

Lesson Plan

Media Matters

Book: *Pro Athlete Pay Equity*

Series: Sports in the News

Level: Voyager

Objective

To help students explore the concept of representation in sports, analyzing how it both shapes and reflects patterns of thought.

Supplies

- *Pro Athlete Pay Equity* book
- Computer or projector
- *New York Times* article “Sure These Women Are Winning Olympic Medals, but Are They Single?”:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/19/sports/olympics/sexism-olympics-women.html>

Before the Activity

Read the *Pro Athlete Pay Equity* book as a class, or assign it to students to read on their own.

Activity

Pro Athlete Pay Equity describes the often vastly different amounts that male and female athletes earn, as well as the work being done to change this. But equity includes more than just salaries. Ask students to list some other ways that male and female athletes have historically received different treatment. Use the following sample answers as a guide:

- Investment in women’s sports was lower, which affected how quickly women’s sports grew (pp. 12–13).
- Women’s leagues often got fewer endorsements and had fewer games shown on TV, which meant their athletes earned less money (pp. 12–13).
- Female athletes often had fewer marketing opportunities (p. 16).
- Female athletes received different media coverage (p. 17).

Media coverage remains a big part of the equity debate today. To take a closer look at representation in sports, have students turn to pages 38–41 of the book. These pages highlight two cycles that reinforce patterns of thinking. Ask students to summarize these cycles, using the following sample answers as a guide:

- Because women at first weren't allowed to play many sports and then weren't as likely to be shown playing sports, people's default idea of an athlete tended to be a male athlete (pp. 38–39).
- The misconception that people don't like women's sports causes them to get less TV coverage, which means that fewer people can see them, which reinforces the idea that women's sports are not popular (pp. 40–41).

When female athletes do receive media attention, they are sometimes covered differently than male athletes. As an example, project the *New York Times* article, which describes some critiques of the media coverage female athletes received during the 2016 Olympics. Read through this article as a class. Then discuss the following questions:

- What are some ways in which female athletes were covered differently than male athletes during the 2016 Olympics? (Possible Answers: Headlines about female athletes were placed lower on the newspaper page; interviewers forgot about records set by female athletes; female athletes were more likely to be described by their relationships than by their own skills.)
- What assumptions and/or patterns of thinking might these differences reflect? (Possible Answers: that facts about female athletes will be less interesting to readers; that interviewers think of male athletes as the default and female athletes as a separate category; that the female athlete is not the most interesting part of the story)

Evaluation

Could students answer the questions about the differences in opportunities and treatment that male and female athletes often receive? Could they describe the thought patterns that likely contributed to these differences?

Standards

This lesson may be used to address the Common Core State Standards' reading standards for informational texts, grade 8 (RI 8.1, 8.2, 8.5).