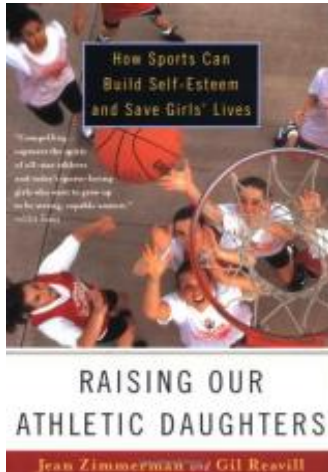


# Raising Our Athletic Daughters: How Sports Can Build Self-Esteem and Save Girls' Lives

by Jean Zimmerman and Gil Reavill

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## About the Book

"If Ophelia had been on the swim team," write Jean Zimmerman and Gil Reavill in this eye-opening report on the state of female athletics, "she might not have needed reviving."

*Raising Our Athletic Daughters* represents the first comprehensive look at the impact of sports in girls' lives, as well as a guide for parents eager to see their daughters succeed.

This book arrives at a time when women in sports are achieving record breakthroughs. Witness the twenty-fifth anniversary of Title IX civil rights legislation; the 1996 Summer Olympic Games and 1998 Winter Olympic Games, where female athletes captured our hearts with their guts and glory; and the first spectacular seasons of the WNBA.

The popularity of Rebecca Lobo, Mia Hamm, Gabrielle Reece, and Jackie Joyner-Kersey has given rise to a new media darling: the female athlete. It seems almost paradoxical that, just as we are witnessing an explosion of female athletics, books and studies attest to a very different picture of girls' lives, charting the loss of confidence and self-esteem with the onset of puberty. With her book *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher was only the latest in a string of theorists to describe the dramatic ways in which girls lose out.

Journalists Zimmerman and Reavill set out to talk with girls and their parents, exploring how sports can counteract this disturbing trend and transform girls' lives. Here are first-hand stories from the inner cities and rural playing fields across our country, offering compelling evidence that participation in athletics makes an extraordinary difference in the lives of young girls--from reducing pregnancy rates and substance abuse to increasing college attendance. Indeed, sports may be the most powerful resource that parents can tap in order to raise strong girls. A clarion call for all those eager to help their children succeed and level the playing field, at last.

## Discussion Guide

1. Parents' personal history colors their approach to introducing their daughters to sports. What were some of your own sports-related experiences growing up?
2. More people tuned in to televised coverage of the Women's World Cup in Summer '99 than the NBA finals the same year, seemingly disproving the theory that there is no large-scale audience for televised female athletic events. Was it a fluke or a trend?
3. The authors cite studies saying that 95 percent of national sports coverage focuses on male athletes. They say the trend has begun to shift in other venues. How are local newspapers' coverage of women's and girls' sports different, and why? What difference does it make to girls what sports get covered in the media?
4. The authors make the claim that playing sports not only boosts girls' confidence and enhances their physical well-being, but can even "save girls' lives." What evidence is there to support this assertion? Do you know girls for who this conclusion is true?
5. Debate exists regarding the benefits of same sex or coed sports participation. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of each?
6. What about athletic activities that are traditionally "boys only"--such as wrestling, ice hockey, football, boxing--what are the benefits for girls of taking part? Is there a downside? Are they different than participating in more "feminine" sports--like swimming, gymnastics, tennis?
7. Kate Morrel is a soccer player whose teammates helped her through a tough time. Have you ever played on a team that felt like family?
8. Girls' games are not often capable of drawing big crowds of spectators, something girls in the book note with disappointment. Why does it matter--and who do girls want most in the stands cheering them on?
9. Fathers and athletic daughters share an unusual bond. What are some of the advantages that a father might bring to his daughters sports experience? Disadvantages?
10. The authors assert that how we treat girls and boys even before they start kindergarten shapes their later sports participation and ability. What messages do we send by putting girls in tutus and boys in dungarees, or by scolding girls when they come in dirty from playing outside?
11. The hours of 3 to 8 pm have been described by child professionals as "the witching hours." Why? In addition to the teen crime rate tripling, the teen pregnancy rate also rises. What's the relationship researchers have found between girls' physical activity and premarital sex?
12. Kids play neighborhood pickup games less frequently than they did years ago. Instead, we have much more adult-organized team play. What are the pluses and minuses of this evolution?

**13.** The authors describe the boom in girls' sports involvement as a "children's crusade." What evidence do they cite for this view? What are some of the obstacles to equal sports participation for girls?

**14.** What are some of the barriers in schools to girls' sports participation? What can parents do to monitor what goes on in their kids' school?

**15.** What are some of the sporting events of the last several years that have altered the public expectation for women athletes and fueled girls' desire to play?

**16.** The authors profile a number of young athletes throughout the book. What are some of the more memorable characters? Did any of the girls remind you of a girl you know? Did the descriptions of girls' personalities ring true?

**17.** The book talks about the role of some especially devoted coaches. What makes them good? Talk about your own experience with coaches. Do you remember a standout coach?

**18.** Corporate America is taking notice of the explosion in sports for women. Examples? Why is business so interested?

**19.** How do some coaches ensure that kids excel academically as well as athletically? Can you think of an example the authors give of a high school student who was motivated by her sports involvement to improve her academic performance?

**20.** It's been said that while sports teach boys what they must be, they teach girls what they can be. Can you explain what this means? While physical activity is good for all kids, do you think it holds particular advantages for girls? If so, what are they?

**21.** "Not to have confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself," wrote Simone de Beauvoir. Social theorists like Mary Pipher have described the culture we inhabit as "girl poisoning." What kinds of features make girls lose confidence in their bodies and how can physical activity help girls regain a healthy body image?

## Author Bio

Jean Zimmerman collaborated with Felice Schwartz on **BREAKING WITH TRADITION: Women and Work**, the New Facts of Life and was the author of **TAILSPIN: Women at War in the Wake of Tailhook**. Her husband, Gil Reavill, is a freelance journalist. They live in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, with their daughter.

## Critical Praise

"We need this book. Strong girls make strong women, and athletics is an important part of that. If you want your daughter to enjoy the health and confidence that come from playing sports, **Raising Our Athletic Daughters** is a must-read. "

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