



# Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports

*Michael A. Messner*

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In the past, when sport simply excluded girls, the equation of males with active athletic power and of females with weakness and passivity seemed to come easily, almost naturally. Now, however, with girls' and women's dramatic movement into sport, the process of exclusion has become a bit subtler, a bit more complicated-and yet, as Michael Messner shows us in this provocative book, no less effective. In *Taking the Field*, Messner argues that despite profound changes, the world of sport largely retains and continues its longtime conservative role in gender relations.

To explore the current paradoxes of gender in sport, Messner identifies and investigates three levels at which the "center" of sport is constructed: the day-to-day practices of sport participants, the structured rules and hierarchies of sport institutions, and the dominant symbols and belief systems transmitted by the major sports media. Using these insights, he analyzes a moment of gender construction in the lives of four- and five-year-old children at a soccer opening ceremony, the way men's violence is expressed through sport, the interplay of financial interests and dominant men's investment in maintaining the status quo in the face of recent challenges, and the cultural imagery at the core of sport, particularly televised sports. Through these examinations Messner lays bare the practices and ideas that buttress-as well as those that seek to disrupt-the masculine center of sport.

*Taking the Field* exposes the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which men and women collectively construct gender through their interactions-interactions contextualized in the institutions and symbols of sport.

Michael A. Messner is professor of sociology and gender studies at the University of Southern California. His previous books include *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* (1995) and *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (1997).

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