"Sexual Equality in Sports"

English

Strategy

• To argue that equal opportunity in sport demands equal access to half the "scarce benefits"

• English makes her case by arguing that women need and deserve their own sports
What is Equal Opportunity?

- Three views of equal opportunity:
  1. Nondiscrimination
  2. Equal Chances
  3. Equal Achievements for the "major social groups"

1. Nondiscrimination

- Equal opportunity as nondiscrimination
  - Nondiscrimination demands that one be "color blind" in that one include only relevant characteristics in making decisions about one's ability to perform a given task (e.g., law school)
  - Objection: This view of equal opportunity is too weak
    - If women do not see women in leadership roles (in real life or on television), then "sex blindness" will not lead to equal opportunity
      - Equal opportunity is necessary for justice, but not sufficient
Nondiscrimination in Sports

- "Sex blindness" in sports would not result in more women qualifying for sports
- There are physiological differences between men and women and these differences do not go away
- Differences in size and strength are relevant differences for sports
- Sex blindness will likely decrease equal opportunity, not increase it

2. Equal Chances

- Two individuals have equal opportunities when the probabilities of them achieving that position are equal
  - A and B have equal opportunities to become brain surgeons when the probability of each becoming a brain surgeon is the same
- Objection: This view is too strong
  - Two individuals with two innately different set of skills and abilities will not have the same probabilities of success at the same disciplines (e.g., genius vs. mentally handicapped)
  - The differences between individuals may be relevantly different
Equal Chances in Sport

- English thinks this view of equal opportunity has merit with respect to sports
- Sports offer benefits to which everyone should have the same probability in receiving:
  - **Basic benefits**: the benefits to which everyone has a right, including health, self-respect, teamwork, character building, skill acquisition and development, and having fun
  - Even if Brett is not a very good quarterback, it would be unjust to deny him the opportunity to play the position for health, self-respect, or fun

3. Equal Achievements for the "Major Social Groups"

- One group has equal opportunity when the percentage of that group in the population mirrors the percentage of that group in a given profession
  - If the U.S. population is 50 percent women, then 50 percent of the members of Congress should be women
Equal Achievements for the "Major Social Groups" in Sports

- Applying this notion to sports results in the conclusion that football is unjust when the team does not include 50 percent women
- Reverse discrimination would result in 200-pound men being discriminated against because of the need to include 50 percent women

Scarce Benefits

- **Scarce benefits** are the benefits of fame and fortune that the best athletes gain
  - Scarce benefits are over and above basic benefits
  - Scarce benefits are not universally available, as are basic benefits
  - Scarce benefits is an issue of resource allocation, where resources are accorded to those who distinguish themselves from others
Allocation of Resources and Benefits

• "I shall maintain that the second account, equal probabilities, should be applied to the basic benefits; whereas the third model, proportional attainments for the major social groups, should be applied to the scarce benefits. And I shall construct an argument from self-respect for taking the 'average' across the major social groups in the case of scarce benefits." (304-5)

Why Self-Respect?

• Why does English argue that self-respect is the basis for resource distribution and equal opportunity?
  
  • Because men and women are different physiologically and these physiological differences are relevant for different treatment in sports
  
  • Solutions:
    A. Group athletes based on physiological differences
    B. Group athletes based on ability
    C. Aid physiologically different groups
A. Group Based on Physiological Differences

- One solution is to form competition classes based on physiological differences
  - Problem is that some advantages in sports are not the result of physiological differences (dressage, car racing)
  - Also, sex-based grouping will prohibit smaller boys from competing with similarly sized girls
  - Another problem: separating groups for distinctive treatment develops "feelings of mutual identification which have an impact on the members' self-respect" (306)

B. Group Based on Ability

- Groupings based on ability results in b-leagues and different leagues based on perceived competencies
  - English does not find anything problematic with these types of groupings
    - Competition with your equals makes for enjoyable competitions
  - The problem is when people competing in "lower" leagues are treated disrespectfully or ridiculed for their abilities
    - When winning and excelling dominates, then basic benefits are undermined
C. Aid Physiologically Different Groups

- As a group women, tend to be smaller, less muscular, and have different skeletal structures
- Despite these differences, different sports benefit different physical characteristics
  - Ballet and balance beam advantage women's physique: women are more flexible, smaller, and have a lower center of gravity than men, all of which benefits women in these sports
- Encouraging sports that aid women is beneficial
- Problem: "a protected competition class suggests inferiority" which diminishes women's self-respect

Male Bias in Sports

- "In calling for the development of new sports, I am suggesting that our concept of 'sports' contains a male bias. Historically, this is understandable, because sports were an exclusively male domain, probably based on war and hunting, and actually used to assert male dominance…. But if women had been the historically dominant sex, our concept of sport would no doubt have evolved differently." (307-8)
Division of Sports

- Sports’ benefits should be divided into two classes: basic and scarce
  - Access to basic benefits of sports should be accessible to all
  - Access to scarce benefits of sports should be proportional to the women in the population
  - Half of the prize money in all of sports should be given to women, since women comprise half the population
  - Anything less would compromise women’s self-respect

Belliotti's Response

- Belliotti criticizes English's Argument From Self-Respect
  1. "Members of disadvantaged groups identify strongly with each other's successes and failures.
  2. "If women do not attain roughly equal fame and fortune in sports, it leads both men and women to think of women as naturally inferior.
  3. "When there is a wide disparity in these attainments between men and women, this is damaging to the self-respect of all women.
  4. "All women have a right to self-respect. This right to self-respect justifies the demand for equal press coverage and prize money for women." (309)
Belliotti's Core Criticism

• Belliotti thinks premises 1 and 4 are true
• Belliotti does not think premises 2 and 3 are as persuasive
  • The main reason is that one's self-respect as a person is different than one's competency as an athlete
  • This also is true of how others view one or one's gender
    • "There simply is no necessary connection between a person's athletic attainments and that person's degree of self-respect…." (310)

Influences on Self-Respect

• What matters for one's self-respect is whether one does one's best
• For matters of self-respect, it is basic benefits that matter
  • Scarce benefits are determined by market factors independent of the athlete and should have no bearing on the athlete's self-respect
  • Self-respect should focus on participation in sports and not on watching sports