

# APPENDIX TWO

## BUT WHAT ABOUT....? CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS

**Y**ou may have mixed feelings about gender equity. Your questions and concerns are legitimate and deserve to be answered. Here are some that have surfaced in many discussions on the topic of gender equity.

**Q** *Won't a plan of action to achieve gender equity have a negative affect on existing programs?*

**A** We're all in favour of equal access to participation in sport and to positions of responsibility in sport organizations. That doesn't exist today. Introducing a plan of action that requires new policies, procedures and programs designed specifically for girls and women represents movement towards real equity. An equity plan introduces a positive guideline to help make systems and procedures more fair. Some "catching up" has to be supported to create the possibility of equal access.

**Q** *Funds are limited. How do I reduce funding for current programs in order to create opportunities for women?*

**A** Cost is the eternal argument used against change. If fairness and justice are held hostage to financial considerations, they are never achieved. Full equity programs do require financial resources. However, government funding is available to assist with these programs. Within the total context of sport organization budgets, financing equity programs can be accommodated. Besides, many gender equity initiatives can be undertaken with little expenditure of funds; eg., establishing a Gender Equity Committee or writing a policy on harassment. Keep in mind, too, that taxpayers' funds come from women as well as men and should be used to support programs which benefit both.

Cost concerns often mask a "zero sum argument" which assumes that more funds to women and women's programs means fewer funds to men and men's programs. This need not be true. Over time, increased women's participation means a stronger financial base for the organization as a whole.

You should also consider the cost of inequity. Sport organizations will increasingly be required to demonstrate gender equity practices to receive full government funding. Failure to encourage women in sport and increase the participation of girls and women in your sport may limit your revenue base and your popular support. Failure to promote women's sport events ignores a large, untapped market.

There is another "cost" to not being equitable. Discrimination is against the law, and defending legal actions will cost your organization time, money, and its good reputation.

**Q** *Do special measures and/or equity programs promote women who are not as qualified as men into positions within the sport system? If so, is that really what fairness in sport is all about? Don't we want the best person to be there?*

**A** Of course we want the best person to be working in the sport system. To date, many women have neither been encouraged nor allowed to make their valuable contributions. No one disputes that women do indeed have valuable contributions to make. To achieve a

fair system, special measures are sometimes needed to provide equal access for women and men to participate in sport and to hold positions of responsibility in sport organizations. Equal access doesn't exist today. Some catching up has to be supported to create equal access.

In Canada, both the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and human rights legislation recognize the need for catching up, and provide a legal basis for affirmative action programs.

**Q**  
**A**

*Don't women choose to participate less in sport as both athletes and leaders?*

If you examine the facts of inequity and ask women themselves for their explanations of the different levels of participation in sport, a different picture emerges. Does anyone really believe that women athletes and coaches prefer to have less recognition, less power, less money, and fewer choices than men athletes and coaches? The combination of discriminatory practices in sport and women's position in society as a whole means women are disadvantaged in the sport system. We need policies and programs that can change this situation.

**Q**  
**A**

*Isn't the issue of equity irrelevant to many sports, particularly those which are single sex sports?*

There are no reasons why women and men shouldn't have opportunities to play whatever sport they choose. The increasing interest of women in ice hockey and wrestling are clear examples of the progress possible when the door is open to both genders to organize and compete in any sport.

Certainly there is no reason for an organization to exclude persons of either gender from activities such as coaching, administration and officiating. The principles of equity are relevant to both men's and women's sport.

**Q**  
**A**

*Do men athletes deserve more benefits than women athletes because women's sports do not generate as much revenue at the gate through sponsorships and advertising?*

This is the old chicken and egg dilemma. If we don't break the cycle somewhere, the situation will never change. Until women receive financial recognition for their sport performances, their accomplishments will never be valued as highly as those of men. Discrimination in benefits begets discrimination in other areas. Of course, sport organizations can't force advertisers and private sponsors to change their practice, but they can ensure equal reward and recognition of both sexes within their sport. And they can explain the benefits of equitable treatment to sponsors, including the expansion of their consumer audience.

**Q**  
**A**

*Don't family commitments prevent women coaches from making coaching a priority?*

Remember, not all women coaches have young children. Even if they do, coaching can still be a priority for women. After all, men with families are able to make it a priority. Let's not assume that raising children should be primarily a women's responsibility.

Sport organizations can put programs in place which encourage and support women coaches so they'll be able to play an active role in their sport; eg., childcare, training organized to fit with family domestic responsibilities, changes in the requirements for coaching which don't require long leaves of absence. These and other policies and procedures will create a new realm of possibilities for women (and men). The sport system should be sensitive to the needs of individuals with families, not the other way around.

**Q**

*Is affirmative action reverse discrimination?*

**A**

When people talk about reverse discrimination, what they are saying is that the status quo is fine for now and change will come naturally and slowly over time. The fear is that to speed up the process will take opportunities away from those currently benefitting from the system. To target certain groups and offer them special measures is the proven way to eliminate imbalances supported by outdated traditions. Those currently receiving the benefits must learn to share the existing resources and programs. Since we are seeking a sport system in which all persons have opportunities to participate, it is women and other currently marginalized groups who need assistance.

**Q**

*Do you worry that women involved in sport are, or will become, lesbians?*

**A**

There is no relationship between sport participation and sexual orientation. Sport doesn't make people heterosexuals, bisexuals or homosexuals. So, too, one's sexual orientation doesn't have anything to do with whether or not one is good at a particular sport.

Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is prohibited in several provincial human rights codes, as well as in federal anti-discrimination legislation. The participation of lesbians, heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals in sport is welcomed by organizations committed to fairness and equality. Such an organization welcomes the active involvement of everyone in sport.