

Transgender Awareness in Sports: A Choose Your Own Equitable Adventure



It's not fair! Kate, who really is Joe, is a *boy* and shouldn't even be here! Our *real* daughters don't stand a chance!

[Graphic image description: Masculine-presenting coach of Color.]

[Graphic image description: Feminine-presenting white parent/caregiver.]

Coach Response 1:

I agree with you; it's not fair, but it's not my choice. Blame the Secretary of Education and his policy.

Coach Response 2:

I know. I agree with you. I'm all for supporting people's rights, but just make a transgender-only competition.

Coach Response 3:

There is no one way for a woman's body to be. Plus, transgender athletes' bodies vary in athletic ability just as cisgender athletes' bodies do. Including transgender athletes promotes values of non-discrimination and inclusion among all student athletes and I am glad to be a part of that.

Coach Response 1:

I agree with you; it's not fair, but it's not my choice. Blame the Secretary of Education and his policy.

Intent

- To protect women's rights.
- To ensure fair play.

Impact

- Excluding transwomen hurts all women. The real threat to women's sports is racism, pay inequities, sexual abuse, and lack of athletic opportunities (Strangio, & Arkles, 2020).
- It invites gender policing that could subject any woman to invasive tests or accusations of being "too masculine" or "too good" at their sport to be a "real" woman (Gender Justice, 2021b; Goldberg, 2021; Strangio & Arkles, 2020).
- Reinforces negative stereotypes of women such as being weak and in need of protection.

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Coach

- In what ways do coaches uphold dominant narratives through sports?
- In what ways do gendered team names like "Lady Rockets" for women sports' teams, and "Rockets" for the men's sports' teams, contribute to gender inequities in sports, and specifically transgender women?
- How would dropping the gendered mascot terms advance equity for women's sports?

Coach Response 2:
I know. I agree with you. I'm all for supporting people's rights, but just make a transgender-only competition.

2

Intent

- To appear supportive for the LGBTQI+ community.
- To ensure fair play.

Impact

- **Exclusionary practices have detrimental effects on one's emotional wellbeing when pushed out of affirming spaces and communities** (Gender Justice, 2021a; Goldberg, 2021; Strangio & Arkles, 2020).
- **Opportunities to succeed are removed for the transgender community** (Gender Justice, 2021b; Goldberg, 2021; Strangio & Arkles, 2020)
- **Condone, reinforces, and affirms transgender students' social status as outsiders or misfits who deserve the hostility they experience from peers** (Gender Justice, 2021a).

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Coach

- How can coaches build a more inclusive athletic culture in schools?
- How are athletic organizations currently incorporating transgender athletes in their programs?

Coach Response 3:
There is no one way for a woman's body to be. Plus, transgender athletes' bodies vary in athletic ability just as cisgender athletes' bodies do. Including transgender athletes promotes values of non-discrimination and inclusion among all student athletes and I am glad to be a part of that.

3

- **Prioritize equity and inclusion:** Research shows that states that have adopted policies which prioritize equity and inclusion in sports have increased participation, especially for girls' sports (Gender Justice, 2021b).
- **Be flexible and understanding:** When designing and implementing youth sports programs, review current policies in place.
- **Use inclusive language:** Avoid gendered language; avoid win/loss thinking, and collective group labels like "guys" and "ladies;" and avoid labels like trans and insulting descriptors like "posing," "confused," and "real."

Intent

- To provide a safe space for all student athletes to compete.
- To acknowledge student athletes' personal connections/histories.
- To promote and model educational equity.

Action Steps toward becoming an Anti-Oppressive Coach

- **Send clear messages** to the athletic community about the shared values across identities of sport, such as mental and physical benefits regardless of identity.
- **Emphasize** that discrimination is wrong, including opportunities to participate in sports. Push back against gender stereotypes, hypermasculinity, and hyperfemininity.
- **Hold inclusive expectations** which avoid reinforcing values like masculinity, that fitness is important for men to be leaders in society, and to protect women (Watson et al., 2005). These values and expectations are sometimes referred to as *Muscular Christianity* (Hughes, 1861).

Impact

- To promote anti-oppressive coaching.
- Transgender athletes feel valued and safe.
- Transgender athletes are more engaged in school through sports; more equitable outcome for ALL athletes.

Meet the Authors

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Recommended Citation: Rusnak, K. N., Jackson, R. G., Thorius, K. A. K., & Skelton, S. M. (2022). Transgender awareness in sports: A choose your own equitable adventure. *Equity Express*. Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP EAC).

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