Twitter Thread by Dr Sheree Bekker



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I have been hearing more frequently the narrative that women's sport apparently exists as a 'protected category' so that women can win (because on this account without it no woman will ever win again)

This is: a) *not* the reason why women's sport exists as a category,

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and b) it is *not* true that women will never win again.

This narrative is profoundly paternalistic and keeps women small.

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Let's unpack this a little:

A. Women's sport exists as a category because the dominance of men athletes was threatened by women competing.

We see this over and over again in the history of sport...

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Exhibit A1: Figure Skating

1902: Madge Syers enters the World Champs and comes 2nd (no rule preventing her, though no woman has ever entered before)

1903: Women banned from World Champs

1905: Segregated women's category

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Exhibit A2: Skeet Shooting

1992 Barcelona: Zhang Shang wins the Gold Medal. The event had always been an open event (no gendered categories)

1996 Atlanta: women banned from shooting

2000 Sydney: Segregated women's category, fewer targets for women

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Exhibit A3: Football

1920: Women's football thriving in the UK with 53000 strong crowds (men had been off fighting in WW1)

1921: FA bans women's football (men had returned from WW1)

1971: Fifty (50!) years later ban is lifted, women's football is still recovering

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More examples exist but the pattern is clear:

Where women were included (or simply included themselves) it was only when they started threatening men's dominance/entitlement that we were segregated into a separate category.

It is why we still see Sport & Women's Sport ■

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Women's inclusion was on the terms of those in power. They didn't want women 'taking opportunities' away from men so they segregated women.

It was never about a benevolent (still sexist) aim of supposedly 'giving women a chance to win'.

It was about control.

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And the narrative (B) about women being inherently physically inferior to men? Concocted as a reason to segregate us without threatening masculinity.

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There are once again actually greater fears here that women may start to challenge men’s dominance more broadly.

Indeed we are already starting to see this...

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Exhibit B1: ultra-endurance racing

https://t.co/5s6sZkUS0l

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Exhibit B2: surfing (this article is excellent!)

https://t.co/Mhq7dYD7O6

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Exhibit B3: The ban on men pacemaking for women

https://t.co/WXdmyTFq5A

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Exhibit B4: shooting again (fascinating article here for how it tries to explain why women are winning)

https://t.co/ErC5DlNziE

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There are some really lovely real-life examples and research studies that show that the more men participate against women, the more they come to accept that women can be good athletes, e.g.

1. https://t.co/UQNWrcecnX

and

2. https://t.co/KB4Td5mHXu

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Inclusion is not only the right thing to do, but it also makes us *all* better.

This is why I will always fight for the inclusion of trans women in women's sport.

#TransWomenAreWomen #TransRightsAreHumanRights

17/20 Just as cis women are kept small, so too are trans women kept small.

"The idea that women and girls have an advantage because they are trans ignores the actual conditions of their lives"

Our liberation (and excellence!) is bound up together.

https://t.co/P4v0ZbAX0t

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Sport isn't inherently gendered.

We manufacture strict binary gendered differences, and then we naturalise them.

Understanding and interrogating this helps us to understand the panic and fearmongering around women's sport right now, and where we might go next.

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I'll end with this paragraph on women's sport as a radically inclusive space

https://t.co/EEveh7eIEX

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It is possible to have a different conversation here.

Gender expansiveness gives us all permission to break free from - and take up space beyond - societal norms, and I'm very much here for that.

Onward.

Well this struck a chord.

I've compiled this in blog post form for everyone who has asked

https://t.co/IM9rBWWz0B