

WLRN Edition 5: Women in Sports & the Olympics

Transcribed by Julia Beck and Jenna Di Quarto

:theme music - Real Voice by Thistle Pettersen:

:sauntering acoustic guitar:

*"...But through the hallways of academia
And on the face of the moon...
The footprints of conquest
Haven't left us any room.
To say what we think, or...
To speak what we know...
To hear different voices
At least a sound from below..."*

Oh-oh oh oh oh oh...

:vocalizing fades out:

Sarah BARR-FRAAS: Greetings and welcome to the 5th Edition of Women's Liberation Radio News. WLRN produces a monthly radio broadcast to break the sound barrier women are blocked by under the status quo rule of men. This blocking of women's discourse and ideas we see in all sectors of society, be they conservative, liberal, mainstream, progressive or radical. The thread that runs through all of American politics is male dominance and entitlement in all spheres. My name is Sarah Barr Fraas. I'm a student in my early twenties on the west coast of the U.S. Before learning about real and radical feminisms, I used to strongly believe men should have access to women's institutions on the grounds of gender identity. You can check out the conversation I had with Thistle under the "Interviews" tab on the WLRN website to find out how I changed my mind. I'm so excited to be helping out here at WLRN.

Nile PIERCE: My name is Nile Pierce, and today's program focuses on women in sports. We'll hear an interview with psychologist and Professor Susan Basow, coauthor of the paper "Femininity, Sports, and Feminism: Developing a Theory of Physical Liberation" published in the Journal of Sport and Social Issues. The interview for this edition was conducted by Sekhmet SheOwl. Our feature story is by Elizabeth McKeown and is about new gender standards in the Olympics.

Here are today's WLRN headlines for September 1, 2016:

The 2016 summer Olympics in Rio witnessed several women's victories with Team USA at the top of the leaderboard. Team USA won Women's Relay gold. They also took gold when they defeated Spain in the Women's Basketball tournament. The US Women's Gymnastics team took gold with prodigy gymnast Simone Biles hailed as, "the best athlete in America today" who won a well-deserved gold medal for her extraordinary performance in all feats. Simone Manuel and Katie Ledecky both won gold in swimming. Michelle Carter walked away with a gold medal in Women's Shot Put. Gwen Jorgensen took gold for the USA in the Women's Triathlon.

And for the first time in over 116 years, a woman made history in Olympic Golf. Park Inbee from the Republic of Korea took gold for her skill on the green. She remarked later that, "I have won many tournaments, but I have never felt this before." Australian women won gold when they defeated New Zealand in Rugby. Great Britain's Nicola Adams won gold in Women's Flyboxing. Greece's Ekaterini Stefanidi won Women's Pole Vault gold. Estelle Mossely took Women's Lightweight gold for France. Kenya's Vivian Cheruiyot took gold in the Women's 5000 Meter Final. And Germany won their first ever gold in Olympic Women's Football, making them one of only three teams to have won the World Cup and the Olympics.

Despite all these victories and still others, women's achievements continue to be written out of the narrative by many mainstream journalists. If and when women and their achievements are included and reported on, their humanity is frequently reduced to highlight the achievements of the men around them in their field of expertise. Our society's default male norm is patriarchally engrained in the very fabric of our lives. For instance, as the Guardian recently noted, swimmer Simone Manuel discovered this default male norm when her gold medal victory was reduced in headlines to, "Michael Phelps shares historic night with African American." The implication is that white men are individuals, human beings in their own right with personalities and quirks and rich, rounded lives while other people are still defined as members of homogenous other-ed groups.

There has been an international outcry among women's rights activists and others in response to the decision of the Turkish government's constitutional court to annul the criminal code provision to prosecute anyone involved in sexual acts against children under the age of 15. As a result of the decision, the rape of children under the age of 18 will no longer be considered sexual abuse, and the likelihood of child rapists going

unpunished is extremely high. News of the decision was quickly reported in Austria and was reacted to with a pointedly negative tweet by Sweden's female foreign minister, Margot Wallström. Male representatives of the Turkish government responded with vitriol by alleging that the story reported was "false" and deliberately "misrepresenting the Turkish state." The decision of the constitutional court remains in place despite Turkey's public backlash and accusatory tone with foreign diplomats. And despite their attempts to paint themselves a victim of a negative European Union PR campaign, the decision was also reported by Turkey's own Hurriyet Newspaper with quotes from several women's rights and human rights organizations within the country voicing concern over the actions of their state. The law is set to come into effect on January 13, 2017 unless it is challenged within a six month timeframe beforehand. Turkey remains one of the countries that legalized the rape of female children under the guise of marriage, and at present there are over 3.5 million female victims of legalized child rape being tortured within the country. The problem is set to worsen if these decisions are not overturned.

Following the decision by the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Education to legally redefine the category of sex in Title IX to gender identity, the radical feminist activist group WoLF has filed an historic lawsuit against the Department of Justice and the Department of Education challenging their decision on the grounds that it renders Title IX meaningless, as females can no longer be recognized as distinct from males.

The reinterpretation of sex to include gender identity also means that girls' bathrooms and locker rooms must be opened up to any male who identifies as female. Girls' rights to personal privacy and freedom from male sexual harassment, forced exposure to male nudity and voyeurism have been eliminated with the stroke of a pen. Schools that do not comply with the demands of any male student to access to protected female spaces will now lose federal funding. This decision clearly violates the rights of women and girls as well as constitutional amendments 5 and 14.

The suit titled "Women's Liberation Front versus the United States" points out the fact that Congress enacted Title IX in order to reverse decades of pervasive and invidious discrimination of the rights of women at every level of the U.S. educational system. WoLF is seeking financial support to fight this time-intensive and important legal battle and has set up a GoFundMe page asking for donations. Kara Dansky, spokesperson for WoLF, recently spoke with WLRN and had this to say about the lawsuit:

Kara DANSKY: The guidance does mention trans people, but what it effectively does is say, "Anybody can access any facility on the basis of self-declared gender identity."

What I think the trans activist people aren't acknowledging is that the guidance allows any man to say, "I'm a woman today," and go into a woman's space on that basis. It really does. It just says anyone can access any facility on the basis of gender identity, self-declared.

PIERCE: The U.S. federal government has issued a preliminary injunction blocking President Obama's transgender bathroom mandate in response to a lawsuit brought by 13 states. Maya Dillard-Smith, former Chief Executive Georgia's ACLU and founder of FindingMiddleGround.org, penned a poignant op-ed championing the federal government's injunction, calling it a win for American democracy. Dillard-Smith was forced to step down from her position as head of the Georgia ACLU after being labeled "a transphobe" for asking questions about the implications of the new gender identity legislation for the rights of women and girls.

Dillard-Smith noted that the court granted the injunction because the Obama administration and the Department of Education circumvented legally required public debate rules commonly referred to as Notice and Comment Laws in violation of the Federal Administrative Procedures Act. Passing a bill like this in the absence of public input, particularly from those who would be most affected, such as women, girls, and sexual abuse survivors, constitutes what Dillard calls "a steamroll strategy" used on the part of powerful lobbyists. The federal court granting the injunction cited the bill as "contradictory to existing statutes and regulatory texts" regarding sex discrimination based on biological sex and not gender identity. While the silencing of women and girls in policy realms is nothing new, it certainly is nonetheless disappointing with potentially dangerous consequences for women and children.

WoLF Fest, a radical feminist festival for women organized by Women's Liberation Front, will be taking place from September 16-19, 2016 near Crescent City, California. The festival will include 3 days of workshops, discussions of feminist theory, strategy, self-defense classes, and revolution in the majestic redwoods. WLRN will be there to capture the mood by gathering commentary, ambient sounds, and conduction interviews on the ground.

The highly anticipated book *Female Erasure*, an anthology edited by Ruth Barrett, is set to be released in September, and it will likely be a game-changer in the debate around trans politics and the historical erasure of women in society through patriarchal social regimes. The About the Book section of the website reads, "This anthology bears witness and exposes the current trend of gender identity politics as a continuation of female erasure and silencing as old as patriarchy itself. Forty-eight voices celebrate female embodiment while exploring deeper issues of misogyny, violence, and sexism

disguised today as progressive politics. These perspectives come at a time when gender identity politics and profits from an emerging medical transgenderism industry for children, teens, and adults inhibit our ability to have meaningful discussions about sex, gender, changing laws that have provided sex-based protections for women and girls, and the reframing of language referring to females as a distinct biological class. Through researched articles, essays, firsthand experience, storytelling and verse, these voices ignite the national conversation about the politics of gender identity as a backlash to feminist goals of liberation from gender stereotypes, oppression, and sexual violence.” If you’re interested in hearing more about the book from Ruth Barrett herself, check out WLRN’s interview with her in our 4th Edition podcast online. Stay tuned to WLRN here and on Facebook as we’ll be posting links to *Female Erasure* as soon as it’s released. You can also go to the book’s website as well at your leisure. The address is femaleerasure.com. And now for our featured news story on the Olympics and policies and practices surrounding gender.

Elizabeth MCKEOWN: Even putting aside the ethics of performance enhancing drugs in sports competition for which testosterone is used both in athletics and in gender correction, the devastation to young people and female bodies in particular is severe and often deadly. Damages to the liver, the heart, irreversible hair and voice and bodily changes, cancer, birth defects, stillbirth, miscarriage are some of the outcomes. Behavioral effects include aggression, increase in competitive drive, and lack of empathy. Psychologically, it can manifest issues such as eating disorders, self-harm, and attempts at sex reassignment surgery in order to societally adjust to the body’s new state. Now imagine these steroids being given to young teens who have not finished developing. Whether this is to have the edge on the competition or to validate someone’s fitting into a gender box, how can we justify inflicting this on a person?

Now men can compete against women in Olympic competitions if they say they are women. But wait a minute. Biological sex comes with a number of markers. A male with lower testosterone, higher estrogen alone is no less a male. A transwoman on estrogen doesn’t perform like a woman but like a man who is taking a less aggressive steroid. A woman with higher than average testosterone alone is no less a woman, but it is our combination of traits that point to our sex. It is said that estrogen adds but does not subtract. A male using estrogen could experience softer skin, breast growth, and stronger emotions, but this alone may not reduce testosterone, and it certainly doesn’t negate some of the other advantages associated with maleness: speed, muscle mass, bone density, skeletal structure and shape, decreased body fat levels and distribution, etcetera. Hormones alone may not make one male or female. It is the combination of all these details together which provide the answer which, not surprisingly, can typically be determined easily for most of us based on genitals at birth.

What are the Olympic gender standards? It can vary, but for instance, the qualifying speeds for entry into certain events is stricter for men. Theoretically, a slower male who couldn't place within his sex can in fact compete against the women if he calls himself one. You'll notice the advantage does not work in the reverse. The International Olympic Committee released a document last November stating that the only criteria a male-to-female trans person needs to meet in order to compete against women is a period of 4 straight years being declared female and testosterone levels at no higher than 10 nanomoles per liter. This would put a male at the low end of the average for males which is 9. A biological woman's average nanomole per liter of testosterone is 1. Meeting the testosterone requirements may be easy enough. The declaration of womanhood whether genuine or not can be too.

Most Olympians train for at least four full years in preparation for the next games giving it their all. The women of East Germany were masculinized irreversibly for Olympic glory back in the 70's and 80's with steroids. Why wouldn't a man be willing to feminize? Dedication and willingness to do anything for the gold is common in inspiring Olympic athletes, and yet the testosterone amounts to qualify as a woman remain high, because the International Association of Athletics Federations says there is not sufficient evidence to substantiate that higher testosterone levels lead to increased performance, despite everything. Despite the past, despite East Germany, despite steroid abuse being popular among athletes in general, and despite the Olympics' own no-doping policy where they literally drug test people in an attempt to determine if artificial steroids were used.

:Song interlude - Under His Glove by Ali Bee:

*"He wants to be a woman, behaves just like a man
And he wants to beat a woman any time he can
He gets paid to beat up women
Feels to him like love to think about the blood
And the feel of breaking bone under his glove, under his glove*

*He's short for a man, and maybe he's afraid of pain
He can't win against men, so he'll fight women for his gain
You can't change your bones
You can't change your DNA
Beating women for a living just makes you an MRA*

*You must watch your language
You must police your friends
And if you fail, the attacks and threats may never ever end
Knowing truth and speaking it must be silenced at all cost
The truth is told, if women speak men's power would be lost*

*He wants to be a woman, behaves just like a man
And he wants to beat a woman any time he can
He gets paid to beat up women
Feels to him like love to think about the blood
And the feel of breaking bone under his glove, under his glove*

*This man who thinks he's female, this father of a girl
Who beat a woman senseless and boasts about it to the world
Is followers adore him, they're his ever loving fans
And the blood of beaten women is on his and on their hands*

*He claims he doesn't understand why women don't accept him
He believes that we are bigots when women intercept him
And know that he's a male and block him from our spaces
He'd like to beat us, every one, and punch us in our faces*

*He wants to be a woman, behaves just like a man
And he wants to beat a woman any time he can
He gets paid to beat up women
Feels to him like love to think about the blood
And the feel of breaking bone under his glove, under his glove*

*So Fallon mate, we know your name another word for penis
A woman you will never be and you've never really seen us
False breasts do not a woman make, not cutting off your dick
You are still a nasty violent male. You'll always be a prick.*

*Those hands that beat you, they're not women's hands
There's naught more male than thinking you've the right to women's land
And here is something I don't think you understand
It takes more to be a woman than telling us you're not a man.*

*He wants to be a woman, behaves just like a man
And he wants to beat a woman any time he can*

*He gets paid to beat up women
Feels to him like love to think about the blood
And the feel of breaking bone under his glove, under his glove"*

Thistle PETERSEN: That was Ali Bee of alibeemusic.com with her new song, "Under His Glove." WLRN's Sekhmet SheOwl recently interviewed Susan Basow, professor of psychology and women's studies at Lafayette College about women in sports and the recent Olympics. Here's an excerpt from that phone call. The extended interview will be posted under our WLRN Interviews tab.

Sekhmet SHEOWL: The paper, *Femininity Sports and Feminism*, one thing I definitely want to ask is, do you think that anything has changed culturally regarding women embracing and believing in their own physical strength since you wrote the paper?

Susan BASOW: I am sort of an optimistic person, although it certainly has been tempered by reality, but I do think things are somewhat better, but not as much better as one might hope given, you know, the time difference from when it was written. I think what we saw with the recent Olympics shows both that the advances and the work still to be done. The women athletes were amazing, and they demonstrated incredible power, strength, and clearly the result of hard work. But often the reporting of it highlighted femininity qualities, and of course they're still dressing the part -

SHEOWL: Right.

BASOW: ...there's the sequins and the makeup. Obviously not everyone, one group is the gymnasts. There's still a mixture of messages for women. ...And it's still quite interesting, the racial and intersectional analysis of who the women are who are in some ways really demonstrating the most power - and they tend to be women of color - for reasons I think that were highlighted in the article; That they never were seen as able to meet the feminine ideal that was based on upper and middle-class white women's bodies. The history of women in the Olympics - just their *being* in the Olympics - has been a steady and persistent sign of progress. I mean they were not able to run the marathon because somehow it was seen as beyond their capability... Having women compete period took a lot of persistent effort and hard work on the part of women athletes. So I see tremendous progress in the number of competitions that have women in them, that are comparable to the one's that showcase men . Women even have them for the same rules, that women and men were judging, has moved towards a more consistent standard, so that women's gymnastics, for example,

the same with ice skating, was often judged with more weight given to gracefulness and to artistry as opposed to power moves like the jumps and all of the incredible moves that we see now. And the rating has changed over time so that women were recognized for their strength, not just for being graceful; Because sometimes they weren't so graceful! They were doing incredible bodily feats, and the hand movements may not have been as a ballet dancer. So there is still a component of the scoring of things, like gymnastics, that would take into account, I forget what it's called now, but it's not anywhere near as big a factor as it used to be. So yes I do think there's been a change; But the society we're born into is a patriarchal one and so that's the set of beliefs we have... :laughs: ...that justify it basically, and justify maintaining it so it's very hard to make progress. Certainly not as quickly as many of us would like.

SHEOWL: So what would you like feminists to understand about the world of sports and how it relates to women's liberation?

BASOW: It is important to embrace the whole person and recognize the way in which our views of our physical bodies and maybe our physical limitations actually can keep us moving towards what we might otherwise view as the ideal society. I don't think everybody has to be an athlete but everybody has a body. Bodies are sort of an annoyance or they're just objects or things we decorate or use... We need to develop a more holistic sense of self and of our basic potential.

MCKEOWN: And that concludes of 5th edition of Women's Liberation Radio News for September 1st, 2016. We're always interested in comments and questions from our listeners. Email us at wlrnewscontact@gmail.com. Thanks for listening. I'm Elizabeth McKeown, your co-host.

Chante HOLSEY: This is Chante Holsey, singing off for now. Stand tuned next month for our program focused on the Black Lives Matter movement and black feminism hosted By Catina Hyman and myself. That program will be release on October 6th.

BARR-FRAAS: And I'm Sarah Barr-Fraas. Join us next month for edition 6!

:theme music - Michigan (Gender Hurts) by Thistle Pettersen:

driving acoustic guitar

"...But how will we find out way out of this?"

*What is the antidote for the patriarchal kiss?
How will we find what needs to be shown?
And then after that, where is home? (home...)
Tell me, where is my home? (home...)
...'Cuz gender hurts... :song fades out:*