

**Speaking up: A feminist analysis of the possibility of cultural change in women's
artistic gymnastics in Australia and England.**

Overview

The contemporary (conservative) culture of gendered politics in both Australia and England has resulted in several examples of women speaking out against sexism and harassment in the workplace. In doing so, these women have gained media (and public) interest and support as evidenced by the recent *Ms Represented* (2021) television series,¹ where Australian female politicians, past and present, spoke of their experiences in parliament house and politics. However, some men, in positions of institutional power, repeatedly debunk the idea of cultural or systemic sexism and harassment, despite evidence revealing the devaluing of women's opinions, a victim-blaming mentality and an overall subordination of women. It is within this politically and socially conservative environment that women athletes also have been challenging equally concerning issues within sport. The neoliberal ideology which currently underwrites Australian and British society, facilitated by the tool of social media, has given rise to a women's movement which is pointedly individual but potentially collective.

This chapter centres on the 'fight back' culture that has developed in women's artistic gymnastics (WAG) over the past five years, where athletes, past and present, have revealed the sexual, emotional and physical abuse suffered as part of the 'accepted' culture of gymnastics. Recently released reports in Australia (*Change the Routine*, 2021) and England (*The Whyte Review*, 2022) point to a 'toxic culture' within women's artistic gymnastics that includes such abuses. These investigations, along with the precedence set by the prosecutions resulting from the USA Gymnastics inquiry, have empowered these women to not only speak out about their experiences, but also to challenge the status quo. An analysis of investigative sport and government reports (such as those listed above), policy and media articles are used here to articulate how these athletes have challenged perceptions and practices in gymnastics, using social media and by contributing to investigations of the sport. This chapter will explore the nature of the challenge to the 'toxic' culture of women's gymnastics² in a climate of

¹ This series examines women in Australian politics throughout history. The series was created and presented by Annabel Crabb who has over 20 years' experience as a political journalist and is the *Australian Broadcasting Commission's* (ABC) chief online political writer.

² The authors acknowledge that forms of abuse (physical, emotional and sexual) are experienced by male athletes and by rhythmic gymnasts. However, this chapter limits itself to a discussion of women's artistic gymnastics (WAG).

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

cultural and gendered conservatism in both Australia and England and realistically consider the possibility of change.

Misogyny and Conservatism

In 2012, then Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave what has become known as the “Misogyny Speech” to the Australian House of Representatives. Gillard laid out several examples of sexism, historic and contemporary and alluded to the ongoing culture of sexism in Australian politics (Gillard, 2012). Despite this speech being now 10 years old, little has changed. The Australian parliament has experienced a regular trickle of misdoings and rumours which came to a head in 2021 (Walton, 2021). The *Ms Represented* series, mentioned above, aired around the time of a number of incidents: Grace Tame (a survivor of domestic abuse) was named 2021 Australian of the Year; in the same year, Brittany Higgins went public with allegations that she was raped in a Minister’s office at Parliament House in 2019 (Grattan, 2021); and by November 2021, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) released a report following an inquiry into sexual harassment and bullying in Australia’s parliament (Walton, 2021; Grattan, 2021).

In Britain, as the #MeToo movement escalated around 2017, several women Members of Parliament (MP) and parliamentary staffers in the UK houses of parliament made allegations of sexual harassment and bullying including, but not limited to, “groping, inappropriate touching, making unwanted passes, initiating sexual chatter, making misogynistic comments, sending improper text messages, using sexual overtones and pressurising women into unwelcomed sexual behaviour” (Julios, 2022). These, collectively, have been called “a sleaze scandal”, with the parliament being dubbed “the Palace of Sexminster” (Julios, 2022). The allegations spurred several independent reviews into conduct in both houses of British parliament, with three inquiries taking place in 2018 and 2019 (Cox 2018; Ellenbogen, 2019; White, 2019). Even recently, in 2022, then Prime Minister Boris Johnson faced calls to conduct compulsory training for MPs given the ongoing accusations of sexual misconduct (Allegretti, 2022). It is unfortunate, and telling, that the UK Labour Women’s Network continues to provide resilience training for women entering public office to counter some of the misogyny they know they will face (Allegretti, 2022).

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

While the similarities between the halls of government and children practicing and competing in sport may seem unrelated, the sport of gymnastics has an ingrained toxic culture, one which is highly problematic both from a gendered perspective and in terms of athlete well-being. Both arenas (parliament and gymnastics) have seen allegations of misconduct, sexual and otherwise, both had independent inquiries after the allegations became public, and both have deeply entrenched cultures which are difficult, if not impossible, to remedy.

A brief history of women's gymnastics

Since the mid-1970s, girls who went into the sport of gymnastics and dreamed of the Olympics were subjected to a culture which essentially produced submissive underage athletes. The standard for gymnast body shapes switched from adult-figured women to childlike, pre-pubescent figures popularised by the success of the Soviet Union's Olga Korbut and Romania's Nadia Comaneci, with her achievement of the first Perfect 10 gymnastics score at the 1976 Olympics. There was a desire for a fictional, yet very much sought after, weight-to-power ratio (one which was impacted severely by puberty) and a physique that was accepted as required to score well in competition. Over the past four decades, the culture of gymnastics in what we might term western democratic countries began exhibiting practices similar to the Eastern Bloc nations, particularly as they related to the pursuit of high-performance sport, Olympics medals and national dominance in gymnastics.³

Gymnastics was not commercialised or professionalised and the young athletes were not an economic entity, at least not to make money for themselves. For the most part, gymnastics in countries such as Australia relied on government funding for continued elite existence (See Sands, 2018). As for the gymnasts themselves, while some gained scholarships to continue training, most relied, financially, on parental support. The culture of submissive women in gymnastics led to a culture which rarely questioned physical and emotional abuses, conceiving such methods as essential (See Novkov, 2019). This culture, once associated with the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries is predicated on the belief that progress in skill learning and mastery had to be achieved in a short time. Western nations, including Australia and the UK

³ Georgia Cervin's (2020) review of the film *Athlete A* points out that blaming the Eastern Bloc for the current culture of gymnastics is not representative of the claims being made over the past few years.

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

employed coaches fleeing the East and by the end of the 1980s it was not unusual for elite programs to be coached by Russian, Romanian, or Chinese coaches based on coaching philosophies normalised within their home countries.

Gymnasts spend many hours in the gym with their coaches. It is not unusual for a child to train in excess of 25 hours a week (Ryan 1996). The scrutiny of gymnast performance and progression throughout training and competition is constant. Falling behind, admitting fear or injury, or complaining of tiredness were signs that the gymnast was not elite material (O’Keefe, 2021). In concert with the fact that most elite gyms were ‘parent-free’ spaces (ostensibly to maximise the gymnast’s concentration), this environment, with its lack of external surveillance, gave rise to a deep-rooted culture where the abuse of athletes could flourish. This culture was replicated and defended as the accepted way to train female gymnasts before the “complications” of womanhood were thrust upon them. Keeping athletes lithe, fragile-looking and child-like, yet able to perform increasingly daring, even dangerous, routines flawlessly was an enduring aspect of the judges’ expectations.

Over the past decades, many investigations relating to the treatment and expectations of the young athletes in competitive programs were conducted. Physical abuse, humiliation and emotional abuse were periodically alleged but investigations into misconduct were regularly handled internally with the upshot being that individual athletes were made to feel as though they were not tough enough, dedicated enough or talented enough to endure in the world of elite gymnastics. Despite previous investigations, few substantive changes were made to the underlying culture of the sport (Novkov, 2019).

Feminist analysis and neoliberalism

While feminism, even multiple ‘feminisms’, are useful in understanding some aspects of these toxic cultures, it would, of course, be impossible to discover, delve and decide on either the causes or the cure for such a complex entity. This chapter acknowledges that WAG gymnasts are subject to neoliberal structures and ideology which frame most of western society, which logically extends to sport.

Neoliberalism is situated as a political-economic ideology which postulates that “to enhance human well-being, it is necessary to maximize individual economic freedom in society” (Bal & Dóci, 2018, p. 536). Neoliberalism has profound negative effects on social justice and the lack of awareness of neoliberalism is causing it to be

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

legitimised rather than contested in workplaces and other areas (Bal & Dóci, 2018). As Hovden notes, “neoliberal ideology has transformed democratic organizational structures into more professional and ‘business-like’ forms” (2015, p. 474). Moreover, it is believed individuals are improved by economic agency. This belief results in calls to de-regulate, remove obstacles and place the responsibility for success on the head of the individual (Bal & Dóci, 2018). The existence of “losers” in society (as determined by a lack of will rather than a lack of resources) are seen as an unavoidable but acceptable by-product. These people have not performed well enough in what is seen as a meritocratic system and therefore have only themselves to blame. According to Andrews and Silk (2012), neoliberalism fails to recognise the community and social nature of humans. Elite sport firmly aligns with neoliberal culture, as money is made and there is an individual responsibility. Additionally, the influence of (neoliberal) sport management studies may influence organizational studies towards a concern for “economic efficiency, new public management, and new managerialism” (Hovden, 2015, p. 474).

The feminism movement, once a stalwart for progressing women’s liberation, is now perfectly in sync with the evolving neoliberal order and Rottenberg (2014) articulates concern that a movement once pursuant of women’s liberation is now framed in extremely individualistic terms and, disturbingly, offers little critique of neoliberalism. Women are simultaneously aware of the gender inequalities in society while accepting “full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care” (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). Rosenberg (2014) notes that in encouraging women to take this responsibility neoliberal feminism speaks to the middle- and upper-middle classes, effectively erasing the majority of women from view.

Vendramin (2020) argues that the image of “feminism” has been radically altered by current media representations. Feminist themes, popularised and “mainstreamed”, now align well with neoliberal ideology. Feminism is marketable, but only “those strands of feminism uncomplicatedly promoting the neoliberal principles of agency, choice, and empowerment” (Rivers, cited in Vendramin, 2020, p. 7). Vendramin (2020) posits that collective endeavours are side-lined and there is a noticeable shift towards the personal battles. The images of independent and successful women (supposedly displaying “feminism”) fail to acknowledge structural limitations and success is presented very much as individual attainment (Vendramin, 2020).

#MeToo, Neoliberalism and Sport

Rottenberg (2019) notes that the #MeToo campaign does little to combat neoliberal feminism, but she does not reject the movement outright. She writes, “I do think that the campaign goes beyond the ‘Me’ of MeToo in important ways - there is, after all, the ‘Too’, which can serve to produce solidarities and mobilisations” (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 46). It was inevitable that the #MeToo movement would encompass sport (Macur, 2017; Olsen, 2017) and scathing reports concerning athlete mistreatment in sport came from countries such as South Korea (Morgan 2020a) and Japan (Morgan 2020b). USA Gymnastics, unravelled by the Nassar case⁴, saw additional reports of sexual, physical and mental abuse, and their voices were joined by gymnasts from around the world calling out mistreatment. High-profile gymnasts such as Becky and Ellie Downie (UK) wrote open letters on social media with their claims (Downie & Downie, 2020) and mainstream media sources began investigations such as the *ABC’s* Special Report on abuse in Australian gymnastics (Mark & Snape, 2021) and the ‘Hurdles to Recovery’ documentary (O’Keefe, 2021).

While neoliberalism focuses on the individual and their abilities to determine and achieve, the changes that need to be enacted in gymnastics might better be served by solidarity. The #MeToo movement can be seen as a series of individual actions which have limited success in changing the practices and discourses of sexism, harassment and sexual abuse in neoliberal and patriarchal societies. #MeToo might be compiled of discrete points, but these are nevertheless connected and may be seconded for greater impact. In terms of WAG, the visibility and support for #MeToo emboldened former and current gymnasts, providing an outlet for complaints which benefitted by being enveloped in related accusations, reports and stories. Astor (2022) suggests that a conversation about sexual abuse, soon moved to other forms of abuse and the ‘culture of obedience that enabled them’. The western media then disseminated the accusations of gymnasts against coaches, and the system.

Challenges to the culture of gymnastics

⁴ Larry Nassar is a former USA gymnastics team doctor found guilty of sexual assault of over 300 gymnasts (See Fisher & Anders, 2020).

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

Calls to address the abuses in elite gymnastics programs are historical and legion. According to Astor (2022), the death of Christy Henrich should have been the wake-up call.⁵ It should have piqued a widespread concern when Julissa Gomez was rendered paraplegic as the result of gymnasts around the world trying to master a new vaulting move in time to compete effectively at the international level (Hudson, 1988).

Joan Ryan raised concerns in 1995 with her book (*Little girls in pretty boxes*) as she outlined the abusive culture of gymnastics and figure skating, particularly around eating disorders. For many decades now, the research into the culture of women's gymnastics concluded that changes are imperative in the sport. Research comes from many angles; exploring the impact of median age increases in international competitors (Kerr, 2018; Eagleman et al., 2014); examining the evolution of the female body in gymnastics (Barker-Ruchti, 2009; Eagleman et al., 2014); changes in coaching practices (Kerr et al., 2019); reporting on an increase to athlete rights in the sport (Cervin et al., 2017; Novkov, 2019); the impact of uniform regulation change in international competition and the conceptualising of abuse in WAG as linked to gender (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2021). A research group, the International Socio-Cultural research group on Women's Artistic Gymnastics (ISCWAG), dedicated to academic research on the issues within WAG, was also formed.

There are two different but related paradigms here. Firstly, the culture presupposes that there is one way, one look and one process to being successful in gymnastics and that it requires complete obedience to an authoritarian coaching style. The athlete should be willing and should aim to succeed above others for the limited rewards available at the elite level of gymnastics, by adhering to the strict regimens dictated by the coach. Traditional coaching practices, of which physical and emotional abuse are a part, fall in line with notions of efficiency because the coach need not spend valuable time on athletes considered unable to succeed under that model. Secondly, the culture creates the conditions where sexual abuse can occur, that is, athletes with complete deference to the coach in their pursuit of athletic excellence are vulnerable (Burke, 2001). The well-being of many is pitted against the success of the few. Any directive for change may not even be possible in gymnastics today. Can the situation be

⁵ Christy Henrich (USA) was an elite WAG gymnast who died from complications related to anorexia nervosa, a disease which was linked to the weight control regimes undertaken to reduce and/or maintain weight (See Novkov, 2019).

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

improved without an overhaul of the ethics and logic of elite gymnastics – we claim not. The neoliberal logic of the individual as central to both the problems and the solutions will likely stall discussion of the culture as it stands.

Reports, investigations and court cases

In December 2021, over 500 women and girls agreed to a \$38 million settlement with USA Gymnastics and the USA Olympic and Paralympic committee (Sands, 2018). Additionally, 13 victims also sought 130 million from the FBI, after there were claims of poorly conducted investigations and ignored evidence related to abuses by Nasser (Sands, 2018). Sands (2018) claims that there has been “no admissions of guilt, little concern for what happens to gymnastics in the long-term, and lots of finger-pointing” (p. 447). Physical and mental abuse is often linked to an individual and not a culture. In this view, the fault is not that of the society or the community but is instead attributed to the individual who has deviances (Burke, 2001). The result is that action or change rarely examines the traditional structures of elite gymnastics which foster these problems.

Child protection in sport has been a growing narrative for decades in both the UK and Australia. Sexual abuse of children and adults in gymnastics has long been considered criminal and records of perpetrators (at least of those who have been caught) exist but the internal logic of the sport of gymnastics and the coaching practices regularly include abusive practises and punishments, both physical and emotional. Although “working with children” documentation is mandatory in coaching in Australia, most of the abuse in elite gymnastics are not covered in such checks as they form part of the accepted process of training. Coaches who have been successful (procuring medals) have regularly used physical punishment and ridicule as invaluable and irreplaceable tools for achieving this success, and it has become the standard and accepted way of achieving medals.

In Australia, Gymnastics Australia commissioned the AHRC (an independent body) in August 2020 to investigate and report on the state of Australian gymnastics. The final report (*Change the Routine*) was published in May 2021. The completed document is 110 pages long, colourful and replete with images of gymnasts, either in motion, visibly smiling, or seemingly concentrating albeit with serene faces. The report found that the “toxic” culture could be attributed to a number of factors including “win-at-all-costs” approach; the young age of the gymnasts and inherent power imbalances; a

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

culture of control; and an overarching tolerance of negative behaviour (p. 28). It outlines the kinds of abuses contributors experienced, such as sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse (including the use of physical conditioning or exercise as punishment), medical negligence (training while injured), negative weight management practices and body shaming (p. 10). The coaching methods (related to a culture of control) are said to contribute to the problem, and this is compounded by ineffective recruitment processes (p. 29). Very little in the report is surprising to those who have been involved in gymnastics and academic research has previously highlighted the majority of the concerns.

However, the AHRC report also includes a one page, poster-like, child-friendly summary of the findings, which seems to place considerable responsibility with the individual athlete. The text of the child-friendly summary reads:

To make sure you always feel safe, [the AHRC] asked Gymnastics

Australia and other gymnastics organisations to do some things, such as:

- ★ create groups in every state and territory for children and young people to meet and share their views and to be heard.
- ★ make sure children and young people understand all the different rules inside a gym and while doing gymnastics.
- ★ have a separate group of people that will listen to and take care of problems and complaints about bullying, abuse, and sexual harassment.
- ★ ask for your permission when adults need to do exercises with you or do check-ups with your body.
- ★ do regular tests to make sure your mental health and body are healthy.
- ★ make sure coaches and staff treat you well and know how to keep you safe.

(Change the Routine, 2021)

The child-friendly version advocates for safeguarding structures which give agency to children and young people to speak up about their experiences whilst simultaneously asking them to understand ‘all the different rules’ and ‘tests’ that determine mental and physical health in order that they can give their permission that these can be carried out. However, placing such responsibility on the heads of young athletes in the current climate of the sport is problematic and it sets aside the reality of the extant culture of competitive gymnastics as discussed above.

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

In the UK, a number of reports from high-profile gymnasts, even in the wake of changes made to British Gymnastics (BG) after a 2019 review of the high-performance program, resulted in UK Sport and Sport England appointing Anne Whyte QC to review over the period 2008-2020. The *Whyte Review* commenced on the 25th of August 2020 (similar to the Australian report) but was not published until June 2022, over a year after the Australian AHRC report.

The *Whyte Review* emerged as a 300+ page document, with few images and much to say on the extant culture of gymnastics in the UK and how this culture developed. Many of the elements which the report highlighted as problematic in the culture were similar to, if not exactly the same as, the AHRC report. For instance, gymnasts, and their parents, feeling unable to raise complaints with appropriate authorities; a feeling that BG had, in the pursuit of national and international competitive success, not only failed to prevent or limit abusive behaviours but had seemed to condone them. Abusive behaviours cited included bullying, belittling, extreme weight management, regular over-stretching, use of excessive physical force, training on serious injuries, gas-lighting, coercive control and a reluctance to raise complaints/lack of opportunity to do so.

The *Whyte Review* (2022), examined the culture in great depth and, importantly, paid close attention to the mechanisms which caused and maintained the culture. The report recognised the role of outside bodies and purposely avoided recommendations which are dependent upon the agreement and involvement of outside bodies (such as FIG and the IOC) and concentrates on what BG itself can do to improve the culture of the sport. This report, similar to the Australian one, then outlines recommendations which should help to “re-calibrate” the culture of gymnastics in Britain and make it more athlete centred. With few exceptions, the report is in line with allegations from gymnasts from Australia and the USA, as well as those from numerous other countries around the world. The investigations may be national, but the deep-seated problems of the culture are undeniably global.

Changing the gymnastic culture in a neoliberal climate

Neoliberal workplace values are in place in the sports world. Coaches who do not achieve success will find themselves unemployed. The individual is held accountable and the follow-on from this is that the gymnasts are also held accountable. The traditional and entrenched methods of gymnastics coaching are well served by

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

neoliberalism. The logic of meritocracy is alive and well in sports. As sport shifted from a leisure-based pursuit to a professional field, a field funded by governments and sponsors (who imposed a culture of accountability), the development of sports 'institutes' required a shift in coaching procedures (documentation, performativity, repeatability, stability – all at the highest level) to ensure governments and sponsors got 'bang for buck' (Andrews & Silk, 2012).

Little children (in this case, girls) are potentially one of the easiest groups to manipulate. The logic of divide and conquer tempers the possibility of the gymnastics community working to prevent abuses in the sport. The idea that gymnasts must necessarily be good early (with the implication that there is no time to waste) and a pervasive notion that these girls can be worked hard, and not be susceptible to 'real' pain or injury is misguided. This belief is supported by the fact that if they do hurt and tire, they often hide this from coaches, parents and support staff (see Novkov, 2019).

The continuation of a sport like gymnastics – one which is not professional and rarely receives monies from non-government sources – requires (under neoliberal logic) visible, demonstratable and continued success to maintain funding and, therefore, to survive. In both the UK and Australia, sports are nationally funded, and this relies on participation (member) numbers and is subject to fluctuation by success (medals) and failure (no medals) at international competitions. Additionally, the member numbers are affected by success or failure in achieving medals or high rankings. Unfortunately, it is not the club or coach with the most caring and empowering program which will be highlighted, it will be the coach who gets results, or the club that produces several members of the national team, who gets the kudos, the media coverage and the increased members.

There is difficulty in any decision to stop engaging in a particular culture and begin speaking about and acting in ways that are different. Just as there is no one point at which neoliberal ideology underwrote action, policy and thinking in many spheres of western life, there is no singular point at which gymnastics can expect to move from an endemically abusive culture to a safe one. The roller-coaster of accusation, investigation, report and (in)action has, in the past, served to change the practices of those willing to change, but the culture has remained. Individual coaches, clubs and countries can adopt regulations and attempt to instil a culture without systemic abuse. In the past, these have tended to be outliers, and these instances have not changed the

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

wider culture. Change needs to be universal – both regulatory and culturally – but this is nigh impossible given that many influential nations in FIG are unlikely to agree to such change. Indeed, those nations that have found success under the current regulations and whose representatives sit on national and international bodies have been served well and will be steadfast in maintaining the status quo.

Discussing the impact of the *Ms Represented* series, Williams (2021) notes that parliament in Australia continues to be a highly patriarchal institution and, in line with the thinking of Rorty's (1989) "contingency of language", quotes Audre Lorde (American civil rights activist), "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (cited in Williams, 2021). Williams posits that there is a need to "rebuild a parliament that is for everyone, not just the privileged few" (2021). The same can be said for gymnastics. Those who subscribe to problematic teaching methods cannot be charged in making or even overseeing the changes which need to occur.

Conclusion

Sands asks the question, "who are the adults in gymnastics?" (2018). Adults involved in this space should be seeking the solutions, not the young gymnasts. It has been noted many times that gymnasts (especially female gymnasts) are often in a learned state of dependence. The call to empower gymnasts is a worthy one, but it must be supported by realistic, and maybe radical, change in the culture of the sport. What started with individuals speaking up has transpired to highly visible court cases and sackings (in the USA), inspiring more individuals to tell their abuse in gymnastics stories and sparked investigation in many gymnastic programs across the western world. Potentially the anonymity and distance of social media has facilitated the move. It has also coincided with a greater number of older elite gymnasts, the #MeToo movement, Biles' withdrawal from the All-Around event at the Tokyo Olympics and more general moves to empower women and girls. This has resulted in a "perfect storm" of conditions just right for a challenge to the gymnastics culture. However, it cannot stop here. The changes suggested by academics and investigative reports must be enacted and maintained. This requires buy-in from the gymnastics community. Any change to the culture will not be sustained without the support of coaches, parents, administrators and governing bodies.

Globally, there has been a small movement away from conservative, neo-liberal politics. The 2021 defeat of Trump in the USA, the ousting of Australia's conservative

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

Coalition government in the federal election of 2022 and Boris Johnson's resignation as PM in the UK, are just some of the counter responses to the empowered, masculinised and individualised national leaders. However, the spread of neoliberal ideology, including the denial of endemic male privilege, is still strong despite cutting off the proverbial head(s) of the hydra. The replacements for these Heads of State are in effect more similar than different to those they remove. The culture runs deep and as Rorty (1989) has concluded, change takes time and is rarely the result of individual action. Just as the ideology of neoliberalism was not 'decided on' and implemented, neither will any shift from it.

In gymnastics, the sacking of national and program coaches and the removal of the heads of the national governing bodies is akin to the removals above, and perhaps equally futile. Ridding the institution of the key perpetrators is a typical but ineffectual way to address the issues of culture that need to change. Again, the work of Rorty (1989) is relevant, in gymnastics any move to change the culture is not accomplished by decision, but instead by the gradual adoption of a different language, one which suits our purposes better. While the purposes of elite gymnastics continue to be governed by the same regulations and conditions as are in place now, those with the mindset and the language of inside, and aligned to, the sport of gymnastics will find it difficult if not impossible to conceive of how it might look under a different view. Change may come, but it will be the result of small movements, deviations from the current path, and a change to the 'language' of sport, and not just the language of gymnastics. It must be considered that we don't yet have the linguistic tools to re-write gymnastics.

References

- Allegretti, A. (2022, May 3). Calls for compulsory MP training to tackle sexist culture in parliament. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/may/02/boris-johnson-under-pressure-to-back-compulsory-workplace-training-for-mps>
- Andrews, D. L. & Silk, M. (2012). *Sport and neoliberal politics, consumption, and culture*. Temple University Press.
- Astor, M. (2022, April 26). A gymnast's death was supposed to be a wake-up call. What took so long? *New York Times* <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/sports/christy-henrich-gymnastics-eating-disorder-death.html#:~:text=Wake%20Up%20Call.-,What%20Took%20So%20Long%3F,but%20progress%20has%20been%20slow.>
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Change the Routine: Report on the Independent Review into Gymnastics in Australia*.
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021, November). *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2021). *What does the Independent Review into Gymnastics in Australia say? Child-friendly summary*.
- Bal, P. M. & Dóci, E. (2018). Neoliberal ideology in work and organizational psychology, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(5), 536-548, DOI: 10.1080/1359432X.2018.1449108
- Barker-Ruchti, N. (2009). Ballerinas and pixies: A genealogy of the changing female gymnastics body, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26(1), 45-62, DOI: 10.1080/09523360802500089
- Barker-Ruchti, N., Schubring, A., Stewart, C. (2020). Gendered violence in women's artistic gymnastics: A sociological analysis. In Melanie Lang, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. 57-68
- Barker-Ruchti, N., Kerr, R., Schubring, A., Cervin, G. & Nunomura, M. (2017). "Gymnasts are like wine, they get better with age": Becoming and developing adult women's artistic gymnasts, *Quest*, 69(3), 348-365, DOI: 10.1080/00336297.2016.1230504
- Burke, M. (2001). Obeying until it hurts: Coach-Athlete Relationships. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 28(2), 227-240. DOI:10.1080/00948705.2001.9714616
- Cervin, G. (2020). Athlete A: The documentary that launched a global crisis in gymnastics. *Journal of Sport History*, 47(3), 282-284 (Review).
- Cervin, G., Kerr, R., Barker-Ruchti, N., Schubring, A. & Nunomura, M. (2017). Growing up and speaking out: female gymnasts' rights in an ageing sport, *Annals of Leisure Research*, 20(3), 317-330, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2017.1310625

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

Crabb, A. (2021). *Ms. Represented with Annabel Crabb* [TV series]. ABC

Cox, L. (2018). *The bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff*. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/dame-laura-cox-independent-inquiry-report.pdf>

Downie, B. & Downie, E. (2020). Becky and Ellie Downie. Letter published on Becky Downie's Twitter account.

Eagleman, A. N., Rodenberg, R. M. & Soonhwan L. (2014). From 'hollow-eyed pixies' to 'team of adults': media portrayals of Olympic women's gymnastics before and after an increased minimum age policy, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 6(3), 401-421, DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2013.877961

Ellenbogen, N. (2019). *An independent inquiry into bullying and harassment in the House of Lords*. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-committees/house-of-lords-commission/2017-19/ellenbogen-report.pdf>

Fisher, L. A. & Anders, A. D. (2020). Engaging with cultural sport psychology to explore systemic sexual exploitation in USA Gymnastics: A call to commitments. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 32(2), 129-145, DOI: 10.1080/10413200.2018.1564944

Gillard, J. (2012, October 9). Motions. *House of Representatives Official Hansard*, 15, 11581-11585.

Grattan, M. (2021, August 6). Man to face court over alleged rape of Brittany Higgins. *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/man-to-face-court-over-alleged-rape-of-brittany-higgins-165763>

Hovden, J. (2015). Assessing the sociology of sport: On sport organizations and neoliberal discourses. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(4-5), 472–476. DOI: 10.1177/1012690214566645

Hudson, M. (1988, June 25). The unthinkable happens: Gymnast Gomez, 15, in coma after suffering broken neck during warmups. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/story.Julissa%20Gomez>

International Socio-Cultural research group on Women's Artistic Gymnastics (ISCWAG) (2020). The future of women's artistic gymnastics: Eight actions to protect gymnasts from abuse. *Science of Gymnastics Journal* 12(3), 441-463

Julios, C. (2022, April 6). Despite #MeToo, tackling sexual harassment of women in Parliament remains a challenge. LSE British Politics and Policy blog. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/metoo-parliament/>

Kerr, R. (2018). The Role of Setting in the Field: The Positioning of Older Bodies in the Field of Elite Women's Gymnastics. *Sociology* 52(4), 727–743

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

Kerr, R., Barker-Ruchti, N. Schubring, A. Cervin, G. & Nunomura, M. (2019). Coming of age: coaches transforming the pixie-style model of coaching in women's artistic gymnastics, *Sports Coaching Review*, 8(1), 7-24, DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2017.1391488

Macur, J. (2017, October 19). The 'MeToo' Movement inevitably spills into sports. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/sports/olympics/mckayla-maroney-me-too.html>

Mark, D. & Snape, J. (2021, May 2). AIS accused of ignoring decades of allegations of physical and psychological abuse of gymnasts. *ABC News* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-02/gymnasts-allege-abuse-at-ais-human-rights-commission-report/100108974>

Morgan, L. (2020, July 3). South Korean triathlete takes own life after suffering abuse from coaches. *Inside the Games*. <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1095920/south-korea-triathlete-suicide-abuse>

Morgan, L. (2020, July 20). Human Rights Watch report documents abuse of child athletes in Olympic host nation. *Inside the Games*. <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1096488/human-rights-watch-japan-abuse-olympics>

Novkov, J. (2019). Law, policy, and sexual abuse in the #MeToo movement: USA Gymnastics and the agency of minor athletes. *Journal of women, politics and policy*, 40(1), 42-74.

O'Keefe (2021, April 23). Hurdles to recovery, *ABC News* <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-23/former-child-gymnasts-seek-redress-for-alleged-wais-abuse/100078488>

Olsen, L. (2017, December 21). The #MeToo movement comes to sports, a reckoning long overdue. *The Athletic*. <https://theathletic.com/192516/2017/12/21/the-metoo-movement-comes-to-sports-a-reckoning-long-overdue/>

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony and solidarity*. Cambridge University Press.

Rottenberg, C. (2014). The rise of neoliberal feminism, *Cultural Studies*, 28(3), 418-437, DOI: 10.1080/09502386.2013.857361

Rottenberg, C. (2019). #MeToo and the prospects of political change. *Soundings: A journal of politics and culture*, 71(Spring), 40-49.

Ryan, J. (1995). *Little girls in pretty boxes: the making and breaking of elite gymnasts and figure skaters*. Warner.

Sands, W. (2018). What happened to gymnastics? Personal reflections. *Science of Gymnastics Journal* 12(3), 441-463.

SPEAKING UP: CULTURAL CHANGE IN GYMNASTICS

Vendramin, V. (2020). Teaching and Trending Feminism in the 21st Century, *The School Field* 31(5/6), 5-12.

Walton, K. (2021, March 12). Is this Australia's turning point on sexual harassment, assault? *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/12/is-this-australias-turning-point-on-sexual-harassment-assault>

White, G. (2019). *Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff*. <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/Conduct-in-Parliament/GWQC-Inquiry-Report-11-July-20>

Whyte, A. (2022). *The Whyte Review: An independent investigation commissioned by Sport England and UK Sport following allegations of mistreatment within the sport of gymnastics*. <https://www.whytoreview.org/>

Williams, B. (2021). Ms Represented: Exploring 100 years of struggles and firsts for women in politics. *History Australia*, 18(4), 872-874.