

Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination in Sports and Esports Industry: A Systemic Review of Causes and Statistics

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Abstract: There are many inequalities existing in our world, including gender inequality and race inequality. These inequalities are caused by discrimination and stereotypes. In sports industry, the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes is common. Female athletes and women who want to work in sport industry are confronting the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes. In addition, a rising industry, esports industry, has the same problem. The aim of this study was to review the current state of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry and causes of it. This paper reviews relevant references to give a holistic review of the current state of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry, including statistics and background information, and this paper reviews the causes of this problem from macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level. The findings of this paper indicated that although sports organizations gave policies that seem to solve the problem, gender discrimination and stereotypes still exist in both sports and esports industry. Therefore, by examining the causes of the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry, future study can be more targeted while they are investigating the way to solve the problem.

Keywords: Sports, Esports, Gender Discrimination, Gender Stereotypes

1. Introduction

Our world is always cruel. Even though people were seeking the true optimal society with the fairest social structure in past few decades, there are many inequalities now existing in our society. A hot-debated one is the existence of income inequality in our societies. Inequality is not desirable because it brings harmful consequences to the society in many ways. Like income inequality, it not only widens the gap of poverty in a country, but also restricts the economic growth of a nation [1]. Despite income inequality, there are many faces of inequality like gender inequality, race inequality, etc. While many parts of the world were trying to reduce racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination during the 1960's and 1970's, the phenomenon of these types of discrimination are still existing [2]. For instance, race and gender differentials have been persistent over time in the labor market. Workers are treated differently according to their races and gender. Wage and employment rate are differentiated according to gender and races, which indirectly points out that discrimination is existed [3]. In addition, there are gender stereotypes existing. People always associate competence with males and warmth with females, and relevant behavior of male is automatically associated with individual

task performance, but relevant behavior of female is associated with caring of others [4]. These stereotypes and discrimination make people have prejudice of gender when they are judging.

Especially in sports field, on a general level, sport is a domain that is believed for the preference of male [5]. This is because the physical compatibility of males is generally more appropriate for competitive activities, which make people unconsciously believe females are not appropriate for it. A past study confirmed that activities involving strength, endurance, and physical contact were mainly conceived as masculine activities, and activities involving concentration, application, and flexibility were considered as feminine activities [6]. Despite the discrimination of the categorization of sports, people are treated differently according to their gender in sports industry. For instance, some Spanish basketball and football player have no compensation when they are pregnant on their contracts, and players accept these contracts without complaining because they fear to lose their careers [7]. Such contracts with no guarantees are common to see in sports industry. At very beginning, it is rare to see female athletes, but recently, female athletes are having greater opportunities to participate in sports events internationally [8]. However, even though the participation rate of female in sports industry increased notably, it is rare to see women are withstanding leader position [9]. Recently, a new form of sports, esports, has skyrocket [10]. Unlike traditional sports, which men are considered to have more advance physical capability of doing sports than women, physical factors are unrelated to high performance in esports, allowing both men and women can compete in same events [11, 12]. Nevertheless, in esports industry, it is still heavily male-dominated, with little portion of female leader, fan, and participant [13].

However, references that examine and investigate the current state of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry needs to up to date. Therefore, this paper aims to examine and give a deeper insight into the current state of gender discrimination and stereotypes. In other words, this paper examines is there still implicit gender stereotypes and discrimination in sports industry. It is significant because getting a deep insight into the problems existing in sports industry is beneficial for future improvements. Reduce the phenomenon of gender inequality which is caused by stereotypes and discrimination can make the society better. A lot of eminent and outstanding females are obstructed by these stereotypes. Therefore, by investigating this phenomenon and making people aware the severity of it is significant.

2. Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

In this section, a brief overview of the background information of gender stereotypes and discrimination is provided, including historical context and definition of both gender discrimination and stereotypes.

2.1. Historical Context

“Women are from Venus, men are from Mars” is a phrase that is used to describe the difference between the way of thinking of men and women. Venus and Mars are two planets that are millions of miles apart, in this case, the distance between two planets symbolize the difference between women and men. Even now, women still face formidable obstacles in many domains. Especially in sports industry, women face different challenges and discrimination. For instance, in international competitions the German men’s football team, who won the world cup in 2014, earned 44 times more than Japanese women’s football team earned by won the world cup in 2011 [14]. In addition, management discriminates against women, paying them less than man in 10 out of 35 international competition sports [15]. Similarly, the difference of wages is considerable in many cases. Men earned 81 times more on average than women in the USA basketball league [16]. Moreover, men received 50% of their league’s total revenue whereas women receive 33% [17]. The highest earning male

receives approximately 220 times more than the highest earning female in UK football [18]. Such huge difference in wages and treatment are worth to investigate and pay effort on.

Gender stereotypes and discrimination play a crucial role in this phenomenon. Where exactly these stereotypes in sports industry are and their challenges are the main focus of this paper. This paper brings significant value because such examination is necessary to alarm people and eventual eliminate this inequality.

In the 18th century, women enthusiastically participated in sports [14]. Yet, two pivotal factors led to a decline in women's sports involvement. Firstly, Tony Collins articulates the evangelical church's resistance against women's active role in sports, not due to an assessment of their physical prowess, but their moral stature. He elaborates, "Rather than assessing their physical attributes, the church's opposition stemmed from the perception of women as morally inconsistent and thus in need of restraint." Secondly, the tidal wave of industrialization compelled numerous individuals to relocate to industrial areas. With women predominantly occupied in unpaid factory labor, leisure time was a luxury they couldn't afford, resulting in their alienation from the sports arena [19].

Despite the significant uptick in women's sports involvement in Western societies, there exists a scrutiny of appropriateness concerning certain activities. This is often determined based on compatibility with either biological or socially-constructed female attributes [20]. As women's involvement in sports grew, several reservations about their participation surfaced. Some posited that certain sports could cause "hormonal discrepancies" with potential for lasting harm, while others viewed women's involvement as "unladylike or too masculine". Further, disparities in opportunities were glaring. A case in point: In England's rowing competitions, women grappled with fewer resources—fewer boats, restricted training time, limited coaching, and lesser funding in comparison to their male counterparts [14]. Alongside these entrenched biases in traditional sports, the esports realm is not untouched by gender prejudice. Although conventional wisdom suggests men have an upper hand in sports due to physical prowess, the electronic gaming industry, where physical attributes are ostensibly less crucial, remains gender-stratified. In 2016, a female Overwatch player, SeYeon Kim, known by her gaming moniker "Geguri," found herself under the lens of suspicion for allegedly using prohibited software to augment her gameplay. Yet, Geguri, with aplomb, dispelled these allegations by streaming her gameplay live, void of any unauthorized software. Even as her video gained global traction, the narrative waned, but the underlying skepticism persisted. The incident raised eyebrows, questioning why a young girl like Geguri had to defend her proficiency in the game. Luke McKinney, reflecting on Geguri's predicament, noted that the skepticism arose from the ingrained belief that "a young female couldn't possibly excel to such an extent without illicit aid." So vehement were Geguri's detractors that they vowed to step away from their profession if her gameplay was validated [21]. It provokes a pertinent query: Had Geguri been male, would the rumor mill have churned with such intensity?

In the sphere of sports, it is disheartening to note the conspicuous underrepresentation of women in leadership roles across various echelons, despite the pervasive narrative of gender equality and dismantling stereotypes [8, 22-24]. Looking from a broader perspective, the realm of sports has ingrained gender biases. This essentially signifies that entrenched gender disparities remain a persistent hallmark of sport institutions [9]. Zooming into the meso-level analysis, to thoroughly comprehend the institutional factors amplifying gender biases and stereotypes, it is paramount to delve into the intricate nuances of gender roles within these organizations [25]. Transitioning to a more granular, micro-level investigation, academic experts employ discourse analysis as a tool to demystify the lived experiences of women in sports leadership. Their goal is to uncover the underlying factors inhibiting their ascension within these organizations. Pioneering work by Shaw and Hoeber reveals that predominant leadership roles were often colored by masculine discourses. Conversely, roles which were typically undervalued within these organizations resonated more with

feminine discourses and were commonly associated with women. Intriguingly, the barriers faced by women in securing coaching positions were not so much rooted in systemic or structural roadblocks, but rather stemmed from their interactions with their male counterparts during coaching stints [26]. Norman's comprehensive examination of elite female coaching experiences in the UK underscores a salient point: female coaches recurrently feel the weight of having to validate their coaching prowess, particularly in the face of skepticism or diminishing remarks from male peers [27].

2.2. Definition of Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

Stereotypes reflect a phenomenon of general expectations about members of particular social groups. Nevertheless, even though such general statements are true in some cases, not all individual exemplars in these groups will necessarily differ from each other. For instance, in people's mind, males are mostly taller than females, but we all know it is wrong in some cases because a general statement cannot represent all individuals. The stereotypical perception that a particular feature characterizes membership of a specific group typically leads people to overemphasize differences and underestimate variations in the group, which eventually cause some inequalities occur [4]. Therefore, given the definition of stereotypes, it is easy to understand the definition of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes mean people are overemphasize the different particular feature of a gender and characterize this gender as the same. For instance, when people think of males, they might relate "ambitious, leadership, individual task performance" with them; on the other hand, when people think of females, they might relate "family, caring of others, warmth" with them [4]. In fact, some of the females are as outstanding as males. Discrimination is traditionally referring to negative and unfair actions meant to restrict or deny the equal treatment of individuals and groups [28]. Gender discrimination means the process of differentiation among persons based on characteristics that are not adequate or relevant of that particular individual. Therefore, when people are judged by stereotypes and are being discriminated based on their gender, gender inequalities will prevail in many domains.

3. Examination of Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

In this section, this paper is going to trace the causes and factors that contribute to the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes. This section will explore the factors that lead to the formation of gender stereotypes and discrimination from three levels: macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level. By analyzing from three levels, a relative holistic research and examination is available.

3.1. Macro-level Examination of Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

In an expansive examination of the matter, it becomes crucial to consider the entire population. A glaring disparity emerges especially in the realm of sports, where gender imbalances are unmistakable. Sports institutions, both within the U.S. and on a global scale, predominantly feature male leadership [8, 22-24]. Indeed, within intercollegiate circles in the U.S., men occupy the apex of power. Furthermore, a significant majority of head coaching positions for women's sports at Division I Bowl Championship Series (BCS) universities are held by men, while leadership roles for men's sports are almost exclusively held by them [22]. A stark imbalance remains in professional sports leagues across the U.S., with women constituting less than a quarter of senior leadership roles [24]. Case in point: In the Women's National Basketball Association, merely a third of general manager positions are held by women. This pattern persists internationally, where women rarely ascend to leadership roles, including volunteer positions [23,29]. Interestingly, while the International Olympic Committee mandates that women should comprise at least 20% of boards [8], a staggering 85.3% of these governing bodies consist solely of male leaders. A mere 14.1% feature mixed-gender leadership, and

a single organization, in Zambia, possesses an all-female leadership (.5%) [8]. These figures underscore an alarming trend: the sports sector is overwhelmingly male-dominated in leadership roles. This gender skew promotes the idea of sport as a predominantly masculine domain, marginalizing female power and influence.

This disproportionate representation can also be attributed to the pervasive influence of hegemonic masculinity. It significantly hampers women's pathways to leadership within sports institutions [9]. Whisenant, Pedersen, and Obenour probed into this, discovering that men overwhelmingly govern top-tier intercollegiate sports, specifically Division I. Moreover, a paltry 15% of athletic director roles at the interscholastic level are occupied by women [30].

The interplay of power dynamics further compounds these gender disparities in sports leadership. Claringbould and Knoppers delved into affirmative action policies and their implementation in sports entities. Their revelations were telling: even as male executives laud the significance of integrating women into board roles, their rhetoric is not matched by action. Their support for policies championing female inclusion remains lackluster at best. Recruitment and selection standards are, disturbingly, tinged with gendered expectations – prospective candidates should be free of young dependents, boast high educational qualifications, have prior experience in senior roles, maintain flexible personal commitments, and embody decorum as delineated by male standards. Such parameters illustrate how men in power potentially stymie women's access to leadership roles within sports institutions [29].

3.2. Meso-level Examination of Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

In scrutinizing the multifaceted nature of gender discrimination and entrenched stereotypes from an intermediate perspective, it becomes imperative to dissect the intricacies of organizational operations which perpetuate these issues. Yiamouyiannis and Osborne embarked on a comprehensive study to elucidate the roles women occupied within the paramount governing structure of U.S. intercollegiate sport, particularly the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Their revelations painted a concerning picture, showcasing an alarming dearth of female representation in leadership roles. A paltry figure, less than 25%, represented women in executive leadership roles, with the percentage dipping further, to below 18%, at the directorial level. Moreover, the committees overseeing men's sports barely had female representation, while over half of the Committee on Women's Athletics was dominated by men [31]. Adriaanse and Schofield further compounded these findings, highlighting the male-centricity of sports boardrooms where the pivotal roles — ranging from strategic planning to financial management — were monopolized by men, relegating the lone female director to marketing. This corroborated the earlier conclusions drawn by scholars such as Shaw & Frisby, who propounded that sports organizations predominantly operate under an overtly masculine schema, wherein men are ubiquitously perceived as power figures, while women are marginalized and perceived as passive entities.

Policies and programs of an organization can actually influence the gender composition in leadership positions [32]. Claringbould and Knoppers noted that when examining recruitment and selection of the board members, male boards will both “affirming and negating affirmative action policies and policing ‘fit’ during recruitment and selection processes” to maintain their power [33].

Culture of organizations can also strongly influence the gender composition in leadership positions. Shaw and Penney noted that adopted policies that embrace gender diversity and equality is because it can secure the organizational funding, but such policies were not effective and failed to address and solve the problem of gender inequality in the organization. Besides, organizations that adopted such policies are possibly not embracing gender equality at all [34]. Organization culture is “the set of shared, taken-for-granted implicit assumptions that a group holds and that determines how it perceives, thinks about, and reacts to its various environments” [35]. The institution of sport is a

hegemonic masculine system that operates to reinforce masculine dominance [36]. Therefore, most of the sports organizations in U.S. and internationally support and maintain such institutionalized norm, value, and behaviors. Instead of gender equality policies, an atmosphere and top managers that emphasizes gender equality can better adjust the problem of gender inequality in sports organizations [37].

Another reason for women is not likely to be considered as leader in sports organizations is because these positions are believed to have stereotypical masculine attributes and behaviors. In addition, when women are in leader positions, they might be evaluated unfavorably because they act incongruently with their prescribed gender roles [38]. Even though some women are having potential to be successful leader in sports organizations, they are still less likely to be recruit [39]. For position like coach, female characteristics (e.g., affectionate, sympathetic, tender) are considered as less consistent with the idea of head coach than male characteristics (e.g., dominant, aggressive, independent) [40]. Besides, Shaw and Hoeber noted that at England national sports organization, women need to prove their abilities as a leader, on the other hand, men only need to prove their abilities. Also, managers said they will give women more challenging tasks and interviews since there was an assumption that women are less suited for those positions [26]. Women are also discriminated with their treatment. This is because their opportunities, rewards, and resources which they legitimately deserved are deprived [40,41].

3.3. Micro-level Examination of Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination

On shifting the lens to a micro-level analytical approach, the spotlight is on individual experiences, the derived meaning from these experiences, and how these influence one's understanding of power dynamics, organizational policies, and operational procedures. Shaw and Hoeber discerned that narratives deeply embedded in masculinity permeated senior leadership echelons, while feminine narratives were juxtaposed with roles considered subordinate within the sports ecosystem. The myriad challenges confronting women aspiring for coaching positions were not just dictated by organizational rigidity, but were also a product of their daily interactions with their male coaching peers. In this milieu, the significance of social relationships and networks becomes paramount. The disparity in access to social resources and networks between genders can serve as a deterrent to women's professional aspirations in the sporting arena [42]. A pivotal barrier to women aspiring for coaching roles is their limited access to essential social capital, such as networks and mentorship, which could pave the way for coaching opportunities [43]. The enthusiasm among female assistant coaches to transition to head coaching roles has witnessed a dramatic slump, a possible aftermath of both overt and covert gender-biased experiences within their roles [44]. Walker and Bopp made a pertinent observation, noting that many women are caught in a conundrum where they feel the pressure to emulate masculine traits to be accepted while others deem it an untenable strategy for career advancement.

4. Gender Discrimination in Esports

The esports realm has seen a meteoric rise in popularity, garnering increased attention. While traditional sports have historically favored the physical prowess of men over women, esports offers an ostensibly level playing field. Yet, the esports world remains heavily gender-segregated. Noteworthy studies reflect the gender disparity: while women constitute a respectable 35% of esports enthusiasts [45], a mere 5% transition to professional echelons [46]. Such statistics elucidate the glaring underrepresentation of women in top-tier esports. Research suggests that the lack of female representation is not due to diminished interest but is attributed to the overwhelming male dominance, which often discourages budding female gamers [47]. A survey conducted by Reach3 Insights in

2021 provided unsettling insights into the online gaming landscape, revealing that 77% of female gamers in countries such as the US, China, and Germany encountered gender-specific harassment, ranging from derogatory comments and unsolicited advances to blatant gender bias. A sizable 59% opted for androgynous or male pseudonyms during online gaming to avert confrontations. Furthermore, 44% were barraged with unwarranted personal questions concerning their relationship status. There's a growing consensus that the limited participation of women in esports can be attributed to the hostile gaming environment, characterized by rampant harassment targeting female players [12, 48-51]. Esports entities and the broader professional gaming milieu, predominantly molded by male ideologues, tend to perpetuate conventional masculinities [47]. It's worth noting that the skepticism regarding the gaming capabilities of female players is unwarranted, as research has consistently negated gender-based differences in high-level gaming competencies [52]. Yet, these baseless critiques precipitate anxiety among female gamers [47].

Beyond the realm of players, the portrayal of women in video games is also riddled with bias. Female characters are frequently caricatured in a hypersexualized manner, objectifying and perpetuating derogatory stereotypes. Findings by Downs & Smith showcase that female characters are predominantly represented in a partially nude state, donning sexually suggestive attire, and characterized by unrealistic body standards [53]. Although recent years have witnessed a surge in the number of female characters in video games, the paucity of female protagonists remains evident — a meager 20.8% of games released between 2017-2021 feature female lead characters [54]. The skewed representation and portrayal of female characters in video games not only reinforce gender stereotypes but also potentially precipitate harmful repercussions such as body dissatisfaction, self-objectification, and susceptibility to eating disorders among female players [55].

5. Case Studies

In this discourse, the emphasis will be placed on the compelling nature of empirical evidence in portraying the extent of gender disparity within the sports industry. Far from relying solely on verbiage to sway the audience, the richness of the following statistical data paints a more vivid tableau of the existing challenges.

As highlighted by Gitnux, a scanty 4% of all sports media coverage is dedicated to female athletes. Such statistics accentuate the glaring underrepresentation of female athletes in the media, a phenomenon that undeniably curtails their career progression. Furthermore, a mere 10% of sports-related articles are penned by female journalists, underscoring the pervasive underrepresentation of women in sports journalism. Regrettably, this disparity isn't a recent development; in 2019, women secured only 37% of prime-time sports coverage on television, the most negligible since 1993.

In another telling datum, between 2016 and 2020, only 36.9% of sports federations boasted female presidents. This trend mirrors earlier findings: women remain conspicuously absent in pivotal leadership roles within the sports domain. Moreover, sponsorships for women's leagues amount to a meager 0.4% of total endorsements, starkly emphasizing the funding inequities faced by women in comparison to their male counterparts.

Turning our gaze to athletes' earnings, female athletes represent a mere 11% of the top 100 highest-earning athletes globally. Additionally, as adolescent girls advance in age, there's a marked 7% annual decline in their participation in sports between the ages of 14 and 17. Such a trend is emblematic of a broader issue: young girls aren't afforded the same athletic opportunities as boys.

In 2019, the gender pay discrepancy in professional football stood at a staggering 69%, favoring male players. Similarly, female athletes were awarded 44% less in prize money compared to their male peers in 2020. Furthermore, in that same year, only 33% of certified athletic trainers in professional sports leagues were women. Alarmingly, a paltry 8% of sports photographers are female,

and men in professional sports accrue almost quadruple the sponsorship revenue compared to their female counterparts [56].

Supplementing this data, Goal Five sheds light on the persisting prejudices. As recently as 2015, approximately 40-41% of women in the sports domain reported experiencing gender bias. Moreover, almost half of the publicly-funded national governing bodies possess boards with female representation under 25%. In the realm of academia, college-level female athletes receive roughly 16% of recruitment budgets, translating to a shortfall of \$179 million in scholarship funds. An additional disheartening statistic indicates that there are approximately 1.3 million fewer athletic opportunities for high school girls, correlating with the propensity for girls being twice as likely as boys to abandon sports by age 14 [57].

In synthesis, the provided empirical evidence underscores an inescapable reality: gender discrimination remains deeply entrenched within the sports industry. Confronting and dismantling these entrenched biases necessitates sustained, deliberate efforts.

6. Discussion

After all, findings of this paper indicate that even though many organizations in sports industry are giving policies that seem to reduce the phenomenon of gender discrimination and stereotypes, the problem of female are being discriminated in sports industry is still existed. This problem leads to unequal treatment and inequalities to both female athletes and female who want to work in sports industries. Both female athletes and workers are having limited access toward leadership positions. In addition, female athletes are being treated differently. Therefore, policies given to reduce the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry are not effective to eliminate the problem. According to the data given in the section 5 (Use Data to Show Gender Discrimination in Sports), it shows female are still being discriminated and stereotyped somehow in sports industry. As a result, it is safe to conclude that sports industries are gender discriminated.

When comparing the studies on gender discrimination and stereotypes in traditional sports industry and esports industry, both findings of these studies are consistent. They found that both traditional sports and esports industry are male-dominated. And masculinity is a characteristic existing in both industries. In addition, findings of studies show that in both traditional sports and esports industry, female are being treated differently. Unequal treatment and inequalities cause low participation rate of female. Also, females who want to work in sports industry, they face the problem of having limited access and resources that are significant for them to approach leadership positions. Therefore, after reviewing studies done before, it is clear that in both traditional sport and esports industry, female are facing similar problems and obstacles.

The value of this study is to provide a holistic review of current state of gender discrimination in sports industry. And by examining the causes of the problem, future study can be more targeted while they are investigating the way to solve the problem. Different from other studies, this paper includes both traditional sports industry and a rising industry-esports industry. Also, this paper provides various statistics to vividly show the status of female in sports industry. Even though there are various policies given by different sports organizations to achieve gender equality, they are not effective to eliminate the problem. In other words, there isn't any current strategy to virtually solve the problem of gender discrimination and stereotypes in sports industry. Therefore, in order to achieve true gender equality in sports industry, future studies are probably focusing on how to approach it.

7. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the findings of this research show that gender stereotypes and discrimination are still existing in both traditional sports industry and esports industry. Especially in sports organizations,

female are still facing the problem of gender discrimination, which cause limited access to leadership positions. Instead, female athletes are facing various inequalities simply because the issue of gender. In esports industry, female athletes are facing rumors and inequalities such as unfair treatment. Therefore, this paper reviewed the current state of gender discrimination in sports industry, and this paper provides a strong base for future research on this topic.

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