ANTIANDROGNISTS MAINTAIN, according to B. C. Postow, that distinct gender roles in sport must be maintained either due to natural differences between males and females or to preserve socially cultivated gender roles. Against antiandrogynism, Joyce Trebilcot has argued for a distinction between monoandrogynism ($M$), where males and females should develop masculine and feminine traits and compete in both traditionally masculine and feminine activities) and polyandrogynism ($P$), where individuals of both sexes are encouraged to develop along masculine or feminine lines exclusively, or according to the guidelines of $M$). Trebilcot’s distinction, Postow argues, is unavailing in that it sweeps away the larger social issue of genuine differences in genders, while it focuses on the issue from the perspective of individual excellence.

Postow then distinguishes four different senses in which sports may be labeled “masculine”: (1) masculine (sports characterized by physical aggression, power, and effectiveness); (2) masculine (sports in which the attitude of aggressiveness, competition, stamina, and discipline combine in a focus on winning and setting records); (3) masculine (sports that serve and have served as a vehicle for masculine identification); and (4) masculine (sports in which certain masculine biological advantages, like strength and speed, are factors). The question she addresses in the remainder of her paper is this: Do any of these senses of masculine offer women a moral reason for refraining from sports or, at least, for participating in them in a manner different from men?

Of the four types of masculinity in sports, only the latter is problematic, where participating with males in sports where males have an obvious statistical advantage, women perpetuate the image of female inferiority. One way to rectify this is by selectively competing in sports in which females have a statistical advantage or, at least, have no disadvantage.

A problem emerges. Fairness and freedom of opportunity seem to dictate that women who can compete with men in masculine sports ought to be able to do so. But, if allowed, then men ought to be able to compete freely
with women in such sports. This may be fine for a few women who can compete with males, but what of the many others who cannot? Thus, the scarce available resources, such as facilities and coaching, would go preferentially to men, and this seems unfair.

Questions to keep in mind while reading: Do you agree with Postow’s argument that Trebilcot’s androgynous solution to antiandrogyny is flawed? Postow’s own solution to inequality of gender in sport seems radical. It suggests that women who want to play masculine sports but who cannot compete with men in them ought to seek other sports in which they are competitive or superior. Is this solution fair? Will it eliminate the notion of female inferiority or perpetuate it? Is the having of athletic role models so critical for female (or even male) self-respect? Might it not be the case that much of American male gender uncertainty and instability is on account of having aggressive and violent role models like many male sports figures?

Supporters of the antiandrogynist, or “vive la difference,” ideal of gender identification may understandably find encouragement and reassurance in the contemplation of sports. Sports have traditionally been regarded as an unequivocally masculine endeavor—a training ground for manly skills and attitudes. Nature itself seems to support the antiandrogynist position, for in sports anatomical differences between men and women are undeniably relevant, giving men a very considerable statistical superiority over women. I shall investigate the various senses in which sports may plausibly be called masculine, and I shall argue that the fact that sports do qualify as masculine in these senses yields no support to the antiandrogynist ideal. The antiandrogynist position holds that people ought to maintain a distinction between the masculine and the feminine either to conform to some good natural order or to foster and preserve distinct gender identities for reasons of mental health or social welfare. My investigation will reveal no natural order which is prima facie worthy of efforts for its preservation. I shall also argue against the view that the desirability of preserving distinct gender identities justifies maintaining any sort of distinction between men’s and women’s sports, (e.g., by subtly discouraging women’s participation, or even by maintaining sex

segregation in teams). I shall also argue, on the other hand, that the natural male advantage in most sports must be acknowledged and dealt with in a way not provided for within well-known androgynist ideals of individual excellence.

Joyce Trebilcot (9: pp. 71–72) distinguishes between two androgynist ideals: monoandrogynism, or $M$ for short, and polyandrogynism, or $P$ for short. According to $M$, each individual should develop both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine personality traits and should engage in both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine activities. According to $P$, it is desirable for any individual who is inclined to do so to conform to the ideal approved by $M$, but it is equally desirable for an individual who is inclined to do so to develop only “masculine” or only “feminine” personality traits and to engage only in “masculine” or only in “feminine” activities. With respect to women and sports, $M$ would naturally lead us to believe that it is desirable for women to participate in “masculine” sports; $P$ would naturally lead us to believe that it is equally desirable for women to participate in “masculine” sports as not to participate in them. Both $M$ and $P$ seem to lead us astray here because they are limited to ideals of individual excellence and do not deal with the larger social reality. I shall argue that unlike most activities, some sports are masculine\textsuperscript{1} in a sense that I shall call masculine, which does give women a moral reason not to support or participate in them.

First, I will define the senses in which sports may be called masculine and then inquire whether the fact that a sport is masculine in any of these senses provides a reason for women not to engage in it or to engage in it differently or separately from men. At least four different features or clusters of features of a sport might reasonably be referred to in calling a sport masculine. One such cluster of features was isolated by Eleanor Metheny, who analyzed those sports (e.g., wrestling, weightlifting, long-distance running, and most team sports) from which Olympic rules have excluded women. She lists these features as follows:

An attempt to physically subdue the opponent by bodily contact
Direct application of bodily force to some heavy object
Attempt to project the body into or through space over long distances
Cooperative face-to-face opposition in situations in which some body contact may occur. (7: p. 49)

Perhaps these features are believed to be especially appropriate physical expressions of aggression, power, and effectiveness, which are seen as especially masculine. Whatever the explanation, however, it does seem that a
native speaker would be likely to call sports which possess these features masculine or even supermasculine, although sports may also be characterized as masculine on other grounds. Metheny has shown that some features which identify a sport as masculine are characterizable solely in terms of the behavior required of participants by the rules of the game. To determine whether a sport has these features, one should refer to the rules of the game rather than to the characteristic attitudes of participants or to the societal function served by the sport. Any sport requiring the behavior depicted by Metheny’s list or some similar list, then, will be called masculine.

A second cluster of features which may prompt people to call a sport masculine concerns the attitude with which the sport is characteristically played and which is thought to be necessary for playing the sport well. This attitude includes “aggressiveness, competitive spirit, stamina, and discipline” all focused on winning or setting records. Devotion to a team is also a contributing factor. These elements of attitude constitute a “mode which is understood to conform to an image of masculinity no less strong in contemporary America than in ancient Greece” (6: pp. 184; 187). Sports which are characteristically played in this mode and which it is commonly thought must be played this way to be played well, will be called masculine sports. All sports may be masculine to a greater or lesser degree, but sports such as football, in which approved aggressiveness includes a readiness to injure an opponent, seem to qualify as masculine to an especially high degree.

Another feature which may be thought to qualify a sport as masculine is its use as a vehicle of masculine gender identification. A sport will be termed masculine if participation in it in our society functions to engender or reinforce a feeling of identity and solidarity with men as distinct from women. Baseball and football are two sports which have traditionally served this function in our society, largely by being designated as activities especially appropriate for boys and men and inappropriate or questionably appropriate for girls and women. Swimming and volleyball would not qualify as masculine sports.

Of course, masculine sports and masculine sports are somewhat related in that masculine sports are by definition well suited to socialize males in accordance with the particular ideal of masculine gender identity embodied in the masculine attitudinal mode. Nevertheless, an activity which is masculine to the highest degree would fail to be masculine if it were approved for women and men equally and without role differentiation. Such a sport would socialize both women and men in accordance with the masculine atti-
tudinal mode, but it would not socialize men as a group distinct from women. Little League baseball has traditionally been masculine, but sex-integrated Little League baseball should cease to be masculine even if it remains masculine.

Another reason for which sports may be thought masculine is their definition of athletic excellence in terms of developed capacities, such as strength and speed, in which men naturally have a considerable statistical advantage over women. A sport will be called masculine, then, if it is such that due to biological factors, most men are significantly better at it than most women, and the best athletes in it are men. Examples of masculine sports are football, baseball, basketball, and tennis, which strongly emphasize upper-body strength (10: p. 96). Not all sports are masculine. On the balance beam, “small size, flexibility and low center of gravity combine to give women the kind of natural hegemony that men enjoy in football” (5: p. 275), and in long-distance swimming women have the natural advantages of long-term endurance, buoyancy, insulation, and narrow shoulders (10: p. 98). Still, the vast majority of our sports, including the most prestigious ones, are masculine.

Does the fact that a sport is masculine in any of the senses explained above provide a moral reason for women not to engage in it or to engage in it differently or separately from men? The features which make a sport masculine seem generally to be morally neutral,5 and insofar as they are neutral, I take it to be uncontroversial that these features per se provide no moral grounds for women to observe any limitations on participation, or to participate separately from men. Of course, masculine sports are generally also masculine6; this fact is arguably grounds for sex segregation and will be subsequently dealt with.

In my opinion, there is nothing intrinsically immoral in participating in masculine sports in a masculine way, but if there is a superior ideal, there is a moral reason to pursue that ideal rather than the masculine ideal. Mary Duquin (4: pp. 101–102) depicts a superior ideal of sport which combines instrumental and expressive attitudes and behavior. In ideal sport, “the participant feels a sense of fulfillment when participating, as well as when winning. She feels joy, strength, thrill, competence and control when sporting whether in practice or competition. She performs ethically, drawing her ethics from her own self-conscience. . . . She performs with confidence and comradeship.” Now, all masculine sports seem capable of being played in a nonmasculine way.7 Therefore, those with moral objections to the masculine
attitudinal mode have no reason to refrain from masculine sports, but only (at most) to refrain from participation with those who subscribe to that ideal. This might well preclude participation in professional or even subsidized athletics, but it need not preclude mixed teams of men and women, for not all men subscribe to the masculine ideal. Nothing that has been said supports the antiandrogynist position, for women have not been shown to have any less right than men to play masculine sports in a masculine way against men. Insofar as Duquin’s ideal is accepted as superior to the masculine ideal, however, $M$ must be preferred to $P$, for $P$ would approve of the masculine ideal equally with Duquin’s ideal.

I shall assume for the sake of argument the positive value of masculine orientation and solidarity for males. It may be thought that women should refrain from participating in masculine sports, or at least be relegated to second-class status in them, for we have seen that a sport ceases to be masculine if women are fully integrated in it. But sport is not the only way to forge masculine orientation and solidarity, and exclusion from the dominant sport culture is directly and indirectly detrimental to women in many ways. Thus, even if masculine orientation and solidarity for males are of undoubted net value, women would betray their own dignity as agents with rights as important as those of men by accepting limitations on participation or second-class status for the purpose of preserving popular sports as masculine male preserves. Those who disagree with me may object that sport is not, as I have alleged, merely one of many possible vehicles of masculine orientation in our society. Arnold R. Beisser (2: pp. 194–195) argues that sport’s emphasis on strength, together with its separation of male from female roles, makes it uniquely suited to relieve the tensions created by the facts that men have lost much of their fatherly authority and their status of sole breadwinner and that male strength is almost obsolete, even though “the cultural expectations of masculinity have remained fixed as they were in pioneer days.” Notice, however, that the function of sport to which Beisser is here drawing our attention is not merely the formation or reinforcement of masculine gender identity, but rather the relief of a tension generated by the dissonance between reality and the ideology of “pioneer days” that men deserve respect and authority because of their physical strength. Insofar as sports serve as a safety valve to relieve the pressure caused by the dissonance between this ideology and reality, they help to preserve the ideology. Because this ideology is patently unworthy of preservation, Beisser’s observation cannot be used to show that the fact that sports are masculine is a
good reason for women to refrain from participation in them or to accept second-class status in them.

As I indicated at the beginning of the paper, the fact that a sport is masculine does, I think, provide some reason for women not to support or engage in it. The number and prestige of sports in which men have a natural statistical superiority to women, together with the virtual absence of sports in which women are naturally superior, help perpetuate an image of general female inferiority which we have a moral reason to undermine. An obvious way to undermine it is to increase the number and prestige of sports in which women have a natural statistical superiority to men or at least are not naturally inferior. Thus, there is reason, at least where this can be done without undue personal sacrifice, for women to withdraw energy and support from masculine sports and to turn instead toward other sports—preferably ones in which women naturally excel. It seems clear, however, that women who enjoy or are well-suited to masculine sports are not obligated to abstain from them in order to popularize sports in which women excel, for that end can be achieved without such sacrifices.

My moral intuitions become less definite when we turn to a problem of current interest raised in school athletics by the male advantage in masculine sports. It seems unfair to bar from men’s teams those women who can make the grade, for this would deny those women equality of opportunity to compete, defined as freedom from legal or other socially imposed restrictions. But if women should be free to compete against men, then it seems that men should also be free to compete against women. In masculine sports, allowing men to compete against women would expose women to a drastically reduced probability of receiving the moderately scarce athletic resources, such as access to facilities and coaching, that go with making a team. This too seems unfair. Equality of opportunity _qua_ freedom from socially imposed restrictions on one’s ability to compete seems to work against equality of opportunity _qua_ probability, given the same level of effort, of actually receiving the benefits of the sport. The first kind of equality of opportunity seems required by the ideal of fair competition; the second kind of equality of opportunity seems required by the students’ _prima facie_ equal rights to what Jane English (5: p. 270) calls the basic benefits of sports, such as health and fun. A scheme supported by Richard Alan Rubin that each sport should have three independent teams offers a possible compromise. The varsity team “would consist of the best male and female athletes. . . . The remaining two
teams would consist of athletes of lesser ability and would be separated by sex” (8: p. 566). In Rubin’s scheme, women interested in participating on a team in a masculine sport would still have roughly half as much probability of making some team (i.e., either varsity or second string) as men have, because men would make up all or almost all of the varsity and all of the men’s team, whereas women would be almost exclusively confined to the women’s team. This might be acceptable, however, if Rubin is right that “virtually everyone interested would be able to compete.” Preserving one team for women and one for men would, at any rate, avoid the drastic reduction in women’s chances of participating that would result from having only mixed teams. Rubin’s scheme also avoids the drastic denial of formal equality of competitive opportunity for men that would result if a team were reserved for women but not for men. Of course, one might wish to strike the compromise differently, sacrificing men’s rights to formal equality of opportunity in favor of women’s rights to equal probability of receiving the benefits of sports. This could be done by having only one second string team which either barred men completely or put a quota on them.

A possible problem with both these compromise schemes is that they are probably illegal under the ERA (8: pp. 573–574). Another objectionable feature is that they tie probability of receiving the basic benefits of a sport to natural aptitude. Men and women with unsuitable physiques do not have an equal probability of receiving the basic benefits of sports, compared with more athletically gifted men and women. A way to grant fully everyone’s *prima facie* claim (even those with unsuitable physiques) to an equal right to the basic benefits of participating in the school sports which she or he most enjoys, and still to grant fully everyone’s *prima facie* claim to equal formal freedom to compete, would be to sever the connection between winning a place on a team and being granted access to moderately scarce athletic resources. In team sports, either enough teams could be available at every ability level to accommodate everyone who wanted to play and who was willing to turn out for practice (with scarce athletic resources simply spread as thinly as necessary to go around), or there could be at least one team for each ability level, with membership in the teams determined by some form of lottery that equalized the probability of being on a team for everyone who wanted to play and was willing to turn out for practice. There would, in these schemes, be no apparent need for sex separation, because women would not be deprived of an equal chance for athletic benefits by being made to compete with men. Of course, the best athletes would stand to lose a great deal
compared with the usual arrangement which makes access to scarce athletic resources a reward of winning competitions. Perhaps a sound argument could be made that the social desirability of helping the best athletes develop to their fullest potential overrides the *prima facie* claim of athletically ill-endowed people to an equal right to the benefits of the sports they enjoy. In this case, a scheme like Rubin’s would be preferable.

In professional athletics, there may appear to be a special reason for maintaining single-sex teams in masculine sports. Jane English (5: p. 273) argues that “when there are virtually no female athletic stars, or when women receive much less prize money than men do, this is damaging to the self-respect of all women.” But this argument is open to several objections. Raymond A. Belliotti (3: pp. 68, 71) seems correct in stating that “we should not respect ourselves because of our own or our group’s attainments of fame and fortune in professional sports,” and that “as an empirical matter of fact, these attainments *are not* an important factor in the way the vast majority of women determine their respect for themselves.” Furthermore, if women’s self-respect were dependent on the existence of female athletic stars, it would seem more helpful to have stars in female-biased sports, where the very best athletes are women, than in masculine sports, where the very best athletes are men.

In closing, let me recapitulate the major positions I have taken in this paper: (1) The antiandroginist position is incorrect: women have as much right as men to engage in any masculine sport in any sense of that term and do not have any duty to accept second-class status; (2) sex segregation is not morally required in sports on grounds of its usefulness in preserving masculine sports, nor is it morally required on grounds of its usefulness in maintaining women’s equality of opportunity in masculine sports, or on grounds of serving women’s self-respect by making possible female stars in masculine sports; (3) because they are ideals of purely individual excellence, both forms of androgynism discussed by Trebilcot lead us astray concerning the desirability of women participating in masculine sports. Neither form of androgynism takes account of the fact that men do naturally have a very considerable statistical advantage over women in performing prestigious activities such as masculine sports, and that women have reason to counter the general image of male superiority fostered by those activities by withdrawing support from the activities and promoting activities in which women have a natural advantage over men.¹²
ENDNOTES

1 I intend the word “masculine” itself to be neutral between the androgynist and antiandrogynist ideals. I shall at this point cease to put the word in quotes. This may seem to favor the antiandrogynist position, but it would have favored the androgynist position to use quotes at every occurrence. I have decided that it is fairest to err, if err I must, by allowing my choice of punctuation to favor the position with which I have least sympathy.

2 One suggestion for tinkering with the list is to delete Metheny’s third item and to add “the use of deadly force against animals” to capture bull-fighting and hunting.

3 Duquin (4: pp. 97–98) is here speaking of the instrumental orientation (i.e. focus on winning) which she says has characterized sports up to the present. She argues that sports have been regarded this way because they have been regarded as masculine, and “society has traditionally expected males to be instrumental, not expressive.”

4 The fact that females must be excluded for a sport to be “masculine” is obvious also to the promoters of sports as a vehicle of masculine socialization. Duquin (4: p. 90) cites the following examples: A. Fisher, “Sports as an Agent of Masculine Orientation,” The Physical Educator, 29 (1972), p. 120, and P. Werner, “The Role of Physical Education in Gender Identification,” Ibid., p. 27.

5 The use of deadly force against animals (see note 2 above) seems morally objectionable to me—equally objectionable for men as for women, of course.

6 Possible exceptions are sports in which there is an “attempt to project the body into or through space over long distances,” for if the distances are long enough male strength may be countered by female endurance, light weight, and tolerance for heat (10: p. 98).

7 It seems that if soccer can be played noninstrumentally, then any sport can. I know that soccer can from my participation in a series of soccer games played by a mixed-sex faculty group at my own institution. Although we played our best and cheered enthusiastically when our team scored a goal, most of us did not keep track of the number of goals scored, and did not know which team had won the game when it was close.


9 Some other ways are the wearing of clothing socially defined as male attire, behavior which is determined of and reserved for males by etiquette, the different roles assigned to men and women in dancing and other mixed-sex activities,
participation in groups and ceremonies from which women are excluded, and participation in activities in which males and females engage separately (e.g. sex-segregated clubs). I do not wish to defend all of these as morally unobjectionable.

10 This is argued in detail by Iris Young in an unpublished manuscript, “Social Implications of the Exclusion of Women from Sport.” Drawing on Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Eleanor Metheny, she argues (to put her argument very roughly) that because sport is activity *par excellence*, to be regarded as an inappropriate participant in sport is to be regarded as less than a human subject or conscious agent. Furthermore, she argues, exclusion from the dominant sport culture carries serious cultural disabilities in business, politics, and everyday life.

11 Other possible drawbacks of the plan favored by Rubin are expense, dilution of talent, and difficulty of finding schools to compete with at the lower levels. See (1).

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