

Non-Traditional Sports: Social Barriers

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Non-Traditional Sports: Social Barriers

Gender barriers have always existed in the field of sports. I will be focusing specifically on women in the field of bodybuilding and men who enter synchronized swimming in order to illustrate the social and cultural costs and benefits of these individuals entering their given [sports](#).

Breaking Barriers:

The gym is the world of gods and heroes, goddesses larger than life, a place of incantations where our bodies inflate and we shuffle off our out-of-gym bodies like discarded skins and walk about transformed. . . . Here, in this space, we begin to grow, to change. The transformation has begun, and our flawed humanity is falling off fast. We are picking up our shoulders, elevating our chins, shaking ugliness from our shoulders with a series of strokes, the glistening dumbbells, listening to our blood's rush. Our pasty misshapen bodies are developing clean lines. Our day's tribute of trials and heartaches is fading, for here, in this gym space, we become kings and queens. Larger, invincible, gods in ourselves. (Introduction, *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Body Building*)

Women in [bodybuilding](#) is a recent phenomenon. It is an example of the cultural transformation and revolution that has been in the process for many years now. Leslie Heywood, the author of the quote above, is an assistant professor of English at the State University of New York, Binghamton. As stated by a critic of her recent book, *Bodymakers*, "Heywood looks at the sport and image of female body building as a metaphor for how women fare in our current political and cultural climate. Drawing on contemporary feminist and cultural theory as well as her own involvement in the sport, she argues that the movement in women's bodybuilding from small, delicate bodies to large powerful ones and back again is directly connected to progress and backlash within the abortion debate, the ongoing struggle for race and gender equality, and the struggle to define "feminism" in the context of the nineties. She discusses [female bodybuilding](#) as activism, as an often effective response to abuse, race and masculinity in body building, and the contradictory ways that photographers treat female bodybuilders." It is evident from this brief yet descriptive narration of her book that Heywood believes both cultural costs and benefits of women in the sport of bodybuilding exist, as well as in any other field in which women push the restraints of social acceptance.

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