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Sporting women in the media

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Contents

Introduction	4
Learning outcomes	5
1 'You run like a girl!'	6
2 Gender discrimination in sport	8
3 Inequalities in sport	12
4 Masculinity and the culture of sport	16
5 Femininity and sport	17
6 Gender outlaws	18
Conclusion	20
References	21
Acknowledgements	22

Introduction 01/10/24

Introduction

The aim of this free course, *Sporting women in the media*, is to explore how and why gender discrimination and gender inequalities exist in sport and to investigate some of the implications.

There might be some biological differences which means that males and females don't compete against each other in all sports, but these do not explain or justify why there are such disparities of career opportunities and rewards for women in sport.

Indeed, sport could be argued to have one of the largest fields of unequal pay between the genders despite the equal pay act being passed over 50 years ago in the UK. Pay discrepancies continue between men and women. For example, Women's Super League players receive just 1 per cent of male Premier League players (Collingwood Legal, 2023). Audiences and UK consumers notice this disparity; over half believe there is inequality in salaries/winnings, and media coverage (Towers Mode, 2023). With women's sports fans being identified as a lucrative audience this is an important topic to explore (Towers Mode, 2023).

This OpenLearn course is an example of level 3 study in <u>Sport and fitness</u>. You might be interested in the related Open University course <u>E315 Contemporary sport and exercise issues</u>.

Learning outcomes 01/10/24

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand the key contemporary issues surrounding gender in sport
- draw on evidence (not just statistics) to understand gender equality in sport
- understand gender discrimination in sport via traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

1 'You run like a girl!' 01/10/24

1 'You run like a girl!'

You will begin by examining the commonly used insult: 'You run like a girl!' Why is that a derogatory comment when we see highly competent female athletes such as British record holder Dina Asher-Smith (Figure 1) competing on the track?



Figure 1 Dina Asher-Smith

Do you think that derogatory comments like this discriminate against women? The comment could implicate girls not running as fast as boys; and when a female athlete does run fast their gender is questioned, evident in the case of Caster Semenya (Figure 2). What impact do you think comments like this have on young girls?



Figure 2 Caster Semenya

To get a flavour of why gender is a contemporary issue in sport, and why it is important to study it, complete Activity 1.

Activity 1 Why study gender in sport?



Allow 40 minutes

Listen to the audio below in which Helen Owton speaks to Katie Barak.

Also look at the poster "Smile more": women's experiences of sexism while working in sport' (McGinty-Minister, Whitehead and Swettenham (2023) and answer the following questions:

- 1. What sort of behaviour do women report as experiencing at an interpersonal
- What reasons did women give for avoiding reporting sexism?

As you listen to the audio and look at the poster, reflect on why gender is a contemporary issue and why it is of relevance to you.

1 'You run like a girl!' 01/10/24

Please note that any references to 'course' in this audio refer to studying gender in sport at The Open University course (E315), rather than this OpenLearn course.

Audio content is not available in this format.



Provide your answer...

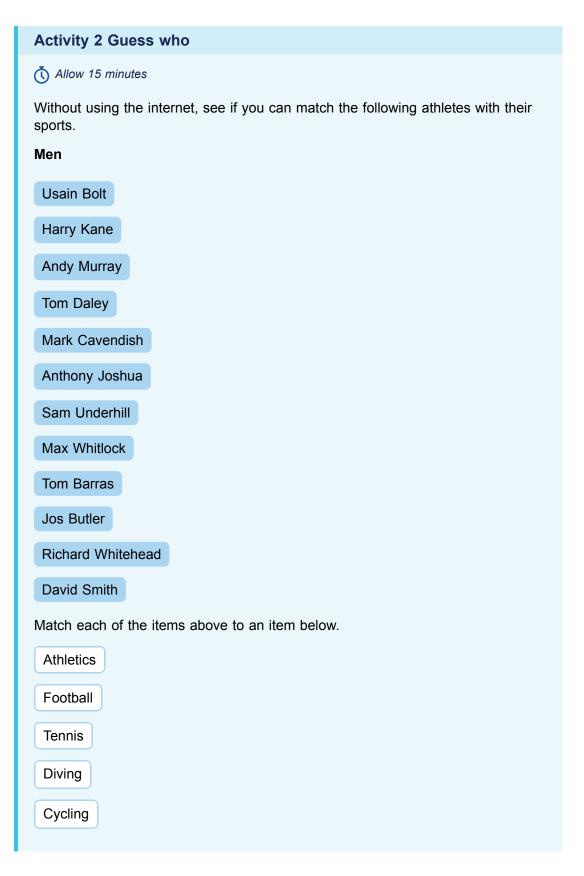
Comment

- 1. Women report experiencing condescending behaviour, sexual comments and behaviour, policing gender stereotypes, and using 'banter' to minimise sexist transgressions. 77.2% of women reported being treated as inferior, for example men interrupting them or talking over them in meetings.
- 2. Women avoided reporting sexism for two reasons:
 - a. 38.1% of women thought there would be negative consequences for their reputation.
 - b. 33.3% of women thought there would be negative consequences for their career overall.

Gender is an issue for women and men to consider, study and become passionate about in sport. It's also important to consider intersectionality, which is the idea that everyone is composed of multiple intersecting identities. Race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and ability are all part of someone's identity and they are not experienced exclusively.

2 Gender discrimination in sport

You will start your exploration of gender discrimination in sport by reflecting on your knowledge of male and female athletes, in the activity below.



Boxing
Rugby
Gymnastics
Rowing
Cricket
Para athletics
Boccia
Women
Dina Asher-Smith
Leah Williamson
Katie Boulter
Eva Okaro
Lizzie Deignan
Lauren Price
Marlie Packer
Becky Downie
Helen Glover
Heather Knight
Hannah Cockcroft
Match each of the items above to an item below. Athletics
Football
Tennis
Swimming
Ownining

Cycling

Boxing

Rugby

Gymnastics

Rowing

Cricket

Para athletics

How many did you match correctly and why do you think this was (e.g. consider the type of sport, exposure to female/male sport)?

Discussion

It is likely that you knew more of the male athletes than the female athletes. There are several reasons why this might be the case, but one reason could be due to gender differences in media coverage. Nonetheless, increased media coverage and the broadcasting of major women's sporting events on free-to-air TV has been one of the biggest factors driving expanding interest in women's sports in the UK. Media coverage of women's sport in 2015 made up just 7 per cent of all sports media coverage (Women in Sport, 2015, p. 3). However, a US global report in 2022 by Wasserman shows this average had risen to 15 per cent. In a UK-specific report by Women's Sport Trust (2023), figures show that BBC and ITV account for 11 per cent of 2023 coverage hours of women's sport but 77 per cent of viewing hours, with football dominating. Of note, women's sport continues to attract new audiences: for example, 15.6 million people watched the Women's World Cup in 2023.

While progress has been made in terms of visibility, with record numbers in 2023, coverage reduced in 2021 and the proportion of coverage devoted to women's sport by TV sports news and print media was even lower in 2022.

The imbalance in sponsorship gives further exposure to men's sport.

You will now continue to investigate the gender imbalance in sport, and its potential implications for how women's sports are valued.

Activity 2 highlights some of the gender imbalance evident in media sports coverage. This gender imbalance could be thought of as a form of discrimination. Gender discrimination is defined as 'a situation in which someone is treated less well because of their sex' (Cambridge Dictionary Online). Under the UK Equal Opportunity Act (2010), which replaced the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), it is against the law to discriminate against, bully or treat someone unfairly in sport because of a personal characteristic (e.g. race, sex or disability). For example, a sports team not selecting someone to coach their team because that person is a woman, or a sports club refusing to provide the same range of sporting equipment to both a women's and a men's football team would be classed as

discrimination. Although the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often used interchangeably, there are subtle differences between them. These are explained in the following key terms and definitions.

Having now examined an example of gender discrimination, in the next activity you will reflect on your own experiences of gender discrimination.

Activity 3 Sharing experiences



(Allow 30 minutes

Think about whether you have experienced any form of gender discrimination connected to your involvement in sport or exercise. Remember that both women and men can be discriminated against.

Write down your experiences in note form, using the 'prompt' questions below as a guide.

- What was the situation?
- How did it make you feel?
- Why do you think it occurred?
- How do you think this could have been prevented?

If you can't think of any personal experiences, think about why you haven't experienced any discrimination and/or think of an incident you might have witnessed. Also, consider whether you might have been an unintentional perpetrator of discrimination.

Reflect on your experiences and consider whether you feel that gender discrimination is a significant issue in sport and exercise.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Reflecting on your own experiences is a good way to construct a deeper and more meaningful way of understanding and articulating knowledge. You may have spoken to others about their own experiences and this may have encouraged you to consider different perspectives. Sometimes, the dynamic process of reflection can also challenge existing theoretical perspectives. An awareness of gender inequality can provide you with a base from which to challenge discrimination as a whole (e.g. on the basis of disability, race or sexuality).

3 Inequalities in sport 01/10/24

3 Inequalities in sport

In the previous section you reflected on your own experiences of gender discrimination. Now, let's look at how some of these inequalities are evident in top-level sport by examining global sporting events. You will start by examining gender at the Olympic Games.

Activity 4 Have we come a long way?



At the first modern Olympics in Athens in 1896, no women were allowed to compete. In this activity you will examine the progress that has been made in women's sport since that time.

- Look at Table 1, which shows the gender balance at each of the Olympic Games up to 2012. What pattern do you notice since 1908 in relation to the three London Olympics held, and does this type of analysis give us the full picture of gender in sport?
- 2. Read the journal article

'Female athletes, women's sport, and the sport media commercial complex: have we really "come a long way, baby"?' by Janet Fink. As you read, answer the following questions:

- What is the purpose of this article?
- What are the key points arising from the article?
- What is the purpose of a review paper?
- Take a look at the following article '#GenderEqualOlympics: celebrating full gender parity on the field of play at Paris 2024'. Then consider the following question: what changes can you spot in terms of gender equality?

Table 1 Male and female athletes in the modern summer Olympic Games, 1896-2012

Year	Place	Countries represented	Male athletes	Female athletes	Percentage female
1896	Athens	14	241	0	0.0
1900	Paris	24	975	22	2.2
1904	St Louis	12	645	6	0.9
1908	London	22	1971	37	1.8
1912	Stockholm	28	2359	48	2.0
1916	Olympics scheduled for Berlin cancelled (First World War)				
1920	Antwerp	29	2561	63	2.5

3 Inequalities in sport 01/10/24

1924	Paris	44	2954	135	4.4
1928	Amsterdam	46	2606	277	9.6
1932	Los Angeles	37	1206	126	9.5
1936	Berlin	49	3632	331	8.4
1940	Olympics scheduled for Tokyo cancelled (Second World War)				
1944	Olympics cancelled (Second World War)				
1948	London	59	3714	390	9.5
1952	Helsinki	69	4436	519	10.5
1956	Melbourne	72	2938	376	11.3
1960	Rome	83	4727	611	11.4
1964	Tokyo	93	4473	678	13.2
1968	Mexico City	112	4735	781	14.2
1972	Munich	122	6075	1059	14.8
1976	Montreal	92	4824	1260	20.7
1980	Moscow	81	4064	1115	21.5
1984	Los Angeles	140	5263	1566	22.9
1988	Seoul	159	6197	2194	26.1
1992	Barcelona	169	6652	2704	28.9
1996	Atlanta	197	6806	3512	34.0
2000	Sydney	199	6582	4069	38.2
2004	Athens	201	6452	4329	40.9
2008	Beijing	204	6450	4637	41.8
2012	London	205	6068	4835	44.3

(Coakley and Pike, 2009, p. 241)

Provide your answer...

3 Inequalities in sport 01/10/24

Discussion

1. If you compare the percentages of female competitors at the three London Olympics, you can see that there has been a substantial improvement, with an increase from 1.8% in 1908 to 9.5% in 1948 and to 44.3% in 2012. This suggests that great strides towards gender equality have been taken, but does this show us the full picture? The data from the 2012 Olympics suggests that we have almost reached gender equality. However, the recognisability of women in sport is still less than that of men, so perhaps gender equality is further away than the participation data would suggest.

2.

- a. The purpose of the article is to raise awareness of the unequal representation of women in sport. This shows that participation data (such as that shown in Table 1) does not give us the full picture.
- b. Fink notes that while there is an increasing number of women in sport, there is unequal media coverage. Furthermore, she analyses how female athletes are represented in the media. For example, she uses the term 'gender marking' when suggesting that male athletes and men's sport are seen as 'the norm', rendering women and women's sporting competition as secondary. Additionally, she highlights 'infantilising', which is when female athletes who are highly accomplished are referred to as 'girls' or 'young ladies'. Skilled male athletes are rarely referred to as 'boys'. She argues that the media focus on sex appeal, femininity and female athletes' roles as wives, girlfriends and mothers instead of focusing on their accomplishments.
- c. The purpose of a review paper is to provide a concise and coherent account of what is known in the particular field. The aim is to position the research into context, identifying strengths and weaknesses, questioning the design of the existing research and suggesting future areas of research to investigate.
- 3. On the IOC website, they report 50:50 full gender parity for the first time in history. They report that this gives a gender-balanced schedule and provides journalists with the opportunity to better balance the media coverage. Another change they have made for the 2024 Olympics Games is to schedule the women's marathon after the men's marathon; this event will conclude the athletics programme on 11 August 2024 during the Closing Ceremony. For many years, the men's marathon has held this spot, as a culminating event to bring the Olympic fortnight to a close. This change is aimed at reversing the order and showcasing women's achievements and performances. At the time of writing, the event has not taken place; use this time as an opportunity to explore some of the media coverage and assess whether gender parity helped improve women's 'place' in sport. As Fink argues, does participatory data show the whole picture?

Although participation in the Olympics shows gender parity in 2024 in terms of participation rates, evidence suggests that gender discrimination does still occur in sport (Fink, 2014; McGinty *et al.*, 2023). In order to explore this further you will examine the experience of women's sport.

3 Inequalities in sport 01/10/24

Activity 5 Gender discrimination debates in sport



(1) Allow 30 minutes

Watch the video below which shows a clip taken from the Channel 5 programme Jeremy Vine, aired in 2019, and complete the questions/tasks that follow.

In the video, there are two main arguments made in reference to what makes sport sexist. Identify the two debates explored in this programme.

2. How can you link an example back to Fink's (2014) paper in the previous activity?

Clare Balding blasts sexism in sports

Provide your answer...

Comment

- Some of the arguments made in the programme were:
 - gender pay
 - media exposure b.
- 2. Fink's (2014) work enables you to understand the differences in the way women and men are treated in sport, as well as providing understandings for why this is.

Hopefully Activities 4 and 5 have helped you to understand that equality means more than just equal numbers of women and men in sport.

In the next section you will investigate the idea of gender ideologies in sport. Gender ideologies are a set of beliefs typical of how men and women are expected to behave and be treated. Key to these beliefs is the culture of masculinity, which you will also explore in the next section.

4 Masculinity and the culture of sport

The culture of masculinity embedded in sport is key to understanding gender discrimination.

First, it's important to define 'masculinity'. The term 'masculinity' refers to the social and biological qualities associated with being masculine or 'manly', and many sports can be an arena in which these characteristics are played out. For example, sport enables men and women to express aggression, competitiveness, speed, strength and skill – traits commonly associated with masculinity.

In sport, typically tough 'masculine' slogans are emphasised (e.g. 'No pain no gain'). For men, sport can be a masculinising experience, which exposes them to an environment highlighting these masculine ideals through sporting experiences that emphasise a 'mentally tough' attitude.

The cultures surrounding sport need to be understood in order to appreciate women's and men's behaviours in sport. Consider whether you think men 'own' masculinity and whether you feel it's acceptable for a woman to show 'masculine' traits, such as a 'win-at-all-costs' mentality. This goes against traditional views of femininity, which are not necessarily positively associated with sport.

What is known as hegemonic masculinity is the most valued form of masculinity and is associated with being white, heterosexual, privileged/middle class and able-bodied. In modern society masculine and feminine traits are not considered to be exclusive to males and females respectively, but how does hegemonic masculinity lead to gender discrimination?

5 Femininity and sport 01/10/24

5 Femininity and sport

You came across the term 'hegemonic' in the previous section and it is defined in the introduction to this course. Hegemonic femininity, often described as a 'hetero-sexy' image, is the ideology/stereotype women are pressured to conform to (e.g. white, ablebodied, slim, toned, privileged/middle class, heterosexual) (Krane, 2001). During the leadup to the 2012 London Olympics the Women's Boxing Association argued that women boxers should walk into the ring wearing skirts (Woodward, 2014). This suggestion has been viewed as a presentation of hegemonic femininity and a way to distance women boxers from behaviour (e.g. boxing/punching) perceived as masculine (Krane, 2001). Do you think that making women boxers wear skirts is a form of gender discrimination? Many female boxers and observers did think this was discriminatory and protested. As a result the boxers wore shorts in the Olympics. Uniforms continue to be a source of controversy: for example, Nike's Olympic track uniform highlighted concerns over sexism as well (Kim, 2024).

Some argue that, for women, having strength, muscularity and athletic skill is an asset, but these qualities can also be perceived as unfeminine and much less valued, and are sometimes denigrated. In 2018, for example, while Formula 1 ended their long-standing practice of using walk-on 'Grid Girls', they actually argued that they were not 'just pretty faces' and worked hard as saleswomen. You may find it useful to reflect on how strength, muscularity and athletic skill are regarded in any sport and fitness environments that you use.

Often women who engage in sport and exercise challenge existing perceptions and expectations about femininity and gender. These women can sometimes be seen as 'outsiders' because they fall outside of what is expected of women. You will explore this further in the next section.

6 Gender outlaws 01/10/24

6 Gender outlaws

In the previous sections you explored hegemonic masculinity and femininity and how men and women who challenge these through sport can be considered as outsiders, or what Shilling and Bunsell (2009) describe as 'outlaws'. One of the most notable examples of women being referred to as 'outlaws' is female bodybuilders. In the next activity you will explore how female bodybuilders challenge the perceived gender norm.

Activity 6 Female bodybuilders





Figure 3 Gender outlaws: (a) Sadik Hadzovic who won the IFBB Arnold Sports Festival Champion in 2015; (b) Margie Martin who won the IFBB Wings of Strength PBW Tampa Pro in 2015.

Look at the photos above of a male and a female bodybuilder. Note your immediate reaction to these two photos.

Reflect on why you reacted the way you did to the images and consider whether your reaction was influenced by stereotypical perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Were your reactions indicative of gender discrimination?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Numerous authors (e.g. Roussel et al., 2003; Shilling and Bunsell, 2009, 2014) have suggested that female bodybuilders challenge the gender norm by seeking a muscular body, which is generally viewed as more acceptable for men. Do you believe that this is true (think about your immediate reaction)? Think about whether

6 Gender outlaws 01/10/24

and how different your responses were to the two images and whether you think this was because of gender.

Shilling and Bunsell (2009) refer to female bodybuilders as 'gender outlaws' because they break gender norms, both aesthetically (appearance) and kinaesthetically (touch), of what it means to be a woman. When these photos have been shown to students in the past there has been a much stronger reaction to the appearance of the female bodybuilder than to the male bodybuilder. I hear students respond with comments such as 'Urgh, gross!' or 'It's just wrong for women to look that muscular' or 'I don't think women or men should be that muscular'.

The activity you have just completed, along with the rest of this course, will have encouraged you to reflect on gender perceptions within society and how these impact on sport, with a particular focus on the question 'Does gender discrimination exist in sport?' The ability to evaluate the evidence before reaching an answer to a question like this is a very important skill.

Conclusion 01/10/24

Conclusion

This free course, *Sporting women in the media*, set out to help you investigate whether sport is a level playing field for women and men, and to consider whether gender discrimination occurs in sport and exercise.

The main learning points for the course are:

- Gender in sport is a contemporary issue that is relevant to all those involved in sport.
- There is evidence to suggest that, while there has been improvement, women's sport continues to receive far less media coverage than men's sport.
- The proportion of women competing in the Olympics has increased; however, equal numbers are not the only measure of gender equality in sport.
- Traditional perceptions of masculinity and femininity could lead to gender discrimination in sport.
- Hegemonic femininity and hegemonic masculinity have an impact on those who
 challenge what are seen to be 'ideal' images of women and men or who cross
 traditional gender norms. For example, males who participate in traditionally female
 sports or females who participate in traditionally male sports are sometimes
 considered deviant.

This OpenLearn course is an example of level 3 study in <u>Sport and fitness</u>. You might be interested in the related Open University course

E315 Contemporary sport and exercise issues.

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