

Sprinting Beyond Sexism and Gender Stereotypes: Indian Women Fans' Experiences in the Sports Fandom

Authors : Siddhi Deshpande, Jo Jo Chacko Eapen

Abstract : Despite almost half of India's female population engaging in watching sports, their experiences in the sports fandom are concealed by 'traditional masculinity,' leading to potential exclusion and harassment. To explore these experiences in-depth, this qualitative study aims to understand what coping strategies Indian women fans employ to sustain their team identification. Employing criterion sampling, participants were screened using The Sports Spectators Identification Scale (SSIS) to assess team identification and a Brief Sexism Questionnaire to confirm participants' experience with sexism as it aligns with the purpose of the study. The participants were Indian women who had been following any sport for more than eight years, were fluent in English, and were not professionals in Sports. ten highly identified fans with gendered experiences were recruited for one-on-one semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The data was analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand the lived-in experiences of women fans experiencing sexism and gender stereotypes, revealing superordinate themes of (1) Ontogenesis and Emotional Investment; (2) Gendered Expectations and Sexism; (3) Coping Strategies and Resilience; (4) Identity, Femininity, Empowerment; (5) Advocacy for Equality and Inclusivity. The findings reflect that Indian women fans experience social exclusion, harassment, sexualization, and commodification, in both online and offline fandoms, where they are disproportionately targeted with threats, misogynistic comments, and attraction-based assumptions, questioning their 'authenticity' as fans due to their gender. Women fans interchange between proactive strategies of assertiveness, humor, and knowledge demonstration with defensive strategies of selective engagement, self-regulatory censorship, and desensitization to deal with sexism. In this interplay, the integration of women's 'fan identity' with their self-concept showcases how being a sports fan adds meaning to their lives, despite the constant scrutiny in a male-dominated space, reflecting that femininity and sports should coexist; as a result, they find refuge in female fan communities due to their similar experiences in the fandom and advocate for an equal and inclusive environment where sports are above gender, and not the other way around.

Keywords : coping strategies, female sports fans, femininity, gendered experiences, team identification.

Conference Title : ICGSDS 2024 : International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies

Conference Location : Goa, India

Conference Dates : December 09-10, 2024