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## Gender Inequality in Sports

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# Gender Inequality in Sports

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## Abstract

This paper describes the vast differences in earnings between men and women in sports, the historical roots for this and the current causes. It claims that wage differences between men and women are unjust and that governments and sports organizations ought to rectify this and offer equal opportunities for both genders. It proposes numerous corrective schemes and provides answers to several objections.

**Key Words:** gender inequality; justice in sports; equality of opportunity; fairness; sports reforms.

## Resumen

Este trabajo describe las grandes diferencias de ingresos entre hombres y mujeres en el deporte, las raíces históricas de este fenómeno y las causas actuales. Afirma que las diferencias salariales entre hombres y mujeres son injustas y que los gobiernos y las organizaciones deportivas deben rectificar esta situación y ofrecer igualdad de oportunidades para ambos sexos. Propone numerosas medidas correctoras y da respuesta a varias objeciones.

**Palabras Clave:** género, deporte, salud laboral, derechos laborales.

## 1. Introducción

Gender wage gap inequality has been a hotly debated topic since the middle of last century<sup>1</sup>. This paper explains the major inequalities between men and women in the sports industry today. Although some progress has been made over recent decades, women are still discriminated against, undervalued and underpaid in many areas of sport. For instance, some Spanish basketball and football players risk termination of contract without compensation

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when pregnant. Many players accept and sign such contracts without reporting this oppressive clause or complaining because they fear to lose their careers (Arribas, 2017).

This paper advocates equality of opportunity between men and women in the sports industry and is structured as follows. Section I will explain the inequalities between men and women in the sports industry and will examine the background - historical, economic and cultural - that women have faced throughout history and still face today. Section II offers my personal view of gender inequalities and proposes some reforms that may help to reduce them. Section III addresses the following objections: (i) Consumer Sovereignty Objection, which claims that the status quo is fair because it emerges from a free market; (ii) The Irrelevance Objection, which claims that gender equality does matter, but that equality in this relatively trivial area does not; (iii) The Excellence Objection, which claims that excellence is worth inequality costs; and, (iv) The Arbitrariness Objection, which claims that targeting this particular field's inequalities is unjustified. Section IV discusses the limitations of my arguments and suggests possible solutions.

## ***2. Background and Differences***

Women still face formidable obstacles in sports, and these can differ from one country to another. The inequality in wages ranges from local to international competitions. For example, in international competitions the German men's football team, who won the world cup in 2014, earned 44 times more than the Japanese women's team earned by winning the world cup in 2011. Management still discriminates against women, paying them less than men in 10 out of 35 international competition sports (Thompson and Lewis, 2014). Likewise, the difference in wages in local competitions is considerable in many cases. For instance, men earn 81 times more on average than women in the USA basketball league (Travers, 2008, p. 84-85). Moreover, men receive 50% of their total league's revenue whereas women only receive 33% (Berri, 2015). The highest earning male receives approximately 220 times more than the highest earning female in UK football (Wigmore, 2016). Such inequality not only affects the well-off athletes, but many women also abandon their sports careers in search of better paid employments (Das, 2016). Hence, women are disadvantaged in their sports careers compared to men and are rendered incapable of achieving their aspirations.

The salary differences also reflect the differences in the revenues of men's and women's leagues. These differences in revenues are caused by higher spectator numbers and sponsorships in the men's leagues compared to the women's. I believe that these differences are the result of three factors: historical, economic and cultural. They are interrelated and may affect one another. The aim of this section is to describe these factors and their probable negative effects on women; they have almost certainly given women great disadvantages in sports over the past two decades.

### ***2.1. Historical roots***

To some extent women enjoyed participating in sports in eighteenth century Britain. Two factors however have caused a decrease in women's participation: evangelical church reforms and the emergence of industrial capitalism. Tony Collins claims that the evangelical church fought women's involvement in sports on the basis that they are 'weak'. He describes how women were perceived by the evangelical church: "This was not an assessment of their physical strength but of their character: women were morally weak and fickle, and therefore had to be controlled" (Collins, 2013, p.39). The rise of industrial capitalism forced many people to move to industrial areas and to comply with the new system. Women were engaged in unpaid labour in factories and were required to support their families (cooking, cleaning, child rearing and so forth). This of course led to the end of their leisure time, and at this point women were also excluded from the sports industry (Collins, 2013, p.40).

Gymnastics was the first sport that women were allowed to practice in England. Even though this motivated women to engage in other kinds of sports (Hargreaves, 1994, p.83-84), many objections were made against their participation for different reasons<sup>2</sup>. For instance, sports activities led to "hormonal imbalances" and could result in "irreparable damage", or else it was seen as "impropriety and manly" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.83-84). Women suffered the same problems of unequal opportunities in most sports activities (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 126-127). This complete lack of equal opportunities probably delayed women in engaging in sports and creating their own associations.

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<sup>2</sup> If women insisted on playing sports, they were encouraged to participate in gymnastics or figure skating as these sports were considered "feminine appropriate" (Weaving, 2012, p.229-230).

In 1921, after football gained in popularity amongst women, men's football federations stopped providing pitches for women (Collins, 2013, p.45). Similarly, women faced different kinds of discrimination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in many countries around the world. This led to great economic and cultural disadvantages for them in the industry. As a result of this men were able to monopolize the industry for a long time. Women struggled to gain funding and to use resources for training in many sports. For instance, in England women received limited numbers of boats, reduced time for training, coaching and less funding compared to men in the rowing race. Even after establishing their own rowing association, women were still harassed by prohibitions to participating in competitions and having any adequate funding withheld. These disadvantages affected equal opportunities between men and women because of the delay in the establishment of women's associations at a time when men were being favoured. For instance, the first women's rowing association only emerged almost a century after the emergence of the men's association (Hargreaves, 1994, p.125).

## ***2.2. Contemporary obstacles***

Although women have gained access during the past century to most sports, Michael Burke criticizes that nowadays women have still not been granted the right to participate in all sporting competitions (Burke, 2010, p.24). A report from the European commission shows that women form a minority in the vast majority of sports, and in all countries when it comes to decision-making position. Women are excluded from 20 out of 52 sports federations and have less than 25% representation in 46 of them. The main obstacle is believed to be the culture within these organizations being dominated by men. It was found that there is a higher tendency for leaders "to appoint or elect other leaders who looks like themselves", which makes domination by men inevitable. Furthermore, women administrators believe they are judged by a more demanding standards than men. Gender diversity improves decision-making and leads to better results, as it allows for a greater understanding of the consumer (i.e. men and women). Furthermore, women are more likely to understand women's needs, and this makes their opinions and experience essential to the management and the board. The target of the European commission report is to achieve a minimum of 40% women participation in

executive boards and committees of all sports federations by 2020 (Gender Equality in Sport: Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014 – 2020, p.14-15).

Women face additional obstacles besides the lack of representation in decision-making positions, such as the technical quality of women's sports coverage being lower than that of men. Camera work, editing, graphics, sound and framing of sporting events are provided far more to men than to women (Burke, 2014, p.40). For example, if we compare the WNBA and NBA games, "the pregame and halftime shows, the poor sound quality, and the mawkish framing of that contest all contributed to lower production values" for the women's version of the sports. Furthermore, women's matches receive far fewer teasers and promotions than those of the men, percentages ranging from 2% to 14.8% depending on the channel. According to Margaret Duncan, these teasers and promotions may strongly affect the perception of the audience regarding the importance and the charm of the game. In addition, these teasers give more importance to the games in the eyes of producers (Duncan, 2009, p. 252-253).

### ***2.3. Cultural norm***

These disadvantages have not only affected equal opportunities between men and women, they may have also led to contemporary norms. For instance, if most people watch predominantly men's sports in their childhood, they may become accustomed to men's sport as the norm. Furthermore, the lack of coverage of women's sports may be one essential cause for this norm. Women's sports have suffered from a high negative discrepancy in global media coverage (Kane, 1995, p.194; Stevenson, 2004). For example, a study made in Australia found a significant difference in media coverage of men's and women's sports, with women receiving 7% in the non-news media and 9% in the news media (Sherry et al., 2016, p.300). Another study, conducted in the USA, shows that women received 5% of televised sports news in 1989, 5.10% in 1993 and 8.70% in 1999 (Duncan, 2009, p.248). These results show the low coverage and the slow advancement over time given to women by the media.

Gender is a social construct that is acquired in sport through socialization processes where parents, peers, schools and the media influence the thinking and behavior of both genders (Hartmann and Pfister, 2003, p.6-9). Donna Lopiano believes that, prior to the civil rights

movement of the 1960s and 1970s, parents were unintentionally responsible for perpetuating “masculine and feminine stereotypes.” She adds:

They were taught by their parents, key influencers in schools and communities, and the media, that girls shouldn't play sports or weren't interested in sports. At early ages these beliefs guided girls away from sports and boys toward sport. Small actions, like the type of gift bought for a boy or a girl, become a compelling messages. If a girl receives a doll and a boy receives a football, the message to him is an encouragement to play sports (Lopiano, 2004, p.24)

Moreover, Iris Marion Young describes how girls are less encouraged compared with men to engage in challenging physical activities in schools. Women's tasks are often more sedentary, less physically demanding and less targeted to well-defined goals compared with men (Young, 1990, p.43). This may have greatly disadvantaged the popularity of women's sports. For instance, women were not represented at all in the Athens Olympics in 1896; they were represented by 20% in Montreal in 1976 (Hargreaves, 1994, pp.217-220), and by over 44% in Rio 2016 (Women make history and inspire the world on the Olympic stage, 2016). The increase in women participating in sports is clear, but many types of sports were either limited or completely unavailable to them. It was only following confrontations and negotiations that women were gradually included in more types of sports (Hargreaves, 1994, p.217-220).

Lopiano claims that research shows that both genders are equally interested in participating in sports between the ages of six and nine. One of the main obstacles for girls is that they do not receive equal encouragement from their parents compared to boys. Early participation in sports is essential for developing skills in children (Kirk, 2005, p.242). Skill development is essential for early success, and people generally have more fun in sports when they are successful. As girls do not receive the same level of encouragement as boys, they tend to engage in sports years later. This leads to a relative lack of success in developing their skills, as well as in their overall enjoyment of sports activities compared to boys. This results in a drop-out rate that is six times higher than that of boys. In addition, girls have less than a 10% chance to participate in sports when they reach 25 if they do not engage before the age of 10 (Lopiano, 2004, p.24).

Catharine Mackinnon argues that it is not that women are not encouraged equally as men to participate in sports, but they are discouraged to do so. She puts it in:

“From a radical feminist perspective, if you ask why women have not participated in athletics, you get a much more complicated picture. Women have learned a lot all these years on the sidelines watching. Not only have we been excluded from resources, excluded from participation, we have learned actual disability, enforced, weakness, lack of spirit/body connection in being and in motion. It is not that men are trained to be strong and women are just not trained. Men are trained to be strong and women are trained to be weak. It’s not not learned; It’s very specifically learned.” (Mackinnon, 1987, p.119).

Women lack trust in their bodies to carry them to their aims in sports compared with men. This is evident when we compare men and women playing volleyball. Young describes that women are less likely to jump to reach the ball and have a higher tendency to stay in one place compared with men. Women’s lack of trust in their bodies lead many to “a greater or lesser feeling of incapacity, frustration, and self-consciousness.” Hence, women are more inclined than men to underestimate their bodily capacity (Young, 1990, p.33-35). As a result, due to cultural reasons, women have faced more constraints than men to fully engage in sports.

Myths and stereotypes promoted by the media have adversely affected women taking part in sports. Women “become mannish and unfeminine”, “develop an eating disorder”, “become lesbians” and so forth; these are all examples of such myths (Lopiano, 2004, p.25; Mackinnon, 1987, p.122). This pressure has led many athletes to combat such accusations by proving their femininity through physical appearance (by appropriate clothing, etc.), by modifying their behaviour, as well as off field interests (Cahn, 1995, p.5). Moreover, such pressure leads many young girls to give up sports for reasons such as they grew more interested in boys. They see sports as inappropriate for women and do not want boys to see them engaging in sports activities (Schell and Rodriguez, 2000, p.23).

Other cultural discriminations took different forms: one study explains the effect of gender on cultures and ideas about leadership, which were affected by masculine norms and taken as universal human truths. The authors claim:

The cultural values attached to heroic leadership, instrumentalism and rational models of personhood have made it difficult for women to articulate and practice other ways of managing sport that are valued (Fullagar and Toohey, 2009, p.199).

If we take the narrative of male dominance at face value, then the picture that emerges of women engaged in sports is that they are pressured to follow men through general acceptance of the male norm, and providing anything different shows that women are less capable than men. The cultural approach however is not limited to these issues. Women are still discriminated against in sports: print and television media coverage tend to use language that devalues women's performances. In addition, the female image in sports is sexualized in the USA, the UK and Europe, and this affects the perceptions of the audience by undermining their performances through focusing on their bodies rather than their skills (Vincent, 2004; Weaving, 2012, p.232-238; Sherry et al., 2016, p.300-303; Weaving, 2016)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, some women Olympians posed nudes during the last decades due to a lack of funding and to market themselves through the media. One might argue that such sexual objectification of women's body might not happen if they had an equal opportunity to funding as men. Charlene Weaving considers that women's marvelous skills are undermined because they are sexually objectified when they pose nude (Weaving, 2012, p.233-234)

## ***2. Equality of opportunity***

Men's sports might be more popular than women's due to the disadvantages that women have faced throughout the last two centuries in the field. As previously discussed, women were excluded from sports for different reasons (i.e. religious, physical characteristics, societal, and so forth). Many schemes could and ought to be implemented in order to give women in sports a level playing field with men. Nancy Fraser argues that in order to achieve gender justice, a cultural equality (recognition) and material equality (redistribution) should be met (Fraser, 2007, p.25). As discussed in the background and differences section, women are culturally undermined and economically marginalized. In order to achieve gender equality, men's sports organizations ought to invest in women's league and promote new sports for women. Revenues from the major leagues' come from media coverage, sponsorships and the sale of tickets. Media coverage and sponsorships aim to gain as many spectators as possible in order to maximize revenues. For this reason - as men's sports tend to be more popular - they receive more coverage than women's. Furthermore, the male monopoly of the sports industry

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<sup>3</sup> Although some sports (i.e. Ultimate Fighting Championship) are breaking women's sexual objectification as they show physical aggressiveness and violence, women's 'appealing' appearance in such sports still increase their chances of success and popularity (Weaving, 2013, p.137-139).

during the last century has also allowed for domination of media coverage. Thus, men had far greater access to audiences over generations, and were enabled to build a larger fan-base.

These disadvantages occurring over generations may be one essential reason for the norm that has led to a bias towards men. To achieve equal opportunities for men and women, sports managements ought to allow women equal exposure<sup>4</sup> (i.e. television, journals, and so forth). This step is essential as it provides the audience with an equal choice in watching either men or women.

I believe that the norm could be influenced by the media, and also that additional factors are probably essential in effecting a change in this norm, such as political reforms. Leslie Francis argues that universities are ought to encourage women participation in sports through various forms (Leslie, 1993, p.42). Francis' claim may be beneficial for empowering women in sports, however, such support and encouragement should be given to women in high school as well. Governments ought to actively popularize women's sports, especially among younger generations. In addition, governments should also support the education of younger people about women in sports in order to encourage unbiased sports appreciation. The younger generation's appreciation of sport should be free from the historical disadvantages that women have faced and that have allowed men to monopolize the industry. For example, showing students quality female sports performances in school could help in popularization. This step could be broadened as schools take their students to watch live women's sports. Furthermore, case studies and historical examples given during classes should include women's sports achievements.

Judith Stull explains that sometimes a cultural lag occurs in societies. First, she defines material culture as "physical resources that help provide a collection of individuals with a unifying identity." She then claims that the cultural lag occurs when the material culture (shopping malls, houses, iPads, etc.) changes and advances more rapidly than the non-material culture (ideas, belief structures and institutions). She goes on to claim that many women in sports experience role-strain when they enjoy being highly competitive. This is due

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<sup>4</sup> My claim could be seen as problematic. For example, many people watch gymnastics - a sport dominated by women. Equalizing media coverage between men and women here would mean giving men equal media coverage for gymnastics, which may well meet with little or no success because the audience may simply not be interested. To solve this issue, men and women could receive equal coverage in general but without necessarily receiving equal time coverage for each particular sport. For example, gymnastics and bullfighting may be dominated by one gender, but that would not necessarily affect the total number of hours given to each gender.

to their competitive impulses conflicting with the traditionally defined role of women who, based on the older values, are expected to fulfil only supportive roles. This cultural lag occurs when values lag behind material changes (Stull, 2006, p.56-60). If this holds true, then such obstacles may be surpassed by creating and engaging in more sports fiction novels which empower women of younger generations. Such novels have important effects on how women perceive their role in society, in sports, and whether they are able to achieve leading roles (Kane, 1998; Heinecken, 2015). Furthermore, sports fiction ranks third in popular genre among the young generation for both genders combined (Heinecken, 2015, p.23-24), which indicates that the expansion of women sports novel is essential.

Women do receive proportionate governmental funding as men in some countries, such as the USA, following the implementation of Title IX. “Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in any domestic educational program or activity receiving assistance from the government of the United States” (Humphreys, 2006, p.766). Although it is essential for such a step to be implemented worldwide, it seems insufficient for rectifying the major imbalances in many sports. Sportsmen are still earning far more than sportswomen in basketball, football, baseball, American football and many other sports in most of the countries around the world. For this reason, men’s leagues ought to invest in women’s leagues far more than at present (even if, in some cases, they already do so) in order to help them develop. Such investments may save many women’s leagues on the verge of bankruptcy and provide them with stability, which is important for women’s leagues in order to sustain and provide long-term leagues for their fans.

By implementing such reforms, women will be provided with more opportunities for gaining parity with men, and this will also increase opportunities for developing new sports for women. Many women abstain from entering the sports industry because many sports and many divisions do not pay enough to support them. If equal opportunity is achieved, higher numbers of women will be able to enter the sports industry. One may object that this increase is only an assumption, and it could be the case that they do not expect any more participation in sports. My belief is based on the result of the Title IX implementation in the USA, which shows a very large increase in the number of women participating in the Olympics, as well as college and high school sports teams. Female athletes represented 14.8% in the Olympics, 16% in colleges and 17.8% high schools in 1972 (prior Title IX) and 25 years later, it

increased to 34.2%, 39.1% and 40% respectively<sup>5</sup>. Hence, I feel that if women are given the opportunity, their participation in professional fields will increase. Although there are other factors that have contributed to the increase in the number of women in sports, Title IX was almost certainly one of the main influences (Boxil, 1993, p.23-25).

**Table 1** - Female athletic participation growth (Lopiano, 2000, p.164)

Level	1972			1996		
	Male	Female	% of Total Athletes that are Female	Male	Female	% of Total Athletes that are Female
Olympics	6,065	1,058	14.8	7,059	3,685	34.2
College	172,447	32,853	16.0	200,627	128,627	39.1
High school	3,770,621	817,073	17.8	3,706,225	2,472,043	40.0

One popular belief is that men attract more spectators in sports because they present a more interesting spectacle due to their superior physical abilities. Although it is true that men are more likely to have larger bodies than women, to be “more aggressive and more drawn to competitive, aggressive play” (Casal, 2013, p.5), I believe the connection between possessing more marked physical abilities and presenting a more interesting spectacle is inaccurate. The quality comprising an interesting spectacle is the closeness of the results between participants in the same competition. Jean-Jacques Gouguet analyzes numerous studies of the behaviour of people who attend sports events and concludes that more people attend events or matches when the outcome is uncertain (Gouguet, 2006, p.84-85). Another reason why biological differences probably have no effect on demand is that the difference between the two genders is, relatively speaking, not very great. A study comparing the differences in results between men and women from the start of the Olympic era concluded:

The gender gap ranges from 5.5% (800-m freestyle, swimming) to 18.8% (long jump). The mean gap is 10.7% for running performances, 17.5% for jumps, 8.9% for swimming races, 7.0% for speed skating and 8.7% in cycling’ (Thibault et al., 2010, p.214).

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<sup>5</sup> Although Title IX has had a positive effect on women's sport at Universities, it does not eliminate sex discrimination - e.g. many coaches of women's teams are still male, media coverage and additional sponsorship and career opportunities are still unequal.

These differences between the capabilities of both genders may in many cases be negligible when people watch competitions. Let us assume that I am watching two swimming competitions of men and women back-to-back: if men are 10% faster than women, I would not notice the difference when watching the women's race because this 10% difference represents only a few seconds. It is true that the difference between someone who wins the gold medal and another who wins the silver medal may sometimes be less than 1 second (in race competitions) or 1 mm (in high jump competitions), but what actually makes the race interesting is the closeness of competition between the athletes. Many sports athletes have improved their current performances over those of a century ago because of the improvements in coaching, training, technology and so forth. Although many performances in different sports stagnated after the 1990s, notable improvements were made prior to that period (Berthelot et al., 1988, p.6-7). Men had similar, or sometimes lower, results in the past compared to contemporary women's results in sports. For instance, the highest score for the men's long jump in the 1880s was around 7.2 m (Berthelot et al., 1988, p.3) which is lower than the women's record today, being 7.52 m (Rosenbaum, 2017). People probably applauded just as much and were just as satisfied watching the Olympics in the 1880s as they are today. Thus what makes competition interesting is more due to the closeness between athletes than the actual scores. If the women competing have close results, the competition will be as interesting to watch as the men's competition (assuming that the men also have close results).

Let us assume that all the claims made here are inaccurate and that people enjoy watching men's sports simply because of their physical abilities. Is it still fair to intervene in the free market of sports if men attract more spectators and sponsorship than women, even after women receive more funding, equal media coverage and the implementation of new reforms in schools and other areas? This scenario would almost certainly still be problematic because of two potential conditions: if differences in league incomes are still wide, or if women still earn less than men in most of the industries. A valid objection could be made to large income differences in the same types of leagues between men and women, as large inequalities are intrinsically wrong. One may argue that an objection to large inequalities should also extend to inequalities between different types of sports. For instance, if football players earn more than volleyball players, then more equality between the two sports should be demanded. The

main concern of this paper however is to solve the large inequalities between the genders. Furthermore, the ideal is not to intervene in two different sports where people have an unbiased preference for one over the other, because the preference is not based on gender. The second condition is based on men's leagues investing in women's leagues while women are still earning less than men in most industries because of the systematic character of gender inequality. This means that if women were to earn more than men in some industries and less in others, then such differences in income would not be problematic. But when women earn less than men in most of the industries, then such inequalities should not be considered acceptable.

### ***3. Replies to objections***

#### ***3.1 Consumer Sovereignty Objection***

One objection to my claim can be that the sports industry is a fair market in which women earn less than men because they attract fewer sponsorships, less media attention and fewer spectators (ticket sales) at matches. Hence the salary gap is acceptable. By claiming that the market is fair, this view sees men and women as two individuals who start the race equally and the winner collects most of the earnings. I shall reply to this objection by saying that it overlooks an essential issue: women and men did not begin the race equally. Men have built a strong sports industry over the last century, and women were largely absent from the scene. By investing in all these advantages, men have created a formidable gap between themselves and women, which surely cannot be rectified without contributions from men's leagues. A similar example is the emergence of the industrial revolution in Britain before any other country, giving Britain a remarkable advantage later on. Latecomers always face many obstacles in trying to catch up with the others.

Some may question this response and argue that even if men and women did not start the race equally, men are still entitled to the profits. Suppose that 'Anna' opens a bookstore in a neighbourhood that lacked one. As 'Anna' has the first bookstore, she may gain faithful customers. If 'Beatrice' decides to open another bookstore in the same neighborhood she will start with an initial disadvantage because many of her potential customer will be already 'taken'. This viewpoint assumes that Anna is entitled to her benefits and owes no

compensation to Beatrice, and this is similar to the case of men and women in sports. However, this analogy overlooks the fact that women have faced many types of discrimination over recent decades. To return to the bookstore example, let us suppose that Anna and Beatrice open a bookstore at the same time in the same neighborhood. Anna however repeatedly sabotages Beatrice's bookstore: she breaks the windows, issues threats against those who wish to enter, spreads false rumours, and so forth. In this situation Anna should compensate Beatrice for the unfair treatment. Men currently engaged in sports are almost certainly not those same men who determined the chances of women being successful in the field, but they nevertheless continue to benefit from previous discrimination. Following this argument, the onus is on men to rectify the imbalance, and they should be required to contribute to the women's leagues. As already outlined, men have dominated the sports industry over the last century, gaining unfair advantages such as more resources and fans over the generations, as well as high levels of media attention and so forth. Men were also mainly responsible for oppressing women in sports. Women are not latecomers by coincidence or by choice, but only because they were disadvantaged throughout history.

This view may rely on a 'consent theory' of justice: if you enter into an arrangement voluntarily, this means you accept the validity of the outcome (or, at least, that you would not be justified in imposing any changes if other participants do not accept them). The 'consent theory' of justice strikes me as invalid when it concerns women because women were systematically discriminated against throughout history up until the present time. Women are paid less than men in the vast majority of industries, including the sports industry. If we agree with that view, then we can justify all the systematic inequalities that women suffer in other industries also. Hence this view will allow women two options: either they agree to the unfair inequalities in all markets by consenting to work or they can disagree with the unfair market and refuse to work. The former is problematic because under that assumption women cannot rectify the unfairness, and the latter is problematic because a world in which women are unable to work and be treated fairly should not be an option at all. Another issue regarding consent is that many women aspire to sports careers. Choosing a different career path may be devastating for them and may result in women accepting unfair contracts in sports (such as

the Spanish basketball and football players already mentioned) even if they are discriminated against, making their ‘consent’ a wholly involuntary one.

### *The Irrelevance Objection*

Some may object that although gender inequality matters, not all inequalities with a gender dimension matter equally. Critics of gender equality may choose sports inequalities as a reason to dismiss feminism. They may argue that feminism is either redundant, as in the case of domestic violence, which is already prohibited by law, or that it is merely picking up on trivial matters and demanding the impossible. Men will always run faster than women and people will always want to see them do so and push the human record further. It is absurd to want to make women do the same and be rewarded as much for their clearly inferior speeds. This objection is of course based on a distorted and uncharitable interpretation of feminism and merely mocks the aim of this paper. It may also, however, do some damage to the movement. Thus some advocates of gender equality may criticize my focus on sports as detracting from the really important issues (such as other pay disparities, or violence) and give ammunition to critics. I shall reply to this objection by questioning the assumption that sport does not matter. Humans have been interested and engaged in sports since ancient Rome, Greece and Egypt, attributing considerable importance to it. The sports world is now able to expand its historical role and make a profound effect on our societies and nations in different ways (Boxill, 1993, p.25-26). Sport can be used to spread a message of international unity and to combat all forms of hatred, racism and discrimination. South Africa, for instance, was expelled from several of the 1960s and 70s Olympics because it practiced racial discrimination by excluding black sports participants (Kidd, 1988, p.643-644). The importance of sport is not limited to fighting racism but also has an important role in facilitating social integration, such as reducing juvenile delinquency and creating “a sense of community during periods of rapid urbanization and the integration of diverse ethnic groups” (Coakley, 2000, p.215). For example, consecutive governments in Britain have invested in different sports as a means of combating urban unrest (Coghlan, 2003, p.114). Furthermore, sport has taken a different form in Ireland; it has acted as a bridge to facilitate integration between Catholics and Protestant (Bairner, 2001, p.73-74). In China sport is considered to develop “a sense of collective honor and the virtues of unity and mutual

effort” (Xie, 1990, p.30). Sport confers the ability for people to express their beliefs and political opposition to undesirable regimes, for instance Catalonian support for the Barcelona football team during Franco’s regime targeted against the absence of democracy (Coakley, 2000, p.216). The Canadian government invested massively in sport in order to unite the Francophone and Anglophone communities under one national identity (Coakley, 2000, p. 216-217). Another important element of sport is its ability for diplomatic bridge-building between adversary nations. For example, China and the USA used sports in the early 1970s to begin building bridges; the USA sent their tennis table and basketball teams to China (Kropke, 1974, p.26). The games were chosen carefully in order to ensure that whatever national defeats occurred, no shame to international prestige would result. On the international level the USA had ranked low in table tennis (China ranked among the best) and China ranked low rank in basketball (whereas the USA ranked amongst the best) (Coakley, 2000, p.217). As already explained, sport is important in many aspects of our social and political spheres. For this reason, women should occupy a role equal to men. Such a role remains unattainable given the major differences between men’s and women’s current treatment in the world of sports.

### *The Excellence Objection*

Another objection to this claim centres on a loss of excellence through the fight against inequalities. Thomas Nagel puts it the following terms:

I suggest with suitable trepidation that this may justify a society in trying to adopt economic policies that permit such extremes. As things are, these luxuries are the concomitants of earned or inherited wealth. But even if inequalities of that kind could be radically reduced, it would be desirable to permit in some other way the enjoyment of life at its upper boundaries by a few. While there may be no ideal way to distribute such opportunities, I believe no egalitarianism can be right which would permit haute cuisine, haute couture, and exquisite houses to disappear just because not everyone can have them (Nagel, 1992, p.92).

Nagel argues that no egalitarianism can justify the loss of excellence and, based on this view, some people may claim that we might lose athletic excellence at the price of egalitarianism. Many people admire superb athletes; they might be the central reason for them supporting a team in some cases. Furthermore, fans buy star’s jerseys and enjoy wearing them. Some may object to this claim on the grounds that taxing men’s leagues and providing

equal media coverage to women will decrease the earnings of the finest male athletes. This may lead to a decrease in such athletes, as a decrease in earnings demotivates them. This view sees that a decrease in star athletes might lead to a loss in a large number of spectators, which are clearly the basis of every sport. Playing without spectators would result in highly trained athletes playing against each other similarly to amateurs enjoying a game for its own sake.

I shall reply to this objection by saying that, first, that it is no more than a convention that men and women play separately. If we were to combine genders in sports teams (i.e. football, basketball, and so forth), we might be able to counter the excellence objection raised by Nagel. Women's quotas are used in parliaments, political parties and so forth; using such quotas in sports may help to achieve greater gender equality by maintaining excellence. For instance, Korfball<sup>6</sup> is a sport in which the team is formed from four male and four women players. If other sports were to follow suit, league revenues would be shared by the teams, the players and the federations in the way that revenue is already currently distributed in many sports. One can assume that even if the number of team players were made equal, men could still earn more than women. Ranking men and women in teams by gender could be one solution in which players earn their salaries based on their rankings in the gender category. For instance, the fifth man ranked in a basketball team will earn the same as the fifth woman ranked in the same team. The second reason that Nagel's argument does not hold up against my view is because we might be able to create a new form of excellence. Korfball, after all, has its own form of excellence. A higher form of excellence can surely comprise both genders competing in all sports. Rules were changed many times throughout history to suit changing standards. People may appreciate mixed gender sports teams because sport is not solely based on physical ability. For instance, in football we value physical performance and we applaud when a player crosses field rapidly and scores. But we also value fair play (whether team members accept victory or their defeat), team spirit (whether members of the team really cooperate with each other) or attitudes towards the opponent (we generally value a player helping someone on the other team to their feet after they have fallen). This shows that there is much leeway for redefining the rules of the game, as well as our ways of defining excellence (Boxill, 1993, p.26-27). Mixed gender teams may also attract more spectators.

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<sup>6</sup> I thank Elian Casal for suggesting the korfball reply.

Numerous studies have found that men are more likely to become sports fans than women; their emotional commitment is greater and they are more active participants when watching games. Women were found to be more passive; they are more likely to watch sports for companionship and not for the drama or the fun of the game. These differences are believed to arise from social norms, expectations and responsibilities (Gantz and Wenner, 1991, p. 233-242; Wenner and Gantz, 1998, p.236-242). Mixed gender teams could eventually alter social norms and lead to a more balanced society. As a result, more women will watch sports and will become enthusiastically active fans. Hence, mixed gender teams may result in more spectators; clearly beneficial to both sportsmen and sportswomen

### ***3.2 The Arbitrariness Objection***

Some may object that choosing to tax men's league in sports is arbitrary. This view may question the reason to tackle men's league in sports instead of tackling other fields where women also earn less than men. I shall reply to this objection by first considering that if there is some truth in The Irrelevance Objection, then there is no reason to object to equality in that field. Without regard to this consideration, a reason for choosing to tax male leagues is that a great deal of money changes hands in the sports industry, representing large numbers of people globally. The exact GDSP (Gross Domestic Sport Product) is currently not known, but the different estimates range from \$168 Billion to \$207 Billion in the USA in 2005. Moreover, the estimated number of fans is around 200 million in the USA (Milano and Chelladurai, 2011, p.24-27). My main concern is not the exact GDSP, but the enormous amount cited shows the ability of sports to affect the economic system. It is worth mentioning that the \$168 Billion to \$207 Billion in 2005 only applies to the USA, strongly indicating that the economic impact of sports worldwide is much greater.

Furthermore, some may challenge my claim by saying that if I am willing to tax male leagues, then I ought to tax women babysitters, as they are the majority in the field of babysitting. I would claim that such an analogy between babysitting and sports is inaccurate for the following reasons. First, women demand equality in sports and were disadvantaged throughout history, as already explained. On the other hand, I have never heard or read about men demanding or lobbying against inequality in babysitting. Regardless of the reasons behind this, the fact that they are not demanding it could mean that they do not feel

discriminated against. If men were to demand equality in babysitting, then would it be fair to tax women babysitters? I would argue that this would depend on the success rate of men engaged in childcare. If most studies show that men are equally successful to women when it comes to babysitting, then I would agree to tax women in order to combat the inequalities. On the other hand, if most studies show that men are more likely to mistreat children, then I would condemn taxing women babysitters. Hence it would be important to tax the male sports industry.

#### **4. Discussion**

This section will discuss - based on the literature of sports' philosophy - the limitation of my argument regarding abolishing gender categories that I have presented in The Excellence Objection. I will first present the debate about gender categories in the literature and will conclude the section by discussing a possible fair solution.

Claudio Tamburrini and Torbjörn Tännsjö support the abolition of gender categories. They criticize the following argument:

“If we give up sexual discrimination in sports, then probably all women will find (because on average they perform poorly in comparison with men) that they are always defeated by some men. This will be discouraging for women in general and for female athletes in particular” (Tamburrini and Tännsjö, 2000, 102).

Tamburrini and Tännsjö argue that gender inequality between men and women might be either socially constructed or caused by sexual differences. They believe that most of the differences in sports are socially constructed similarly to other fields (i.e. philosophy and math). For example, they argue that the underrepresentation of women in the field of philosophy is caused by: i) women not receiving enough credits for their achievements and ii) “women were met with the wrong expectation when they have taken up philosophy” (Tamburrini and Tännsjö, 2000, p.107).

What if the differences in sports between men and women are not socially constructed, but due to sexual differences? Tamburrini and Tännsjö argue that women should accept the inequality between both sexes if the variation in performance is due to sexual differences. They present an example of how African American overperform white people in some sports

and questioned whether we should introduce racial discrimination to solve such differences. Hence they conclude, if we refuse racial discrimination in sports, then we are ought to refuse sexual discrimination. However, Tamburrini and Tännsjö's argument is problematic for the following reasons. Jane English argues that we should not include racial discrimination in sports that might help white people because they are not under-represented and discriminated against in many fields of work. Moreover, Angela Schneider argues that if we lived in an ideal world, then maybe sex differences between men and women would have been acceptable. However, she adds:

“We live in a world where men's efforts are systematically praised and rewarded. We live in a world where the aptitudes and achievements of women tend to go largely unrecognized and unheralded. In our world, excluding women from the publicity that comes from the highest levels of sporting achievement would merely serve to reinforce women's systemic subservience to men” (Schneider, 2000, 137).

Moreover, Tamburrini and Tännsjö argue that what if women were underrepresented in philosophy due to brain differences between men and women. Should we issue a journal that accepts only articles submitted by women? This argument is problematic for the following reasons. I will first explain English's argument regarding the same issue in sports and link it afterwards to the philosophy example. Let's suppose for instance that the differences in sports' abilities between men and women are caused by physiological characteristics. English argues that what is considered as a physiological disadvantage in one type of sports for women, may be an advantage at other types of sports for them. Weight is an asset among sumo wrestlers but is a disadvantage for football players. If there were sports that require flexibility, balance strength, timing and small size body, women were to dominate these sports. Moreover, such sports characteristics (i.e. balance strength) can be equally appealing to spectators as those of men (i.e. strength and speed). However, most of our contemporary sports were designed to suit men's physiology because men dominated the sport's field throughout history (English, 1995, p.274-275). Now let us return back to the philosophy example, the same answer could be applying if the differences in philosophy performance between men and women are due to brain's differences. One can argue that we ought to invest and promote fields in academia that women have a brain advantage in.

The main concern of English is that women should not be looked as inferior to men in society. How can we assess gender inequality in that case? She argues that athletes benefit in sports from scarce resources. The scarce resources are fame, prizes, money and so on. When women receive much less attention, fame and prize money than men, that can be damaging to the self-respect of all women. If women do not achieve almost equal fame and fortune, that could lead society to see women as naturally inferior. Therefore, English argues that women should receive on average equal media coverage and prizes compared to men (English, 1995, p.275-277). This argument is not limited to sports, but can extend to the rest of the fields of employment.

I proposed in my original argument that abolishing gender categories and including quotas for women at the same time could be one solution. However, this argument can be objectionable because it can lead to a reverse inequality. How can the use of quotas justify denying the chance of men who have a better ability than women in sports to sit on the bench? One can use the self-respect argument discussed above, especially if the differences between men and women are solely caused by social construction. Then, violations of justice on the basis of quotas might be acceptable. English puts it as: “Although ‘formal’ equality is necessary for justice, it is not sufficient. These philosophers would permit temporary violations of this ideal, but only in the transition to a just society” (English, 1995, p.269).

But it seems that the differences between men and women in many sports are not due to social construction because most of these sports were developed to suit men’s biology such as size and strength (Simon et al., 2015). Therefore, we cannot consider that quotas will be temporary and women will catch up with men in terms of sports’ ability. It looks that even if athletes’ women train hard these differences are bound to persist. Men might have hormones that permit massive muscle development and a lower percentage of fat that may be essential to excel in our contemporary sports. However, women have other physiological advantages that might allow them to excel in other sports (Francis, 1993, p.43). Synchronized swimming is one example where women get to benefit from their physiological abilities. It is important to promote and develop sports, such as synchronized swimming, where women have a natural advantage over men (Postow, 1980, p.56). Unfortunately, such sports are still not popular in our societies because women had not the chance throughout history to promote and engage in

such sports<sup>7</sup>. Contrary to my claim, Tamburrini and Tännsjö believe that the failure of women's sport in gaining a large audience is due to the preference of audience in watching male physical abilities (i.e. strength, muscular volume, speed and height) (Tamburrini and Tännsjö, 2005, p.183). However, Tamburrini and Tännsjö did not take into consideration that such a preference in an audience to male sports may be due to a cultural norm that has evolved over the centuries. Moreover, Simona Giordano and John Harris criticized Tamburrini and Tännsjö claim for overlooking that the audience appreciates "technical skills, grace, artistry, style and many other qualities" in sports (Giordano and Harris, 2005, p. 214-215).

To rectify previous discriminations, men's league clubs ought to invest in sports that fit women's physiology. Without receiving such investment, it seems that women might face strong barriers to promote new sports in capitalist systems. Women are already facing difficulties to grant sponsorship deals (Koranteng, 2008), expanding their types of sports will certainly need financial support. As a result, this measure might solve the reverse inequality issue that quotas might bring to sports that have no gender categories.

## ***5. Concluding Remarks***

This paper discusses the very great gender inequalities that exist in the world of sport. Its limited purpose is to advocate far greater gender equality in sport. It also argues that the large differences in revenues between men and women in sport is caused by historical, cultural and economic factors. In addition, the paper proposes many reforms - equal media coverage, more funding from the men's to the women's leagues, implementing school reforms, expanding women athletes' fiction novels for younger generations and financing the development of new sports that are suitable for women's physiology - things that could be helpful for future policies to empower women in the sports industry.

The paper claims that supporting women and implementing these reforms may lead to many more women entering the sports industry. This argument is based on the results of the

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy Theberge supports English's argument of developing new sports that are more adaptable to women's body. However, Theberge believes that such a step is incomplete because it "implicitly leave intact the construction of some sports as male and others as female". Thus, she argues that this will be not sufficient to end the notion of two separate and hierarchal categories of gender (Theberge, 1998, p.184).

implementation of Title IX in the USA. This paper has argued against the claim that men attract more spectators in a free market because of their higher physical abilities. It also claims that the uncertainty of the outcome in any game or competition is one of the main features that attracts spectators. Finally, this paper has responded to four main objections. It replies to Consumer Sovereignty Objection that consider sports to be a fair market for men and women and has shown these objections to be either unfounded or insignificant. Moreover, it also replies to The Irrelevance Objection and explains why sport is an important field and why it deserves full consideration. Furthermore, it claims that the Excellence Objection is inapplicable for the sports industry because mixed gender teams could create a new and higher form of excellence. Moreover, it argues for the importance of taxing men's leagues in particular, and claims that choosing this field to tax is not arbitrary. Lastly, it concludes with a discussion concerning the importance of developing new sports that fit women's physiology.

Women and men should be treated equally in all sectors of our society. As John Stuart Mill has argued:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other (Mill, 1989, p.119).

The historical, cultural and economic disadvantages that women face, and have faced throughout history, create great inequality that should be rectified. These differences are common not just among elite athletes; athletes of lower divisions, who constitute the majority, seem to be most affected by these inequalities. Funding is essential for the progress and survival of any team as it provides stadiums, coaching, financial stability and modern equipment. If we were to implement equal opportunities for men and women, many women would give up their search for financial stability elsewhere. We would give women the opportunity to prove themselves in the sports industry, just as they were given the chance to do so in other industries during the previous century, and in which they have proved to be at least as good, and sometimes better, than men.

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