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Gender discrimination in sports

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Abstract

Gender discrimination in the athletics industry has long been a controversial topic — even the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said in 1896, “No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks.” Since then, gender equality in sports has come a long way, including UNESCO recognizing sports and physical activity as a human right in 1978. Despite the obstacles women face in athletics, many women have led and are leading the way to gender equity. This paper profiles women athletes and administrators who have paved the way, and offers "Strategies for Change" that women and girl athletes, coaches, administrators, and parents can take to make school and college athletics more equitable. Participation in sports benefits women just as it does men, helping to develop leadership skills, boosting self-esteem and grades, and promoting physical fitness and health. Women and girls who participate in sports and fitness programs are healthier and more academically successful. But the emphasis in college on "superstar" male athletes ignores the health and well-being of all students in favour of creating a few profitable athletes. In addition, male athletes in certain sports are taught to de-humanize and degrade women as part of their sports training. This in turn can lead to increased violence against women by these male athletes. We need to create a climate in which sports and fitness are for everyone, not just a few, and in which everyone's abilities are tested and respected.

Keywords: Gender discrimination, self-esteem, gender equality, leadership skills, fitness, male athletes

Introduction

Sport has been a part of the official school program since the mid-1800s, and was originally incorporated into the curriculum to serve as an important line of defense against the potential feminization of American males by a growing female teaching profession. As a part of the curriculum, sport provided opportunities for physical fitness and competition, as well as a medium through which valued socio-cultural life skills could be learned and practiced. Grounded in ideals of masculinity, sport, more than any other part of the educational curriculum has been, and continues to be, a gender issue.

Aim of Study

This paper will explore how school sport has served to institutionalize a gender specific and gender biased sport value system. First the socio-cultural context, in which school sport emerged, and its history and evolution will be reviewed. Next the differential impact which school sport has on females and males will be examined.

Objectives

- To promote gender equality.
- To empower women and girls through sports.
- Equality in society and sports
- To decrease the high dropout rate of women and girls

Hypothesis

The paper hypothesizes that the development of school sport has over time, marginalized and devalued women's sport, and the women who participate. It is suggested that because of this, sport participation by women and girls has actually been suppressed.

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Socio-Cultural Issues

The issue of gender equality in sport is as old as sport itself. Strides have been made, but sport remains an institution dominated by men. Women's sport has been defined and shaped by "...men's values, men's understanding of the world, and men's experiences-all of which suppress the development and expression of female values." The history and evolution of gendered sport cultures substantiates this statement and provides evidence, not only of historic and existing gender bias in sport, but of a sport culture created and sustained to nurture that bias.

Historically, women and girls have not been provided equal opportunities in sport because of (a) perceptions relative to physiological differences between the sexes, (b) societal norms and attitudes, and (c) organizational rules and support. In the early 1900s, medical doctors and female physical educators thought that vigorous activity would endanger a woman's reproductive capacities as well as result in the development of "unsightly" muscle. In response to these concerns, early sport endeavors for women and girls were limited to activities such as archery, dancing, croquet, golf, swimming, and tennis. More recent and ongoing research has shown that there are no medical, mental, or emotional reasons that support the restriction of women/girls from participating and competing in sport. In the early 1970s, two events occurred that dramatically altered the course of sport for women and girls. In 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was created by female physical educators as a "...model of athletic governance designed for female student-athletes, which incorporated the prevailing women's sports philosophy".

Gender Discrimination

School girls everywhere are made to believe that wherever they go, they can be just as smart, athletic and successful as boys. However, the story is not the same in reality. From the moment they are born, girls are forced to realize that even instances wherein only talent and passion are the quintessential distinguishers, they are still to be inferior to their male counterparts. Unsurprisingly, sports, which house the careers of the most passionate and the aspiring, is also a major concern when it comes to the issue of gender discrimination. Male dominance in sports has become a nightmare for female athletes, who in the hope of pursuing their careers in the field of sports, have been deprived of self-esteem among a plethora of gender discrimination instances.

Women's participation in sports has a long history. It is a history marked by discrimination, but also one that is filled with major accomplishments by female athletes and important advances for gender equality. Among many, some of the most notable achievements of women in sports are those of Helene Madison of the United States of America, the first woman to win the 10-yard freestyle in one minute at the 1932 Olympics, Maria-Teresa de Filippis of Italy, the first woman to compete in a European Grand Prix auto race in 1958, and Tegla Loroupe of Kenya, who in 1994 became the first African woman to win a major marathon. These achievements were made in the face of numerous barriers based on gender discrimination. Also, women are often perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports like marathons and weightlifting. Most people still hold the belief that sports are harmful to women's health, particularly to their reproductive health.

Title IX

Passed in 1972, Title IX was a landmark piece of legislations that banned sexual discrimination in all schools, including in athletics. It applies to all state and local agencies that receive education funds, which includes school districts, colleges, universities, libraries and museums. It focuses on giving women equal opportunities in the athletic arena to those of men.

Women as Coaches and Athletic Administrators

There are still significantly fewer women coaches and administrators than men coaches and administrators. One reason is that as the salaries of coaches of women's teams increased with Title IX, male coaches began to displace female coaches. In 1972, the year Title IX was signed into law, over 90% of women's teams were coached by women. Today, half of women's college teams are coached by men, but only about 2% of men's teams are coached by women. The record is not much better at secondary schools. As of 1990, over 40% of girls' teams were coached by men, but only 2% of boys' teams are coached by women. Seventy-five percent of all high school teams were coached by men.

Women are also excluded from administrative positions within sports. Only 21 % of college women's athletic programs are headed by women, and women fill only 33% of all administrative jobs in women's programmes. In high school, less than 20% of athletic directors are women, and less than 40% of directors of physical education are women.

Athletics in the Lives of Women and Girls

Women and girls who participate in sports and fitness programs are healthier and more academically successful. But the emphasis in college on "superstar" male athletes ignores the health and well-being of all students in favour of creating a few profitable athletes. In addition, male athletes in certain sports are taught to de-humanize and degrade women as part of their sports training. This in turn can lead to increased violence against women by these male athletes. We need to create an environment, in which sports and fitness is for everyone, not just a few, and in which everyone's abilities are tested and respected.

Health Benefits of Sports

Many studies have shown the importance of exercise in increasing cardiovascular endurance and strength, and decreasing the chances of heart attacks, strokes, back problems, osteoporosis, and other health problems. A recent study shows that women who exercise regularly from menarche throughout their childbearing years can significantly reduce their risk of contracting premenopausal breast cancer. Women who exercised at least 4 hours/week reduced their risk by over 50%, and women who exercised 1-3 hours/week reduced their risk by 30%.

Academic and Leadership Benefits of Sports

Participating in sports also has been found to increase young women's self-esteem. High school athletes were more likely to describe themselves as "highly popular" than non-athletes. Sports also confer academic benefits. High school girls, who participate in sports have higher grades than non-athletes. In addition, a larger percentage of athletes scored in the top quartile on a standardized test. The positive effects of sports on grades were especially pronounced. Furthermore, high school athletes are more likely than non-athletes to aspire to be leaders in their communities as adults.⁴⁹ If girls are to

grow up to be leaders, they need comparable opportunities to develop their leadership skills through team sports. Expanding sports opportunities for women and girls will help achieve the feminization of power in all realms.

Need For Social Awareness

Parents' influence is important. Girls are more likely to participate if they have a parent who participated as a child, or who still plays sports. Also, parents can help by insisting schools provide equal facilities and opportunities to their daughters and sons. Unfortunately, even girls who participate in sports and fitness cite obstacles, girls getting picked for teams after all the boys are picked; gym teachers who assume girls are not as good as boys; and better coaches and equipment for boys' teams. While urban and rural girls participate equally in sports and fitness, rural girls who quit sports, are more likely to have problems with transportation or

inadequate funds. In addition, more rural girls than urban girls feel boys make fun of girls who play sports.

Strategies for Change

- 1: Support Women's and Girls' Sports
- 2: Join a Women's Rights Organization
- 3: Challenge the Myths
- 4: Speak Out Against Gender Inequity
- 5: Encourage Other Women and Girls
- 6: Push for Gender Equity Policies
- 7: Publicize Discrimination at your School or University
- 8: Spread general awareness

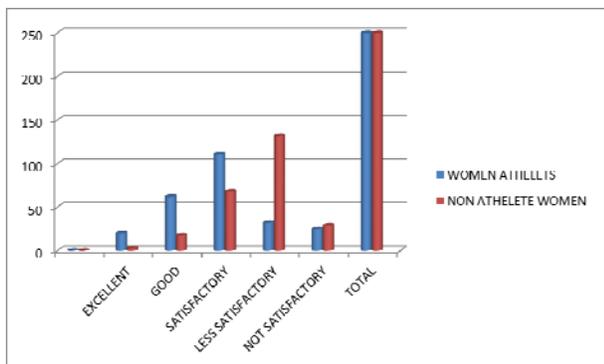
Data Analysis

Table Showing Comparison between Women Athletes & Non Athletes

Level of Social Adjustment	Women Athletes		Non Athletes Women		Z	P
	No. of students	%	No. of students	%		
Excellent	20	8	3	1.2	-1.3538	NS
Good	62	24.8	18	7.2	-6.4233	< 0.05
Satisfactory	111	44.4	68	27.2	4.0112	< 0.05
Less Satisfactory	32	12.8	132	52.8	2.087	< 0.05
Not Satisfactory	25	10	29	11.6	4.279	< 0.05
Total	250	100	250	100		

From the above table it was observed that the social adjustment in women athletes (< 0.05) was better than the non athletic women

Graphical Representation of the Above Table



Discussion

"Women face discrimination. They are treated like animals and it is not right. The thinking needs to be changed. Mentality needs to be changed. Men must understand that women also go out to do their work just as they do. But even women have to realise their own worth," feels Indian sports woman, Sania Mirza

Conclusion

Sports is one area where gender inequality is highly evident. It is deplorable that even today, women are treated so differently, especially in sports. Women in India are still seen as home-making and child-rearing machines. In some cities, women have also started earning their own living but participation in sports is still gloomy. Major problems are social, psychological, financial and family issues. Sexual harassment by the coaches is nothing new. The media and the people are also at fault with the "extra-interest" in the personal lives of sports women and creating a controversy

about it, for instance, the sports costumes they wear. The finest of sports women in India have faced discrimination at some level in their sports career, be it at the hands of authorities, selection teams, coaches, governments, or even their own families. India's former sprint queen, P.T. Usha broke down in front of the media regarding the discrimination meted out to her.

The situation has not changed much till now, but I think we are headed towards betterment with so many talented sports women in India reaching the peaks. We're all rooting for Mary Kom, Saina Nehwal, amongst many others. All we probably need is need to recognise that differences exist and a will to push towards equal opportunities. Like many things in life, the change begins with us.

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