

## **“A Cheer for Humanity”**

**by 123456 Paper #W2**

Our participation in sports is not only a personal choice; it is shaped by the social structure of gender. This paper describes the arc of a sports life in terms of social changes in attention to gender. The character in this portrait came from a time of inequality of the sexes to a hooray for humanity.

When I was in school, girls could be cheerleaders - or nothing. A sport for girls was not an option. So I was a cheerleader. I was the only one not on the Homecoming Court - but that's another story. I cheered for three years. That meant I was cheering on the men so they could win and then we all would win. What an honor it was and what fun, too. The audience loved the connection, and all was well. We cheered the football players and the basketball players. I wished that we could cheer baseball too, but we were dormant in the spring.

Then I went to college. At my college, the cheerleading team was all-boy—like at Yale where George Bush cheered. So I couldn't be one—and women's sports were hard to find; they existed, but they were not featured or “popular.” My athletic development and team experience came to an end. In the theater, we exercised the body in movement classes and rehearsals, but it was to produce an aesthetic or spiritual awareness of the self rather than teamwork. Then, like so many Americans, I became sedentary, isolated, and this did not change during the long years of toil in the corporation. The corporation grew, and so did my derriere, but not my sense of making it all “click.”

To the U.S. in 1972 came Title IX with its attention to sports programs for women. Women began to benefit from the gift of athleticism and sports. Athleticism is about personal power of fitness and sports is about the social power of teamwork. Michele Obama got her start that way. So did Sarah Palin. But the programs were too late for me, and I went into that sports dormancy for decades. That meant an absence of team playing and little attention to physical well-being.

Thus I was affected by the gender structure of sports that lived outside me as social fact.

After decades of inattention to team playing and less than optimal attention to personal health, I decided to change all that. Why? Suddenly, I had a summer off. I found myself having to work only one day a week for the first time in decades. That opportunity made me ask: what's your excuse for not joining the "YMCA?" I had none. I decided to take a spinning class. Not only was the class fantastic for what it was, it provided an opportunity to observe genders of teachers and students to keep my mind on something besides sweat and burning muscles. Spinning is lower body strength training, and the classes are populated mostly by women. Men tend to avoid or drop out of spinning—and it may be because when they join they see so many adept women that they run back to the weight room to work on upper body strength, where they are sure to win and be better.

I started spinning with a woman teacher, and her message was always, "Good, good." "Excellent!" "Very good. Keep it up." "Good." "You're doing it." "Very good." "Give yourself a hand." How could anybody not like that? I loved it. The second woman teacher would say, "Ok, let's do it, yes, ok, yes, we can do it, oh, that hurts, oh my gosh, ok, and here we go." She was right there with you and egged you on. Then there was the teacherman; he was completely different—and all the men who taught were like this: "Faster. Heavier. Faster. More. Harder. Faster. C'mon. No slacking off in the back row there. Turn it up." It is all said with a smile, sure, but he beckons us from afar, as with a measuring rod. We were there – we could be there. C'mon. The woman's way, on the other hand, is to be with you from

where you are, side-by-side, pushing together and supporting. Not only was I getting a work-out, I was seeing the difference between a push (the woman) and a pull from where I was not (the man). This is just how they teach it in the gender books.

In spinning, we are not competing, so there are no teams. This is a fluid set of classes with a teacherman one day, a teacherwoman the next. We see our differences, but we are all there. The sense of teamwork blends into silent support for whoever is there, sweating our ways towards balance.

The Human Homecoming is the realization that we are all on the same team, in the same ensemble. Moving towards health, we get personal growth, a quiet appreciation of how the genders work, and a recognition that we are all in this together. I was a girl, and I became a person. Now I cheer myself, and I cheer us each and all.