

EDITORIAL

Special Issue on Gender, Physical Education and Sport: Voices from the 20th IAPESGW World Congress

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In November 2025, members of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW) gathered in Cebu, Philippines, for the 20th IAPESGW World Congress. Held with the theme, “*Equity in Action: A Global Dialogue on the Advancement of Women and Girls in Physical Education and Sport Innovation*,” the Congress convened scholars and practitioners from around the world to share research and knowledge aimed at improving the experiences of girls and women through physical education (PE) and sports participation. Through webinars, publications, global events, and a range of collaborations with other global organisations such as UNESCO, the United Nations, Women Sport International and the International Working Group (IWG) on Women in Sport, IAPESGW continues to advance policies, practices, and actions that ensure women and girls have equitable access to PE, sport, and dance.

Delegates from the Congress were invited to submit full papers of their oral presentations for publication in this Special Issue on Gender in the *International Sports Studies* (ISS) journal. Those accepted involved research spanning gender studies, sport pedagogy, sport sociology, sport management, sport physiology and medicine, sport nutrition, and sport technology. Core thematic areas included: active cities; health through physical activity, PE, sport and dance; high performance sport; inclusion in PE and sport, leadership and good governance in sports; Paralympic sports and Parasport; physical activity throughout the lifespan; PE in schools; Sport-for-all; Sport for development and peace; technologies and innovation; and traditional sport, dance, and leisure activities.

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Gender Inequalities in Sport and Physical Education

As IAPESGW members and guest editors of this Special Issue, we acknowledge that women and girls have made significant strides in sports worldwide while also recognising that persistent gender inequalities and inequities manifest differently across regions. Geographic, political, cultural and social differences around the globe impact women’s access to and experience of sport and PE. Gender inequalities intersect with race (Maxwell et al., 2022; Stewart-Withers, 2024), sexuality (de Camargo & Altmann, 2021; McGuckian & McEvelly, 2025; Neary & McBride, 2024), social class (Hextrum et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2021), religion (Maxwell et al., 2013; Maxwell & Taylor, 2010), and disability (Culver et al.,

2022), amongst others. For instance, the first Latin American woman to compete in the Olympic Games was a white woman, the Brazilian swimmer Maria Lenk, in 1932, while European and American women began competing in 1900. It took a further decade for the first black Brazilian woman to compete in the Olympics: Melânia Luz in 1948. Melânia Luz competed in track and field, a more accessible and less elitist sport than swimming—a reflection not merely of individual choice, but of the structural hierarchies of race and class that have long shaped women's opportunities in sport.

Despite being recognised as a human right in various legal frameworks, access to sports is not always guaranteed. Gender remains a significant social marker that influences disparities in access. Studies conducted in different countries indicate a lower prevalence of active play among girls (Altmann et al., 2018; de Jesus et al., 2024; Arenas et al., 2025; Işıkgöz et al., 2025). Girls also participate less and are offered lower-quality opportunities in PE classes and university sports. They are more likely to opt out of participation, often remaining on the sidelines (Jacó & Altmann, 2017; Wenzel & Rivero, 2021). Furthermore, women remain underrepresented in sports leadership worldwide (Evans & Pfister, 2021). Reading the articles published in this special issue provides new insights into these issues.

Gender as an Analytical and Political Concept

Gender is an important social marker in the scientific field, and its impact on political action, pedagogical practices, and other areas is profound. The concept of gender was created within the framework of feminist assumptions. The dissemination of the idea of equality in the exercise of rights boosted feminist mobilisation in different fields. Faced with the fact that inequalities were neither fair nor natural, feminists began to build tools to understand how they were produced and how they could be overcome. In this process, the concept of

gender became an important analytical tool, making it possible to question the naturalisation of sex. From the second half of the 20th century, the category of gender became central to political action and feminist theory (Mayorga et al., 2013; Scott, 2008). Today, we can affirm its unquestionable importance in scientific production.

The increasing priority given to feminist thought in the second half of the twentieth century is reflected in the creation of IAPESGW in 1949, 77 years ago. This milestone in feminist thinking is evident in the association's name: International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women. It began as an avant-garde association that preceded the formulation of the concept of gender and sought to promote greater participation by women in the field. The association's name, when referring to girls and women, also indicates that generational issues are at work in this field. Thus, the first formulations of gender, influenced by the feminist movement and shaping social theory, date back to the 1970s. However, it was from the 1980s onwards that the concept of gender spread, offering a new perspective on reality and placing the distinctions between characteristics considered feminine and masculine at the heart of social hierarchies (Meyerowitz, 2008; Piscitelli, 2009).

Moving beyond biological determinism to understand gender relationships has been crucial, especially in fields such as sport and PE, which are part of the health sector and often adopt a biological view of the body and its subjects. To give another example before moving on, it was with this justification that, for a long time, and in some places even today, girls and boys were separated at school for PE classes. The concept of gender was important in questioning this dichotomous way of thinking about bodies and classes. Subsequently, studies linked to the field of sexuality have helped to problematize the binary nature of this classification.

Therefore, reflections on the concept of gender contributed to the creation of a horizon of social transformation in which difference could no longer be understood as a casual act of nature, but rather as an action of differentiation in which the distinction is socially constructed, imposing a hierarchy of sex and sexuality.

Overview of the Special Issue

Given all of the above, several key questions motivate this Special Issue: Why are gender considerations critical in sports, PE, and research? Why is gender still important to reach equity in sport and PE? Why should the *International Sports Studies* journal publish a dedicated issue on this theme?

We expect that the importance of gender in sport and PE, as embodied in this special issue, will inspire our readers to reflect on contemporary challenges in this field and encourage new research and practices. The research articles in this special issue present original contributions on a variety of gender-related topics, focusing on the participation of girls and women in sports and PE settings. These studies examine sports and activities, such as basketball, volleyball, dance, and martial arts. Participants include elementary and secondary school students, college students, athletes, and coaches. In particular, the concept of gender is explored at the intersection with disability and sexual diversity.

A scoping review by Selina Khoo and colleagues examines community-led physical activity programs for women and girls. Their study builds on an impactful keynote presentation at the 2025 IAPESGW World Congress. Their findings align with those of this special issue, indicating that context-sensitive models based on local needs, readiness, and capacity are more effective than one-size-fits-all approaches.

Enrico Manalad and colleagues examine the low participation rates of female college students in PE and analyse the challenges and barriers to greater inclusion.

They highlight the importance of applying feminist pedagogical principles to enhance autonomy, confidence, and sustained participation among female students. Participation in PE is also shaped by concerns related to body image, which may discourage women from engaging in sports and physical activity. After examining how self-concept, environmental influences, and social relationships interact to shape confidence, involvement, and attitudes toward PE, Antonette Roxainne Roque and her team emphasise the urgent need to create inclusive environments that value body diversity. From a similar perspective, Michael Santos highlights the importance of innovative and inclusive practices in PE. He presents a Gender-Just PE Framework encompassing inclusive curricula, faculty development, institutional policy, and student agency. His findings reveal both persistent inequities and actionable pathways for reform in higher education.

Basketball is identified as a space for feminist pedagogy, where gender hierarchies can be challenged, agency can be developed, and inclusive participation can be fostered. Participants in Jumel Miller's study reported a transition from self-doubt to greater physical confidence. The article concludes with recommendations for university administrators, curriculum developers, and educators. Volleyball is another sport examined from a gender perspective. Allan Antalan discusses how gendered dynamic shape female students' experiences in coeducational college volleyball. The findings suggest that educators should adopt practices that ensure meaningful and equitable participation, including targeted social-emotional support for students who are shy, less skilled, or less motivated.

The diversification of physical activities offered to girls and women has been identified as a key factor in increasing women's participation. From this perspective, Jennifer De Jesus examines the health effects of *Indayugan* classes, a structured exercise program inspired by Philippine folk and ethnic dances. The study shows

that culturally grounded interventions can improve health-related fitness while fostering cultural engagement among female college students. Pathways toward gender equity are further explored in research conducted in four junior high schools. David Pascual argues that structural and curricular changes—integrating feminist pedagogy, inclusive design, and participatory governance—are essential to achieving gender equity in PE.

The inclusion of Arnis in school curricula, following its recognition as a national martial art in the Philippines, has opened new opportunities for female instructors in a traditionally male-dominated field. Melane Fernandez finds that women coaches demonstrate strong competence and engagement in promoting Arnis, though their effectiveness is constrained by systemic challenges in resources, training, and institutional support. Norielyn Ramos and team address challenges in teaching girls with disabilities. As suggested by their article title, “*I Had to Learn on My Own: Intersections of Gender and Disability in Teaching Adapted Physical Education in Philippine Special Education,*” female educators in special education face three major challenges: limited specialised training, insufficient facilities and resources, and the complexity of addressing diverse student needs, often compounded by gender dynamics.

Haynes Angelo Narciso examines the experiences of cisgender women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Their findings show that PE is not only a site of physical activity but also a space where identity is negotiated, managed, and sometimes constrained. Participants recommend gender-inclusive curricula, safer and more flexible physical spaces, supportive school cultures, and participatory teaching practices to foster inclusion. In the final article of this special issue, Pierosario Giuliano and colleagues analyse gender differences in a fatigue monitoring protocol used to assess athletes’ post-competition readiness. Their findings indicate that subjective readiness is perceived differently across genders.

Conclusion

This past March, as the world celebrated International Women’s Day, IAPESGW and ISS jointly published this Special Issue on Gender, PE, and Sport. On this occasion, as we simultaneously celebrate achievements and reaffirm the principles of feminism, this publication contributes to ongoing scientific and social initiatives to overcome persistent gender inequalities in these fields. We hope you find the articles in this Special Issue an enjoyable and insightful read.

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