

COMPETITION, FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY IN SPORT AND SOCIETY

RESPONSE TO REVIEW

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# REVIEW

Thanks for the opportunity to review this book. The theme of the book is interesting and quite provocative. In its current form, however, the book strikes me as a bit unorganized, which makes it inaccessible. Actually, it strikes me a bit odd that there are no real chapters in the book. Currently, it instead presents a long line of themes/topics and the connections between these are not always obvious. Some themes also reappear and sometimes the topics rather “pop up” seemingly more or less randomly. The principal discussion being held on fairness, equality, and more is therefore often backgrounded by particularities of the different themes/topics. Following this, I would suggest that the author present the book using a more formal structure in which a thematic topic for each chapter is introduced. An introductory chapter where the aim is clearly stated, how the aim will be obtained, and what the reader can expect in terms of reading the piece, as well as a rough outline of the book, would be the absolute minimum. In the introduction I would also prefer if the author explicitly addressed the overall intent in relation to the topic for the book series in which it is included: what are the focus and sharp ideas that this book will deal with? The title gives some clues regarding focus but still a clear statement on what kind of ideas/argument that will be put forward and what perceptions will be challenged would be a good start.

Following an introductory chapter, the different chapters could then concern competition, fairness, and equality issues in sport and society from different viewpoints (for example, in relation to gender, race/ethnicity, religiosity...or more specifically to athlete

pay, gendered ideals, and more). These themes/topics are currently addressed in different sections, but in the discussions the author tends to move between different levels (cultural, structural, individual) in the argumentation and as themes are introduced I, at times, fail to see how they relate to one another. Put differently: I am unable to understand what each section is supposed to illustrate and how one section builds on another, creating a whole (of sharp ideas). To give an example: early in the book there is a section on transgender athletes and equality (really interesting case), a bit later follows a section on how homosexuality is understood according to the bible and an argument concerning who will be let through heavens gates. There is also a section that touches upon apartheid, the Mandela administration, and the situation in South Africa in the 90s. After this follows a discussion on gender equality in higher education in Sweden (a discussion that I really think should be revised as the room given to Arpi is really misleading and questionable, as Arpi is not an academic and whose writings largely build on right wing perspectives and sometimes conspiracy theories; also the discussion about terminology is misleading here). The point is; as a reader, I find it really difficult to connect these themes/discussions, often but not always found on a meso-level. What is the more general argument put forth? The fact that the themes are bound to different contexts, different parts of the world, and come from completely different times in history also makes it hard to see the links between competition, fairness, and equality in sport and society, beyond the idea that sport can be a looking glass to understand society, and vice versa – an idea that is already established on page one in the book.

So, a clear rationale early in the introduction and some form of structure in which the reader is invited on this journey through different chapters would greatly improve the accessibility of the book. Following this overall comment, I also find it difficult to be more

precise in the critique on the various sections/themes that are touched upon. This is simply because I fail to understand how they are connected and what they are intended to illustrate beyond an interesting and provocative discussion, that I from time to time must say I disagree rather strongly on. The disagreement in itself is not a problem though, and for sure the book discusses topics/themes that are catchy and interesting, but nevertheless it is difficult to follow the intended line of thought throughout. As I understand it, the question of “competition, fairness and equality in sport and society” is central. Perhaps it would be fruitful early on in the book to establish some sort of common ground with the reader about how these concepts are understood, or at least conceptually discuss their different possible meanings. They can of course mean multiple things across cultures, time, and context, but then it would be good to explain this and clarify how this will be illustrated/debated/criticized in a provocative manner throughout the book, and in relation to previous or dominant perspectives, in both research and in public discourse.

Adding to the more overall comment above, and without getting into (too much) detail, there are also some issues that I encourage the author to take into consideration in the revision process. These issues concern structure of the text, choice of references, illustrative examples, contextualization, and more.

In the section on “equality and power” it is concluded that “Consistent with the nature of sport, rivals want to overpower their opponents and see them suffer defeat”...says who and is this not an overly simplified statement? This statement is also used to conclude that “Sport ruthlessly exposes that equality among humans is an illusion,” which again I think is a simplification that needs to be debated rather than simply concluded. Is equality among humans impossible to achieve even though competition serves to crown a winner? What does equality even mean to the author in this discussion? Adding to this, if competition only serve to show inequality,

what happens when football end in a draw or when luck or bad weather plays a deciding role? What is unequal in those scenarios? What I'm asking for here is a more precise discussion on how central concepts are used and understood (as touched upon above).

Later in the same section "black people's merciless slaughtering of white people following the transference of power from the white minority to the black majority in" South Africa and Zimbabwe is discussed in terms of "reverse racial discrimination." To me, this might be a relevant discussion to initiate. The discussion is not, however, contextualized broadly, nor related to a wider discussion on how racialized violence has been directed towards bodies in sport and in society historically and in general, and towards black bodies in particular. Also, I wonder in what ways are white minorities in these countries discriminated in society, culture, and sport? Actually, I disagree on this argumentation, and the discussion (not being contextualized nor discussed on a principal level) falls flat. This discussion (in its current form) could actually be situated in a historical dehumanization rooted in white fear of black bodies (presented as powerful and animalistic), which was one of the underpinning reasons for chattel slavery in the U.S., for example. Although it might be thin, there is a line that can be drawn between a provocative argument and an uninformed ditto. Another example from page 49: "In all other walks of life, at least in the democratic west, it is taken for granted that women are as qualified as men." I would argue that in gender research there is more or less a consensus on the opposite. Men still holds privileged positions in more or less all domains in culture and society. In order to discuss and possibly call power structures (of gender, ethnicity/race, and more) into question, first we need to recognize them, and choose our examples with care.

In the section "the ideal of gender equality" it is explained: "Given the competitive nature of life, it is even more mysterious that

gender equality has been achieved in numerous domains, albeit mostly in the western world, with many influential men supporting women's quest for equality." This sentence alone raises several questions. Have we achieved gender equality? What domains is the author here referring too? And "men supporting women's quest for equality"....surely the author cannot mean that equality is solely a women's quest, and that it is a bit surprising that some men actually support this quest. Right? Later in the same section it is stated that: "The above-mentioned SSGR's policing of Swedish universities gender equality initiatives shows that at least some feminists still think that this is not the case" concerning reaching gender equality in Sweden. Actually, there is quite a large body of research that shows that Sweden has not reached gender equality, although many nations are "worse" on different measurements. In the scholarly debate this is not a controversial issue as indicated here. In Sweden women still take the main responsibility for children and household work, they are on parental leave longer than men, and their pay is about 85-90 percent of men's (more in some work domains), which impact not only their current financial situation but also their socio-economic situation as pensioners. Further, treatment for illnesses such as cardiac diseases are also missed more often in women than men and in general there are gendered health inequalities in Swedish society. Consequently, and although Sweden is considered one of the most gender equal countries in the world, it is not just "some feminists" that thinks that Sweden hasn't reached gender equality. What this comment highlights (as the comment on the use of Arpi's writing) is that the selection of references at times seems biased. In another section later on, it is stated that "It goes without saying that the American women's world champions would not be able to qualify for the men's tournament even if tackles and other forceful physical contact was banned." Again, the choice of wording is unnecessary and the example given is, to

me, sometimes actually quite the opposite of sharp, fresh, and up-to-date ideas. Rather, it exemplifies the gaze of privileged, white, heterosexual masculinity, which I would argue is problematic in a book with the title “Competition, fairness and equality in sport and society.”

The section “The problem of equal pay” is an interesting section, but I think perhaps, for example, that instead of lining up differences in salary between athletes and different sports a more principal discussion should introduce the theme and also finalize the theme in a more summative and principal manner. Such an approach would serve to give the reader not only an interesting read of financial diversities but also a principal understanding of the challenges and “problem of equal pay.” This comment also goes for several other sections as well.

The section that follows is “Equal pay from an athlete’s perspective.” Does this section really deal with athletes’ perspectives? If so, which are their perspectives? At times there is a mismatch between headings and content. Please have a look at this throughout. And the heading “Protection of the weaker sex”...do you mean marginalized sex or second sex? See previous comment on choice of wording, and if you are referring to de Beauvoir (the second sex) it would be good to clarify this. If the author decide to keep “weaker” as part of the heading, again, I think this controversial position should be thoroughly explained/situated and put in relation to contrasting arguments, not just presented as a given point of departure.

All in all, reading this book raises some strong critiques, but hopefully a restructuring of the book, in terms of different thematic chapters and a careful readthrough in which discussions and take-aways are held on a more principal level, could help the author to bring the piece forward.

Best of luck.



# RESPONSE TO REVIEW

I would like to begin this response by thanking the reviewer for providing such extensive feedback. The time and effort are much appreciated. Sometimes an author may have a clear vision of what he or she wants to say, drafts a text convinced that it conveys what it was supposed to, only to learn that the text is not at all an easy read. The first part of the review is testament to this.

The idea I wanted to present in the book was inspired by Marxist sport critical writings such as the French sociologist Jean-Marie Brohm's *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time*. According to Brohm sport is a tool that governments exploit politically to naturalize inequality and hierarchical structures while at the same time advance a competitive mindset that implies self-exertion and self-discipline. In short, sport reflects the workings of society in an idealized way. As convincing as this Marxist theory may seem, what it fails to explain is why athletes and spectators are attracted to sports in the first place. Could it be that people are attracted to sports because humans are competitive by nature? If so, then the dynamics and conflicts that play out in and around elite sport could help us understand the dynamics and conflicts in society at large. When I submitted the manuscript, I thought I had presented this idea intelligible, but it clearly did not resonate with the reviewer. I assume this is the reason why the contrasting examples was received by the reviewer as an incoherent cacophony. Following the reviewer's advice, I have therefore changed the structure of the book and made it more thematical, so the line of thinking should be easier to follow. I have also added an intro-

duction to better prepare the reader by introducing the main idea of the book and its theoretical underpinnings.

The reviewer indicates that (s)he finds (some of) the examples presented in the essay unpalatable. This calls for consideration. Readers have different backgrounds, temperaments, experiences, preferences, sensitivities, sense of humor, beliefs, convictions etc. This inevitably influences their reception. Some readers may find examples “problematic” that other readers find helpful. So, writers would be wise to consider the examples they use and avoid provocations for the sake of provocation. This, however, does not mean that one should always shy away from using examples that may ruffle some feathers. If potentially provocative examples were taboo, writers would be forced to present their ideas in the abstract with detrimental effect on their texts’ readability. On that account, it should be irrelevant whether an example is potentially annoying to some readers, so long as it serves a decent purpose. The South Africa example which the reviewer found particularly offensive and accordingly has been removed from the published book as a result, is pertinent in this regard.

The reviewer claims that this example, was not “contextualized broadly nor related to a wider discussion on how racialized violence has been directed towards bodies in sport and in society historically and in society in general and towards black bodies in particular.” This is true, but does this devalue the example? Admittedly, racialized violence is an interesting topic, but this was not the scope of the manuscript under review. Asking for a broader contextualization and a wider discussion about racialized violence was to ask for an entirely different book. What the reviewer should have assessed was the example in its specific context. The example occurred immediately after the Francis Fukuyama quote (still in the book) in which he argues that striving to be unequal comes to light in all aspects of life. The point Fukuyama is mak-

ing is in accordance with what I find in elite sport. He mentions Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin as examples of people who did not merely strive to be equal to other people although human equality was at the center of their communist ideology. Instead of taking Fukuyama's assertion at face value, I considered if it was indeed a universal truth and tried to think of a person of similar historical importance whose life contradicted this universal claim. There surely aren't many, but from what I have read about anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela who became president of South Africa in 1994, appeared to be such a prominent example.

I can only speculate how the reviewer failed to see that the purpose of this example was to stress Fukuyama's point that competition for recognition, resources, and power is universal and that aside from exceptional individuals like Mandela, those who gain power use it to their own (group's) advantage. My best guess is that the reviewer simply could not accept the idea that a fair and equal society without competition is a mirage. And perhaps even worse, that victims, regardless of skin color, can turn executioners if the circumstances shift in their favor. This presumption was further strengthened by the reviewer's additional remark: 'I wonder in what ways white minorities are discriminated against in these countries?' In the removed passage I gave several documented examples including: the petrochemical company Sasol share scheme introduced in 2018 exclusively for black employees that was an attempt to meet the ANC led government's requirement of black ownership; President Cyril Ramaphosa's proposal of a change of the constitution to allow for expropriation without compensation of land owned by white farmers; and Human Rights Watch report of 2020 that documents that white people in all walks of life are now subject to what the organization describes as "xenophobic crimes". I wonder how many more examples the reviewer needs to stop wondering. Maybe the reviewer

decided to ignore these examples of discrimination because (s) he finds them justified in the light of the injustices done to black people during apartheid. If this is true, the paragraph is reviewed politically rather than academically. If so, this is consistent with the reviewer's objection to the contrasting example.

To demonstrate that the will-to-power-dynamic is not limited to highly unequal societies such as South Africa I used an example from the affluent Sweden that did not go down well either. The example was taken from the untranslated Swedish book *Genusdoktrinen* (The gender doctrine), which the reviewer specifically refers to substantiate his claim that "the selection of references at times seems biased". *Genusdoktrinen* reveals how the Swedish government's implementation of its gender equality in higher education initiative was hijacked by activists within the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research (SSGR) to force "intersectional theory," "norm criticism" and "power relations analyses" into the universities' action plans. "I really think [this] should be revised" the reviewer advises, "as the room given to Arpi is really misleading and questionable, as Arpi is not an academic and whose writings largely build on right wing perspectives and sometimes conspiracy theories."

It is true that Ivar Arpi is a journalist. Why this vocation should disqualify his observations is beyond me. In academic publications you find a plethora of references to newspaper articles. Journalists are trained in collecting facts and researching their subjects methodically to provide reliable information in an accessible language. In doing so, they enhance public awareness of important topics. Investigative journalism seeks to reveal corruption, injustices, and power abuse. In short, quality journalism is a necessity to keep democratic societies strong. To exclude journalistic work from academic writing by default would be a senseless restriction. Moreover, Arpi co-authored the book in question with

PhD Anna-Karin Wyndhamn, who is a lecturer at the Department of Education at University of Gothenburg. In fact, she initiated the study. Wyndhamn worked for SSGR. She had applied for the job because, as a feminist, she sympathized with the government's intention. During her time there, she became increasingly concerned about the activism that she experienced and found academically problematic. The book is based on Wyndhamn's diary notes and insider experience, with more than eighty interviews, alongside reports, lectures, academic articles, and books, and it assembles a mass of quotes from these sources to document the issue. The reviewer does not reveal what information I present from this book that is "misleading and questionable" or where Arpi's alleged conspiracy theory perspective shines through. If, in other writings I am unfamiliar with, Arpi has applied right-wing perspectives and conspiracy theories, in what way does this disqualify his book with Wyndhamn, which is largely based on official reports and left-wing sources? Is the inclusion of voices associated with right-wing liberal perspectives in and of itself academically disqualifying? If this is indeed the reviewer's point of view (s)he seems to be in line with the activist agenda of the SSGR exposed in *Genusdoktrinen*. I beg to differ and have kept the paragraph in the book unaltered.

The reviewer further criticizes my discussion about gender (in) equalities:

In the section 'the ideal of gender equality' it is explained: 'Given the competitive nature of life, it is even more mysterious that gender equality has been achieved in numerous domains, albeit mostly in the western world, with many influential men supporting women's quest for equality.' This sentence alone raises several questions. Have we achieved gender equality? What domains are the author here referring too?

First, I do not say that men and women are equal in all respects. I say that in the western world we have achieved gender equality in numerous domains. Men and women have the same right to vote, to study, to work, to preach, to judge, to drive, to choose partner, to make love or not to make love – to mention just a few domains where gender equality has been achieved. These are formal rights women have fought for, and won, over a couple of centuries. Today, these rights are guaranteed by legislation. I think this justifies the claim I make.

The reviewer's second criticism of the gender equality section is similar: "And 'men supporting women's quest for equality'.... surely, the author cannot mean that equality is solely a women's quest, and that it is a bit surprising that some men actually support this quest. Right?" I readily admit that the word "quest" is vague and not the most precise in the context and have therefore changed this to "fight". Still, I stand by the claim that, given the competitive nature of life, it is somewhat mysterious that gender equality has been achieved in numerous domains and that men have been supportive of women in their fight for equality. In the sentence that follows immediately after, I give the reason why: "It could have been expected that the sex in possession of the power and means to defend the status quo would do so in order to protect their superior position". Having made the reason for wonder clear, I go on to explain why women nonetheless have succeeded and why men have been supportive. So, the patronizing "Right?" indicates that the reviewer, ruffled by the first sentence, read the next few lines without paying attention. But the gender studies lecture goes on:

Later in the same section it is stated that: 'The above-mentioned SSGR's policing of Swedish universities gender equality initiatives shows that at least some feminists still think that this is not

the case' concerning reaching gender equality in Sweden. Actually, there is quite a large body of research that shows that Sweden has not reached gender equality, although many nations are "worse" on different measurements. In the scholarly debate this is not a controversial issue as indicated here. In Sweden women still take the main responsibility for children and household work, they are on parental leave longer than men, and their pay is about 85-90 percent of men's (more in some work domains), which impacts not only their current financial situation but also their socio-economic situation as pensioners. Further, treatment for illnesses such as cardiac diseases are also missed more often in women than men and in general there are gendered health inequalities in Swedish society. Consequently, and although Sweden is considered one of the most gender equal countries in the world, it is not just 'some feminists' that thinks that Sweden hasn't reached gender equality.

If gender equality is understood as a situation in which women and men have identical life situations, same political representation, same income, same jobs, same amount of housework and childcare etc., gender equality does not exist anywhere. The whole point of choosing the example of gender politics in Sweden – one of the most affluent and gender equal countries in the world – was to show that, even in a country where major gender inequality issues have been overcome and where differences between the sexes largely depend on the choices of individual agents, new inequality parameters are established, so new problems can be identified, and the fight continue. As outlined above, this section is intended to mark a contrast, coming immediately after the censured reference to the human rights situation in post-apartheid South Africa. The examples were not chosen at random. They were intended to complement each other and form a whole. How-

ever, as mentioned at the beginning of this response, the original organization of the manuscript made the underlying premise of the book unclear.

The fact that the themes are bound to different contexts, different parts of the world, and come from completely different times in history also makes it hard to see the links between competition, fairness, and equality in sport and society, beyond the idea that sport can be a looking glass to understand society, and vice versa.

What the reviewer grapples with is my attempt to demonstrate that competition is not limited to certain contexts but is a universal fact of life. Which, by the way, is the reason why different interest groups promote different understandings of fairness and equality in various contexts. Something that has become increasingly manifest in the 21st century. The institutions of higher learning are not exempt in this respect, as illustrated by SSGR's activism. Ironically, my point was accidentally confirmed by the reviewer when he criticized the way I express myself:

In another section later on, it is stated that 'It goes without saying that the American women's world champions would not be able to qualify for the men's tournament even if tackles and other forceful physical contact were banned.' Again, the choice of wording is unnecessary and the example given is, to me, sometimes actually quite the opposite of sharp, fresh, and up-to-date ideas. Rather, it exemplifies the gaze of privileged, white, heterosexual masculinity, which I would argue is problematic in a book with the title "Competition, fairness and equality in sport and society."

Why such a "gaze" might be "problematic" and what this might mean is left in the dark. The sentence that the reviewer addresses



follows a paragraph in which I describe why the frustration felt by female football stars over the enormous difference between their earnings and those of their male counterparts is fully understandable. I add that their frustration may only be compounded by the knowledge that the problem cannot be solved the same way gender inequality issues in many other domains have been solved, namely by demanding access to the male territory (in this case: the men's tournaments). Because, given the nature of the game, they would have no chance of qualifying, even if rules were amended to avoid physical contact. This is a fact few would challenge. What is wrong with the wording is not explained. Instead, the entire essay is suddenly rejected out of hand using one of the most dreadful clichés from the radical feminist vocabulary. Bearing in mind the reviewer's objection to my mentioning of the biological fact that female footballers are physiologically disadvantaged in comparison with males, it is possible that he would have found it "sharp, fresh, and up-to-date" to disregard biological differences and make the opposite claim: that female footballers would be able to compete with men had it not been for structural obstacles and patriarchal suppression. However, while being sharp, fresh, and up to date, such a claim would also have been patently wrong.

So, I prefer to remain dull and old-fashioned, and to base my analyses on relevant facts, regardless of how unpalatable some may find these facts and the conclusions that follows from them in these hypersensitized times.