into the utopian fantasy in which mixed competition could advantage women. Also by providing women with the opportunity to compete against men, young girls will be provided with role models who will inspire and motivate them to perform just as well, if not better than them. This would encourage the next generation of female athletes to defeat men, which would continue to break down socially constructed gender biases in years to come.

#### **4.3 Women's football: The application of the fairness and male bias rationale**

So far in this chapter I have identified the sports that in theory, the fairness and male bias rationale for sex segregation can successfully be applied to. However the real success of these arguments lies in their practical application to case by case examples in sport. Therefore the last section of this chapter is going to look briefly at these arguments in relation to a specific case, that of women's football.

Section 44 of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 is a clause which allows women to legally be barred from playing against men in sports where "the strength, stamina or

physique of competitors is relevant” because it is considered unfair and unsafe for them to do so (Burke, 2010, p.12). There are conditions of the act that must be met for section 44 to successfully defend sexual discrimination in sport. One condition is that it cannot be used to prevent children under the age of 12 from participating in mixed sex sports, “effectively safeguarding mixed-sex sport up to that age” (Duthie, 2005, p.10). This condition reflects the fact that before puberty there are no significant physiological differences between the sexes that would influence performance hence there is no good reason for young children to be prevented from mixed competition.

In 1978, Bennett, a school girl aged 12, was banned from playing in a boy’s local league football team because the wording of section 44 meant that the courts were required to consider the “average relevant physiological capabilities between men and women”, instead of those between 12 year old boys and girls (Burke, 2010, p.13). Despite Bennett’s defence arguing that “since she was pre-pubertal she was not disadvantaged physically” judgement was based on the belief that “women have not got the strength and stamina to run, kick, tackle and so forth” (Burke, 2010, p.13). The ruling given in the Bennett case unfortunately became case law and was used for another 10 years to prevent young girls from mixed football participation (Burke, 2010).

However since then changes have been made by the Football Association (FA) to regulations regarding the age limit of mixed competition that suggest attitudes towards the use of sex categories in football are changing. The FA has risen the age that youths can participate in mixed football from under 11 to under 13 and most recently to under 14 years old. This change in legislation suggests that it is not until the age of 14 that significant physiological differences between boys and girls exist that would significantly influence performance. Consequently this change has meant that fewer youths are denied the opportunity to play in mixed football competitions.

The FA should be commended on increasing the age limit that it places on mixed participation; however there is still a long way to go regarding changing legislation to allow more youths the opportunity to play in mixed sport. In football I believe that everyone should be allowed to participate in mixed competition because football is a sport which is not influenced by sex. Physical endurance, speed and strength can

only get you so far as it is the ability to “control the ball and to move in relation to other teammates and opponents that generate the most advantages” (Loland, 2002, p.58). According to the fairness argument therefore, sex segregation is not necessary in football to create a level playing field.

The Football Association’s regulation states that only “a child in the age ranges Under 7, to Under 14 may play in a match involving boys and girls” (FA, 2012, p.120). This is problematic because it reflects the necessity of sex categories to achieve a fair competition in a sport where sex does not influence performance. By only allowing boys and girls who are under 14 years to compete in mixed competition, footballs national governing body are suggesting that it is unfair for anyone else to do so. A suggestion which I have proven is not true because physiological differences between men and women do not determine a winner in football. Ultimately those above the age of 14 in football are illegitimately prevented from playing in mixed competition due to the untrue assumption that it would be unfair for them to do so.

Within this chapter, I have argued that sex segregation is only permissible in sports where physiological differences between the sexes determine the winner, and even in this instance it is still unacceptable to prevent youths from participating in these sports. According to the fairness rationale, I have proven that sex categories ought to be abandoned at youth level. Current legislation and regulations that limit children’s participation in mixed youth sport is therefore problematic because there is no good reason to prevent them from doing so. With that in mind and according to the rebalancing of male biases argument, I propose that the ban on mixed sport should be lifted. Without enforcing mixed competition, the removal of section 44 of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, would allow women to challenge societies sexist views and to slowly but surely rebalance society’s gender bias.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are only two potentially convincing policy reasons for sex segregation in sport: (i) to achieve a level playing field; (ii) to rebalance the male bias. In this dissertation I have argued that sex categories are only legitimate and necessary when applied to, what Coggon et al (2008, p.14) call, “sex affected sports”. In sports where physiological differences between the sexes influence performance, sex segregation is necessary to achieve a level playing field and to prevent either sex from facing a significant and systematic disadvantage. Despite the initial success of the fairness rationale however, it fails to defend sex segregation at youth level in sex affected sports. There are few physiological differences between boys and girls, therefore in youth sport, sex categories are not necessary to achieve a level playing field. For this reason I have argued that sex categories ought to be abandoned in youth sport, irrespective of whether the sport is sex affected.

According to the male bias rationale, women would be disadvantaged further in sport if sex categories did not exist. In today’s society sexist stereotypes and social discrimination limit the opportunities that women receive to participate in and excel in sport. Therefore if men and women were to compete together, women would face inevitable defeat, not because of biological differences but because of society’s male bias. In today’s society this rationale legitimately prevents the enforcement of mixed competition in sport. However this argument is contingent, dependant on the kind of society that we live in. If society’s attitudes towards women in sport changed, this argument would no longer successfully defend sex segregation in sport.

I argue that to change society in this way, the ban on mixed competition in sport ought to be lifted. Section 44 of the sexual discrimination act, 1975, allows sporting organisations to legally prevent girls from participating in sports where strength, size and stamina are decisive to winning. Sporting regulations in football, rugby and hockey for example also limit the age that mixed competition can occur. To lift the ban on mixed competition, legislations and regulations that prevent female participation and involvement in sport ought to be abandoned. This would allow those women with the ability to defeat men, the opportunity to do so, thus challenging society’s sexist stereotypes and the belief that women are second class athletes.



In short, I propose that sex categories should to be considered on a case by case basis as the nature of the sport and also the nature of the participants affect the legitimacy and necessity of sex segregation. Ultimately, I believe that integration of the sexes ought to occur, not through the enforcement of mixed competition but through the removal of legislations and regulations that ban it. Removing the ban would create the “utopian fantasy” that Shneider (2000) claims is the only instance in which mixed competition would not disadvantage women further in sport.

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