

**SPORTS AND GENDER BIAS: AN ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sport is an integral part of the culture of almost every nation. However, its use to promote gender equity and empower girls and women is often overlooked because sport is not universally perceived as a suitable or desirable pursuit for girls and women. In both subtle and explicit ways, women face many barriers to participating in sports, which prevent women and girls from reaping the many benefits that can be gained from playing sports and engaging in physical activity. The gender discrimination in sports is males that dominate in sports at all levels and women athletes have less or no recognition, receive lower levels of media coverage, and are subjected to sexist and derogatory language in the media and from people in their communities. Existing social constructs of masculinity and femininity — or socially accepted ways of expressing what it means to be a man or woman in a particular socio-cultural context — play a key role in determining access, levels of participation, and benefits from sport. It is true in all countries that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to participate in sport, and sport continues to be dominated by males. It is a mistake, however, to assume that this is because girls and women do not wish to participate.

**Keywords:** Gender, Discrimination, Athletes, Dominance, Prejudices, Myths.

### **Introduction:-**

In the history of sport, women's roles and involvement have been less than equal to their male counterparts. In many ways, the equality is not shown for women in sport lead the denial of equality for women in almost all given societies. Women were virtually excluded from sports in ancient Greece (except in Sparta). Indeed, women were strictly barred from even viewing the Olympic Games, and punishments were prescribed for any women caught at the Games. The women did, however, create their own program of sports-The Heraea Games, in honor of Hera, the wife of Zeus. These were athletic events, held every four years, for women only. This is just be called the beginning of women in sports. Sage (1970) lists three reasons for women's historical insignificance in sport:

- Women's cultural "tasks" have been child rearing and home making. This left very little time for sport participation for women.
- The deep seated suspicion in the society is that vigorous sports were a health hazard for women.
- Social mores of masculine-feminine sex roles have discouraged women from participating in sport.

### **Lack of Female Role Models**

Sports personalities flood news headlines, endorse all varieties of products and, in this globalized world, are among the most recognized celebrities worldwide. Even children in remote rural Indian villages carry notebooks depicting cricketing stars who play for India or international players who earned reputation, and can name their favorite players. These stars serve as role models and idols for children around the world, particularly during major sporting events, such as the World Cup. Yet female sports figures are noticeably absent.

As a result, girls who aspire to participate in sports have less exposure to female role models. Consequently, they are less likely to benefit from the positive example that these figures can serve. An example from research conducted in few villages of Andhra Pradesh illustrates this dearth of female sports role models. When a sample of boys and girls were asked to name their sports idols, 49 percent of girls could not name a sportsperson at all, and of those who could, only 17 percent mentioned a woman. Only 11 percent of boys questioned could not name a sports idol, and very few named a female sports star. Without female athletes or cricketers to

look up to, girls miss out on the encouragement, inspiration, and exhilaration that can come from looking up to, and cheering for, a sports idol.

For example, disproportionately fewer females are socialized into sport at both the recreational and competitive levels. Strong cultural prescriptions still govern what is appropriate activity for males and females. Sport to a great extent, is still more closely identified with the male role. Also, males control the decision- making process of most competitive sports. In short, play, games and sport represent yet another domain where there is a gender – based double standards in terms of opportunities, values, and encouragement. When one look into the cricket in India, which is considered as a ‘religion’, has parity among men and women cricketers. An entrant in men’s cricket with a little bit fame is remembered, but a female cricketer, who is world number one in one day cricket almost all for the last two years, is not known to many. The unfortunate women cricketer is ‘Mithali Raj’ from our own Hyderabad. Most of the people knew ‘Rahane’ a male upcoming cricketer from India, but a top world class women cricketer is not known to the people, who lives in their own dockyard, leave about the country. Likewise there are plenty of sports women who are world class but lesser known or almost not known. Few of them are boxer ‘Marycom’ is not known until she won the Olympic medal though she was world renowned boxer and two time world champion in the category she belongs to in boxing. Deepika Kumari from archery was ranked within the top 5 for long. She won the world championship in the field of archery and got good name in their circles. How many of us knew her. On similar lines there are gifted sports women who could not get their due in getting the recognition as their male counter parts does all over the world.

### **Disparities in Media Coverage**

The media performs a vital role within society and in particular is a powerful tool which ‘influences our beliefs, attitudes, and the values we have of ourselves and others as well as the world surrounding us. Accordingly, the media does not merely reflect reality, instead it can entail a process of negotiation and reconstruction, which thus shapes and manages our beliefs and opinions. In recent years the mass media has played an active role in side-lining and trivializing female sporting success, with the ultimate aim of preserving sport as a male domain. For example, in the recently conclude T20 women’s cricket world cup hosted in India, only the matches played by India were only telecasted live whereas on the other side there was club level male cricket going on, was telecasted live. If the most viewed sport in India has this kind of

attitude shown by media one can imagine the fate of lesser known sport. This is nothing different all over the world about the coverage of women events. It is identified that a significant disparity between the coverage of women and men's sport in all parts of the media, despite the rapid growth of women's sport in the last 30 years. On average, men receive far more coverage than any women's sport, and moreover, this coverage is much wider. The message is clear, female athletes are second rate, female sport is of little importance and society accepts only certain sports for female competitors, unfortunately for women, the television schedules are built around male and not female preferences. Furthermore, the evidence supports the view that women are systematically excluded and side-lined, 'in nearly every aspect – column inches, running time, persons quoted, placement of articles, presence, size, length, and placement of photographs or video type, range of sports and size of headlines – women's coverage lags behind.

### **Cultural and Religious Barriers**

Many of the myths have been initiated and perpetuated by the medical and teaching professions and by journalists. These unfounded beliefs suggest, for example, that female participation in sport at any level is harmful to the female reproductive system and a threat to childbearing; Masculinises a female, particularly her facial and upper-body appearance; Threatens the development of male masculinity if girls out-perform adolescent boys in sport; Wastes human and economic resources because females' performance levels are lower than males'; Is not important for their social development, because they do not need or value achievement, aggressiveness, competitiveness, independence, or productivity. Brown (1982) suggests the explanations are complex and involve historical factors, outright discrimination, and events occurring in other societal institutions. Some of the hypothesized contributing factors are Continuing prejudices, taboos, and stereotypes that lead to sport being viewed as a male "preserve" The lack of power in gender relations and the strength of "old boys" networks and the lack of or weakness of "old girls" network; A lack of qualified female personnel to coach and administer athletics; Unconscious or unintended discrimination by males; Failure of women to apply for job vacancies in athletics; Time constraints imposed on married or divorced females by family responsibilities; A lack of female role models as participants and leaders; and A continuation, in some societies and some segments of society, a long-standing gender-role socialization processes that discourage female from sport. Throughout the struggle to become more involved in sport, the situation of females has paralleled that of blacks. Both groups were

Prohibited from participating because of cultural norms or written restrictions; Forced to sponsor their own competitions and leagues; and Benefactors of federal legislation guaranteeing equal rights.

### **Disparities in Rewards**

Sexism has led to double standards within sport. Women have received less than favorable or less than equal treatment in a number of ways, including

- Lower budgets;
- Fewer hours allocated to facilities;
- Shorter schedules;
- Fewer athletic scholarships
- Fewer events or types of sport available;
- Fewer women in leadership positions in sport organizations;
- Submission to sex-identity tests at international competitions;
- Differential (i.e., lower) prize structures (e.g., in golf and tennis);
- Less media coverage;
- Delayed or restricted opportunities for marriage among elite athletes
- Different orientations to games at lower levels of involvement
- Being encouraged (i.e., socialized) to restrict participation to such socially acceptable sports as tennis, swimming, or gymnastics
- Less encouragement from parents to participate in sport, especially in less educated or blue collar families;
- Differential play experiences for young children, which tend to perpetuate the system of gender stratification;
- Less access to commercial endorsements (only about 2% of all endorsements go to female athletes); and
- Higher status attached to the role of cheerleader than to that of athlete.

### **Medical Beliefs**

According to women working in the athletic programs of U.S. colleges and universities, the major reasons for this under representation are, in order of importance

- Men's use of an efficient "old boy" network to get jobs.

- The failure of women to use their own network to help female friends and associates.
- The existence of unconscious discrimination in the selection process.
- Lack of qualified women coaches and administrators.

**According to men the reasons are in order of importance:**

- Lack of qualified women applicants.
- Unwillingness among women to travel and recruit athletes.
- Failure of women to apply for jobs.
- Time constraints on women with families.

**Myths Perpetuating Inequalities**

There are some myths which maintain inequalities in sports between men and women. These are illustrated as follows:

**1. Physiological Myths:-**

It includes that strenuous participation in sport may lead to problems in child bearing. The activities in many sport events may damage the reproductive organs or breasts of women. Women have a more fragile bone structure than men, making injuries more likely. Intense involvement in sport causes menstrual problems. Sport involvement leads to the development of unattractive, bulging muscles.

**2. Performance Myths:-**

As per performance myths discrimination has also been justified by arguing that women are incapable of performing at the same level as men, they should have fewer opportunities and fewer rewards for achievements.

**3. Socio Psychological Myths:**

Some people have believed that a woman's participation in sport can threaten her femininity and that when her participation occurs with or against a male it can threaten his masculinity. Because they do not want to interfere with what they see as normal development, these people recommend a caution in making sport opportunities available to females.

**4. Maintaining inequality through mixed socialization messages:-**

Myths and belief systems may be used to "justify" sex discrimination in sport, but the participation rates of females are influenced by more than myths. Patterns of opportunities and patterns of constraints are also shaped by the socialization experiences of women and girls. As

infants, girls have traditionally been handled more gently and protectively than boys. Boys have been thrown into the air more often, given more toys requiring active play and the use of motor skills, and have been allowed to explore more of their physical environments before being “cautioned” and constrained by their parents. Girls have been watched over more closely even before they have started to walk. This pattern of “protectiveness” and constraints is continued through childhood and it restricts girl’s involvement in physical activities. When a young girl asks one of her parents for permission to go and play, she often hears something like this:

- Stay in the house.
- Do not leave the yard
- Do not go far away from the house
- Go with a friend
- Play with the children who you know
- Get back home at exactly 4 o’ clock – no later
- Do not do anything dangerous
- Keep your clothes clean
- Do not play rough or get hurt
- Do not get in fights or arguments with your friends
- Take your little brother or sister with you

### **Benefits of Sport**

Having addressed some of the challenges facing women’s and girls’ participation in sport, let us turn to the benefits that they experience when these challenges are overcome.

### **Health.**

By participating in sports, girls can derive many of the benefits long reserved for boys. Physical activity develops healthy life style habits and is beneficial for physical and mental health. Just four hours of physical activity a week has been shown to reduce the risk of many diseases, such as breast cancer and heart disease. Developing such positive habits in childhood can have life-long positive benefits. Moreover, the beneficial effects of sport on individual health accelerate overall health indicators of the community.

**Confidence.**

Participation in sports can help to build self-confidence, a crucial component in empowering girls and young women to take on new roles and to challenge the barriers that they encounter. Moreover, participation in sport promotes body consciousness, which has been shown to reduce rates of teenage pregnancy.

**Teamwork.**

Membership on a sports team has positive benefits in terms of building relationships between team members, and teaching teamwork skills, which can later be useful to women in a professional environment.

**Role Models.**

Sport can also be used to motivate groups of supporters by role modeling. Girls can benefit from the encouragement and leadership of a coach, who can serve as an important role model and trusted confidante for them as they manoeuvre the difficult period of adolescence.

**Academic Success.**

It is recognised that there is a strong connection between participation in sport with academic success. Girls who participate in sports tend to be more focused, disciplined in their studies and successful in school.

**Workplace Skills.**

Sport contributes to development of a work ethic, organisation and time management skills, fund raising capacity, and positive character traits, such as accepting others' personality flaws and learning to work towards common goals. Sport also gives practice in developing positive competition between supporters.

**Community Development**

Participation in sports is also intrinsically linked to community development initiatives. The values which sport enshrines - teamwork, inclusion, and personal achievement - build a strong foundation for personal and community growth.

**Economic Development.**

In terms of economic growth, creation of sports teams can provide jobs as athletes, coaches, managers, and administrative staff; the worldwide trade in sporting goods can provide opportunities for product exports; and the revenue brought in by hosting major sporting events can be used to support economic growth in other areas.



### **Conclusion**

With self-confidence, leadership and teamwork skills, girls are better equipped to challenge societal norms which continue to oppress women and relegate them to being second-class citizens. Though discrimination persists around the world, and acts as a deterrent to girl's participation in sport, the value of challenging these norms has become increasingly recognized, by international actors, government bodies, and communities themselves. The governments have to use sports to promote education, health, development and peace. UNESCO and UNDP have both recognized the value of sport as a tool of development, and have supported projects to use sport as a means of empowerment and development. But the real testimony comes from girls and women themselves. With each woman who excels in sport, barriers are broken, and a new generation of girls is able to benefit from participation in sports in a way that their mothers and grandmothers could not. Taking inspiration from the determination and dedication of female athletes from around the world, the next generation of girls can be inspired to participate in sports. In the process, these girls are challenging the barriers which exist in their societies, refuting gender stereotypes, and changing cultural norms, proving that women can excel in all manner of activities if only given the opportunity.

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