

Key Flaws of the Status of Women Athletes Reflected in the Olympics

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Abstract

Women athletes have been discriminated a lot for a long time in the Olympics, and there's a trend for them to earn opportunity back. This paper mainly discusses 3 aspects that women athletes were once seriously discriminated at, but current situation has been mitigated or even no longer being a problem anymore. From sports dressing, women athletes fought for their rights to wear convenient clothes; from media coverage, women athletes faced no report at once, and they have already showed up to the media a lot recently; from the income perspective, women athletes raised their bonus at least equal to men athletes in a few sporting events, but they still have a long way to go.

Keywords

Feminism; Olympics; Content Analysis.

1. Introduction

The Olympics has become the most influential social and cultural phenomenon around the world (Wang et al. 123). The quadrennial Olympic Games promote the development of the Olympics. But, because of the great influence and huge scale of the Olympic Games, the problems and disadvantages of the Olympics are magnified, among which the issue of women is a thorny one. For instance, women, who account for 51% of the world's population, were once excluded from the Olympic Games, and it was not until 1924 that the International Olympic Committee recognized the equal legal status of women and men in the Olympic Games (124). Examining the long 128-year history of the Olympics highlights the stark difference between the respective status of men and women, which brings to bear the question: how to bring social and economic parity for both genders within the Olympics? This would connect to the general theme of equality, which is mainly reflected in Empowering Women Through Sports and The Meaning of Serena Williams in the stimulus materials. With the progress and development of society, the role of women in all aspects of social life is becoming more and more important. The Olympics has an indelible and profound impact on promoting the development of sports in the whole world. As Nelson Mandela said: "Sport has the power to change the world (Mlambo-Ngcuka 5)." Meanwhile, the world of the sport remains plagued by many of the same gender inequalities; issues such as unequal pay, gender-based violence, a lack of targeted investment, and negative stereotypes and social norms (5). Thus, the International Olympic Committee has the responsibility to work with the United Nations and governments to promote the status of women athletes in the Olympics, since the cultural stereotypes of women, biased reporting, and uneven distribution of prize money have worsened women's status in the Olympics. An analysis through cultural, media and bonus treatment lenses can provide insights and solutions to the key flaws in the Olympics.

2. Various Perspectives

2.1. Cultural Constraints

As far as cultural issues are concerned, the restrictions on women in the Olympics are reflected in sports attire. The history of swimsuits reflects the cultural history of society's body views on body image and attitudes towards women. In the mid-19th century, with the increasing popularity of women's swimming, government legislation aimed at banning women's profligate clothing-imposed rules on what people could wear on the beach (Zhao 66). These laws required swimsuits to cover the body from the neck to the knees. The shirt suit was replaced by knee-length swimsuits with belts (66). Swimsuits were not liberated from long skirts until the 1920s, and women donned sleeveless, shouldered sweatshirt-style fleece swimsuits that accentuated the contours of their bodies (67). People began to realize that swimsuits had to be practical.

However, the most fundamental innovation in the swimsuits was the bikini, designed by Louis Riad in 1946 (67). At first, it caused a huge sensation among observers. Most could not accept such a revealing outfit. After the '70s, the bikini gradually gained popularity and by the '90s became the common swimsuits for young people (67).

Over the past 100 years, women's swimsuits have slowly lessened the bondage of traditional gender identity. At present, the achievements made by women athletes are the result of their efforts. Their enhanced status in the field of the Olympics has been improved, but there is still a shadow of gender discrimination in dress' requirements, which requires shifting perspectives by those empowered to regulate clothing in the Olympic Games.

2.2. Section Headings

The change of women's status in the Olympics is closely related to the degree of social recognition of women across media (Yuan 47). Although there is a trend of gender equality in the number and events of women's participation in the Olympic Games, the social recognition of women is not very optimistic. As one of the exceptions, Ms. Margo Vliegthart, Secretary-General of the Netherlands State for Health, Welfare, and Sport, pointed out that women athletes "generally lack social recognition, and they face discrimination and prejudice in society (47)."

There is a bias in the media coverage of women athletes in the Olympics, which can be shown in the number of reports. According to a survey in Australia in 1992, women's sports coverage accounted for only 2.0% of the sports programs (Zhang 60). Besides, according to the UK Association of Sport, only 0.1-0.5% of newspaper coverage in 1992 involved women (61). Albeit, some arguments believe the differences between the proportion of media coverage women athletes get and men athletes get is a business problem, there are still amount of data that can prove those arguments are wrong. For instance, according to the data of eBay and Amazon, 70% of the shoppers are female, and 60% of the consumers of fitness products are female (64). In short, women are the main force to purchase products, which is helpful to businesses. Therefore, the business theory of differentiated coverages may not be valid to the problem which women athletes get fewer media coverage. By hiding women athletes' efforts and records, traditional social media has exacerbated the gender gap, thus worsened the status of women athletes.

In contrast, there are successful examples that women athletes use social media to change their lives. Chinese women's volleyball team has already featured in the media a lot. Based on statistics on Weibo, which is the most popular and widespread social media in China, the account of the Chinese women's volleyball team has about 5 million fans (Dong 21). These women athletes are very famous in China, and they have a certain degree of recognition in society. According to data from Dahe Newspaper, Zhuting, the captain of the Chinese women's volleyball team, earns about 20 million RMB in 2016 (21). Thus, it is not that there are no

successful cases. It is just the problem that the mainstream social media reports on women athletes are biased, resulting in the low status of women athletes in the Olympic Games.

2.3. Section Headings

The intersection of feminism and economics shows the mistreatment of women athletes. Financial sponsorship in women's sports is far lower than that of men. According to a 2018 report by Statista, women's sports received just 0.4% of total sports sponsorship dollars in Olympic Games: just 427 million dollars out of a total 106.8 billion dollars sports sponsorship market (Zhao 61). Not only that, but women athletes' bonus is also much less than the bonus of men athletes get. According to the statistics of table tennis from the Olympic website, the men's singles champion's bonus is \$37,000, while the women's singles champion's bonus is \$26,000, nearly 30% less (62). Overall, male athletes have at least 30% higher bonuses than women athletes have in the same event (63). The bonuses women athletes received are relatively less than the bonuses men athletes received, which accelerated the demotion of the status of women athletes.

Maria Sharapova, after winning the championship of the U.S. Open, said that women athletes "have become stronger, braver, and more powerful, and they should be treated the same way as men athletes (Wang et al. 42)." This not only affirms the value of women athletes but also makes the development of each event tend to be balanced between men and women. With the call for equality between men and women, nowadays, many sports are gradually realizing equal treatment on bonuses between men and women, but it still needs a long time (Sun 1013).

3. Recommendation

To enhance the status of women athletes in the Olympics, scholars have identified lots of solutions, most of which have proven ineffective. For instance, some feminist nongovernmental organizations suggested that the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee should set laws and regulations to protect women's rights from a variety of angles (1014). Admittedly, these feminists focused on the root causes of inequality, but all they can do is call on athletes to protest, not get the organizers to change their rules. In the opinion of many athletes and scholars, some measures can be taken to solve the problem effectively. For example, the government can build an advanced cultural support system with United Nations and International Olympic Committee. The biggest advantage of this measure lies in confronting the deep-rooted feudal concepts of gender inequality and male supremacy.

On the first step, the government can self-correct the gender culture by providing free public speeches and integrate the gender culture and sports culture of its own country by sending brochures that introduce inter-gender sports (Xu 26). The government can also vigorously promote the research of gender culture from a multi-disciplinary and multi-angle, eradicate the backward gender culture from the source, and lay a scientific theoretical foundation for the construction of advanced gender culture (26). Besides, the Olympic culture deeply rooted in people's hearts and ensured that everyone enjoys the right to do sports. Sports culture advocates people's participation in sports, the development of physical fitness, and the cultivation of social citizens' awareness of participation, competition, and noble moral sentiment.

Based on cultural movements, the International Olympic Committee can mitigate discrimination against women in the social media by providing more chances for women athletes to get media coverages, such as setting private room for female athletes to get media interviews (Wu 42). Social media has a far-reaching influence and has great potential to promote women's status and gender equality. The IOC needs to use the influence of social media

to promote gender culture with gender equality as the core from all aspects, improve people's awareness and change the inherent and backward values.

Finally, to ensure this trend can effectively play a role, the United Nations can implement legal safeguards like formulating requirements that ask sports events to realize equal pay and give full play to the supervision of laws and policies on culture by having meetings and setting laws, to guarantee the popularization of advanced gender culture from the legal level.

Through the above measures, the future of the Olympics will be substantially changed. For example, the number of women athletes participating in the Olympic Games will increase, the number of events for women athletes will increase, and the number and status of women in the International Olympic Committee will also increase (Bailey et al. 23). Not only that, but the potential implications for the future are even greater. A new generation of women athletes will grow even more eager to participate in the Olympic Games. In this way, the status of women athletes in the Olympics will gradually rise, until they are equal to men.

Consequently, the trend of equality and fairness will continue to grow. In today's world, there are still many industries where men and women are not equal (18). Women are discriminated against and treated unevenly from all sides. However, some changes are needed at this time, such as improving the status of women athletes in the Olympics. The success of the women's movement has been exemplary and leading, with all the attention it has received. With the unprecedented attention of the Olympics, this trend has incredible power to influence other unequal industries internationally (Wang 316).

However, this seemingly comprehensive and perfect solution has its problems. The government may not balance the minor details of this system well. Excessive government management will lead to the overall lack of vitality but inhibit the development of sports. But the problems of the Olympics will not be solved and may become even worse if government policies are only superficial. To solve this problem, the government can set up a relevant working group or committee, appoint a senior official to chair the work, and employ relevant personnel to obtain the most objective and reasonable advice. In this way, under the high-level leadership of the government, the overall direction and objectives of the work will clear and ensured. At the same time, according to the reasonable advice of the relevant industry personnel, such as athletes and relevant academic experts, the government can well control the overall progress of the work, ensure that the policy is put in place, and solve the problem.

4. Conclusion

The Olympics, as a theory, and movement that transcends sports and competitive sports, has attracted the attention of the whole world on the overall development of human beings, human perfection, and social development. Ever since the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 1896, the quadrennial games have been a perennial topic of conversation (Wang 317). Beneath all the glitz, however, the Olympics' problems lurk in the shadows. There is no doubt that government, United Nations, and International Olympic Committee need to pay some attention to the underlying problems of the status of women athletes and try to take action to rectify them. In the future, the Olympics can become fairer, and both men and women athletes will be able to compete on the same fair field if the big three organizations mentioned above can take the suggested actions to guarantee the status of women athletes in the Olympics.

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