

THE GENDER GAP IN SPORTS AND THE EQUALITY PRINCIPLE

DUMITRESCU Diana-Maria^{1*}, GULAP Monica²

¹Student-Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, Romania

²Department of Physical Education and Sport, University of Bucharest, Romania

*Corresponding author: *dianamariadumitrescu1@gmail.com*

Abstract

Background: Nowadays, an under-representation of women in sports is denounced, especially by feminists, claiming that this is proof of the fact that we still live in a discriminatory society. Moreover, as arguments, they present facts showing that there is a pay gap between men and women in professional sports.

Objective: In this context, the purpose of the research is to illustrate that the gender gap in sports is not necessarily a consequence of discrimination. Furthermore, the study will emphasize that the hyperbolized perception of this gap is a result of a misunderstanding of the equality principle.

Methods: Two methods, based on bibliographic research, will be used to show that the gender gap in sports is not a consequence of discrimination. The first one will describe the equality principle and will facilitate its understanding as a normative concept, not as an empirical one. The second method will show that factors hard to quantify have a significant impact on the under-representation of women in sports. In this respect, I will apply the hypothesis of Ian Morris according to which resources create values.

Conclusion: The research will lead to the conclusion that the gender gap in sports is not necessarily a consequence of discrimination. Furthermore, the study will highlight the possibility of understanding gender equality in sports as a value derived from resources specific to certain societies.

Keywords: gender, equality, facts, norms, resources, values

Introduction

Our moral intuitions and attitudes are challenged nowadays as a result of the need for adaptation to the new technologies. Debates about the moral status of artificial intelligence arose, making ourselves to return to an old question: Should we treat different other forms of life? What are the guidelines we base on if the answer is affirmative? Criteria are hard to establish because they are either lax, either robust. To restrain the framework, the same question was addressed by an entire world when slavery was a common practice. Some races were considered inferior, but the so-called inferiority proved to be impossible to define. Every criterion proposed to justify a different treatment led to an unsatisfactory hierarchy, making the executioner become the victim in other contexts. Therefore, an essential principle arose to escape from this problematic searching for the right criteria: the equality principle. It was not a surprise that thinkers were provoked to find something common to all human beings, a factual foundation for equality. Rationality (Immanuel Kant) or the possession of a moral personality (John Rawls) were some answers, but again, some exceptions made the argument pro-equality founded on the empirical world invalid. Despite all those problems regarding a factual base, equal treatment for all human beings proved to be a functional normative principle, encouraging ethical behavior.

The acceptance of the equality principle didn't suppose that, suddenly, people sense its implications and that all unethical practices disappeared. Nowadays, reminiscents of the time when immoral treating of different groups was accepted are still noticeable. Science emerged as new weaponry in this conflict. Some thinkers used science to show that there are meaningful differences between people that can be reflected by individuals in their social interactions. For example, in the 1970s, Arthur Jensen and H. J. Eysenck pointed out that cultures have different degrees of intelligence. Their research caused a remarkable number of contestants who have been worried that this discovery can be a source to justify discrimination. But, as Peter Singer pointed out, the two professors of psychology showed something descriptive that should not infer anything in the social dynamics (Singer, 1993). That potential deduction is a logical fallacy because equality is not about the observational world, it has not a factual basis, but it should be understood rather as a normative principle. The most common error is to infer norms from facts. Hence, treating people differently because they are from a specific social group is reprehensible, and it is named discrimination. Despite the lessons history teach us, discrimination still

represents one of the main problems nowadays, covering subtle, hard to observe forms. But the accent placed on discrimination creates blind spots, making us incapable of recognizing the abuses in which discrimination is evoked to cover some individual incapacities for certain activities. For example, an applicant for a job who is not selected by the employer may accuse him of discrimination, and he can found his complaint on his appurtenance to a specific group. Those situations reflect the tension between equality and meritocracy. As social problems mirror in specific domains, we will discern the same tension in the sports field. In the last decade, the complaints concerning women's discrimination in sports have increased, even if statistics reveal an enhancement regarding the diminishing of gender disparities. In the sports field, pay gap, women under-representation, and even gender classification are seen by some scholars and by feminists as evidence of discriminatory treatment based on gender. Some of these accusations are not well-founded, and they may impede the identification of the real cases of women discrimination in sports. For example, Torbjörn Tännsjö (2000) claims that even gender classification in sports is discriminatory, considering that one of the fundamental principles in sports is competition which supposes a single winner. In Tännsjö's framework, the assumption is that men and women possess similar physical abilities so treating women differently in sports is unethical. Tännsjö's perspective seems to be strengthened by some recent examples of women surpassing men's records in different sports. But it is essential to see these examples as exceptions, and we need to look carefully at what happens nowadays in debates about transgender athletes. Even in these cases, women denounce that transgender athletes are stronger than them, despite the physical interventions and hormonal treatment. Therefore, even if some women can defeat men in some sports, that is not the case in general because they are biologically different. At the same time, academic research on gender discrimination in sports fails in advancing other explanations concerning the under-representation of women in sports.

In this context, this paper aims to offer some explanations for the most frequent accusations regarding women discrimination in the sports field, hoping that the elimination of some of them will bring to the surface the blatant cases of unfair treatment. The paper will be focused on the pay gap and women under-representation in sports, emphasizing that these are not proofs of women's discrimination. Two arguments will be formulated to support this thesis: the first one will clarify the equality principle, showing that output equality is almost intangible, despite a fair treatment; the second will show that, in understanding under-representation of women in sports, a closer look at the values and resources from their socio-cultural context may be a key. A holistic picture will illustrate that, in some situations, what we see is not gender discrimination.

Table no.1. *Wimbledon Prize Money in 1968, 1969 and 2018*

Year	Gentlemen's Singles	Gentlemen's Doubles (pair)	Ladies Singles	Ladies Doubles	Mixed Doubles
1968	2,000 £	800 £	750 £	500 £	450 £
1969	3,000 £	1,000 £	1,500 £	600 £	500 £
2018	2,250,000 £	450,000 £	2,250,000 £	450,000£	110,000 £

The table reflects that, currently, women and men are equally paid by organizers in tennis. The discrepancies are between simple, double, and double mixed competitions. The aforementioned rejected argument does not explain the wage differences between single and double competitions, which suggests that discrimination is not the determinant variable of these variations. We do not say that double or double mixed players are discriminated against because the award prizes they receive are significantly lower. In this context, income gaps may be a necessary premise but not a sufficient one to illustrate that women face discrimination in sports.

So far, we have shown that income and prize inequality is not exhaustive proof that women are discriminated against by society in the sports field. We will continue to respond to the criticism that the under-representation of women in sport is proof of discrimination. The criticism highlights the fact that social structures encourage and invest more in male athletes, facilitating their ascension to a sports career, while women are discouraged. Indeed, the issue of equality of opportunity highlights more subtle forms of discrimination. Theoretically, everyone is allowed to practice sports, and everyone has the right to compete, to

participate. Practically, the performance of each athlete depends on the socio-cultural environment. In other words, an entire system conditions his chances of making performance in sports. In political philosophy, there is a fundamental dichotomy between formal equality of opportunity and substantive equality of opportunity, a distinction also applicable in the sporting field. Formal equality of opportunity can be translated into the sports field because there are no restrictions for those who want to practice a sport at a certain level. Merit and work will determine a hierarchy of athletes in competitions, competitions open to all, competition in which all athletes have equal chances. Bernard Williams will notice, however, that the problem of this type of equality lies in its formal character (B. Williams, 2005). In other words, in spite of unhindered access to competitions, real chances are held by athletes who have benefited from superior resources such as training rooms, sports equipment, healthy nutrition, etc. Feminist criticism argues that women are being discriminated by because they can formally participate in competitions, but they do not have the resources to give them real chances to perform. We can respond to this criticism in two ways. First of all, most competitions require women to face other women, not men. Therefore, even if women, in general, would not have access to resources, they would compete for one against each other and would not be discriminated against. Women wouldn't maximize their physical training, but this would happen in a context where neither the other competitors would benefit from resources to boost their chances. Secondly, evident is another type of segregation: the regional or cultural one that involves disadvantages that affect everyone, not just women. It is important to emphasize that feminist criticisms do not relate to these types of segregation which make it clear that women who can not be said to have substantive equality of opportunity come from cultures where the same applies to men. It is also true that certain cultures encourage a conservative vision of women's status, not being guided in this framework to practice any sport. In the next section, this fact will be explained, showing why such societies do not see female sports performance as a value.

Cultural relativism: deriving gender equality in sport from resources

Societies are guided by different values, habits, and beliefs. Those have a contingent character, meaning that they are not universal and are invariably changing and adapting. Aspects valued by Occidental societies are not proper for others, even though, from our perspective, they are desirable. As Ian Morris proposed, that happens because values may be influenced by "back-and-forth interactions between moral systems and the environment, combined with external shocks". Morris, following the historical line, observed how foragers, farmers, and fossil-fuel adapted their mentality as their resources changed: "Foragers lived in small, low-density groups, and generally saw political and wealth hierarchies as bad things. They were more tolerant of gender hierarchy and surprisingly tolerant of violence. Farmers lived in bigger, denser communities, and generally saw steep political, wealth, and gender hierarchies as fine. Fossil-fuel folk lives in bigger, denser communities still. They tend to see political and gender hierarchy as bad things, and violence as particularly evil".

Ian's premise can be translated into the sports field, meaning that nowadays, women from Occidental societies and marginalized regions may value different practices. For example, people living in cities are facing the rapid growth of technology. Women may choose to work for the Information Technology industry, or they can embrace more traditional ways of living. In gaming, women and men are almost equally represented. In this context, in communities defined by technological changes, practicing a professional sport may not be a valuable option for women.

The other scenario pictures the less evolved societies, in which women and men have specific roles and attributes. Resources and infrastructure are not proper for sustaining and encouraging sports.

Vishwas Manohar Deshpande denounced 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 living but participation in sports is still gloomy". Depending on the resources a society benefits from, specific roles arise. As Vishwas observes, women in India find emancipation a priority and, once this purpose is attained by, other values will occur.

At the same time, some developed communities promote the sport, but they stress the competitors. In this scenario, sport is not in itself a purpose, but rather a manner that leads to influence. Sports results become

political hierarchy. In these societies, we will observe the contrary outcome: women are sometimes forced by communities to compete and to be performant. We will notice no meaningful gender discrepancies, but the aforementioned doesn't imply that sportives are ethically treated by society.

Conclusions

The under-representation of women in sports can be not a consequence of discrimination, but the effect of arduous to quantify circumstances. In communities in which women are seen as households, men also have a specific task, and their potential in sports isn't fructified, so the problematical features should be considered globally, not particular.

References

- Deshpande, Vishwas Manohar (2016). *Gender discrimination in sports*, International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health, p.545-547;
- Morris, Ian (2015). *Foragers, farmers, and fossil fuels: how human values evolve*, Princeton University Press, p.140-143;
- Prize money finance, Retrieved from
https://www.wimbledon.com/en_GB/aboutwimbledon/prize_money_and_financ.html
- Prize money in sport- BBC Sport study (2014). Retrieved from
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-29665693>
- Singer, Peter. (1993). *Practical Ethics- Second Edition*, Cambridge University Press, p. 16-55;
- Tannsjo, Torbjorn (2001). *Against Sexual Discrimination in Sports, Values in Sport Elitism, nationalism, gender equality and the scientific manufacture of winners*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, London and New York, p. 101-116;
- Williams, B. (2005). *The Idea of Equality*. In Hawthorn G. (Ed.), *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, Princeton University Press, p. 97-114.