

Influences of Women in the Sports Field from the Sociology Perspective

Dingxu Shi

Address: Xi'an Tieyi High School ICC

Abstract: With the development of the society, the gender issue is getting higher degree of emphasis. In the field of sports, the issues is even with more attention. In this paper, the aim is to discuss the participation and influences of women in the sports field from the sociology perspective, from the aspect of opportunity cost, women participation and interest towards sports

1. Introduction

Ever since the emergence and development of modern sports in the United Kingdom in the 18th century, many scholars have investigated into the development status and history of athletes and practitioners of the sports fields, laying a basis for the studies on the sports field from the sociology perspective (LaVoi and Baeth, 2018)^[8]. When the sociology develops as the discipline, an increasing number of stakeholders are involved and considered to examine and evaluate the influences on its development. The gender issue has always been a striking point in the research and development of the sociology, and it is inevitable to be discussed in the context of the sports field. In fact, the participation and influences of women in the sports field have aroused widespread concerns and attention. As most of the social orders and values are affected by the values, beliefs and interests of males, more and more people are aware of the significance and necessity of researching the participation and influences of women in the sports field in terms of the rights, equality and consequences. In this essay, it will discuss the participation and influences of women in the sports field from the sociology perspective.

2 Theories of women' influences on the sports sociology

After the second wave of feminist in the 1960s to 1970s, feminist has expanded from the social movements to academic researches and studies by penetrating into different fields. The combination of female's participation and influences with different fields and contexts has been prevailing across the world, which is derived from the fact that increasing social awareness has been aroused on the legal rights and interests of women in the daily life (Evans and Pfister, 2021)^[7]. The issue of gender relations is so fundamental to sociological analysis that it cannot be simply relegated to a subdiscipline of sociology. This

shows that feminist sociology is not only an important branch of sociology, but also that feminism ought to penetrate into other branches of sociology to enrich the theories of related branches of sociology and make sociological research closer to the real social life. Some scholars have pointed out that, as one of the development trends of contemporary western sociological theory, feminism will further affect the way of observation, thinking and problem consciousness in the field of sociology.

The issue of focusing on the participation and influences of women into the sports field started to attract widespread attention and discussion in the 1970s in the North America. The thriving feminist movement has expanded its perspectives from the political, cultural, educational and other fields of the past to the fields of sports that was not taken seriously. In view of the many problems faced by women's sports, such as their sports power, status equality and remuneration, many scholars have carried out in-depth explanations and interpretations. Liberal feminism believes that women are also rational people, so women should enjoy the same rights as males. In other words, it is expected that women should achieve equality between fertility, employment, education and leisure sports through the choice of rights (Litchfield and Osborne, 2013)^[9]. As for social injustice, it should be improved in the form of law, which means that the concept and reality of gender discrimination should be changed by the coercive force of the law. From the perspective of social justice, efforts made by women in occupying more important positions and exerting more profound influences in the sports field have contributed to the equal opportunities of women in taking the role as athletes to take part in sports, serving as coaches at all levels of competition and gaining a position in the power structure of the sports field (Elsey and Nadel, 2019) [6]. Through the unremitting efforts of liberal feminism, women's participation in sports has gradually been recognized by the society and confirmed in the form of laws. This is reflected in the participation rights of female athletes and

Email: shidingxu2023@163.com

the emergence of female managers in the modern Olympic Games. In addition, the participation of women in the sports field has also affected the formation of relevant documents and regulations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as some extended documents (Matthews and Channon, 2016)^[10]. All of these documents and regulations are the result of women' active participation into the sports field and the consequences of feminist sports view achieved in the real society.

Marxist feminism believes that the root cause of women's oppression in different aspects including the sports field lies in the accumulation of capital and profits. In view of the phenomenon of non "equal pay for equal work" between men and women under the current system, women's rights to work and education have been harmed to varying degrees. At the same time, due to the increase of women's domestic labor services, the idea of the expansion of patriarchy under the class logic was formed. With the continuous reflection of feminism, feminism began to move towards a more comprehensive perspective and view of point in interpreting the participation of women in the sports field. In the sociology of sport, a feminist perspective goes beyond sexism, arguing that gender inequalities in sport are often linked to class and racial inequalities (Mays et al., 2010)^[11]. In the field of sports, there is a phenomenon of unequal pay for equal work between men and women due to men's possession of capital and power. In addition, there is a lack of opportunities for women to participate in sports and other activities. For example, there are fewer facilities used by women in society, fewer women instructors as well as unequal project development investment in men and women sports. The reason for this situation is that Marxist feminists believe that men occupy the space of power in the world, and relevant public policies are all products of this class logic. In order to make changes and improvements in terms of such situations and reality, the reliance on the participation of women in social decision-making and to realize the expression of women's sports rights and awareness should never be underestimated. These differences and inequalities have been noticed and aware by more and more people, affecting the perspectives and awareness of women in striving for the rights and interests in the sports field.

3 Rational choice: opportunity cost for women in participating into the sports field

There is a concept called opportunity cost in economics, which can be understood that a person's behavior is the result of the choice of one of the many possible behavioral possibilities that can occur. In view of the unidirectional nature of time, the maximum of the possible benefits of the other behaviors that are abandoned is the opportunity cost of a certain behavior, which is also called the cost of alternative cost (Cooky et al., 2013)^[5]. Simply put, the cost

of a person's behavioral choice is not only money and energy. In fact, it also includes the benefits of other possible choices. Participation in sports is a specific behavior, which means that participation in sports necessarily forgoes some other behavioral choices, and the possible benefits of these other behavioral choices constitute the opportunity cost of participation in sports.

The benefits of participation in sports are fixed: a certain degree of improved physical and mental health as well as social interaction, while its opportunity cost is the benefit of other options that women give up while participating in sports. The higher this benefit, the greater the cost of participation in sports and the relatively smaller the benefit of participation in sports itself. Prior to the modern era, women were less productive with unequal access to production resources, so they had to depend on men for survival resources. The opportunity cost of participating in sports becomes the acquisition of survival resources, which is obviously a greater and more urgent benefit than the benefits of sports. Therefore, before women's labor force was liberated, the huge opportunity cost of participating in sports was generally unacceptable to women, which means that women's participation in sports at that time was not a good choice from the rational perspective.

In the modern society, women's productivity has been liberated. As the social productivity begin to change qualitatively, resources for survival become abundant and human values gradually become more prominent. As a result, more and more women no longer need to obtain means of survival through dependence on men. At this point, the opportunity cost of participating in sports is much lower than before the modern society and becomes completely acceptable (McClearn, 2018)^[12]. Even at some points participation in sports may be the most cost-effective option for women. However, since this essay focuses on the participation of women in the sports field, it is inevitable to discuss the differences between different genders. Although the opportunity cost of female participation in sports is gradually decreasing today, it is still at a higher level in comparison with men, and this is clearly evident in professional competitive sports. The tendency can be inferred from the interest of women in sports across two generations.

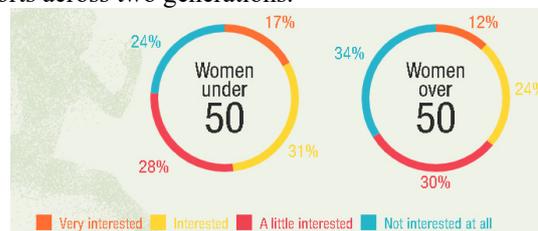


Figure 1 Women' interest in sports across two generations (McDonald, 2015)^[13]

The current income level of female professional athletes is generally less than that of men, with only two female athletes ranking the top 100 superstars in the latest Forbes Sports Stars Earnings Ranking as had been released in 2016, ranked 40 and 88 respectively. Meanwhile, more than half of the top 30 Chinese acting stars ranked in the same period were women (Coche and Tuggle, 2018)^[4]. On the other hand, the world is currently

receiving a lot of attention. On the other hand, most of the professional leagues that have a large and regular fan base in the world are male professional leagues, such as the United States. In addition, most of the current professional leagues with high attention and large regular fan base are male professional leagues, such as the NBA, the English Premier League, and so on. In China, men's games in various leagues are significantly more popular than women's games. In China, the interest in men's games in various leagues is also significantly higher than that of women. Therefore, from the perspective of participation in professional sports, the benefits for women are significantly lower than those for men. Therefore, from the perspective of the participation in professional sports, the benefits for women are significantly lower than those for men, and their opportunity costs are higher as well. As a result, it is natural for the evaluation on the potential opportunity costs of participating into the sports field for women, and the declining opportunity costs may account for the increasing popularity of women's participation into the sports field in more and more occasions. The tendency of female's participation into the sports field also inevitably results in profound influences on a wide range of elements and perspectives.

4 Influences of women by participating into the sports field

Modern researches have proved and verified the benefits of sports activities and participation into the sports for health, including improvements in the physical health and mental health, as well as better adaption and performance in the workplace. Reflecting on the history development process, males occupied a dominant position in the sports field ranging from the coaches, professional sports development and sports field growth direction. However, with the increasing awareness of women of their rights of participating into the sports field and the potential influences, they can gain access to increasing opportunities to participate into the sports field and exert influences on a wider range of people (Whiteside and Hardin, 2011)^[21]. Even though more women are participating in collegiate sports today, fewer women than men still participate in professional sports after their graduation. Some may argue that this phenomenon might be resulted from women's lack of interest or choice in professional sports. Arguably, increasing women's professional sports opportunities will not only allow women to further advance their careers, but also bring more positive social and economic outcomes to society. For example, women who raise their profile through professional sports careers can demonstrate leadership, strength, and the value of sports and physical fitness to younger generations (Mirehie and Gibson, 2020)^[14]. Therefore, as role models, women in professional sports can inspire girls to participate in sports and experience the many benefits of an active lifestyle. To further discuss the influences of women by participating into the sports field, there are several perspectives that worth further elaborating and discussing.

From the social gender perspective, it mainly

emphasizes the expectations and norms posed by the society on males and women in terms of their characteristics, roles, activities and responsibilities. The concept of social gender is different from the distinguishing standard of biological sex (Bum et al., 2018)^[3]. Gender is the product of culture, and is caused by thousands of years of patriarchal society's different expectations for men and women. These feminine traits such as gentleness, virtuousness, weakness, etc. are not absolute characteristics of physiology but the result of patriarchal culture. For a long time, people have ignored the social construction of sports. Most of the researches on women's sports in the sociology of sports are conducted from the perspective of functionalism, reflecting the positive role of women's sports development in social development and the promotion of the Olympics, while ignoring other social issues in relevant to women's participation into the sports field (Sherry et al., 2016)^[20]. In most sports organizations, men occupy the dominate position with leading power, responsibilities and decision-making sectors except in traditionally all-female events. As have been proved by many facts and evidence that sports are organized for and by men and male domination is self-preservation. One of the most notable pieces of evidence is the major international games and the Olympics, which have always been characteristic of the participation of men throughout the history, and the participation of women is the result of their struggle. According to the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport states that without women leaders, decision makers and decisive figures in sport, equal opportunities for women cannot be achieved. The "Program of Action" adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 proposed to mainstream gender awareness into decision-making in the sports field as well (Pape, 2020)^[15].

Reflecting on the participation of women into the sports field with more and more efforts and opportunities, it can be summarized that these practices have challenged the stereotyped views on women and paved diversified paths for their rights and voices in the society. In spite of the stereotyped impression about the social gender, the wider range of participation of women can remind more people of the potential of women in different fields even including the sports field that is used to be connected with features of males. These female pioneers participating into the sports field have set a positive and inspiring example for others in fighting for the legal rights and breaking prejudice on women, thus promoting and encouraging the participation of more women into the sports field (Schmidt, 2013)^[19]. The efforts of breaking through stereotyped social gender features have also exerted influences on other fields, shedding light on the active role of women in different walks of life and social activities in regardless of the restrictions posed by stereotyped social gender.

The participation of women into the sports field can also pose influences on the perceptions of social justice. The social justice perspective focuses on the phenomenon of gender inequality in the sports field. Gender inequality manifests in the sports field as unequal access to power and participation in decision-making in relevant to the sports development and growth process (Barclay, 2020)^[2].

Incorporating the social justice perspective into sport development means giving women more equal access to power and authority in the field of sports. As women tend to be in a disadvantaged position for a long time, they are often more sensitive to sports issues, and more likely to feel the unreasonable and inhumane aspects of sports management. However, due to the lack of appropriate channels, their feelings cannot be expressed and transmitted to sports management. The reflection on the issue of women's participation into the sports field from the social justice perspective tends to arouse awareness on the equal access and opportunities of women to the management and participation of the sports field.

Owing to the participation of female's participation into the sports field, there are some improvements and consequences that may be brought by the participation from the social justice perspective. The first one is the awareness of the existence of potential challenges and inequality between males and women in terms of the sports field. People used to be accustomed to the male dominant position in the sports field in terms of the rule settlement, participation rights as well as other regulations in relevant to the sports participation and management. With the participation of more and more women, their influences on the sports field will increase, thus arousing widespread awareness on the existence of inequality for women in the sports field (Piepiora and Petecka, 2020)[18]. In addition, an increasing number of women can gain access to social justice and equality in the sports field as their voices and opinions can be noticed and handled, which is resulted from the participation of women in the sports field. Equal access to the sports facilities, more opportunities of taking part in the sports field and other rights can be guaranteed as a dispensable part of the social justice for women as the participation of them has increased into the sports field. Influences of women's participation into the sports field can also be analyzed from the perspective of female development. At present, the study of women's development in a harmonious society has become a hot issue in the sociology in different countries across the world. Because of the existence of inequality between different genders, women are excluded from serious business, public affairs, and they have long been rooted in domestic spaces and in activities related to the reproductive and social reproduction of offspring. In order to achieve the goal of women's development, the protection of their rights and interests should be achieved in the real world. In the 1960s, women began to take part in sports activities in accordance with the rules and patterns that were developed under the male dominant sports world (Pope, 2017)[17]. But this situation was a reflection of the political field that was not a manifestation of the harmonious development of males and women in the sports field. In different countries all over the world, there is a common problem that women's sports time and quality lag behind men's. How to understand and guide the development of women's sports has become an important task of current sports sociology research.

With the participation of women in the sports field, more and more experience and models can be summarized and concluded from the practice, thus setting a good

example for the effective promotion of female development in the sports field. Based on the experience, it can be summarized that the professional development model in different sectors and fields can contribute to the high quality development of women. The accumulation of experience got the professionalized development model can guarantee the efficiency and effectiveness of women participation into the sports field across the world with extending influences on women in different sectors and regions.

The increasing participation of women into the sports field might have also affect the discourse system in the society, which can be considered as the potential and profound influences in the sociology sphere. Discourse has become a hot topic in the study of linguistics and philosophy of language. According to Burr's explanation, discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, mirror images, stories or statements (Al-Ansari, 2011)[11]. Somehow these forms pod discourses together generate a particular view of things. Discourse system refers to the system that forms the overall expression of meaning through discourse. Through the investigation of the women's discourse system in the modern society, it can be found that there is a suspicion that the media and the outside world deliberately magnify the reality tragedy of women's sports. Through this discourse, the fact that women are weaker than men in the society is reinforced. In society, it is undeniable that the words of female endorsers carry the traces of the other's speech, which is more obvious in media reports. For example, when individual media reports on women's sports, they often use discriminatory language, try to highlight their appearance, publish erotic photos, pay attention to the emotional performance of female athletes, and despise women in a roundabout way to show their low status.

To occupy a favorable position in the discourse system, the participation of women in the sports field can present the forces and capabilities of themselves in the strong and effective way. People will be encouraged and inspired by achievements and breakthroughs made by women in the sports field as the successful challenge towards human extreme and the efforts of never giving up. Achievements and records made by women in the sports field can be considered as effective tools and evidence to prove the strength and potential of women in the society, thus contributing to the influential position of women in the discourse system. With the help of the advancements and achievements, the stereotypes of women can be overcome while the voices of women can be expressed and conveyed to a wider range in the discourse system. As a result of the beneficent cycle, more and more women will benefit from the discourse system in seeking for higher positions and more influential discourse power in the society, during which the rights and demands of women can be noticed, catered and protected. The bright future of women's participation into the sports field can be inferred from the increasingly influential position of women in the discourse system while more and more women can exert influences and perform their capabilities in the sports field as a way of expressing themselves.

The public sphere perspective can also be used to

illustrate the influences of women participation into the sports field. Public sphere also known as public policy, is a concept proposed by Habermas in Germany's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Domain* (Pfister, 2010)^[6]. It has been defined as a venue and institution for equal and rational debate on issues of common concern. However, due to the gender blind spot of "de-gendering" in Habermas's theory, the issue of women's public sphere has caused widespread controversy. However, it should not be ignored that the continuous emergence of female groups and female sports venues in sports, and the existence of female sports public spaces has been recognized in reality. Women's sports public space provides a venue and possibility for women to participate in decision-making, improves women's sports skills, enriches women's spiritual life, acting as a tool for women's sports awareness, power and legitimacy, and forms a third space outside the workplace and home. Owing to the cultivation and promotion of the public sphere created by the positive participation of women into the sports field, other women can be encouraged to arouse their awareness on their sports potential and the legal rights of taking part in the sports field. It can create a platform for women to present themselves with enough opportunities and possibilities.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the prevailing tendency for the increasing number of women in participating into the sports field has been attracting attention in the global range. An increasing number women have performed with extraordinary achievements and performance in the sports field that might have gone against the stereotypes of women in the history. In fact, many women are still taking a positive role to participate into the sports field to achieve their personal value and exert influences on the society. They have broken through the stereotypes about the gender as women by exceeding records and achieving better performance in the sports field, while the social justice can be maintained and the discourse system can be managed with the active participation of women. Benefited from their participation, the legal rights of women can be integrated and protected, and their voices and demands can also be catered and satisfied through the countless efforts of women participating into the sports field.

References

1. Al-Ansari, M. (2011). Women in sports leadership in Bahrain. *Muslim women and sport*, 79-91.
2. Barclay, V. M. (2020). Status of Black women in sports among selected institutions of higher education (Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa).
3. Bum, C. H., Mahoney, T. Q., & Choi, C. (2018). A comparative analysis of satisfaction and sustainable participation in actual leisure sports and virtual reality leisure sports. *Sustainability*, 10(10), 3475.
4. Coche, R., & Tuggle, C. A. (2018). Men or women, only five Olympic sports matter: A quantitative analysis of NBC's prime-time coverage of the Rio Olympics. *Electronic News*, 12(4), 199-217.
5. Cooky, C., Messner, M. A., & Hextrum, R. H. (2013). Women play sport, but not on TV: A longitudinal study of televised news media. *Communication & Sport*, 1(3), 203-230.
6. Elsey, B., & Nadel, J. (2019). *Futbolera: a history of women and sports in Latin America*. University of Texas Press.
7. Evans, A. B., & Pfister, G. U. (2021). Women in sports leadership: A systematic narrative review. *International review for the sociology of sport*, 56(3), 317-342.
8. LaVoi, N. M., & Baeth, A. (2018). Women and sports coaching. In *The Palgrave handbook of feminism and sport, leisure and physical education* (pp. 149-162). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
9. Litchfield, C., & Osborne, J. (2013). Women in the sports pages: A brief insight into Olympic and non-Olympic years in Australia. In *Fourth International Conference on Sport & Society*.
10. Matthews, C. R., & Channon, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Global perspectives on women in combat sports: Women warriors around the world*. Springer.
11. Mays, D., DePadilla, L., Thompson, N. J., Kushner, H. I., & Windle, M. (2010). Sports participation and problem alcohol use: A multi-wave national sample of adolescents. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 38(5), 491-498.
12. McClearen, J. (2018). Introduction: Women in sports media: New scholarly engagements. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(5), 942-945.
13. McDonald, M. G. (2015). Imagining neoliberal feminisms? Thinking critically about the US diplomacy campaign, 'Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports'. *Sport in Society*, 18(8), 909-922.
14. Mirehie, M., & Gibson, H. J. (2020). Women's participation in snow-sports and sense of well-being: a positive psychology approach. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(4), 397-415.
15. Pape, M. (2020). Gender segregation and trajectories of organizational change: The underrepresentation of women in sports leadership. *Gender & Society*, 34(1), 81-105.
16. Pfister, G. (2010). Women in sport—gender relations and future perspectives. *Sport in society*, 13(2), 234-248.
17. Pope, S. (2017). *The feminization of sports fandom: A sociological study*. Routledge.
18. Piepiora, P., & Petecka, A. (2020). Personality profile of women practising contact sports using the example of karate kyokushin competitors and handball players. *Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology*, 20(1), 23-29.
19. Schmidt, H. C. (2013). Women, sports, and journalism: Examining the limited role of women in

- student newspaper sports reporting. *Communication & Sport*, 1(3), 246-268.
20. Sherry, E., Osborne, A., & Nicholson, M. (2016). Images of sports women: A review. *Sex Roles*, 74(7), 299-309.
 21. Whiteside, E., & Hardin, M. (2011). Women (not) watching women: Leisure time, television, and implications for televised coverage of women's sports. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 4(2), 122-143.