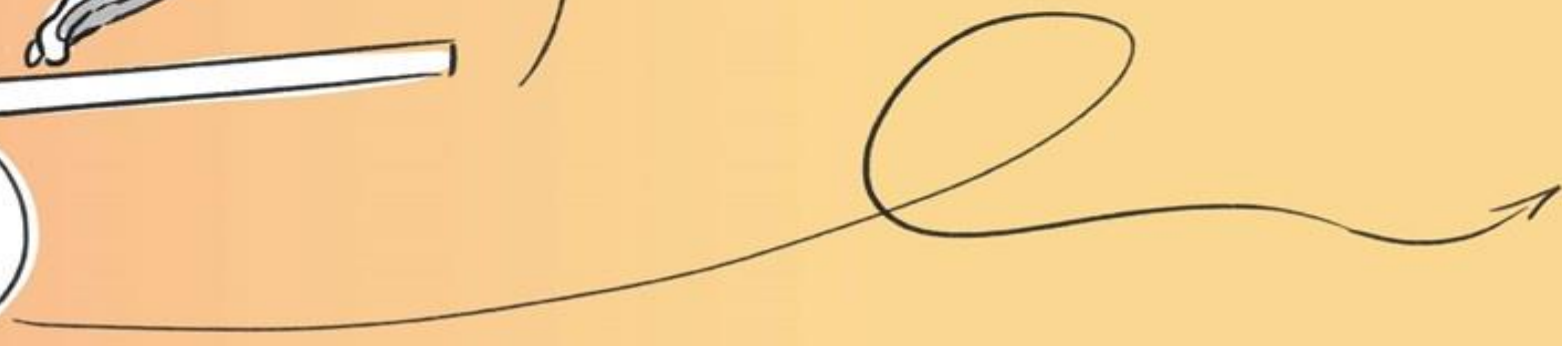




SEARCH for CHANGE





**“We have to focus on socio-cultural factors of gymnastics: defining problems to find solutions”, Monique Kempff
(president Royal Dutch Gymnastics Federation)**

Presentation:

- **Marieke van der Plas (General Secretary/ CEO Dutch Gymnastics)**
- **Froukje Smits (Scientific advisor/ Utrecht University of Applied Sciences)**



The 'Pixie model'



- Since 1970s: younger and child-like gymnasts
- Immature physique and mind are best suited to learn complex gymnastics skills.
- Puberty is feared
- Career timeframe is short: demands early specialization and intense training during childhood.
- The abusive coaching, dietary restrictions, and refusal/delay of medical treatment reported in research and by gymnasts are symptoms of the strategies believed indispensable to achieve the necessary skill learning in the available timeframe.

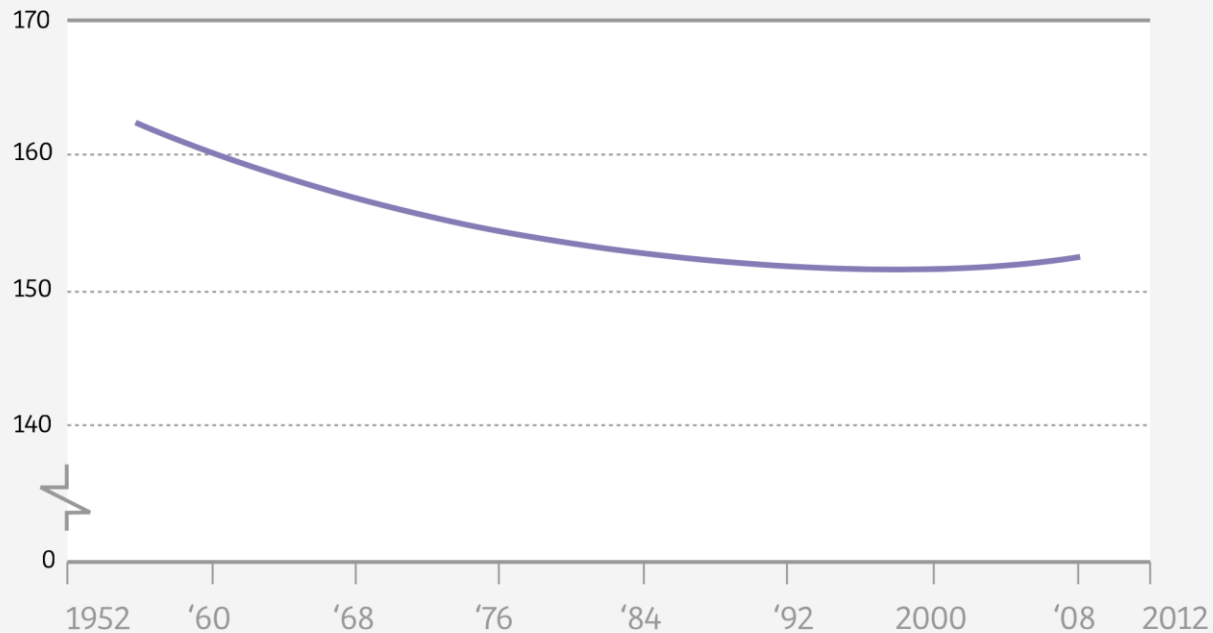
Source: International Socio-Cultural Women's Artistic Gymnastics research group ([ISCWAG](#)). (2020). [The future of women's artistic gymnastics: Eight actions to protect gymnasts from abuse](#). Science of Gymnastics Journal, 12(3): 441-445.



The 'Pixie model' (Gymnasts Length)

Smaller and smaller: the 'pixie-fication' of gymnastics

Average height (in cms) of US olympic gymnasts



Source: Sands et al. (2012)

Source: [the Correspondent](#)



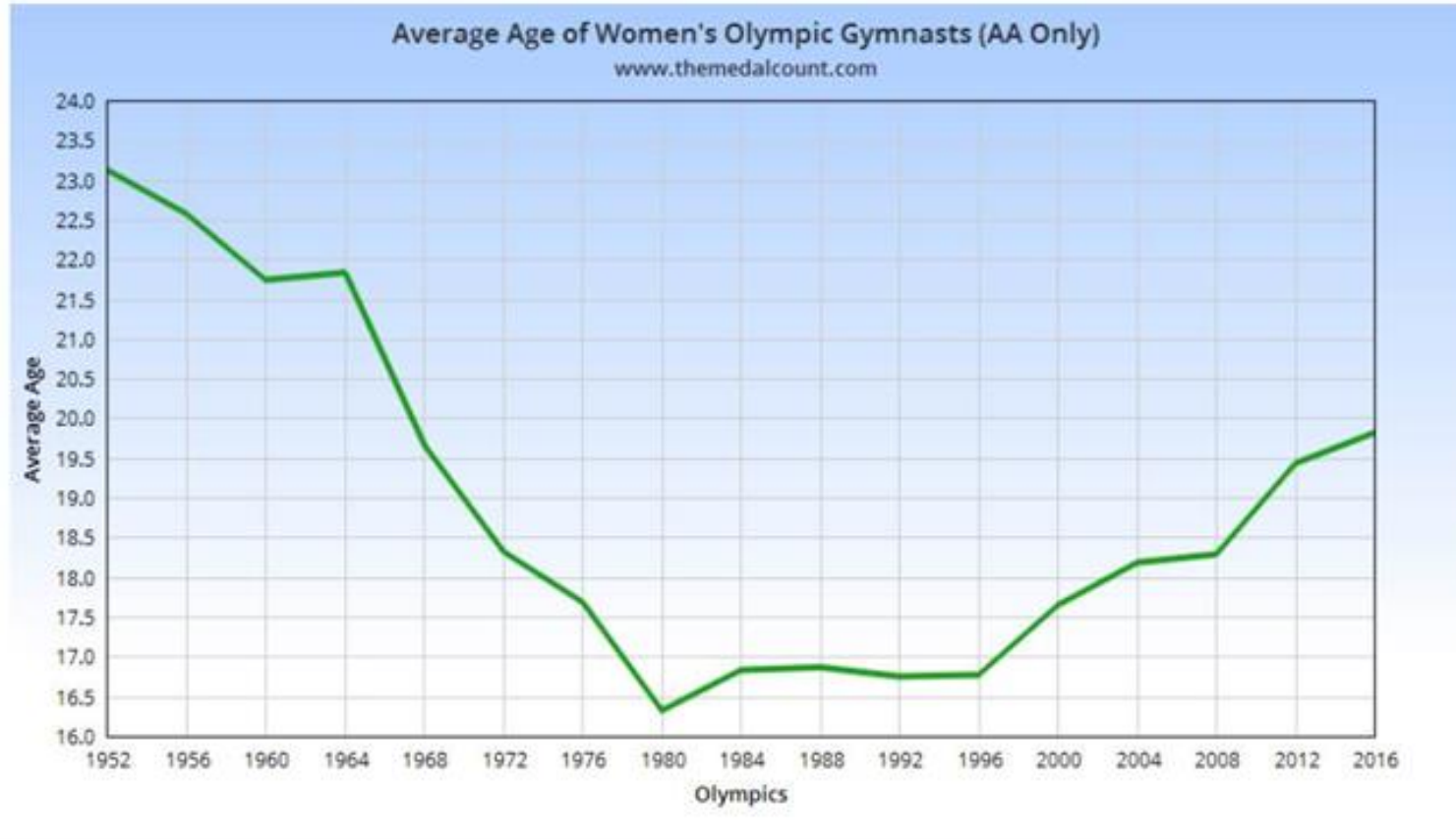
The 'Pixie model' (Gymnasts Weight)

- 1970s -> 1.60 metres and 60kg.
- 1987 -> 1.54 metres and 45kg
- 2000 -> 1.52 metres and 43kg
- 2008 -> 1.53 metres and 45kg

(Body statures of gymnasts during World Championships)



The 'Pixie model' (Gymnasts Age)



Source: <https://themedalcount.com/2020/01/18/a-history-of-the-average-age-in-womens-gymnastics/>



The 'docile – Pixie- model' in Leotards

Leotard -> a skin-thigh suit, V-cut at the crotch exposing the leg, thighs, and buttocks of the gymnast and a regulated requirement of competitions (FIG, 2016).

- Ideal bodies at risk of harm in gymnastics: contributing to the constituting of an abusive culture of 'gender and femininity'.
- Unequal adult-gymnast relationships (e.g., coach-gymnast; official-gymnast; doctor- gymnast).
- In many cases: empower coaches and officials, but disempower gymnasts into submissiveness and obedience: the 'docile pixie model'.

Source:

International Socio-Cultural Women's Artistic Gymnastics research group ([ISCWAG](#)). (2020). [The future of women's artistic gymnastics: Eight actions to protect gymnasts from abuse](#). *Science of Gymnastics Journal*, 12(3): 441-445.

R. Kerr, N. Barker-Rutchi, C. Stewart & G. Kerr (eds.) (2020). [Women's Artistic Gymnastics: Socio-Cultural Perspectives](#). New York/London: Routledge.



Idea 1: loosen leotard rules (and change media representation)

In 2018 **Monique Kempff**, president of the Royal Dutch Gymnastics Federation decided to loosen the leotard rules in competitions after girls and parents spoke out about their uncertainty, especially in puberty – shorts are allowed. In 2020 New Zealand decided likewise.

This re-positioning of the gymnast has potential to **empower and diffuse** the gender of the gymnast which, we argue would, at Risman's social level of gender structure, disrupt the gendered expectations associated with female gymnasts.

Lastly, as altered clothing may introduce different movement styles (i.e. less focus on traditional sensual/erotic movement and poses), and cover gymnasts' crotch area, it could facilitate **photographers** to produce different images, and **sports journalists** to speak/write about gymnasts' performances in alternate ways.

Source: Barker-Rutchi, N., Schubering, A. & Stewart, C. (2020). Gendered Violence in Women's Artistic Gymnastics: A Sociological Analysis. In M. Lang (ed), The Routledge Handbook of Athlete Welfare (in press). New York/London: Routledge.



Idea 2: career extension

- ✓ Monique Kempff decided to change the minimum age of senior level gymnasts from 16 to 18 years old for the next competition cycle
- ✓ Working groups are creating new formats for competition, training & education (of coaches)

Full grown women have won medals in women's gymnastics



DCG



Call to action: create a working group for the next level

Source:



"It is time for the gymnastics community to let girls grow into women before entering the (international) arena as a senior gymnast.

Let them grow physically, go through puberty, and let them have time to mature emotionally. I would love to see this happen within the next Olympiade."

Céline van Gerner





**Dutch
Gymnastics**