

Analysing gender inequality in sports sociology essay



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This essay will seek to describe the issue of women in sports, and discuss the reasons for this, with relevance to some of the concepts covered in this course. It will also go on to discuss the improvements and positives observed in recent years, and explore some other possible measures to improve the situation in the future.

2. Background

In Ancient Olympics, competitive sports were masculine affairs. While males compete to show their prowess, women were prohibited to even watch competitions, much less compete.

Quite simply, even in this day and age of supposed equality and meritocracy, sport still remains a male domain, especially on the community level. Even with improved opportunities and treatment, there is still an invisible barrier between sport and the everyday woman. In the next section, this essay shall explore some of the reasons for this situation.

3. Reasons

3. 1 Introduction to Gender Ideology in sports

The concept of ideology is one that we take for granted, or rather, something we do not even think about. It refers to the ideas and explanations we have been given since young, to explain personal and social life. We have been using our ingrained ideologies to make decisions and judgments ever since we could, without ever questioning or knowing them. In addition, Taylor (1994) mentioned that our identities are formed based on dialogical relations with our significant others. In other words, the complexities of our identities

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are not formed through cultural identification alone (monologic model) but through the interactions with people who are important to us.

Gender, even more so than race or class, is a pivotal organizing factor in social life. While a person's sex is decided by physical characteristics such as genitalia, gender is a social construct formed and shaped by the society (James A. Banks). It is the fundamental way humans classify each other. Thus, we are especially reliant on gender ideology and it is extremely influential on how we organize our thoughts, actions and lives, and how parents bring up their offspring. The deep-rootedness of gender ideology means that everyone makes decisions based on it, from children, teenagers, parents to people in power.

Gender ideology plays a big role in how sport has been carried out throughout the ages. The idea that men are supposed to be strong, aggressive, fast and competitive is reproduced in many sports. Conversely, women are not encouraged to play sports because the above traits are not associated with women (women's athletics: coping with controversy). Thus, a woman exhibiting the above traits would be going against the gender ideology that most people submit to, and this would make her an anomaly. A woman would have to cope not only with her community seeing her as 'not feminine', she also has to deal with lack of resources and financial support because her politicians also have the same ideology and do not support women in sport. Fortunately, the situation has considerably improved from the past.

3. 2 Gender Ideology: dominance and stereotypes

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The fact that males are the dominant group is also accepted by most as part of their understanding of gender ideologies. This is correspondent to John Clammer's point that social inequalities are seen as 'natural' and hence not to be tampered with.

Thus, sport has also suffered as a consequence of the dominant group pulling the strings and the subordinate group accepting it as it is.

In the catalogue of marginality as discussed in Tatum (1997), gender is one of the categories of dominance and subordination. The dominant group, in this case male, are seen as the norm for sports. This element of identity is therefore taken for granted, giving males the power and authority to 'control' females, who are members of the subordinate group. As a result, the inequities go unnoticed by the males. Furthermore, the stereotypical representations of the males may lead females to focus on their difference from the 'norm' and lose belief in their own abilities and equal rights to sports.

Tatum's point about the catalogue of marginality is also relevant to the situation. Members of the dominant group, in this case males, take it for granted and do not notice the inequities. Whereas Tatum says that members of the subordinate groups, in this case females, further focus on their difference from the 'norm' and lose belief in their abilities and equal rights to sports.

People's submission to gender ideologies has led to the persistence of certain stereotypes. A simple example would be the one where girls are supposed to like pink and boys are not supposed to. This can be seen from <https://assignbuster.com/analysing-gender-inequality-in-sports-sociology-essay/>

the fact that the majority of girls' schoolbags are sold in pink color, and boys' bags can be in any other color but pink. This may seem harmless enough, but consider it that people also submit to the idea that ' boys like to do sports, girls do not'. Or worse still, ' boys need to do sports to become manly, but girls do not need to, thus they do not need to do sports'. This is a common idea perpetuated by many, unknowingly, due to their deep-rooted gender ideologies. As parents give a football to their sons and a doll to their daughters, they are again passing on the wrong message to their children. Although some may argue that parents are giving these gifts based on their child's interests, research has shown that girls and boys between the ages of six and nine are actually equally interested in sports. (XXX, intro section)

The ideas that women are weak, vulnerable and susceptible have also led to other myths preventing women from taking part in sport. The media, another institution controlled by the dominant group in society, males, have assisted in perpetuating the following myths about women who play sports - that they become unfeminine, develop eating disorders, suffer more knee injuries because of weaker female anatomy, and become lesbians. (XXX, intro section) These myths may sound ridiculous to the women of today, but these were real reasons women in the past were prevented from taking part in sport. And definitely, there are families around today who are not supporting their daughters' sporting interests due to the fact that ' women are weak' and should not be partaking in vigorous activity. Even within the sporting arena, less rough and less demanding sports were created for women e. g. netball and softball. In the case of netball, basketball was deemed too aggressive and manly, thus, a non-contact sport where players were not

allowed to touch each other and leave their boundaries was created for women.

Even if girls do persevere in sports, they often find themselves playing with boys and in the minority (need paraphrase). Based on the above circumstances mentioned, girls lack opportunities to play and develop motor skills. As a result, the rate of girls (by age 14) dropping out of sports is six times higher than boys.

In such situation, boys do not positively reinforce the participation of girls. Clammer (?) hypothesized that reinforcing of the category race as the dominant mode of social classification is a product of the dominant ideology in Singapore. In this case, males are being reinforced

Reinforcing of male as a dominant force in sport reinforces gender as a dominant mode of social classification.

The creation and reinforcing of race as the dominant public mode of social classification is itself a product of the dominant ideology or political culture, which is strongly Chinese in its characteristics.

3. 3 Gender ideology: Trivialization of women in sports

The media, as described above, is another controlling arm of the dominant group in society, and has a big part to play in the trivialization of women's sports. Up till as recent as the 1990s, horses and dogs were accorded more column inches in US sports pages than women. And even now, 90 percent of all sports television hours are devoted to men's sports. Women's events are seen as less important and are less likely to be covered by the media. Only <https://assignbuster.com/analysing-gender-inequality-in-sports-sociology-essay/>

in major competitions such as the Olympic Games, or 'feminine' events such as ice-skating and gymnastics, do we see the achievement of female athletes. And there is a lack of inspirational and positive stories about the triumph of female athletes. All too often, male reporters sensationalize stories of women athletes who challenge men, of women athletes being stabbed or abused, or of women athletes dying from eating disorders.

Another way both the media and spectator trivialize women's sport, is seeing it as second rate because women do not have the same power and speed as men. People who persist in such ideas feel that since women cannot perform to the same physical standards as men, they do not deserve the same support. This is an example of how members of the dominant group dictate what the norm for humanity is (Tatum). Although top women athletes have also excelled in their sport through discipline, skill and finesse, some are still not according women with equal recognition. Charles Taylor's point of misrecognition comes into focus here. In this case, those who are trivializing women's sport are not giving equal respect and dignity to women, though like men, they are also human beings. Women's efforts in sports are being misrecognised as inferior and not worthy of appreciation.

3. 4 Gender Ideology: 'New' factors

The gender ideologies that privileged sport as an exclusive male domain and resigned women as weak are not as strong as in the past. However, gender ideologies about the general role of men and women in society are still hampering the progress of women in sport today. Consider a household in this day and age; typically, both husband and wife would be pursuing

careers. And still, it is the wife who is the one who has to shoulder the responsibility of childcare and housekeeping. This means, during her limited free time, a working mother who may have the interest and inclination towards sports has to sacrifice her time for her household instead (Teo, 1999).

The male in the household still has more freedom for athletic and leisure pursuits, due to the longstanding ideology that women are the housekeepers.

4. Improvements and positives

As aforementioned in portions of the essay, the situation has improved considerably over the years. The global women's movement over the past thirty years has helped to challenge the traditional roles that women have and weakened male control over women's lives. The movement has also emphasized that women's lives are enriched when they develop themselves physically and intellectually. These ideas and changes have aided in emancipating women especially in developed nations, encouraging them to participate in and pursue sports. (sport in society)

Specifically in the sports arena, there have also been leaps of improvement in the quest for equal rights. In the United States, since Title IX was passed in 1972, women have had a legal basis to push towards equity in college and high school sports. Of course, equity is still not a reality in terms of facilities, programs, funding, and media coverage. But there has been encouraging signs; participation, peer, and self-acceptance of women's sports have all increased in the past 10-15 years. (women, sport and culture).

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To cite a recent example, the Pakistani women's cricket team won Pakistan's first Asian Games gold medal in eight years - an achievement that would not have been possible if women in the country did not have decent access to sports (Chang, 2010). This milestone points to the need for even better reform of ideologies and better opportunities for women in developing countries.

Achieving gender equity through a multicultural education

Multicultural education is a reform process which features the importance of all students despite gender and other social categories having equal opportunity to school (Banks). Stereotypical gender differences in sports have denied girls' participation in physical activities. In physical education context, a PE teacher has to understand that the dynamics of gender can influence one's knowledge of students. Failing to do so may result in simplistic prescription of pedagogy (Grant). Teachers being aware of stereotypical perceptions of females in sports can correct the misconception amongst girls that sports is not for them. This can be done through modifying their teaching approaches to encourage girls in class that they can also excel or benefit in sports.

5. Conclusion

Although sport participation and the acceptance and support of female athletes has increased exponentially since the late 1970s, future increases are not a given. And even now, the reality is that women in some societies still struggle against the traditional gender ideologies that hamper their participation in sport. In developed countries, gender inequities still exist in <https://assignbuster.com/analysing-gender-inequality-in-sports-sociology-essay/>

support, funding, and sport-related jobs. To further effect change, the gender ideologies that are related to sport must be put out onto the table and examined, before any subsequent action can be taken. (sports in society).

Multicultural education is a platform for achieving greater gender equity in sports.