

Anything Boys Can Do, Girls Can Do Better: Dr. Shawn Ladda's Journey to Female Equity

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Dr. Shawn Ladda is no stranger to female oppression. She was marginalized at an early age for being a female athlete. Her first familiarity included being kicked off her youth baseball team for striking out a boy. Following that incident, she experienced receiving hateful comments from parents for being better than the boys in soccer. Her experiences are not diverse from many women in America. According to Adams (2017), feminists have used sport and physical activity to stress that sexism exists and to show disparity between men and women. Shawn's experiences have shaped her mission of social justice and equity for females in sport and physical activity and in the greater society.

Dr. Shawn Ladda received her Bachelor's degree from Penn State University, her Master's degree from Springfield College, and her second Master's and Doctorate degree from Columbia University. Shawn was a women's soccer coach at Columbia University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In the early 1990's she was hired as a professor in the Kinesiology department at Manhattan College in Riverdale, New York, where her extensive career continues to flourish. Additionally, Shawn is past President of National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS). NAGWS aims to "advance fairness and equity in sports" (Ladda, 2009, pp. 48). Through this organization she has lobbied Congress multiple times, presented at conferences nationally and internationally as well as worked on many projects related to social justice and equity.

While at Penn State, Shawn played on the universities club women's soccer team. At the time, there was a varsity men's soccer team but only a club women's team. During her junior year, the team qualified for post-season play, but the university refused to sign off on paperwork to let the women play past the regular season. They went on to fight for justice internally and held a meeting with then Athletic Director, Joseph Paterno. When these efforts failed, Shawn and

other players on the team filed a Title IX complaint in Pennsylvania. Their goal was not for immediate gratification, but rather to pave an equitable road for future women at Penn State. There are currently 14 varsity women's sports teams competing at Penn State University, all of which can qualify for post-season play.

Shawn has researched extensively on the topic of girls and women in sport and physical education in order to highlight female inequity and bridge the gap. According to Shawn, "most of the research shows that girls and women have made considerable gains since Title IX passed in 1972, but there is still a way to go" (personal communication, December 5, 2017). Moreover, research displays that there is a strong link between health and well-being and participation in physical activity for girls and women (Womens Sport Foundation, 2015). As a professor of Kinesiology at Manhattan College, Shawn makes it her mission to make every female student feel strong and supported through constructive positive reinforcement and providing professional career opportunities.

Through her own research, Shawn has found many social justice issues related to this topic. Dr. Ladda noted in 2014 that "the commitment to physical literacy is a social justice issue" (Ladda, 2014, pp. 3). In 2015, Shawn wrote a piece titled "Where Are The Female Coaches?", 43 years after the creation of Title IX. In this article, she argued that the efforts of Title IX have only gone so far since 1972 and showed the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, such as coaching and athletic administration. She also noted in this research that female coaches were being treated unfairly compared to male coaches. More recently, in 2016 Dr. Shawn Ladda called for action of educators to "provide an inclusive and respectful environment for all" (pp. 3), something she herself contests for with her students in the department of Kinesiology at Manhattan College.

Attempting to reach opposing views is a challenging task in the fight for social justice. Dr. Shawn Ladda uses experiences with those with opposing views as a teaching strategy. She has noticed that if individuals are not part of a marginalized group, they do not see the disparity that has existed for decades and still currently exists. In order to diminish this facet, Shawn has students from marginalized groups tell their story. She herself tells her story and speaks about her own privileges. Shawn speaks to her students about the privileges she has experienced and finds that it puts people on the defensive, but to her, in order to create change you have to make people feel uncomfortable. Much like Shawn, Bickmore and Parker (2014) noted that actively engaging students in conversations of conflict and conflicting viewpoints was important in facilitating significant lessons about equity. Shawn makes sure that her students understand the true definition of privilege and encourages them to look deep into themselves to understand the term better. She agrees that this is challenging, but is determined to make others see their own privileges and understand the stories of others who might be oppressed.

Dr. Shawn Ladda is a strong, educated and willful feminist. Her work is remarkable and has been shaped by experiences that many women have faced throughout their life, simply by just being a woman. “My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better.’ *All of us, women and men, must do better*” (Ngozi Adichie, 2015, pp. 48). Shawn sets out to make sure we *all* do better.

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