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ENG 100: How Would You Feel If You Were One of Them?

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Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Judit, "ENG 100: How Would You Feel If You Were One of Them?" (2019). *English 100-200-300 Conference*. Paper 9.

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ENG 100

11/3/18

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How Would You Feel If You Were One of Them?

It is an image that is hard to extract from memory: on April 19, 1967, at the centennial marathon in Boston where female athletes were not allowed to participate, a middle-aged man wearing a black jacket tried to grab the shoulder of a thin silhouette running while the rest of the runners watch the scene with a mixture of disinterest and disbelief. The silhouette that flees from the obstacles of Jock Semple, the director of the race, was Kathrine Switzer. She created a smart strategy to sign up for the Marathon. To avoid the ban, she used her initials (K.V), and she managed to participate in the competition. "Come out of my race and give me your shirt" were the words that Semple said consecutively to Switzer during the race, but these words were not an impediment for Switzer because she continued running without stopping. She wanted to show the world that women have the same abilities as a man to perform any activity. "No matter what happens, I must finish this race, I have to do it with my hands and knees. If I do not finish it, people will say that women cannot do it" she told herself during the race. Finally, Switzer crossed the finish line, recording a time of 4 hours and 20 minutes. That April 19 marked the history of athletics by breaking the barriers that females could not compete in marathons. Years later, Switzer remembers that race to perfection. "Instinctively I turned my head sideways and met the vilest look I have ever seen, a huge man, showing his teeth, and before I could react, he grabbed my shoulder and shook me back, yelling at me," described Switzer.

There is inequality when social status, wealth, or opportunity between people or groups is different. To be more specific, gender inequality is a social and cultural phenomenon that spreads discrimination. Gender discrimination occurs when is treated unequally, in a negative way, for the simple reason of a person's gender. Although, by its definition, this discrimination can affect men or women, women are the ones who suffer the most. The causes of this difference in treatment have a historical root. Faithfully, the history of the Olympic Games (JOO), the most universal international event in the field of modern sport, reflects the evolution of women in professional sports. The modern Olympic Games were born in 1896 thanks to the efforts of a French aristocrat, Baron de Coubertin, who after several attempts convinced the members of the Olympic Congress to establish this international event and reproduce it every 4 years in a different place in the world. The Olympic ideals, at that time, included world peace, twinning between peoples and comprehensive education of youth, however, women were left out of youth. The motto "Citius, Altius, Fortius"/ "Faster, taller and stronger" represented the masculine ideal in sport.

Sport was something that only men could practice. For example, in the first modern Olympic games (Athena, 1896) the male athletes competed naked, so the judges made sure that women did not participate. It was considered that being "weaker" could not compete. The woman had no place in a world of men who since antiquity had been imposing their concept of superiority. Four years later, at the Olympic Games in Paris, the participation of women in female disciplines (golf and tennis) and mixed disciplines (sailing, cricket and equestrian) was allowed. At least, 22 women participated this time. One of them was the British tennis player Charlotte Cooper, the first female gold medal in the Olympic Games. The rights of women in the democratic societies of the time had advanced considerably. However, the participation of women in the Olympic Games was still lower than men's participation and did not begin to equalize until the 1980s and 1990s. For many years, the woman continued to fight to achieve equality in sport. Firstly, in order not to be excluded from a social phenomenon that represented modernity, the principle of a new democracy and equality among human beings. Secondly to show that they are not inferior to man, to make visible his competence and his qualities. Unfortunately, gender inequality still exists in professional sports. To find a balance between male and female athletes, the public should know how different the salary is between male and female athletes, how female athletes' performances are publicized and how female athlete figures are shown in the media.

Nowadays, the world is so advanced in some aspects and so delayed in others, like the salary difference between men and women in professional sports. The pay gap is the biggest manifestation of gender inequality. In the journal "Advantage Men: The Sex Pay Gap in Professional Tennis" by Collin Flake, Mikaela Dufur and Erin Moore, you can find a study that determined to what extent a pay gap exists between male and female professional tennis players ranked in the top 100 at the end of the 2009. The researchers measured on a scale in terms of the total US dollar amount a player earned in 2009 from participating in singles and doubles tournaments. The median 2009 prize money winnings for females is US \$878,808, while for men is \$2,144,600. However, the prize money earned by men and women is equal in prestigious tournaments such as Grand Slam events. Although, tennis is one of the sports that has made the most efforts to equalize the prizes, there is a large salary difference in most sports. Equal pay for equal work is still not a reality. In the case of soccer, the difference is much bigger. Ali Krieger, U.S. Women's National Team 2015 World Cup Champion, said "We got \$2 million for winning the World Cup and had to split it up among the team. Whereas the U.S. men's team got \$8 million after losing in round 16. And we actually won the tournament! It just makes no sense". This case can be remarkable, but unfortunately there are more cases that are more surprisingly like when Mireia Belmonte, Spanish swimmer, Olympic, world and European champion had to pay from her pocket the 500€ of a hotel while competing representing Spain, or the 9-hour bus trip before beating two world records at the World Championships in Berlin. This situation leads to several problems. If the players are not enough paid for their sports, they have to work outside the sport to be able to pay extras as Maria Belmonte. It is very complicated because, having a job on a daily basis, they have to combine work and a family life with workouts after work. They are very long days and many

times the accumulated stress of these days can cause injuries. Opponent's easy thought is that the physical and biological constitution between man and woman is different, being the man who has more physical capacity. A lot of organizations are still fighting to equalize salaries. More audience, more income and more qualities are not a reason for more salary. In my opinion, this type of argument is usually culturally and socially conditioned, they do not consider the contempt of female sports that is often done in the media.

Textual and visual media are the factor that most influences society in terms of gender values because female athletes are being reported unfairly by the press. How many male soccer players come to mind right now? And what about female players? Stop thinking about the second question, it's kind of difficult. In the journal, "The Representation of Female Athletes in Textual and Visual Media" by Christeen George, Andrew Hartley, Jenny Paris, you can find the study of how female athletes are represented in comparison with male athletes in textual and visual media. The researchers have analyzed newspaper and television coverages to prove that male athletes are receiving more television and newspaper coverage than female athletes. The difference was marked with 129 hours of coverage of men's sport as opposed to just over half an hour's coverage of women's sport. It happened the same in newspapers coverages. According to the Spanish journal "La Presencia Invisible de la Mujer Deportista en la Prensa Deportiva Española" / "The Invisible Presence of Women Athletes in the Spanish Sports Press" by Eva Gómez-Colell, Pilar Medina-Bravo, and Xavier Ramon, only 81 covers of 672 contain information about women in sport during five years in the most popular Spanish newspapers analyzed. As I said before, opponents think that female athletes never had enough capacity or ability to attract the audience. A perfect example to discredit this argument is the case of Lili Álvarez, the first Spanish woman who participated in the Olympic Games of Paris in 1924. Later, she reached the Wimbledon tennis final three times and another two the semifinal over multiple competitors. Then, in 1940 she won the Spanish Ski Championship. She also excelled in other sports such as skating and motorsports. With only 19 years old, she became the first woman to win a men's event. In addition, her multifaceted character and her great capacity and qualities allowed her to dedicate herself to journalism and writing, publishing books about feminism, religiosity and sport. Lili was an active woman in the defense of feminism, not only from the track, but also with her writings and presences. Settled in Spain after her tennis career, she clashed with the Franco regime, and was only recognized after her death in 1998, with the gold medal for sporting merit. This story can be summarized in one sentence: a late recognition, in a masculine society. It's true that she had support from the audience, but when she was dead, not when she needed. I think that women have always worked hard to be successful in their sports career with almost no recognition in return. Maria Belmonte, days ago of her world record in swimming said: "importa más el pelo de Sergio Ramos que mi récord del mundo" / "Sergio Ramos's (famous Spanish soccer player) hair matters more than my world record". This means that the society has more information about the football player's hair than the world record of the swimmer. Media should be more aware of what are they showing to the readers because this can affect

to the society thinking. Female athletes are almost invisible on media and when they visible they usually emphasize other things and not the skills of the athletes.

The publicity of women's sports is often treated with sexist mentality and content in which the physique of the athlete is emphasized and not its sportive value. In the article "The Impact of the Media on Gender Inequality Within Sport" by Eoin Trolan, I found a quote that says "They are still viewed as women first and athletes second" (Trolan, 216). This means that female athletes are featured for their sex appeal and beauty, rather than their athletic abilities. For example, men are seen in advertisements wearing their sport uniforms, kicking a ball, or doing whatever they are known for. However, women are seen with no uniform, just with their clothing or equipment covering enough skin. These images send a message to the spectators, the message they receive is that the media have a lot of content about male athletes and little content about women and therefore they need to talk about their body or beauty. That notion is not true, women athletes put the same effort or more as male athletes to achieve their dreams, however they are discriminated and viewed as sex objects on media.

Those who are against gender equality in professional sports think that men perform more and better. They argue that there is a point where the differences between the sexes are clear and that it is in the biological. The study "Differences in Physical Fitness of Male and Female Recruits in Gender-Integrated Army Basic Training" by Ran Yanovich et al. demonstrates that , males have 22% higher aerobic fitness and 13.1% higher upper extremity endurance than females. In addition, men have more muscle mass, longer limbs and a lower torso wider. However, that's not why their tournaments and their performances are necessarily better. Although both sexes do not start from the same basic biological capabilities, the competitiveness to which women are subjected in their first-ranking tournaments is maximum, as happens if we see the tournaments of men. In the same study we can also see that although women have a lower aerobic capacity than men, they can get more benefits from the training program than men. That shows that in sport the effort is not paid with justice.

There are many organizations that are in favor of gender equality in professional sports. Furthermore, I found some quotes from professional male athletes supporting women. For example, when a journalist said to Andy Murray, a Scottish tennis player: "Sam is the first American player to reach the semifinals of a grand slam since 2009" and Murray interrupted the journalist saying: "Male tennis player". Murray is absolutely right. Without going any further Serena Williams has won 13 grand slams since 2009. Here we see that there are male players supporting that issue but that is not enough. As Eva Gómez said in her journal, "Sport continues to exist for and over men"(803). We need females supporting it and men advocating and acting for it. In conclusion, it's that the gender inequality in professional sports has changed and improved since the beginnings of the modern Olympic Games, however, next step to close the gap between men and women in sports must address to the difference of salaries, coverage on media, and the sexualization of female athletes.

Words: 2,265

Vocabulary:

Current profile	
%	Cumul.
74.22	74.22
7.57	81.79
6.12	87.91
12.10	100.00

Eva Gómez-Colell, Pilar Medina-Bravo, and Xavier Ramon. "La Presencia Invisible de la Mujer Deportista en la Prensa Deportiva Española/ "The Invisible Presence of Women Athletes in the Spanish Sports Press", *Ediciones Complutense*, vol. 23 no.2, 2017, pp. 793-811. <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/ESMP/article/viewFile/58016/52201>

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