



INVISIBLE BARRIERS: WOMEN AND SPORTS GOVERNANCE IN CANADA

“Women are the untapped gold mine
of the Canadian sport system”

Sheilagh Croxon, Coaching Association of Canada and Olympic Coach

Sport Governance in Canada: How does it work??



Woman and Sport in Canada: A Brief Summary

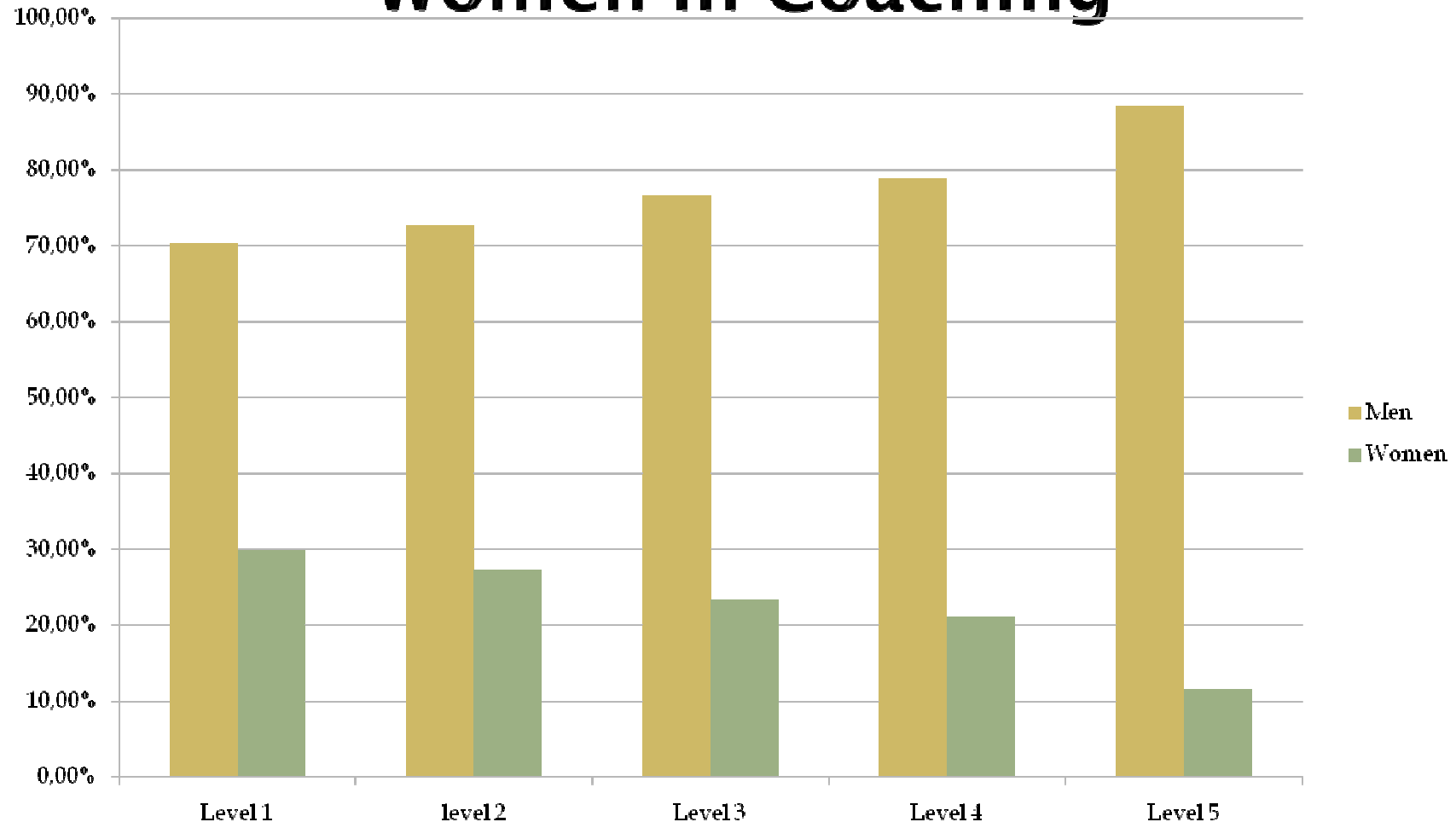
As an Athlete: Women are Gaining Ground.

- Statistics Canada Report on Sport Participation 2005: 15% gap in participation rates in all sport, down from 18% in 1998.
- However..





Women in Coaching



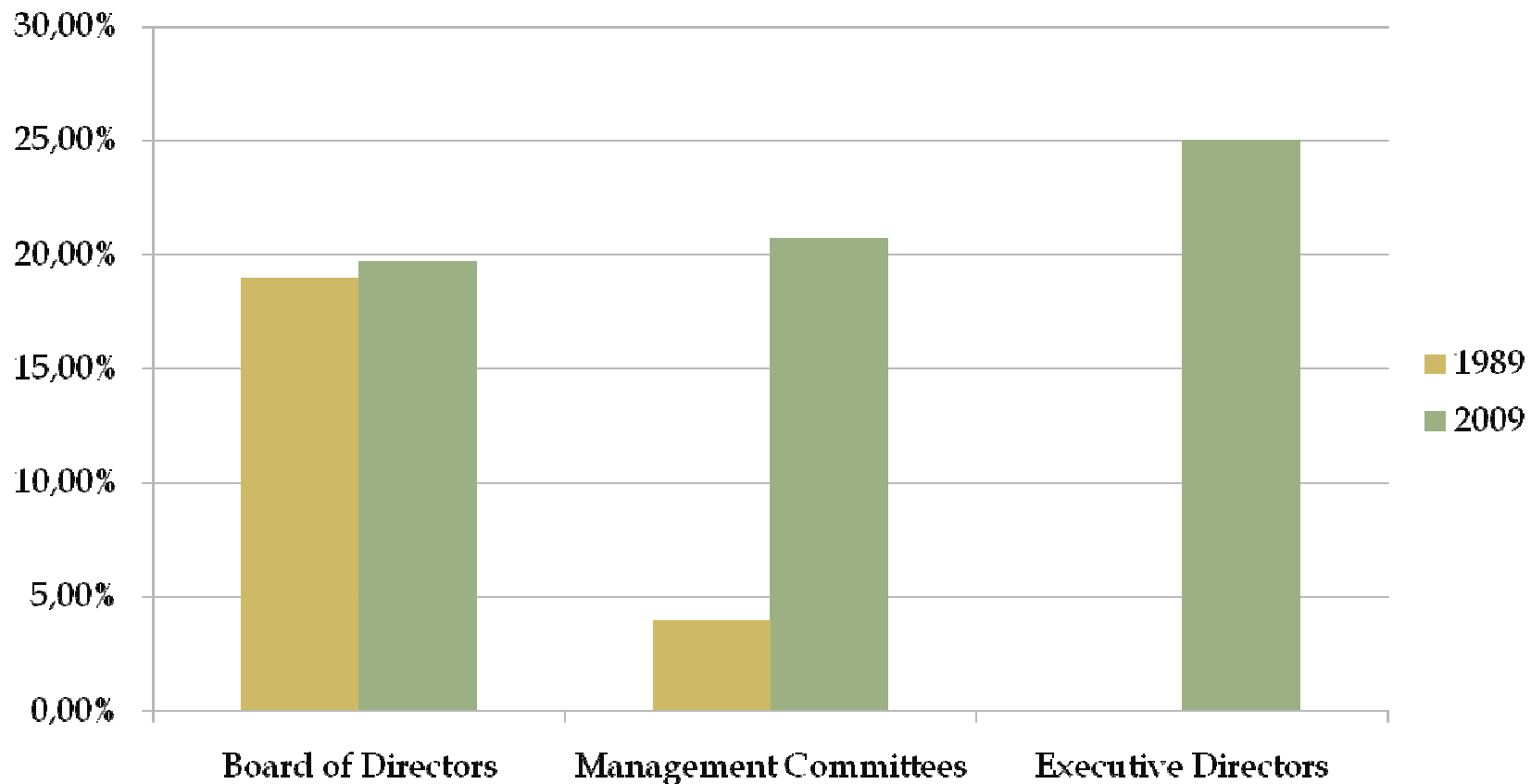
Source: Coaching Federation of Canada



Sports Governance in Canada

- ❑ Whitson and MacIntosh in 1989
 - focused on inequality in Canadian NSO's
 - selected six sports which have strong male and female participation numbers
 - discussed the lack of women involved in Canadian sport governance and attempted to find explanations
 - How far have we come in 20 years?
- ❑ Statistics from 1989- Percentage of Male Leadership.
 - 100% Executive Directors
 - 81% Board of Directors
 - 96% of the Executive/Management Committees
- ❑ How does this compare to today??

Twenty Years Later: Narrowing the Gap



Source: Whitson and MacIntosh "Gender and Power" and Sport Canada



What has changed in 20 years?

The Canadian Government and most NSO's have policies in place that are designed to increase the number of women in sport, which have been moderately successful since 1989.

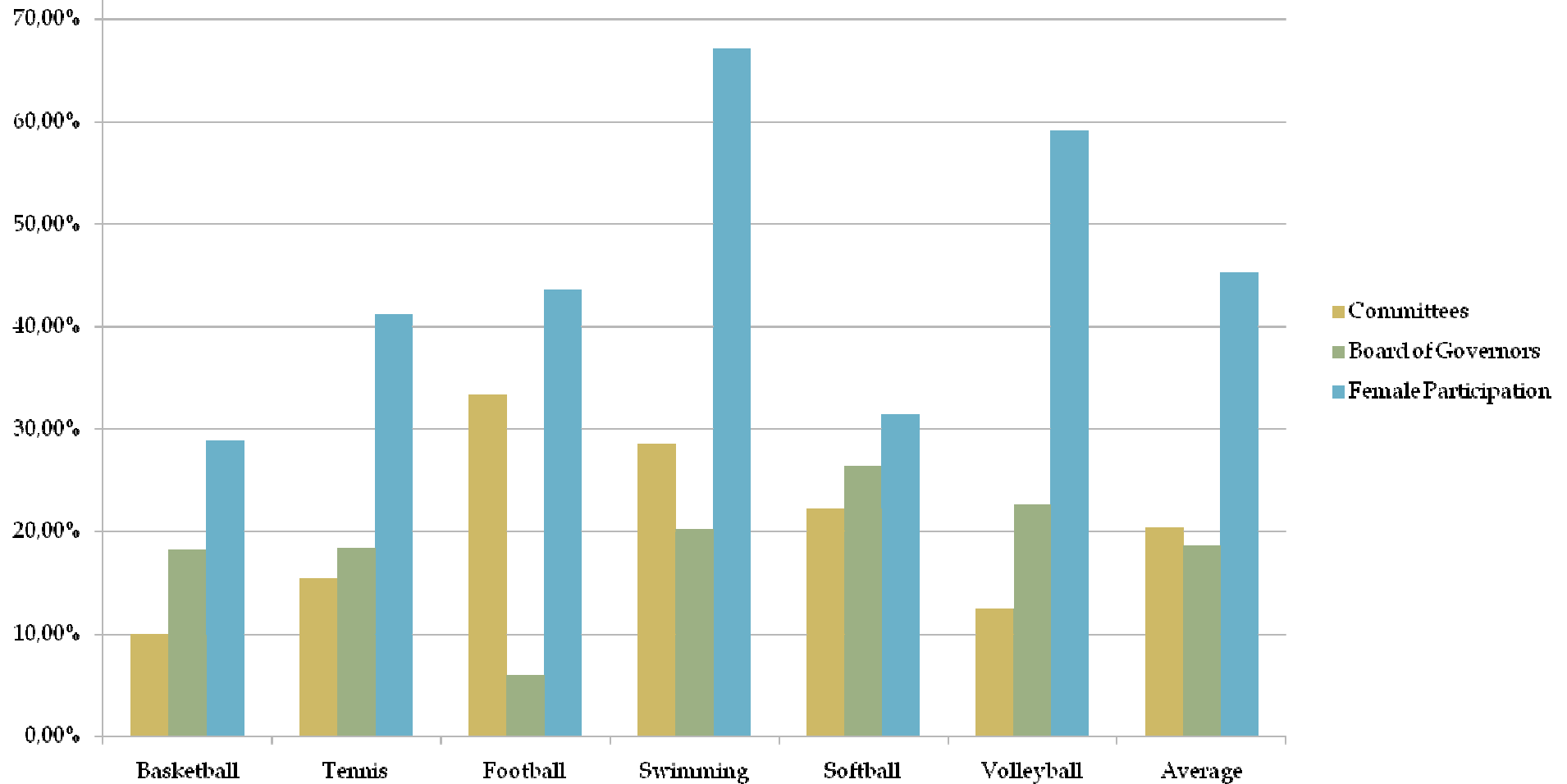
Mission Statements and official NSO policies stating that they recognize the importance of gender equality in sport.

Canadian Sport Policy on Women in Sport (1986).

Special Campaigns, Committees, Programs targeting women.



Female Participation in Sport v. Participation in Sports Governance



Source for Participation Numbers: Statistics Canada Sport Participation Report , 2005

Beyond the NSO's

▣ Canadian Olympic Committee (COC)

- Board of Directors- 71.40%
- Session- 77.22%
- Athlete's Council- 42.80%



Canadian Inter-University Sport (CIS)

- Employees- 70% (Including the CEO, director of marketing, director of operations, director of development, media and publications)
- Board of Directors- 87.5%

What are the Barriers?

- ▣ 1. “Token Status” at many levels within sport
Causes increased pressure to perform and increased visibility (Theberge, “Construction of Gender in Sport”).
When women are constantly underrepresented it is difficult for them to make progress, even when programs are put in place.
Example: the “Women in Coaching” Program.
 - Women coaches not treated with respect.
 - No “critical mass” of women anywhere within the sport system, makes it harder for them to press issues as a group and be listened to.



“Where we get into problems is with men treating a woman who may be in an apprentice capacity as a result of the Women in Coaching Program as the token female- you are only here because of the grant- and thus not allowing the woman coach to be given certain responsibilities or the respect they may deserve.”

Sheilagh Croxon, Coaches Association of Canada.

What are the Barriers?

- 2. Masculine Culture: Krauchek and Ranson, “Playing by the Rules of the Game.”

Women looking to be successful and respected are often forced to adopt strategies that gain them respect from their male peers.

Female participation in sport is largely contingent on their willingness to accept the masculine rules of the game.

Many that dislike this culture simply drop out of sport completely rather than attempt to change it.

Therefore, many do not speak out about sexist comments or other behaviour that make them feel uncomfortable.

What are the Barriers?

- ❑ 3. Genuine Lack of Experience
- ❑ (Whitson and MacIntosh, “Gender and Power”).

Women as primary care givers- less time to gain experience in areas that are valued.

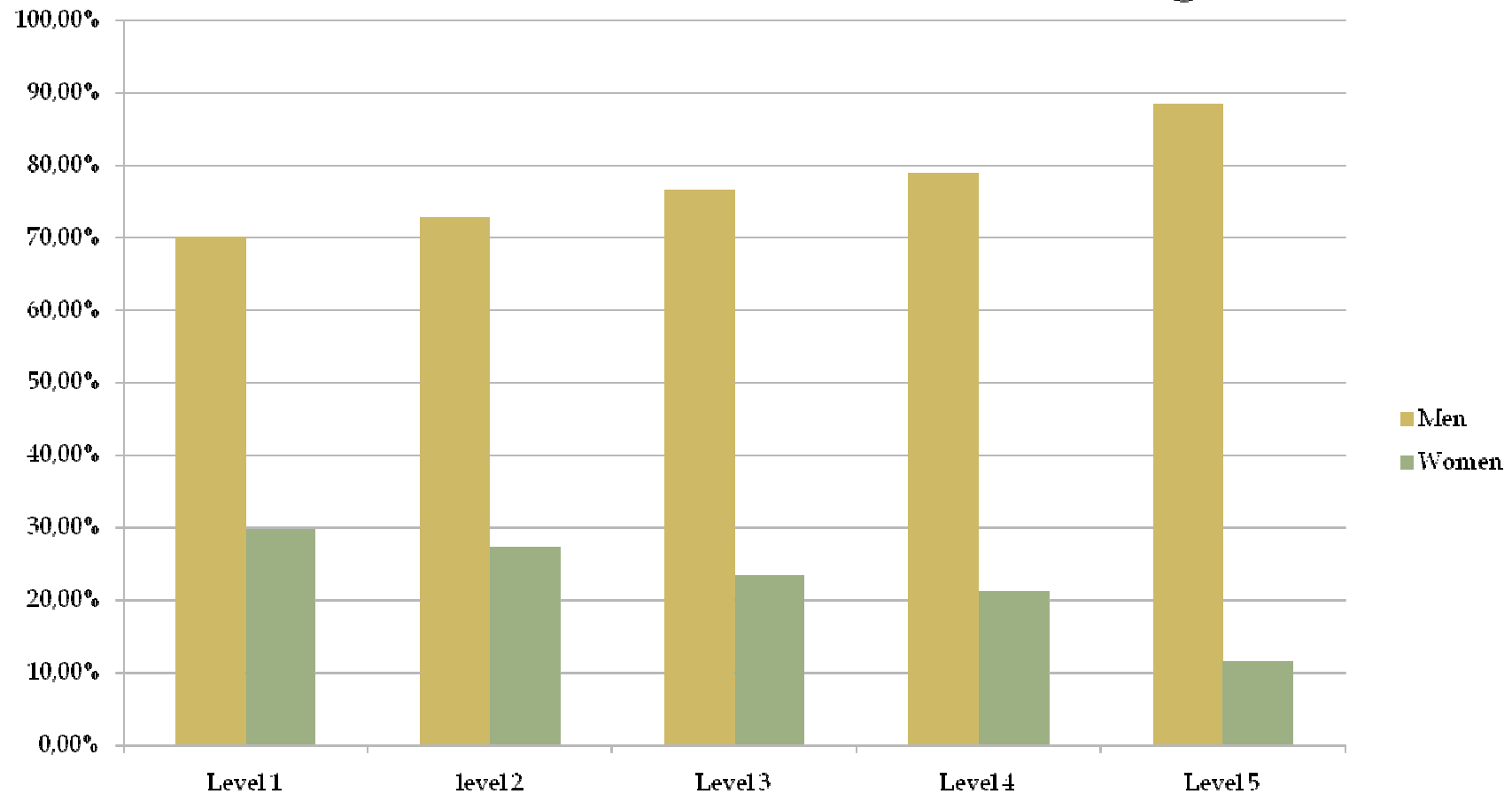
Gaining respect and experience in sport takes a lot of time, money and self-sacrifice.

Fewer opportunities

Coaching and volunteering opportunities in male v. Female sport.



Women in Coaching



Source: Coaching Federation of Canada

What are the Barriers?

4. A Lack of Interest?

Some argue that women are simply not interested in getting involved in sports governance.

If so, WHY?

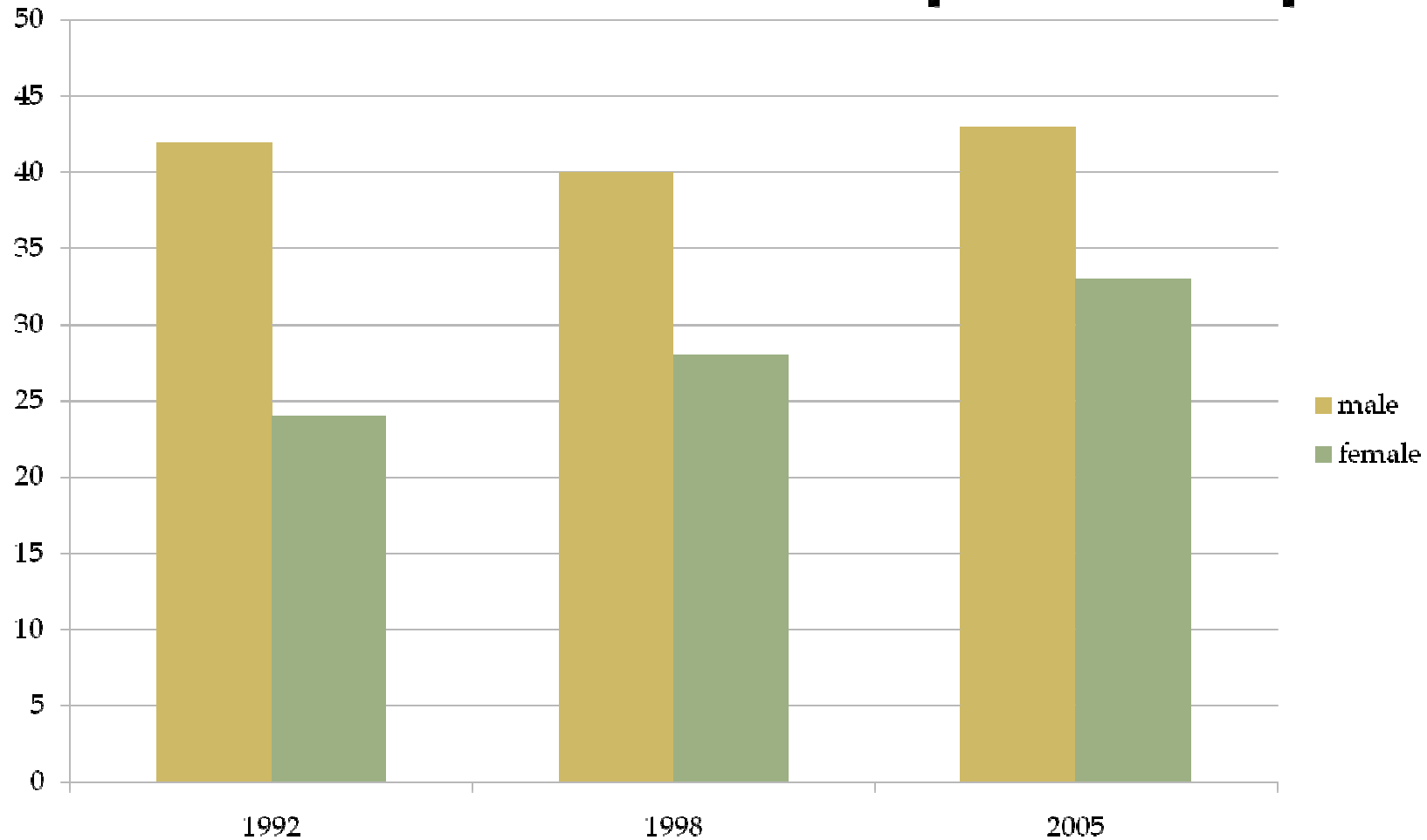
Women in Canada are participating in sport at a rate that is only 15% lower than men in Canada.

What about competitive sport?

There is only a 10% gap in the percentage of men and women that participate in tournaments and competitions

Women's interest in competitive sport has increased

Women v. Men in Competitive Sport



Source: Statistics Canada Sport Participation Report, 2005.



Why Does it Matter?

1. Lack of Female Leadership

- Prevents female athletes from developing strong female role models
- Women are given fewer opportunities to develop their leadership skills in sport

2. No Voice, No Problem

- Many people involved in sport do not recognize there is a problem
- The numbers of women involved are so low that many women that do raise concerns are simply not listened to or they do not have a large enough mass to be taken seriously (Whitson and MacIntosh).

3. Participation Rates of Non-Adolescent Women in Physical Activity

- young women that become involved in their sport beyond the playing field are more likely to stay involved with the sport in some athletic capacity as well

4. Sport is in Crisis



Techniques to Bridge the Gap

1. Reserving certain positions, or a certain number of positions for women.

Softball Canada has added a “Female Athlete Representative” to all of its major committees.

The Women in Coaching director feels that quotas are the only way for women to begin to gain a voice on coaching committees due to the fact that they are so under-represented.

Problem: Backlash if these positions are filled with women that are not qualified.

Techniques to Bridge the Gap

2. Continue attempts to increase female participation in other areas of sport to create a more female friendly atmosphere.

- As athletes.
- As coaches.
- As officials.



Techniques to Bridge the Gap

- ❑ 3. Focusing on the athlete. Why are female athletes leaving sport all together?
 - ❑ - It is not all genetics: The drop out rate occurs in the **18-24 age group**
 - ❑ - The same percentage of women that are involved in sport at age 25 are involved in sport at age 54 (Statistics Canada Survey, 2005)
 - ❑ - More research needs to be done into why female athletes leave sport at such a young age, much earlier than most Canadian women have children, and why they do not get involved in sport after they are finished competing.



Techniques to Bridge the Gap

- ❑ 4. Committees focusing on women's issues (that have BOTH genders involved)
- ❑ - What are the benefits of having both genders involved??

Techniques to Bridge the Gap

- ❑ 5. Social Capital: Promoting opportunities for groups of women that are involved in sport to gain a united voice
 - ❑ - Working groups with respected women within sport
 - ❑ - Networks that women can turn to when there is a problem within their organization
 - ❑ - Organizations whose purpose is to promote and unite women in sport (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport)



Techniques to Bridge the Gap

- ❑ 6. Making women the best candidate for the job.
- ❑ - Skills in Coaching
- ❑ - Providing Volunteer Opportunities
- ❑ - Sponsorships for women in sports management programs



Summary

1. In 20 years we have seen marginal improvement. The statistical improvement does not necessarily align with increased power.
2. Women are grossly under-represented in NSO's, the COC and CIS based on sport participation numbers
3. A combination of the new strategies recommended here, and successful in other areas, could provide avenues for further advancement



Thank you for your attention.

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