

Gender justice?: Muslim women's experiences of sport and physical activity in the UK

While reading the paper I noted how the participant's views on desiring sex-segregated spaces contrasted with those of Katie Barnes and her commentaries on removing sex-segregation in sport.

Despite the study being based on less than a dozen subjects, in one location, all of whom participate in sport, I agree with the article's conclusions about the participatory, distributive, and recognition issues faced by Muslim women in sport. This is a global phenomenon experienced by Muslim women in sport not unique to the UK. The issue in the UK is not the provision of resources for women, it is their unsuitability for devout Muslims. A second contrast here is France's *laïcité* approach to this issue.

Although the most popular birthname in the UK is Mohammed, Muslim's represent 1/20th of the UK, or put another way, non-Muslim's represent 19/20th of the UK. Most western societies are majority-ruled and culturally based on historical context. It is not unusual to see both newly situated and culturally different groups representing small portions of the population not serviced properly. In this example it is South Asian women but could just as easily be the Sami in Scandinavia, the Maasai in Kenya, or Indigenous tribes in Brazil. Is this wrong? Without a doubt. But it is a common phenomenon; any group representing a small fraction of the general population in a large and complex society will always have to fight for proper recognition and equitable distribution.

The UK has taken positive actions towards creating opportunities for Muslim women in sport; ranging from female Muslim football organizations to local pools offering women-only sessions with female lifeguards. More interesting is not how hospitable the UK is towards providing resources in sport for a small sub-population, but how female sport is treated in countries run by Muslim majority. For every Muslim woman in the UK there are a thousand Muslims globally. There is a hidden thread in this article that the UK is responsible for the difficult experiences of Muslim women in sport, however it is arguably better than most Muslim countries provide. The more fundamental question is not how Muslim women can participate and compete in sport in the UK, but how they can in Saudi Arabia, in Yemen, in Somalia, in Pakistan, in Iran, in Afghanistan, etc. Western countries like the UK have many initiatives in place to provide greater opportunities in sport for Muslim and South Asian women and can and will do more to both encourage and celebrate their participation. However, unfortunately the world has many regions and areas where this progress and optimism is either non-existent or a distant reality. The answer to the question "how might Muslim women in sport achieve gender justice in sport?" probably resides closer to home there than in the UK.