

Benjamin CARR, Researcher, University of Lausanne

Thank you to the Council of Europe for the invitation to join the event today, to the other presenters for your contributions, and to all of you as well for your attendance. I must preface that with only a few minutes to speak today, I won't be as nuanced as I might otherwise like to be in my speech and language use, so I apologize in advance if my speech is not as considerate and inclusive as it could be.

In the attempt to identify and combat gender-based violence in sport, I would like to refer to what social scientists have identified as the primary value in sport, at least in the Western Global North, and that is physical dominance.

Building on Mhairi's presentation of the "success at any and all costs," this value of physical dominance is the criterium we use to evaluate "success." That is to say, for example, that we aren't giving out any medals for generosity.

This value was supported and developed by men in the period of growth for modern organized sport in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Physical dominance in sport was a way for men to reinforce their superiority, often through physical violence.

The sport we practice today largely continues to uphold this value, by celebrating athletes who are relatively physical dominant, and thus implicitly supporting the assumptions of men's superiority.

There is a tendency to focus on the physical and sexual forms of gender-based violence, but I'd like to focus on some more subtle forms.

For instance, even the language of "combatting gender-based violence" implies that it requires violence to get rid of violence.

When physical dominance is the primary value, those who are not physically dominant are not of value. The sport we practice today largely upholds this value, implicitly reinforcing the social value and superiority of the physically dominant, generally, men. If women are relatively physically dominant, they sometimes face an identity conflict, or fear of judgement from others as being "too manly," somehow not "being a woman" correctly. These are justifications given by women when we investigate the high rates (usually around 40-60%) of girls and women who stop playing sports before age 18. If practicing sport is a good thing, gender-based value of physical dominance is creating a harmful, or violent, psychological experience for young women

What about the women who "succeed" in sport, as athletes, coaches, administrators, referees? Certainly, sport must be doing something positive for them, right? I'm not so sure, because whatever honor, recognition, and respect they feel they have has come from the same system that pre-defines their gender as inferior. They have been "successful" in their pursuit of sport's primary value: physical dominance. They have created social value for themselves in physically dominating other women, in quite the same way that men had created value for themselves for physically dominating women. (As an aside, I must say that this isn't the pursuit of sport for *all* women; I am certainly overgeneralizing). Continuing to practice sport that celebrates the physical

domination of another person is upholding that value in all its forms, which ultimately reinforces that original idea of men's inherent superiority.

What can we do about that? Often the answer I see from people is to make sport about competing with oneself. Seemingly then, we are no longer celebrating the physical domination of *another person*, but this is where the conditions of psychological violence become quite subtle. "Becoming the best version of yourself" or "being better than you were yesterday," is an abstraction or externalization of an idea of ourselves, which becomes the equivalent of the earlier opponent standing on the other side of the field. There is a tendency to develop aggression towards oneself - "*I am the enemy*" - and I become in constant conflict with my own state of existence. I'm never at peace because I know that today will by definition not be good enough for tomorrow, so I'm perpetually "bad."

As a coach and researcher, my interests are in figuring out how to interrupt this cycle of reproduction of a system based on the value of physical dominance.

Using the analogy of a baker, let's imagine I have a recipe, ingredients, and process for baking a cake. I practice and practice to get great at baking this cake, so much so that I can start a career of it. If someone comes to learn from me, I'm not likely to start teaching them how to cook vegetables. My knowledge, my interests, my values have all developed in the system where cakes are good, and I'm not going to suddenly give that up because someone tells me vegetables are healthier.

Likewise, coaches (again, not *all* coaches) have developed and profited, often as athletes themselves, from a system that values physical dominance. It is naïve to expect them to suddenly start "cooking vegetables," the equivalent of many safeguarding behaviors in this analogy, changing what value they pass on to athletes, just because we tell them the cake they've been making for years is unhealthy.

I believe, if we want to eventually interrupt this system, we have to recognize the value that coaches have created for themselves, why they believe they are worthy of respect. Meeting them where they are, we can then start on a long process of illustrating these subtle ways in which that value, based on physical dominance, is actually harmful to everyone involved, coaches included, but especially women.