MALE COMPETITIVE SPORTS ARE MORE POPULAR

Dr Amir Singh

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Abstract. *I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Mdm Saudah (my wife) for her support throughout my studies, not only for my post graduate studies but my earlier two doctorates as well. I am also thankful for Doctor Freddy for his encouraging words always, never hurting but always guiding with warmth. The expertise and insights provided by AIU have played a pivotal role in shaping the direction of this literature review, and the feedback has been crucial in ensuring the research's quality and rigor. I am grateful for the encouragement, feedback, and insightful discussions from my family and friends, as their contributions have been immensely valuable to my work. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to the participants of this study who generously shared their expertise, knowledge, and time, greatly contributing to shaping my ideas and findings. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the material support provided by my colleagues at work, as their assistance has made this research possible.*

The difference in viewership between different gender in sports is a multifaceted issue that involves various contributing factors. Despite efforts to increase the popularity of women's sports, men's sports continue to attract larger audiences. This can be attributed to historical and cultural factors that have traditionally favored men's sports in terms of attention and resources. Moreover, disparities in physical abilities and performance levels between male and female athletes can lead to variations in the pace and intensity of the games. Additionally, media coverage, marketing strategies, and sponsorship opportunities predominantly focus on men's sports, reinforcing the cycle of male-dominated viewership. Nevertheless, there is optimism regarding the potential to enhance the popularity of women's sports through increased investment, promotion, and a shift in societal attitudes towards gender and athleticism. This paper aims to explore the existing factors that significantly contribute to the disparities between men and women in the sports industry. The review will delve into the historical and cultural context of gender inequality in sports, analyze the media's role in promoting male-dominated sports, and examine the biological and social factors that contribute to the perception of male superiority in sports. Through the examination of various research studies and surveys, the goal is to gain a deeper understanding of these factors and work towards bridging the existing gaps.

Keywords*: Gender, media, stereotypes, inequality, athletes, sports*

Introduction

Sports have always been a popular source of entertainment and leisure activities worldwide. Whether it's basketball, football, cricket, rugby, tennis, or swimming, sports have captivated people of all ages and genders. Both men's and women's sports encompass various athletic competitions specifically designed for athletes, including team sports like soccer, basketball, and relay races, also individual sports example wrestling, swimming, and weightlifting. Athletes from both genders have gained recognition, shattered records, and achieved success across a wide range of sports, showcasing their skill, athleticism, and dedication. However, when it comes to viewership, men's sports have traditionally attracted larger audiences compared to women's sports. Several factors contribute to this discrepancy. One significant reason is the historical and cultural context surrounding sports. Gender inequality in sports has been a persistent and complex issue. Despite the significant progress made in terms of visibility, funding, and fan base for women's sports, men's sports continue to dominate the

global sporting industry. Throughout history, men have been associated with physical strength and dominance, and sports have provided a platform for men to exhibit their physical prowess. This cultural context has created a perception that men's sports are more exciting and competitive than women's sports. Nevertheless, there is a gradual shift occurring with increased attention being given to women's sports and the creation of more opportunities for female athletes to showcase their talents. It is now our responsibility as fans, media outlets, and stakeholders to support and promote women's sports, fostering a more equitable and inclusive sporting landscape. By actively working towards breaking down barriers and providing equal opportunities, we can help bridge the gap and create a more balanced representation of athletes across genders in the sporting world.

Cultural norms and societal expectations

Numerous studies and research have examined the reasons behind the higher viewership of men's sports in comparison to women's sports. The disparity and inequality in women's sports leagues and events can be attributed to several potential factors. One of the primary contributors to this unfairness is cultural norms and societal expectations. Senne (2016) suggests that women continue to face scrutiny and stereotyping due to social norms that define them as fragile, less capable, and passive. Additionally, sports have traditionally been associated with masculinity, leading to a perception that women are encroaching upon male domains. In certain communities, such as in Myanmar, there may be disapproval of women participating in sports while it is seen as positive for boys (Thein, 2015). Yu et al. (2017) found that girls in China, Shanghai, engaging in certain sports, like soccer, were considered to be deviating from femininity. Senne (2016) further notes that sporting norms and traditions reinforce notions of dominant masculinity, leaving women with limited roles in co-ed sports or segregated women's teams, which can discourage female participation. Societal expectations play a significant role in shaping women's involvement in sports across different countries. There are specific gender roles that may deem certain sports inappropriate for women. Women are often assigned specific societal roles that do not align well with sports, resulting in their underrepresentation in many levels of the sports industry. According to Gender Differences in Sports (2021), societal expectations make women less likely to participate in sports and they tend to face more challenges when they do, leading to lower retention rates. It is particularly concerning that female coaches are underrepresented in coaching education programs, leaving girls and women with predominantly male role models in sports. The lack of confident and strong female athletic models contributes to the issue. While male athletes are plentiful, girls are exposed to societal beauty standards that may not align with athletic pursuits. Overall, societal expectations, cultural norms, and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles contribute to the disparity and underrepresentation of women in sports. Addressing these issues requires challenging stereotypes, promoting gender equality, providing more opportunities for female athletes, and increasing the visibility of successful women in sports to serve as role models.

Physical and biological differences

Although physical differences exist between men and women, it does not imply that men are inherently superior to women in sports. From a biological standpoint, men generally possess larger size and greater strength than women, which can pose challenges for women competing against men in sports that emphasize physicality and aggression, such as high-speed collisions and powerful dunks. This can make men's sports appear more thrilling and impressive to fans, particularly those who value physical strength and athleticism. The gender gap in sports, while narrowing, persists due to a combination of biological differences affecting performance and socio-political factors that

hinder full female participation in various sports worldwide (Capranica et al., 2013). Coleman and Shreve (2018) suggest that one reason men and boys tend to outperform professional female athletes is due to testosterone levels. Testosterone levels produced by the female body, without androgenisation, are not competitive against males, defined here as athletes with testes and testosterone levels in the male range. These differences usually provide men with a competitive upper hand in sports. Factors such as longer and larger bones and a higher muscle mass-to-body weight ratio give men a clear mechanical edge over female athletes (Latham, 2018). TABLE 1 compares the best results of boys under 18 to professional female athletes.

However, Sousa et al. (2019) conducted a study highlighting physical attributes that allow women to excel in longer distances or colder environments. Women tend to have a higher body fat accumulation and greater efficiency in utilizing fat oxidation for endurance performance, which can be advantageous in longer events (Pro Sports, 2022). Additionally, Latham (2018) mentions that female athletes are better than at converting glycogen to energy, a secondary fuel source used when glucose levels drops. This is why female athletes excel in ultra-long-distance sports and usually avoid hitting the point of exhaustion during extended races. While physical differences between men and women can impact athletic performance, it is crucial to recognize each athlete as an individual and strive to create an equitable playing field that allows all athletes to reach their full potential, irrespective of gender. It is important to celebrate and support athletes based on their unique abilities and achievements, considering a variety of factors beyond biological sex.

Table 1

*Under 18 boys

Event	Best Women's Result	Best Boys' Result
100 Meters	10.71	10.15
200 Meters	21.77	20.51
400 Meters	49.46	45.38
800 Meters	1:55.16*	1:46.3
1500 Meters	3:56.14	3:37.43
3000 Meters	8:23.14	7:38.90
5000 Meters	14:18.37	12:55.58
High Jump	2.06 meters	2.25 meters
Pole Vault	4.91 meters	5.31 meters
Long Jump	7.13 meters	7.88 meters
Triple Jump	14.96 meters	17.30 meters

Source: https://law.duke.edu/sports/sex-sport/comparative-athletic-performance/

Institutional and historical supports

Institutional and historical supports Institutional support plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and opportunities of female athletes and sports teams. This support encompasses various resources, facilities, and services provided by sports organizations and governing bodies, including financial aid, training facilities, coaching staff, and other support personnel. However, there is a huge disparity in the level of institutional support between both male and female athletes in professional sports. Research conducted by Box (2021) reveals that male athletes receive $179 million more in athletic scholarships annually compared to their female counterparts. Moreover, collegiate

institutions allocate only 24% of their athletic operating budgets to female sports, with even lower percentages (16% for recruiting budgets and 33% for scholarship budgets) dedicated to female athletes. Consequently, women's sports teams often face limitations in terms of resources, equipment, training facilities, coaching staff, and other forms of support. This disparity hinders their ability to succeed and compete at the same level as male athletes. Furthermore, the lack of sponsorship for girls' teams at the community sport level is a significant contributing factor. Local businesses often provide less sponsorship to girls' teams due to the perception of smaller supporter bases (Sports England, 2009). The inadequate support for women athletes extends beyond financial aspects and includes factors such as limited access to fitness resources and equipment, inconsistent training schedules, and emotional distractions, which are more prevalent among female athletes (Purc-Stephenson et al., 2022). Additionally, sports halls tend to prioritize male sports for pitch time, resulting in less convenient scheduling for women and girls (Sports England, 2009). The exclusion and lack of inclusivity for women in sports date back to historical events. For instance, the founder of the Modern Olympics, Pierre De Coubertin, excluded women from participating in any sports in the first Olympics held in 1896 (Owyong, 2013). Discrimination against female participation in sports was often justified based on the perception of physical weakness and the equation of athleticism with masculinity. While progress has been made since then, with women gradually gaining more opportunities, challenges persist. Although advancements have been made towards equality in sports, there is still a need for ongoing efforts to ensure that women receive equal support and recognition. Initiatives aimed at challenging gender biases and prioritizing gender equality in the sports world are necessary to create an inclusive and equitable sports culture where all athletes, regardless of gender, can thrive and receive equal opportunities.

Media coverage and sponsorship

Advertisers and marketers play a significant role in shaping the popularity of men's and women's sports. However, their efforts often target male audiences by focusing on men's sports as a means to reach them. This preference stems from the historical disparity in media coverage, funding, and resources between men's and women's sports, making men's sports a more visible and profitable platform for advertisers. Consequently, sports sponsorships and endorsements predominantly feature male athletes and cater to male audiences, with male sports stars serving as spokespeople for various products and services. The lack of advertising for female athletes has several negative consequences. Media coverage heavily favours men's sports, with only a small portion, approximately 5%, dedicated to women's sports in national and local print media on average (Sports England, 2009). The media plays a crucial role in shaping public knowledge, opinions, and attitudes towards women in sports, which, in turn, influences participation levels. Furthermore, media often perpetuates the notion of sports being categorized as masculine or feminine, aligning with traditional gender expectations. This reinforces gender barriers and makes it challenging for women to participate in traditionally male-dominated sports and vice versa (Academy, 2018). Multiple factors contribute to the disparity in sports sponsorships. A significant factor is the lack of media coverage for female athletes. Despite nearly half of athletes in the United States of America being female, they cover only 2%-4% of media coverage. The exposure to media significantly impacts an athlete's publicity and, consequently, their sponsorship opportunities (Iacovides, 2021). Recent statistics indicate that women's sports sponsorships accounted for a mere 0.4% of all sports sponsorships (Iacovides, 2021). The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has added additional pressures on athletes to engage directly with fans. While social media can positively raise the profiles of athletes,

teams, and competitions, it also highlights the differential treatment of male and female athletes. Female athletes are less likely to secure sponsorships because sponsors perceive the image of female athletes as less lucrative compared to their male counterparts. This inequality needs to be addressed to promote a more equitable and inclusive sports landscape.

Methodology

To investigate the reasons behind the higher viewership of men's sports compared to women's sports, I conducted a survey using both face-to-face and video conference methods. The survey aimed to explore various factors contributing to the gender disparities in the sports industry. The participants consisted of 25 individuals, including 12 males and 13 females, aged between 22 and 40 years. All participants were either athletes or coaches. To understand the reasons behind the inequality in the sports industry between men and women, participants were presented with five options and asked to choose which factor they believed contributed to the disparity. The options provided were skills level, athleticism, strategy, speed of play, and rivalry. The survey results, shown in Table 2, highlight the responses received from the 25 participants. Given the issues discussed earlier, it is crucial to further explore the causes of gender inequality and seek ways to address these differences. Participant identities were kept anonymous throughout the survey process.

Results

The survey data collected includes the proportions or percentages of respondents who indicated a preference for men's sports over women's sports. This data has been instrumental in determining the prevalence of this preference within the surveyed population. Through this study, we have gained insight into the varying factors that contribute to the participants' preference for men's sports. This allows us to gauge the relative importance of different reasons influencing their preference. The findings reveal that "Rivalry" among players and teams in men's sports is the most significant factor driving the preference for men's sports. However, the survey results do not provide information regarding the corresponding factor for women's sports.

Discussion

Gender equality and inequality in sports remain prominent issues in today's society, demanding our attention and concerted efforts. While progress has been achieved in the pursuit of gender equality in sports, significant challenges and disparities persist. One of the key manifestations of gender inequality in sports is the discrepancy in participation rates and opportunities. Despite efforts to encourage female participation, notable gaps remain across various sports at both amateur and professional levels. Another crucial aspect is the unequal treatment in terms of pay and resource allocation between male and female athletes. Female athletes often face lower salaries, fewer sponsorship deals, and limited endorsement opportunities compared to their male counterparts. The gender disparity is further reflected in the media coverage and representation of sports. Men's sports tend to receive more attention, airtime, and media coverage, resulting in greater visibility and fan support. Gender inequalities also extend to leadership and decision-making positions within sports, including coaching, administration, and governing bodies. Women are frequently underrepresented in these roles, which limits their influence and voice in shaping policies and strategies. Stereotypes and discrimination based on gender continue to persist in sports, affecting both male and female athletes. Women often encounter challenges related to stereotypes about their physical abilities, appearance-based judgments, and biased evaluations of their skills. LGBTQ+ athletes may also face specific forms of discrimination and exclusion, further exacerbating the inequality in sports. Nevertheless, there have been positive developments and ongoing advocacy for gender equality in

sports. Initiatives such as equal prize money in some tournaments, increased media coverage of women's sports, and campaigns promoting inclusivity have shown promising steps forward. Achieving gender equality in sports necessitates continuous efforts and collective action from various stakeholders, including sports organizations, media outlets, sponsors, and society as a whole. By addressing disparities in participation, pay, media representation, and leadership, as well as challenging gender stereotypes, we can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive sports environment that benefits athletes of all genders.

Conclusion

Sports offer valuable lessons to young athletes, regardless of their gender. They teach skills such as teamwork, cooperation, discipline, and time management, among others. Sports also provide a source of joy, relaxation, and escapism from the challenges of everyday life. However, it is important to acknowledge the disparities that exist between men's and women's sports in terms of visibility, investment, and opportunities, as discussed and demonstrated in this paper. Historically, men's sports have received more attention and resources, resulting in larger fan bases and higher levels of commercialization. Nonetheless, the landscape is gradually changing as efforts to promote gender equality gain traction. Both men's and women's sports possess unique qualities and contribute to the diverse tapestry of athletic competition. Men's sports often emphasize physicality, power, and speed, while women's sports highlight grace, agility, and skill. It is crucial to recognize and appreciate the achievements and abilities of athletes irrespective of their gender. Gender equality in sports is not only a matter of fairness and justice but also vital for personal development, health, empowerment, and social progress. Promoting equality in sports requires collective action. This involves challenging traditional norms, advocating for equal pay and resources, increasing media coverage and exposure for women's sports, and providing mentorship and support for female athletes. Many individuals and organizations have been making efforts to promote gender equality and bolster support for women's sports over the years. Encouraging girls and women to participate in sports, ensuring equal funding and resources, enhancing media coverage, and advocating for policy changes are some of the ways that individuals and organizations have contributed to making a difference. In summary, the reasons behind the higher viewership of men's sports compared to women's sports are multifaceted and influenced by historical, cultural, and structural factors, as well as media coverage and advertising. While these factors contribute to the existing disparity, it is crucial to challenge and address these biases, support women's sports, and work towards creating a more inclusive sports environment that provides equal recognition and support for athletes of all genders.

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