

Gender Discrimination in Sports

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Despite institutional efforts to level the playing field, female athletes continue to fall behind their male counterparts in pay and overall representation in athletic careers. Additionally, female athletes face undue sexist language and harassment based on their gender in the sports industry. Gender discrimination is prominent in various areas of the female sports industry. Women face issues regarding unequal pay between male athletes despite their success levels. Female athletes are also severely underrepresented in the media due to a lack of media coverage for their sporting events in comparison to their male counterparts. In regards to underrepresentation, women also face discrimination when pursuing careers in the athletic industry such as sports broadcasting and sports journalism. Lastly, female athletes experience a multitude of gender discrimination through sexist language and sexual harassment.

One of the most prominent movements in the fight for gender equality is the issue of the pay gap in sports. With the assistance of social media, teams like the United States Women's Soccer Team, have used their platform to protest against the pay disparities between male and female athletes. "Even with the 1963 enactment by the EPA, which aimed to eliminate gender discrimination, women still face discrimination and are paid significantly less than men" (Adams, 2021, pg. 26). In 2020, women earned 84% of what men earned (Barroso and Brown, 2021, par. 1). With this movement by the United States Women's National Soccer Team, they have also started a conversation about the causes of the wage gap. The justification from employees for paying professional female athletes less by employers is that women are "less exciting, less profitable, and therefore less compensable" (Adams, 2021, pg. 27). Especially when it comes to the USWNT, this logic is not applicable due to the women's national team achieving significantly larger success than the men's national team. For example, in the most recent World Cup, the women's team won first place while the men failed to even qualify (Adams, 2021, pg. 28). The USWNT's immense success further proves their point that they deserve to be paid fairly and equally.

Not only are professional women's teams earning less, female collegiate athletic programs earn less in regards to program funding. Even with the introduction of Title IX, which "outlawed sex discrimination in universities that received federal financial assistance" (Wuerdemen, 2017, pg. 85), it was common for some programs to use Title IX as a way to cut programs that weren't producing any revenue to further fund other men's programs (Wuerdemen, 2017, pg. 85). This was especially prominent at Temple University when two

women's programs were cut with the excuse that they weren't creating enough revenue to be sustained and that money was then used to fund the football team (Wuerdemen, 2017, pg. 85). Temple University is a prime example of how Title IX doesn't truly protect female athletes from gender discrimination in sports. Title IX does not explicitly state that women's and men's programs must have the same amount of funding, it was made to ensure proportional participation in women's and men's sports at universities (Wuerdemen, 2017, pg. 85-86).

Because female collegiate athletic programs receive less funding, they aren't able to generate as much revenue as their male counterparts leading to indifference in pay between male and female coaches. The main concern is "whether similar metrics in training, education, and specialized human capital result in comparable wages for both males and females" (Traugutt, Sellars, and Morse, 2018, pg. 43). This issue is especially prominent in collegiate level coaches due to "preconceived notions of earning structures" (Traugutt, Sellars, and Morse, 2018, pg. 43-44). Surprisingly, 72% of male colleagues have an easier time discussing pay raises (Leasca and Ryan, 2016, par. 6). While women don't do anything drastically different from men, gender roles and stereotypes continue to be pushed by employers. When men attempt to continue the push for traditional gender roles in the workplace, they are rewarded monetarily while women are questioned for attempting to do the same (Traugutt, Sellars, and Morse, 2018, pg. 44). Essentially, there are no distinct economic factors that provide an explanation as to why there are gender pay disparities in the workforce and coaching jobs specifically (Traugutt, Sellars, and Morse, 2018, pg. 44).

The issues of pay disparities within the sports industry have simultaneously brought to light the struggles women face when having careers in the male-dominated industry of sports. For reference, "women only hold 33% of the general manager positions within the Women's National Basketball Association" (Senne, 2016, pg. 2). The main operating principle of this discrimination is "hegemonic masculinity" which restricts women's access to leadership positions within sports (Senne, 2016, pg. 2). Even when women are given the opportunity to have leadership positions, the men use their power to ask for unrealistic expectations such as they have "no young children, are well educated, held high jobs previously, had flexible schedules, and behaved properly based on the standards of male leaders" (Senne, 2016, pg. 3). However, it is proven that programs that value equal opportunities for women tend to have a

more positive impact on the organization's goals (Senne, 2016, pg. 3). Society's reasoning for gender disparities is constantly debunked which leads us to wonder why it is still relevant today.

Due to the masculinization of the sports industry, men dominate coaching positions within female sports. When Title IX was initially passed, 90% of coaches for female athletic teams were female (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 1). Due to the lack of financial support and social support for female teams, female coaches were the first choice (Blackshear, 2016, pg.1). However, over the years as female teams became more successful and grew to be as competitive as male teams, the coaching job became more "attractive" to men (Blackshear, 2016, pg.2). Between 2000 and 2014, two-thirds of women's athletics head coaching jobs were held by men (Wallick, 2018, pg. 1). This leads us to wonder why men are increasingly picked over women for female program coaching positions and why it is widely normalized in society today. For men, coaching positions are seen as successful and stable careers while for women it is increasingly challenging for coaching to be a stable source of income (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 14). Depending on whether a coach is male or female, the idealism of what a coach should be along with the impact they have on the culture of a program can be different (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 16). Male coaches are associated with stereotypes such as being "strong, confident, assertive, and independent" which are attributes that are valued by society for people in positions of power (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 16). Due to these stereotypes that society finds valuable for coaches, women are constantly challenged to overcome them and break the "glass ceiling" (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 17).

Along with challenges for women in coaching careers, women face discrimination in sports broadcasting careers as well. With the evolution of the sports industry having a dominant presence on national television and various forms of media, these jobs are becoming increasingly sought after by women even though it is a highly male-dominated career (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 17). Because sports broadcast and journalism careers are male-dominated, this creates a "hostile work environment" resulting in unfair treatment and discrimination (Hyre, 2017, pg. 216). For female reporters, their looks have become a requirement for women to get a sports media job instead of their skills and talent (Hyre, 2017, pg. 216). Male reporters gain viewers because of their knowledge and performance while women are "judged solely on their appearance" and continue to fight to be seen for their knowledge (Hyre, 2017, pg. 216). In a recent study, "nearly one-third of women" admitted to experiencing questionable treatment at work related to their

appearance (Schwantes, 2019, par. 8). For reference, 95% of sports journalists are male which brings to light how severely underrepresented women are (Hyre, 2017, pg. 216). Even though there is the opportunity to increase female representation, women may not feel safe in this environment and won't be able to receive the same pay as their male counterparts (Hyre, 2017, pg. 216). Due to this, change in the sports media industry for women has become more stagnant.

Not only are women underrepresented in sports media careers, but female sports also lack the same media coverage as their male counterparts. For reference, "the percentage of female sports coverage time on television has stagnated since 1999" (Hyre, 2017, pg. 215). Around 40% of college athletes are female but female college sports only receive 4% of overall college media coverage (Hyre, 2017, pg. 215). Because of the lack of media coverage, female sports bring in less revenue which simultaneously makes it impossible to narrow the pay gap (Hyre, 2017, pg. 215). Positive media coverage for female sports is vital for influencing society's perception of female athletes and the "relationship between women and sport" (Villalon, 2018, par. 3).

With this struggle of women finding the balance between their femininity and athletic identity, women are portrayed in a more sexualized way compared to their male counterparts. This issue is especially prominent in magazines such as Sports Illustrated and ESPN magazine covers. Through the years, the media continues to "ignore the significance, contribution of, and importance of inclusion for women athletes" (Frisby, 2017, par. 3). Since the 1980s, female athletes have slowly gained more media coverage, however, much of the coverage is "framed in ways that distort, trivialize, and sexualize female athletes" (Frisby, 2017, par. 5). In 2019, coverage of women athletes "totaled only 5.4% of all airtime", a very subtle change in comparison to the "5% observed in 1989" (Cooky, 2021, par. 7). It has been suggested that the media plays a significant role in "developing these sexual perceptions" of female athletes in our society today (Frisby, 2017, par. 8).

Due to the sexualization of female athletes, women experience sexist language regarding their bodies. Female athletes are more likely to receive negative media comments and are "targets for comments that are degrading to and demeaning" especially when these women are compared to other male athletes (Frisby, 2017, par. 4). Because of this negative representation, female athletes face the issue of microaggressions towards their gender and sport. These microaggressions are constantly overlooked by society and "may not be regarded as insults in a society that accepts sports as a male domain" (Kaskan and Ho, 2014, pg. 275). For reference,

microaggressions against female athletes, specifically in the media, “increased by nearly 40% from the 2012 Summer Olympic Games to the 2016 Summer Olympic Games” (Hurst, 2017, par. 1). The issue of these microaggressions stems from the assumption of inferiority which is “the notion that women are less physically and/or mentally able than men” (Kaskan and Ho, 2014, pg. 277).

Because of the assumption of inferiority, the victories of female athletes are often “attributed to her opponent’s weaknesses, rather than to her abilities” which in return essentially invalidates the woman’s athletic ability (Kaskan and Ho, 2014, pg. 277). Shockingly, women who have achieved great success in the sports industry is not solely because of their talent or impressive track record, they are also viewed as physically attractive by society (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 14). This observation further proves femininity and physical attributes are viewed as priorities in our society rather than seeing women as valid athletes (Blackshear, 2016, pg. 14). Additionally, femininity is often “synonymous with weakness in men’s sports” (Kaskan and Ho, 2014, pg. 277). Derogatory terms with feminine attributes are often when men do not live up to physical expectations (Kaskan and Ho, 2014, pg. 277-278). These microaggressions and insults have put women in vulnerable positions in these male-dominated environments.

This inferiority has additionally been used against women to take advantage of them. In our society today, female athletes experience more cases of sexual harassment within their sport. The sports industry has been viewed as a “breeding ground for sexual assault cases due to the idealization of masculinity” (Reel and Crouch, 2019, pg. 178). Predators with authority positions create an environment with a false sense of safety resulting in athletes becoming more vulnerable (Reel and Crouch, 2019, pg. 178). Athletes who experience sexual assault continue to deal with their injuries and develop mental illnesses in response to their traumatic experience (Reel and Crouch, 2019, pg. 178). The issue of sexual assault also exposes the lack of sexual harassment and sexual assault curriculum within sports management (Taylor and Hardin, 2017, pg. 1).

The sports industry’s masculine culture also prevents proper education on sexual assault in sports management education (Taylor and Hardin, 2017, pg. 1). Because of this, “50% of students are exposed to education on sexual harassment” which withholds the ability for proper sexual assault prevention (Taylor and Hardin, 2017, pg.1). Sexual harassment is one of the prominent yet controversial issues in regards to gender discrimination in sports. Our society must undergo major societal changes to reach the ultimate goal of gender equality in sports.

Due to these factors of unequal pay, lack of media coverage, under-representation, sexist comments and sexual harassment, gender discrimination remains a prominent issue for female athletes in our society today. Gender pay disparities continue to be prevalent even with cases of societal pushback. The gender pay gap is a direct result of the lack of media coverage withholding female sports from achieving a high revenue in comparison to their male counterparts. With the sports industry being male-dominated, this reveals the issue of female under-representation in careers within the sports industry. Due to this under-representation, women face sexual comments in regards to their bodies rather than being valued because of their athletic abilities. This sexualization of female athletes and women in the sports industry leads to the chronic issue of sexual harassment and assault in the masculinization of the industry along with the lack of education on sexual assault prevention.

As female athletes fight for equality within their sports, they have started important conversations to bring awareness to the issues they deal with every day as a female in a male-dominated industry. Especially with monumental movements such as the United States Women's soccer team's fight for equal pay and sexual assault awareness like the #MeToo movement, the fight against gender discrimination has gained significantly more support. Even with this tremendous support by the public, it will take many more years and the evolution of societal values to truly achieve the idea of gender equality in all aspects, not just within sports. It's ultimately up to the public to help strengthen the fight for equality for female athletes and break these cycles of gender discrimination in sports. We must put in the work to push for the inclusion of women and recognize their importance in the sports industry. Through the use of social media to assist in promoting the power of women in sports and eliminate the stigmas against women in the male-dominated sports industry, the goal of equality could be achieved in our society.

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