

THE ANACHRONISTIC SPORT-GENDER IMBALANCE: THE GLASS ESCALATOR OR, BEYOND THE GLASS CEILING

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ABSTRACT

We've come a long way since the 1952 Helsinki Games, where women represented only 10 percent of the Olympic athletes. At the 2008 Olympics in Beijing women represented approximately 43 percent of the total athlete delegation, up from 41 percent in the Athens 2004 Olympics. However, the “*glass escalator*” (Kamberidou 2009; Williams 1992, 1995) is not yet gender inclusive since women are exceedingly under-represented in all sport governing bodies (SGBs), primarily in the executive bodies of national and international sport organizations and institutions, such as the IOC. Researchers argue that men ride up the “glass escalator” when they enter predominantly female professions, as opposed to women who confront the glass ceiling and the “sticky floor” (Kimmel 2004) when they enter predominantly male professions. Taking their gender privilege with them, men experience positive discrimination (the glass escalator) when they enter female dominated social spheres, in other words they are socialized, encouraged, supported and promoted up the ladder even faster than their female counterparts. The first part of this study examines to what extent gender personification, the structurally secured and enforced gender segregation system continues-extends beyond the competitive sport expression, defeating the advocated values of social equity. In exploring the interrelation of social theories, anachronistic *biologistic* approaches and gender-based ideologies that established gender stereotypes and gender segregation in competitive sports, this paper renegotiates sport identity and corporeality in ways that reflect the processes of change in the construction of new sport identities: e.g. gender fluidity, men's participation in women's sports, respect for diversity, normalizing bodies and identities, *bionic athletes*, ‘naturalness’ versus artificiality, emerging technologies used to enhance performance in competitive sports. (Miah 2005, et al.)

Current discussions on the gender subject, no longer focus exclusively on the biological gender (sex), as an analytical category, but on the *social gender* (Kimmel 2004, McNay 2000) which formulates, defines and redefines identity, according to evolving socio-cultural interpretations. In the new theoretical framework, gender identity and corporeality are being rediscovered and are under reconstruction, namely viewed as linguistic conceptions, socio-cultural manifestations, transformable meanings and evolving elements of change. Such an example is men's participation in rhythmic gymnastics (Tsopani et al. 2006, Kamberidou, Tsopani, Dallas, Patsantaras 2009), despite gender stereotypes that depict the sport as unacceptable for the image of masculinity, including the male body aesthetic. In light of the growing participation of men in the competitive sport of rhythmic gymnastics—on national and international levels— in Japan, Australia, Canada, the US, Russia, Greece and Italy,

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the second part of this study presents the gender views of the internal environment and the external environment of women's rhythmic gymnastics. Two hundred and ninety-nine (299) participants from around the world—rhythmic gymnasts, judges, trainers/coaches, members of the technical committee of rhythmic gymnastics (MTCRG), as well as parents, journalists and an international audience—responded to a closed questionnaire during the 20th World Championship of RG in Budapest. According to the results, an overwhelming majority of the respondents—mostly women—support the official recognition of men's rhythmic gymnastics. Specifically, 94,3 percent (internal environment) and 82,6 percent (external environment) are in favour of the official participation of men. Additionally, the majority of the respondents (60,5 percent) are in favour of the participation of men in mixed group and in mixed pair competitions! Such a possibility could have a catalytic effect on the gender segregated sport system. The exclusion of men from rhythmic gymnastics, on the competitive level—as that of women in the past—is inconsistent with prevailing social values on gender equality and gender equity. Genetic personification in sports or exclusions based on genetic characteristics are a contradiction to the value system of sports (Olympic Charter, rule 2, paragraph 5, July 7, 2007). In view of changing interpretations concerning sport identity, the socially constructed and historically specific nature of gender and corporeality need to be renegotiated.

Keywords: gender segregation, genetic personification, the glass escalator, the sticky floor, tokenism, sport identity, corporeality, gender neutral, gender inclusive

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