

Sports inequity

By Theodore Dalrymple

The following statement is to be found in an article in *Scientific American* about mankind's prehistory and the assumption that men were hunters whilst women were gatherers:



Inequity between male and female athletes is a result not of inherent biological differences between the sexes but of biases in how they are treated in sports.

What, one might ask, is inequity – unfairness – in sports? Cheating, or the fact that some people are better at sport than others, no matter how hard the latter try? That some win in competitions in which others lose, without such considerations as natural endowment having been taken into account?

The only way of ensuring equity in sport is that all should have prizes, that in a race every competitor should be considered to have reached the finishing line at the same time. Abolition of competitive sport would, of course, be best, at least from the point of view of equity. Then there

could be no mistakes.

That scientific research often results in counterintuitive results is clear. No one would arrive at quantum physics by the exercise of common sense alone. Therefore, the violation of common sense is not by itself an argument against an assertion. But in this case, nothing that could be called scientific research leads to the counterintuitive assertion that women are not as good as men at football only because of the way they have been brought up, or because of some other socially imposed handicap.

There is no greater power than that over people's minds, and the exertion of power is a pleasure; indeed the proper (and inevitable) goal of existence, according to some philosophers. The purpose of propaganda is not to spread truth, but to violate individual autonomy.

Therefore, the more absurd and inescapable it is the better, and the greater the violence it does to minds. The goal of modern academic life (it often seems) is to make us believe six impossible things before breakfast, or at least to make us behave as if we did.

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