

# The (In)Visibility of DisAbility: Reflections and musings 20+ years later

Karen P. DePauw, Ph.D.

Vice President & Dean for Graduate Education  
Professor, Department of Human Nutrition, Foods  
and Exercise and Department of Sociology



VISTA conference - September 2019



# Body

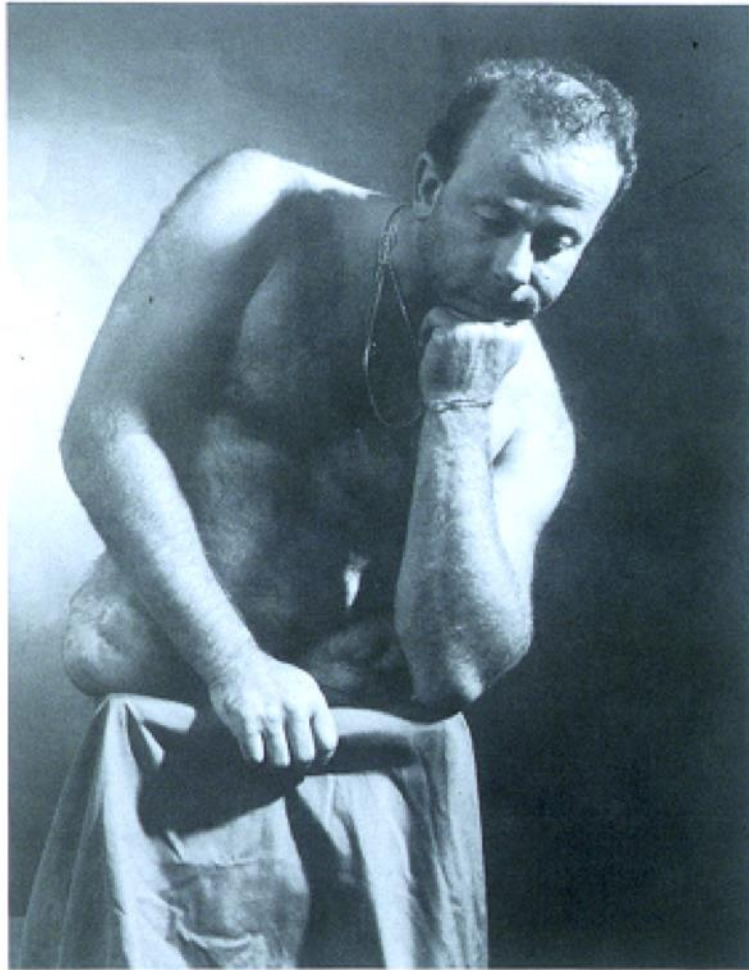
- Focal point of identity
- Medium through which messages of identity are transmitted
- Focus on body because it is the means through which identity is defined, viewed and perceived

# Individuals with disabilities

- Identified and judged primarily through one's body
- Heightened attention to body
- Conspicuous
- Compared to “normal” and “perfect” body

the stare and spectacle

*"My body is in no way ugly.  
It is unusual and very individual."*



*"Completely Unperfect"*

a photo exhibition at the Marriott Marquis Hotel – Imperial Room A  
from August 18 - 26, 1996

**Rasso Bruckert**

# Sport

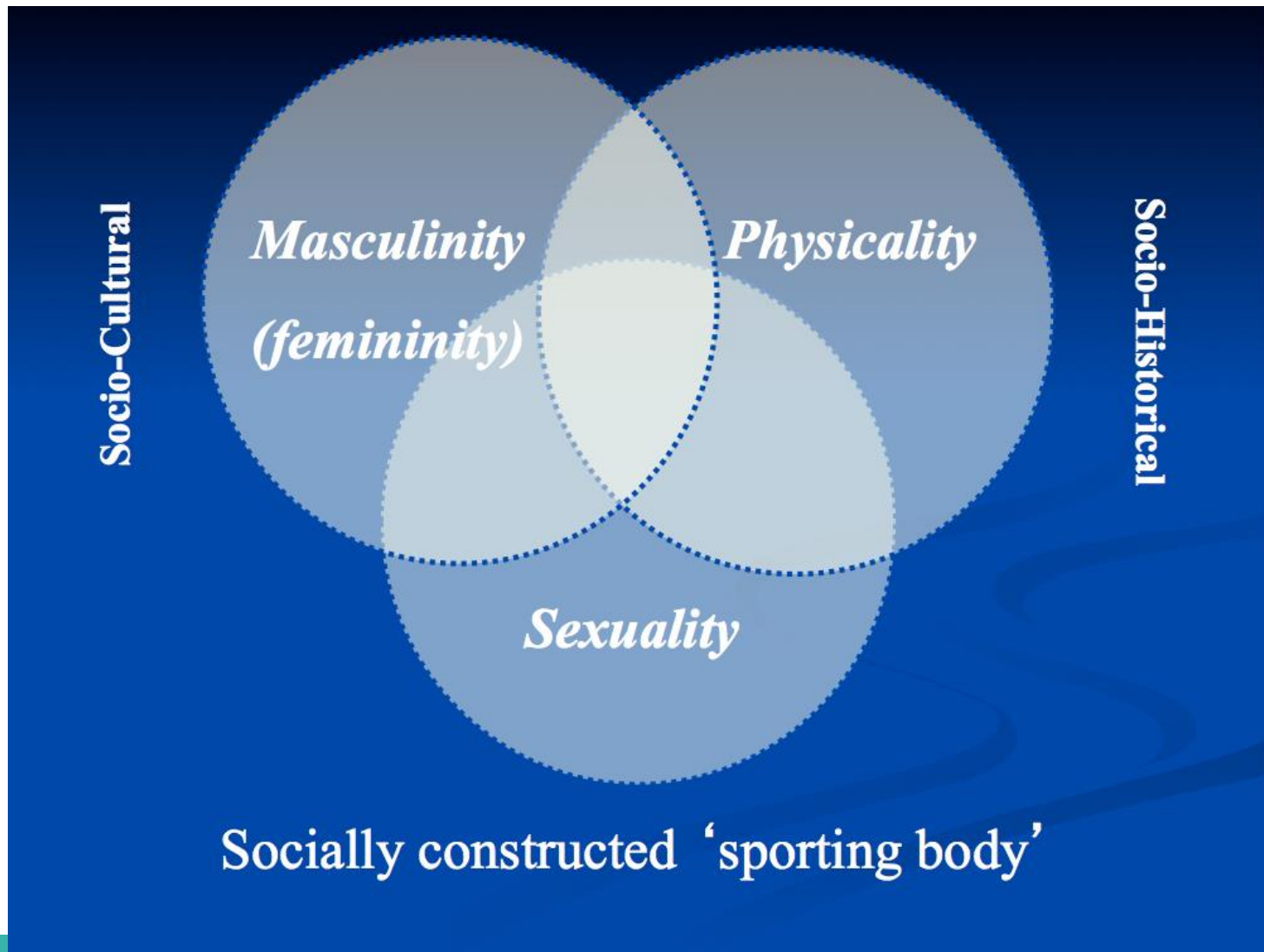
- **Reflection of society & societal values**
- **Reproduction of status quo & social inequality**
- **Site for resistance & production of social equality**

# Sport has contributed to the social constr

- **normal**
- **disability**
- **body and**
- **sporting body**

**“Fit” within traditional model of sport**

**who is in and who is out**

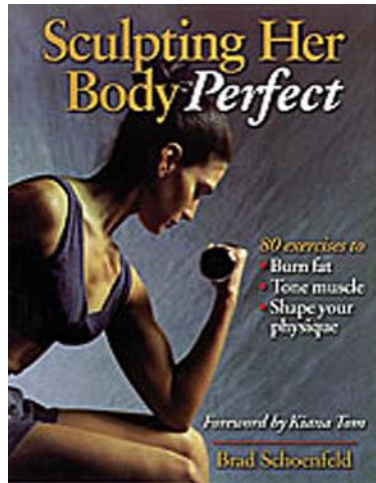


GRADUATE SCHOOL  
VIRGINIA TECH.

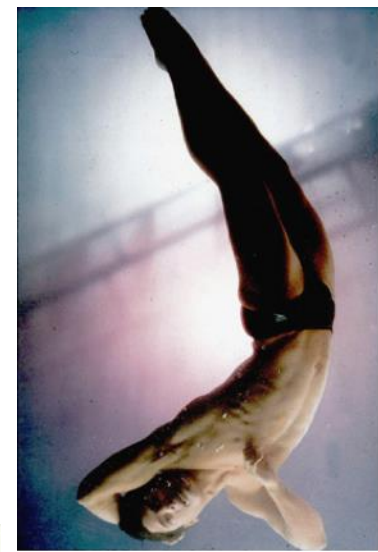
DePauw, K.P. (1997). The (In)Visibility of DisAbility: Cultural Contexts and "Sporting Bodies", *Quest*, 49, 416-430.



# Images of 'sporting body'



Ability  
Perfect  
Beauty  
Athleticism  
Normal



# Sport

- Reflection of society & societal values
- Reproduction of status quo & social inequality
- **Site for resistance & production of social equality**

# Sport as site for access, equity & social change ....

# Views of disability sport

Rehabilitation  
Freak Show  
Empowerment

Soeder, 1995



**Invisible: invisibility of disability in sport**

**Visible: visibility of disability in sport**

**Visible as athletes in sport**

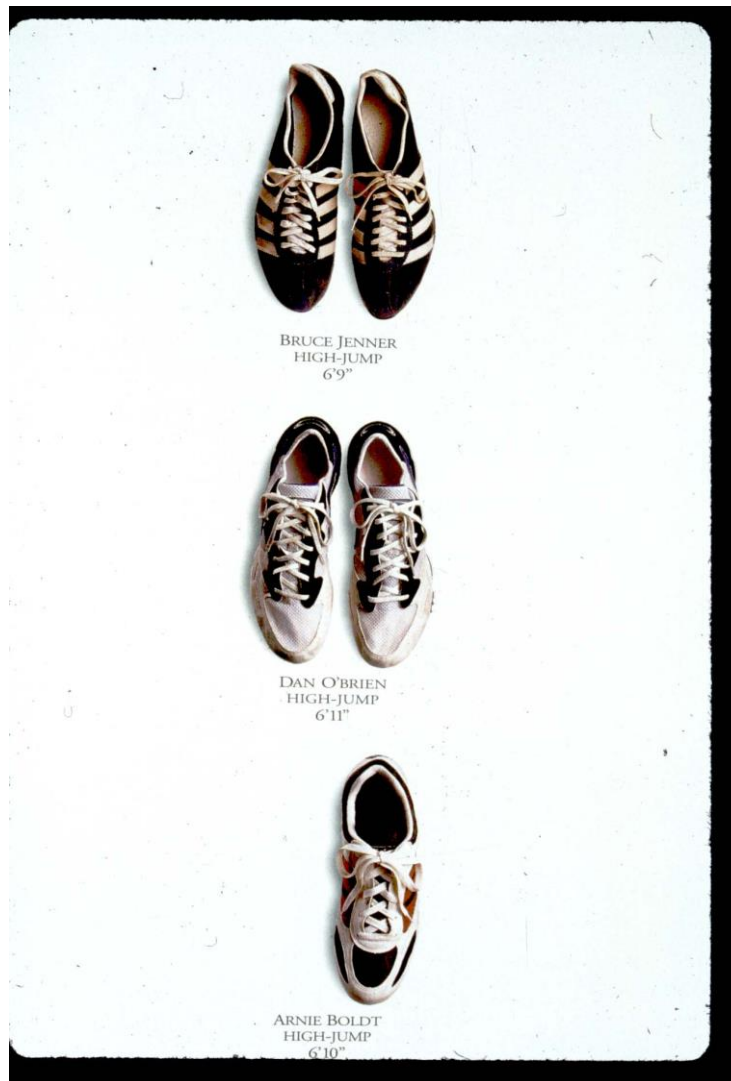


DePauw, K.P. (1997). The (In)Visibility of DisAbility: Cultural Contexts and “Sporting Bodies”, *Quest*, 49, 416-430.



**the paradigm shift**

**views of body and ability**



evolving image of (dis)Ability

# Who is the top amateur athlete?

Ballots for the 77th Sullivan Award are being sent this week to AAU officials, U.S. Olympic Committee members, college sports information directors and others. Fans, too, can join in the voting for the nation's top amateur athlete by going to [sports.usatoday.com](http://sports.usatoday.com). The total fan votes count one-third toward the final tally. Voting ends March 31. The winner for athletic excellence in 2006 will be announced April 11. The finalists:



Your vote counts: Help determine this year's Sullivan Award winner by voting at [sports.usatoday.com](http://sports.usatoday.com)

## Brady Quinn, football

He led Notre Dame (10-3) to the No. 19 ranking in the final USA TODAY Coaches' Poll. Won the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, presented to the top senior quarterback in the nation. Set school season record with 37 touchdown passes.

## Sasha Cohen, figure skating

A back injury kept her from competing in two seasons, but Cohen placed fourth in her first major international championship in the 2002 Salt Lake Games. That set the stage for her emergence last year. By winning her first national title in 2006, she earned her ticket to the Torino Games, where she won silver.

## Troy Dumais, diving

The former University of Texas All-American was named USA Diving athlete of the year in 2006. Early that year he partnered to win the 3-meter synchronized diving title in the 2006 national championships in Indianapolis. He also won bronze in the 3-meter springboard event in the FINA World Cup in July.

## Joey Cheek, speedskating

A North Carolina native, he was a two-time medalist in Torino, where he won silver in the 1,000 meters and gold in the men's 500. His 500 two-run time total made Cheek the only competitor to break the 35-second mark in each run. He was also the 2006 world sprint champion.



By Evan Stripling, USA TODAY



## Jessica Long, paralympian swimming

At age 15, Long has 18 world record-breaking performances and holds the record in 12 events for paralympic swimming. Long, whose legs were amputated below the knee, learned to swim in her grandparents' pool and has won at least three medals in every Paralympic Games since 2004.



By Jack Grobler, USA TODAY

## Hannah Teter, snowboarding

Teter comes from a family in which her two older brothers, Abe and Elijah, are professional riders. In only four years as a competitor, Teter has won every major halfpipe championship in the world with the exception of the U.S. Open. In 2006, Teter solidified her position as one of the world's best by winning the women's halfpipe gold in the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino. She added a silver in halfpipe in the 2006 Gravity Games. Teter was ranked second in the 2006 Chevy Trucks Grand Prix Olympic qualifying series behind Gretchen Bleiler, who took silver in Torino. Teter was named 2006 U.S. Olympic Committee sportswoman of the year.

From USA Today, March 2, 2007



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
VIRGINIA TECH.





**“Fit” within Paralympic model of sport?**

**who is in and who is out**

**equity issues in disability sport**

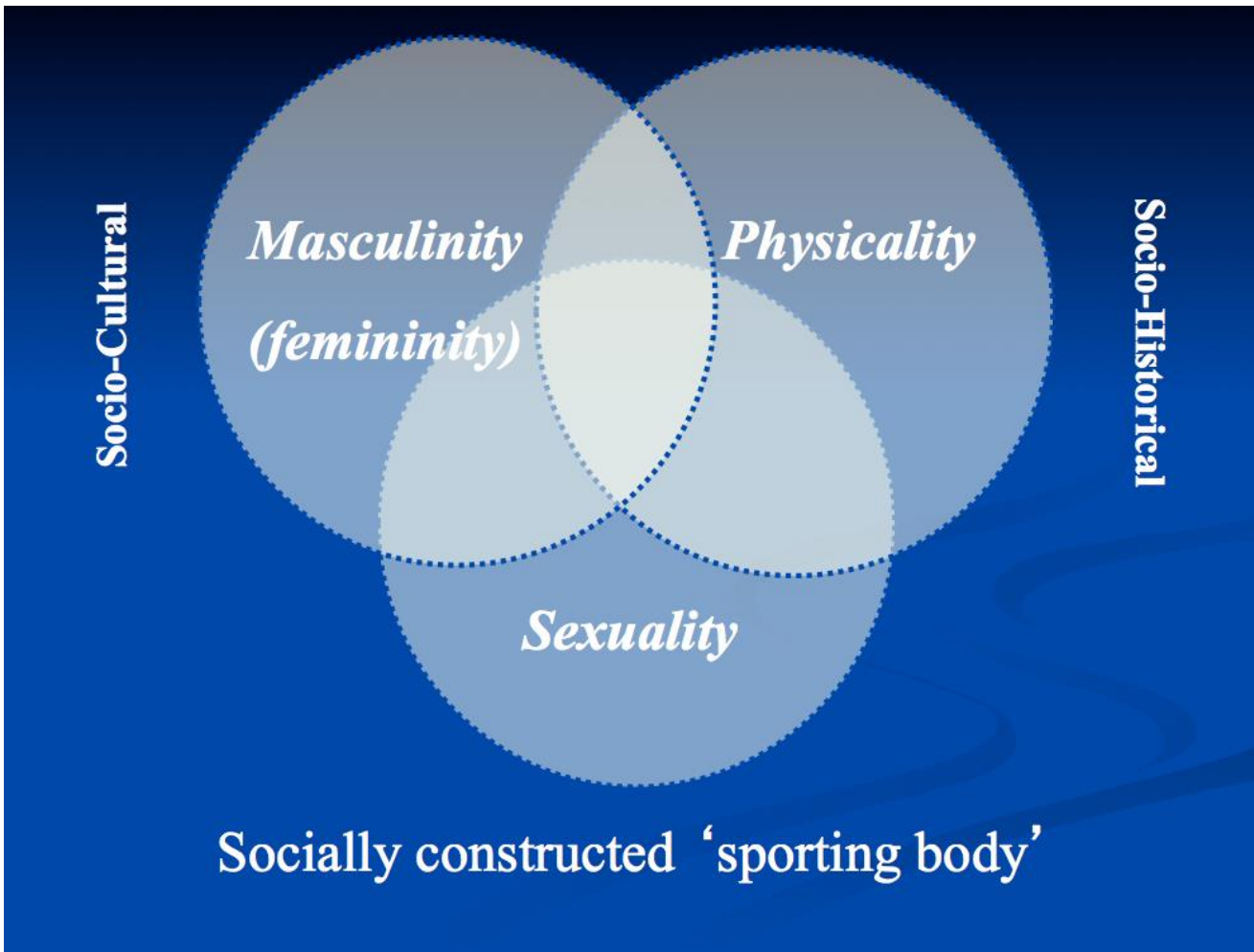


**Intersection of gender and disability**  
**Type of impairment**  
**Severity of impairment**  
**Sport event**  
**Socio-economic status/global location**  
**??**

equity issues in disability sport



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
VIRGINIA TECH.



Ableization of “para” sport?



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
VIRGINIA TECH.

# Sport as site for access, equity & social change ....

# Vision of the IPC



**Make for an inclusive world through  
Para sport**

# To conclude and more

- Sport is a highly visible and influential social institution
- Body, ability and disability are social constructs portrayed through a 'sporting body'
- Views of ability have changed through the inclusion of 'others' in competitive sport
- Views of disability have changed due to the presence of athletes with disabilities in competitive sport
- **To what extent have we achieved institutional change? or social deconstruction of able?**
- **How do we move meaningfully to inclusion?**

**words and actions do matter...**

**A day at the beach:  
A walk in the sand**



# Reflections and musings



**Thanks!**