

**WOMEN'S SPORT IN CANADA:  
HAVE WE ACHIEVED GENDER EQUITY?**

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**SPEAKING NOTES ONLY  
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this presentation is to examine whether or not gender equity has been achieved in Canadian women's sport. The answer is both "yes" and "no". **First**, I examine areas where gender equity has been achieved especially over the last 10 to 15 years. **Second**, I discuss some of the strategies found to be successful in achieving gender equity, such as the shift from a focus on "equality" to a focus on "equity", the inclusion gender equity goals in government policy statements and funding guidelines, the sophisticated use of information technology, and finally legal challenges to inequality. **Third**, there are many areas of gender inequity still remaining in Canadian sport, and I point to several examples in physical activity and sport participation, sport leadership, and media coverage. It is important to understand why some strategies work and others do not in bringing about gender equity. **Fourth**, I examine the relationship between the women's or feminist movement in Canada and the achievement of gender equity in sport especially as women's movements today are more plural, diverse, and globally connected. **Fifth**, it is also important to understand the role of feminist academics and researchers in projects to bring about change in sport, and I suggest several ways to do this. Our work is often ignored or misinterpreted, and I want to discuss why I think this is the case. **Finally**, I make a few, very brief comments about the future of women's sport in Canada and by extension throughout the world.

## **Presentation Themes**

- What have we been doing to bring about gender equity in sport (especially last 10-15 years)?
- Strategies employed – what has worked?
- Areas of gender inequity still remaining
- Relationship of women's (feminist) movement to achieving gender equity in Canadian sport
- Role of feminist academics and researchers in the change process
- Future of women's sport in Canada (and the world)?

### **What have we been doing to bring about gender equity in sport?**

The following are just a few examples to illustrate why it would appear that we have been able to improve significantly the situation for girls and women in Canadian sport especially over the last 10 to 15 years.

- Our women athletes achieve remarkable success on the international stage
  - 2006 Winter Olympics: 14/19 Canadian medals won by women
  - 2006 Paralympic Winter Olympics: 6.5/13 Canadian medals won by women
  - Canadian female athletes constitute as much as 50% (and sometimes more) of the membership of many national teams
  - They have equal access to training and competitive environments as well as health, medical and sport science services
- *2010 Legacies Now* women in sport inclusion strategy (unique to the Olympics)
  - Implementation of the strategy during the organizing phase (2003-2010) will coordinate and build upon existing efforts to increase participation in sport and physical activity by girls and women of all ages and backgrounds (especially in British Columbia)
  - Focus areas are leadership, access, participation, awareness, and research
- Growth of a network of women's sport advocacy organizations in Canada
  - Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS): national organization, formed in 1981
  - Provincial organizations are expanding such as proMOTION Plus (British Columbia), InMotion Network (Alberta), Égale Action (Quebec)
  - These organizations sponsor a variety of programs aimed at getting more girls and women participating in sport and physical activity
- Evidence of increased participation by girls and women in team sports like soccer and ice hockey (see statistics)
- Specific campaigns to increase the number of women coaches at all levels (e.g., Coaching Association of Canada)
- Information gathered by sport organizations to assess gender equity issues and practices (e.g., Canadian Interuniversity Sport)
- Sport organizations are increasingly willing to address controversial issues (e.g., homophobia, sexual harassment and abuse)

### **Strategies employed – what has worked?**

What strategies have been used to bring about these changes? Which have been most successful?

- 1990s: shift from “equality” to “equity” discourse
  - Equality = equality of opportunity
    - Women (and other disadvantaged groups) identified as a target group
    - Focus is on women themselves
  - Equity = focus on a system (e.g., sport)
  - System needs to change to accommodate women
  - Equality focuses on creating the same starting line for everyone
  - Equity has the goal of providing everyone with the same finish line
  - Women’s sport advocacy organizations (e.g., CAAWS) endorsed this shift
  - CAAWS (and other groups) work with other sport organizations to become gender equitable
- Incorporation of gender equity into Sport Canada policy statements
  - The most current *Canadian Sport Policy* was endorsed by the federal, provincial and territorial governments in April, 2002
  - The goals of the *Canadian Sport Policy* (2002-2012) are:
    - enhanced EXCELLENCE: That by 2012, the pool of Canadian athletic talent is enlarged and the performance and ranking of Canadian athletes, obtained through fair means at the highest levels of national and international competitions, is reaching world standards
    - enhanced PARTICIPATION: That by 2012, sport participation reflects the diversity of the Canadian population and a significantly higher proportion of Canadians be involved in quality sport activity at all levels and in all forms of participation
    - enhanced CAPACITY: That by 2012, the essential components of an ethically based participation and athlete-centred development system be in place and be continually developed and strengthened as required
    - enhanced INTERACTION: That by 2012, the components of the sport system are more connected and coordinated as a result of the committed collaboration and communication amongst the stakeholders
  - With regard to enhanced PARTICIPATION, the *Canadian Sport Policy* calls for barriers to participation in sport to be identified and eliminated, making sport more

accessible to all. The barriers to participation can be social, linguistic, cultural, and economic. Certain groups such as girls and women, people with a disability, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities continue to be under-represented in the Canadian sport system as athletes/participants and as leaders. In addition, and despite past efforts, language-based barriers still exist in the sport system for francophones, especially at the national team level.

- Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (Sport Canada):
  - In order to receive funding from Sport Canada, National Sport Organizations (NSOs) must have a formal policy or policies demonstrating commitment to equity and access, notably for women, persons with a disability and Aboriginal peoples as athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and leaders. Note that a formal policy on women and sport is not required for NSOs which exceed 40% female participation or representation in all areas (athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and leaders)
  - Is this funding policy effective?
    - very difficult to find out (no data available)
    - many large NSOs do not rely on Sport Canada funding
    - NSO websites do not mention gender equity policies
    - NSO “strategic plans” do not mention gender equity
    - Having a policy and taking action are not the same thing
- Sophisticated use of information technology
  - websites continually updated
  - information archived and easily accessible
  - electronic newsletters and journals
- Legal challenges to inequality
  - cases brought to federal and provincial human rights commissions
  - many have been successful
  - mechanism used less now than in the 1970s and 1980s

### **Areas of gender inequity still remaining**

Despite our successes, there are still a number of areas where gender inequity is present. The following statistics and examples illustrate these problems.

- *Physical Activity Participation*

- According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute 2002 Physical Activity Monitor:

- 59% of adult females are not active enough to benefit health (compared to 53% of males)
    - 68% of women (aged 65 and over) are not active enough (compared to 53% of men)

- *Sport Participation*

- Rates are dropping for Canadian women over 15 years of age;

- 1992: 38.0%
    - 1998: 26.0%
    - 2004: 23.4% (39% for males)

- Participation for both genders decreases with age

- *Physical Activity and Sport among Children and Youth*

- Over half of Canadian teenagers are sedentary, accumulating the equivalent of less than one hour walking a day

- Only 21% are accumulating enough daily activity to meet the international guidelines for optimal growth and development

- Teenagers, aged 15 to 19 are more likely to be sedentary than those aged 12 to 14 (51%)

- 63% of girls 15-19 years of age are inactive compared to 44% of boys
    - 55% of girls 12-14 years of age are inactive compared to 43% of boys

- Obesity rates among Canadian children and youth are increasing and are among the highest in the world

- *Diversity Issues*

- Aboriginal girls and women are often severely disadvantaged and marginalized

- Visible minority females (14%) greatly under-represented in sport and physical activity

- Women with disabilities participate much less than able-bodied women

- *Women in Sport Leadership*

- According to a 2005 study:

- 1.17 million volunteers in organized sport (about 1 in 20 Canadians)
    - Volunteers: 64% men; 36% women
    - Coaches: 73% male; 27% female
    - Executives: 61% male; 39% female

- Olympic Coaching Statistics
  - Sydney 2000
    - 4 out of 30 head coaches were women (13%)
    - 16 out of 86 total coaches were women (18%)
  - Salt Lake City 2002
    - 3 of 14 head coaches were women (21%)
    - 14 of 57 total coaches were women (24%)
  - Athens 2004
    - 2 of 27 head coaches were women (7%)
    - 8 of 82 total coaches were women (10%)
  - Turin 2006
    - 10 of 68 total coaches were women (14.7%)
- National Coaching Certification Program gender comparison statistics (2005) – see slide

- *Media coverage*

- Traditional sports media (e.g., print journalism, television) VERY male
- Professional men's sports predominate
- Coverage of women during major sporting events (e.g. Olympics) is excellent
- New media (e.g., Internet) allows for more coverage, representation, and discussion
- Representations of female athletes still problematic
- Few women in the sports media

### **Relationship of women's (feminist) movement to achieving gender equity in Canadian sport**

- Late 1960s: beginning of organized (second-wave) feminist movement in Canada
- 1970s:
  - legal challenges to sex discrimination in sport
  - increasing government involvement in sport
  - barriers to inequality slowly being recognized
  - 1974: first national conference on women and sport
- 1980s:
  - second national conference in 1980

- Women's Program in Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch established in 1980
- CAAWS was founded in 1981: "to advance the position of women by defining, promoting, and supporting a feminist perspective on sport and to improve the status of women in sport"
- Sport Canada formulated and adopted a *Policy on Women and Sport* in 1986
- 1990s:
  - CAAWS becomes less a women's (feminist) organization (promoting its aims through sport) and more of a sports organization for women (seeking to improve the situation of women in sport)
  - shift in the discourse from "equality" to "equity"
  - focus of CAAWS: bring gender equity into Canadian amateur sport system; building national partnerships
  - CAAWS removed all references to "feminism" from its mission statements and goals
- Where are we at today?
  - new generation of feminism representing younger women (third-wave)
  - second-wave feminism left many women behind (white, middle-class women do not represent all women)
  - race, ethnicity, sexuality, class or country of origin are equally, if not more important, to how women experience their lives (identity politics)
  - gender is only one relationship of power
  - little of this third-wave analysis has been considered by sport "feminists" (still focused on gender equity)
  - the traditional liberal feminist definition of gender is outdated: the universal categorization of "women" as one discrete group in opposition to "men" based primarily on biological differences
  - differences based on race, ability, sexuality, class, and other factors, are equally as important and powerful
  - university PE students rarely consider a feminist analysis (few, if any, courses available)
  - few individuals working/volunteering today in sport organizations in Canada are exposed to any sort of feminist analysis
  - women's sport organizations and advocacy groups do not reflect diversity of Canadian population



- In sum, now very little connection between feminism and gender equity in sport movement

### **Role of feminist academics and researchers in the change process**

Although I could discuss this topic at length, I will make only three important points here:

- Analyze and critique “new” strategies to promoting gender equality
  - Promote feminist participatory research and action
  - Work to bridge the widening gap between academics and practitioners
- Analyze and critique “new” strategies to promoting gender equality
    - For example, *gender mainstreaming*:
      - systematic integration of gender equality into all systems, structures, and organizations
      - came into widespread use with the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995
      - now espoused and promoted by the UN, the World Bank, many bilateral aid agencies, government departments, and human rights organizations
      - accepted by the 5th European Women and Sport Conference (2002)
    - Does gender mainstreaming work?
      - Results have been mixed
      - Keeps gender equality on the agenda
      - Not simply a point to get to, but a process
      - Women’s specific needs no longer the main focus of attention
      - “Gender” as a category of analysis that focuses on the relationship of power between men and women gets lost
      - Marginalized women (e.g., immigrants) feel unrepresented or misrepresented by policies that prioritize a male/female analysis
      - Ensuring *all* women’s empowerment is more effective
    - Despite this critique, do not discount the importance of *gender-based research* and *gender-based analysis*:
      - analyze policy impacts on women early in the policy decision-making process
      - develop analytic tools, training approaches and data for undertaking gender-based analysis

- requires partnerships with all actors in the sport environment (e.g., governments, sport organizations, women's sport advocacy organizations)
  - an EXAMPLE of gender-based research and analysis in Canadian women's sport is the work of the provincial organization, proMOTION Plus in British Columbia, which conducts gender equity audits and consultations (see [www.promotionplus.org](http://www.promotionplus.org)) upon request
- Promote feminist participatory action research
    - feminist participatory action research is where community partners and researchers collaboratively identify research questions, collect data and develop actions
    - EXAMPLE: The Kamloops Women's Action Project
      - funded by the BC Health Research Foundation
      - designed to address health issues of women living below the poverty line by encouraging increased involvement in community recreation
      - project expanded to three other communities in BC
      - Source: *Taking Action: Mobilizing Communities to Provide Recreation for Women on Low Incomes*, British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (2001), ([www.bccewh.bc.ca/Pages/pubspdflist4.htm](http://www.bccewh.bc.ca/Pages/pubspdflist4.htm))
- Work to bridge the widening gap between academics and practitioners
    - Critical academic work is being ignored by the new policy makers and "femocrats" of women's sport
    - Seem reluctant to engage with those who criticize the status quo
    - National and international women's sports movements have become overly governmental
    - Grassroots organizers (and critics) are increasingly ignored, sidelined, displaced by glossy new committees
    - Change needs to be initiated by both the grassroots organizers and critical scholars
    - International women's sports movement will only grow in effectiveness if it can "*find ways of reaching those women who are marginalized in their own countries, to transform the existing set of power relations and to 'reach out' and 'pull in' women from underprivileged backgrounds and involve them in a process of reconstruction*" (Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p.231)

### **Future of women's sport in Canada (the world)?**

Here I make just a few, brief comments about the future of women's sport in Canada, and by extension to various parts of the world today.

- Our future is very promising
- Declining sport and physical activity participation rates are very much a health issue
- Need to work very hard on leadership issues (especially lack of women coaches)
- We will continue to be a world leader in equity issues in sport and physical activity
- As a world leader, we can show leadership in various areas:
  - *For example:*
    - The inter-relationship between the women in sport movement and the women in development movement
    - Women in development movement has not focused much on sport
    - Women in sport (WIS) movement has only begun to focus more on development
    - WIS is rooted in the development of women's sport, and not primarily on women and development through sport
  - Some of our most popular women athletes are actively involved in development movements, leading the way for others
    - Photos are of Clara Hughes and Silken Laumann, who are both involved with the Right to Play movement

## **Useful Resources available on the Internet**

- *Women's sport advocacy organizations in Canada*
  - Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS): <http://www.caaws.ca/>
  - ProMOTION Plus (British Columbia):  
<http://www.promotionplus.org/content/home.asp>
  - InMotion Network (Alberta): <http://www.inmotionnetwork.org/index.html>
  - Égale Action (Québec): [http://www.egaleaction.com/index\\_quisommes.htm](http://www.egaleaction.com/index_quisommes.htm)
  
- *Women in Coaching program (Coaching Association of Canada)*  
<http://www.coach.ca/eng/women/index.cfm>
  
- *Resources available through Sport Canada*
  - Canadian Sport Policy (2002): [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/pol/pcs-csp/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/pol/pcs-csp/index_e.cfm)
  - Sport Funding and Accountability Framework (2005-2010):  
[http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/prog/cfrs-sfaf/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/prog/cfrs-sfaf/index_e.cfm)
  - Sport Canada Contribution Guidelines (2005-2007):  
[http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/contributions/2005-2006/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/contributions/2005-2006/index_e.cfm)
  - Policy on Women and Sport (1986):  
[http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/pol/femmes-women/index\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/sc/pol/femmes-women/index_e.cfm)
  
- *Canadian sport and physical activity participation statistics*
  - Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute: <http://www.cflri.ca/>
  - Active Healthy Kids Canada: <http://www.activehealthykids.ca/index.cfm>

### **M. Ann Hall**

Ann Hall was educated at Queen's University (BA, BPHE), the University of Alberta (MA), both in Canada, and at the University of Birmingham (PhD) in England. In 1968 she joined the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta, where she remained until her retirement in 1997 as Professor Emeritus. Her teaching and research interests focus primarily on gender relations in sport and leisure, organizations and gender equity, and the application of feminist epistemology and methodology to the social sciences, specifically the sociology of sport. She is also a former Chair of the Women's Studies Program in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. She has written extensively on the topic of women in sport, presented at dozens of conferences internationally, and lectured at several universities. Currently, she serves on the editorial board of several academic journals, and is co-editor of the "Sport and Culture" book series published by the University of Minnesota Press. Her most recent books include *The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada* (Broadview Press, 2002); *Honoring the Legacy: Fifty Years of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women* (with Gertrud Pfister, Smith College, 1999), and *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Human Kinetics, 1996). She is presently at work on a new project – the story of the Edmonton Grads (1915-1940) – Canada's most successful women's basketball team.