

“A Mediated Man Cave of Televised Sports Coverage”: Sexism in Sports and Sports Media

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Abstract

The 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup championship between the United States and China still holds the international record for spectators at 90,185, and the total number of attendees, 1.194 million, remained the record until 2015. Despite this, the limited coverage of women’s sports reflects institutionalized sexism within sports media and gender-bland sexism in their broadcasts. The social value of gender separation in sports affects the perception of women’s sports and female athletes through the presence of gendered language, sexist attitudes, discrepancies in broadcast time, poor treatment of female reporters, and differences in Olympics coverage, as well as the consequences of normalized sexism in the sports industry. Despite numerous professional women’s sports leagues and the celebrity of specific female athletes, the coverage of women’s sports, including news and highlight shows, totaled 5.4%, a statistically insignificant increase from 5% in 1989 and 5.1% in 1993 (“Overlooking Her Shot,” 2021). When removing the 2019 Women’s World Cup from the study, overall coverage time in 2019 drops to 3.9%, showing an inflation of 1.1% on local TV and 1.9% on SportsCenter (“Overlooking Her

Shot,” 2021; Miller, 2021). The use of different language towards female athletes, including Olympians, continues to highlight the “otherness” of female athletes, and the glass ceiling in the sports broadcasting world continues to limit the advancement of female reporters outside their traditional roles. The rise in athlete activism, however, sees female athletes calling out major sports organizations and demanding recognition and gender equity in coverage of their sport.

Keywords: gender, sports, sports media, gendered communication

Introduction

The 1999 FIFA Women’s World Cup championship between the United States and China still holds the international record for spectators at 90,185, and the total number of attendees, 1.194 million, remained the record until 2015. Despite this incredible success, the limited coverage of women’s sports continues to reflect institutionalized sexism within sports media. Though the coverage of women’s sports lacks overt sexism, gender-bland sports broadcasting may be more problematic for gender equity in sports. Sports create positive benefits for mental and physical health, and the currently lackluster coverage of women’s sports may disincentivize girls from playing sports, negatively affecting their physical and mental well-being. The social value of gender separation in sports affects the perception of women’s sports and female athletes through the presence of gendered language, sexist attitudes, discrepancies in broadcast time, poor treatment of female reporters, and differences in Olympics coverage, as well as the consequences of normalized sexism in the sports industry.

Sexist Language and Commentary in Sports Media

Although the sports media industry, since the 1990s, changed the treatment of female athletes, the commentators continue to use gendered and sexist language and present dismissive attitudes towards women's sports and female athletes. A disproportionate focus on female athletes' stereotypical life outside sports, their appearance and attractiveness, and their age led to language predictors including language related to attractiveness, personal or family information, and gender issues, while the most frequent language in relation to men included academic or professional language, indicating the traditional ideology of separate spheres and male breadwinners (Whitcomb, 2021; Fox, 2021). The trend also appeared in the 2012 London Summer Olympics, where women disproportionately received comments about their emotions, attractiveness, and personality (Billings et. al., 2014, p. 149). Gendered language, especially in a highly gendered field like sports, reflects the institutionalization of gender-based ideas in American and European cultures. The normalization of gendered ideas spreads to the language, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of sports journalists (Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 3).

Gender-bland sexism, the modern form of women's sports coverage, lacks the overt sexism and sexualization of the 1990s (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). In the 2000s, the commentary for women's sports became "diluted and indifferent" without the inappropriate commentary (Krasovitski, 2019). The commentary lacked jokes and compliments, and networks relegated women's sports to minor segments and a fraction of the coverage on sports networks (Whitcomb, 2021). Gender-bland sexism, perhaps an improvement from the 1990s commentary, may negatively affect viewership of women's sports. If the content on women's sports presents as boring and lackluster, fans may not return, and the sports news or media outlet may stop

producing and broadcasting women's sports content (Whitcomb, 2021). Quality nonsexist color commentary may limit the coverage of women's sports; gender-related comments, normalized through decades of sexism, became the norm in highly gendered activities.

Specific language choices highlight how gendered language can influence the viewers' attitudes towards women's sports. Commentators repeatedly referred to female athletes to as "girls," regardless of their age, in situations where sportscasters would not call male athletes "boys" (Fox, 2021; Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002, p. 298). This language qualifies as a micro assault, an explicit derogation characterized by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the victim by name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposefully discriminatory actions (Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 2). During the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, commentators repeatedly got the names of female athletes wrong, reinforcing a stereotype that no one watches women's sports (Fox, 2021). Commentators more frequently referred to male athletes by their surnames than female athletes, again devaluing the contributions of women athletes, and male athletes received more compliments (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002, p. 298). Other language associations for female athletes include the words "aged, pregnant, married, compete, participate, and strive" (Fox, 2021). The gendered associations with women's sports reflect the classification of women's sports as "other," as women's sports and female athletes require a gendered prefix to delineate it from the mainstream men's sports (Fox, 2021). Microaggressions on behalf of sports commentators create and maintain a "dismissive, hostile and sexualized environment" for all female athletes, which further highlights gender as an identifying characteristic (Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 2). Microaggressions, specifically towards women athletes, relate to their historical inferiority and second-class status in society as a whole and in sports, while racist and sexist jokes further reinforce their inferiority at other levels (Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 7).

Sportscasters also framed female athletes' accomplishments alongside motherhood and policed their behavior according to traditional ideas of femininity (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015; Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 5). Commentators also mention female athletes' roles as women and mothers, traditional ideas of femininity, before detailing their athletic accomplishments, less traditional ideas of femininity (Krasovitski, 2019). This may date to the twentieth century's ideas of sports and the pushback against female participation. The choice to cover female athletes in a way that conforms to conventional gender roles related to sexuality or supporting figures reflects traditional gender roles and ideas of a woman's place in the supporting cast, not as a principal figure (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). This treatment remains in a more diluted form, neither respectful nor equal (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015).

The Consequences of Normalizing Sexism in Sports

The normalization of masculine hegemony, or how stereotypically male traits like competition, aggression, and behaviors "form the base of a dominant ideology that exercises social control over others" exists as a major cause and consequence of the gendered language, attitude, and coverage of women's sports (Schmidt, 2018, p. 60). Masculine hegemony frequently appears in male-dominated or male-oriented societies where actions and language reinforce gender expectations, and the media and social standards continue to endorse the usage of gendered language. Masculine hegemony appears to support male-associated characteristics and behaviors to the point where these behaviors become extreme and harmful. In an example of male hegemony, coaches and administrators removed Chris Weiland from the UCLA track and cross-country teams after making racist and sexist comments in a video (Bolch, 2021). His comments led to student groups demanding that administrators remove him from the sports

teams and even campus because he created an unsafe environment for members of the group whom he had described with racial slurs. Similar comments also led to the National Football League (NFL) firing John Gruden of the Las Vegas Raiders over sexist, racist, and homophobic comments to and about others associated with the NFL (Belson & Rosman, 2021; Brewer, 2021). In 2015, sports commentator Dan Bernstein made a crude sexual comment about a female broadcaster that his bosses did not fire him for (Tumino, 2020). In today's post-#MeToo culture, major social commentary around this comment could dominate the Internet demanding his bosses to fire Bernstein; however, in the pre-#MeToo era, the level of accountability and audience interest in his removal did not appear. The #MoreThanMean campaign began in the sports world because female reporters received death threats and threats of sexual violence over social media, previously something socially acceptable because female reporters got less respect, and the accountability for the comments, again, did not exist in the sports community.

Other consequences of the normalization of sexism and women's sports' secondary status manifested in a substantial gender pay gap. In 2019, the United States Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT) sued the U.S. Soccer Federation under the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 alleging unequal pay and resources for a better performance than their male equivalent after originally filing a complaint in 2016. Twenty-eight players cited unequal prize money, lesser accommodations and facilities, and unequal pay only to have U.S. Soccer release a statement explicitly saying that the members of the United States Men's National Soccer Team had greater responsibilities and physical abilities than the women's team. Over one thousand female soccer players from eighty-one international teams earned \$32.8 million a year when their salaries combined while one male player, Neymar made \$32.9 million dollars in the same year (Whitcomb, 2021). Since then, the court denied the claim of unequal

pay. Players renegotiated a new collective bargaining agreement with the federation. The gender pay gap manifests in other sports; the average professional basketball player from the National Basketball Association (NBA) earns ninety-six times as much as an athlete in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the best-paid female athletes at any level in the United States (Whitcomb, 2021).

The normalization of sexism in the sports world also allowed a culture of sexual harassment and assault to form. Many professional women's soccer players have become involved in a new conflict with the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) over the league ignoring player accounts of sexual harassment and coercion by coaches still in both the NWSL and Major League Soccer (MLS). Players, during games in October 2021, halted play at the sixth minute of the game to stand together in the center of the field for a minute of silence, bringing attention to the six years since the first reported claim of sexual harassment in the NWSL. USA Gymnastics also attempted to settle with Larry Nassar's victims six years after a gymnast filed the first report that the FBI subsequently dismissed. Having filed for bankruptcy in 2017, the organization originally offered \$215 million to go to the victims, declined due to its inadequacy for addressing the physical and mental well-being of the victims. The latest proposed value ranks at \$425 million, three-quarters of a million less than what the University of Michigan decided on distributing to Nassar's victims from his time on staff.

The NCAA college basketball tournament, one of many college sports tournaments, displays the negative effects of institutionalized sexism within sports and sports media. In 2021, the gross weight room disparity went viral, as the female athletes' weight room consisted of a handful of weights while the men's room included modern athletic equipment, despite women's

basketball holding the title of most watched female sport in the country (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). This belongs to an extensive list of inequities between men's and women's basketball, as the women's tournament never used the March Madness branding. Other inequities deal with the establishment of a boys' high school basketball academy with no female counterpart, a lack of financial incentives for conferences when teams advance into the women's tournament bracket, and the vice president of women's basketball must report to someone solely focused on the men's tournament (Blinder & Longman, 2021). Furthermore, the representation of female coaches dropped dramatically since the passage of Title IX, which led to the monetization and increased competition level of women's sports. In 1972, women made up 90% of all college women's basketball coaches, but in the 2019-2020 academic year, women made up only 41% of coaches (Blinder & Longman, 2021). This matches the association of profitable sports with male authority figures; once college women's basketball became successful and profitable, men began to apply for, and receive, head coach positions. By replacing female coaches with male ones, the opportunities for women to advance in the college athletic world narrowed, as women coaches can only coach women's sports while men can coach both men's and women's sports. Somehow, with such extensive gender inequity, women's basketball became the most profitable and most watched women's sport, and no other women's college sport sits in a position "in the near term to generate revenues or, potentially, profits" (Ackerman as seen in Blinder & Longman, 2021). With this level of gender inequity in the most popular women's sport, the other women's sports statuses and gender inequities look very bleak.

As part of Phase II of the organization's gender equity review considering the debacle of the women's basketball weight room, the NCAA released a detailed report covering all sports and Divisions, existing gender inequities, and steps the organization can take to address the

situation. Overall, the report revealed that the NCAA, to no surprise, spends more on their male athletes than the female athletes across the board (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 10). The NCAA only sees men's Division I championships for baseball, basketball, ice hockey, lacrosse, and wrestling as revenue-producing; three of these sports have female Division I equivalents, where the review committee observed the greatest disparities in resources and gender equality (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 10). The NCAA also invests more in Division I women's volleyball and gymnastics, sports with greater profits and success than their male counterparts (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 10). Well-developed and well-funded, the NCAA championships in revenue-producing sports take resources from less developed championships, which include many women's sports and limit their ability to become large and revenue-producing (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 10).

Sexist Divisions in Broadcast Time

The sexist nature of the sports world carries over in televised broadcast coverage, where women's sports hit a glass ceiling, an unofficially recognized barrier towards advancement in a field specifically directed at marginalized groups. This glass ceiling directly affects coverage time and quality commentary for women's sports broadcasting (Billings et. al., 2014, p. 142). Major networks cite a "lack of interest" in women's sports from fans to justify the lack of coverage of women's sports, not necessarily true (Serazio, 2019). This results in overlapping broadcast slots and limited coverage as full programs or highlight segments, revealing the network's priorities, which places revenue and viewership, and thus men's sports, at the top of the broadcasting ladder (Serazio, 2019). Surprisingly, the 2012 London Summer Olympics mentioned women athletes more often than male ones and gave women's sports more clock time for the first time in Olympic history (Billings et. al., 2014, p. 142).

In 2019, the Women's World Cup Championship broadcast overlapped with the Copa América and the Gold Cup finals, both male events, and still managed to have 263.62 million viewers tune in over live television and streaming services (Serazio, 2019). The Copa América final had 3.1 million viewers, and the Gold Cup final had 8.7 million viewers, significantly less than the Women's World Cup. Despite this impressive viewership number, women's sports as a whole average around 2% of sports coverage on ESPN and 3% overall on all American networks (Serazio, 2019). SportsCenter, when combined with total television coverage, had 95% of all coverage focus on men's sports in 2019, and this disproportionate statistic also appears in social media posts and online sports news coverage (Miller, 2021). Coverage time varies by network, as SportsCenter and Fox Sports tend to cover fewer women's sports than NBC, which leads all networks in women's sports coverage due to their Olympic coverage. Fox Sports and SportsCenter, over 118 hours, gave women's sports less than 1% of coverage (Whitcomb, 2021).

In 2019, a study found that the televised coverage of women's sports, including news and highlight shows, totaled 5.4%, a statistically insignificant increase from 5% in 1989 and 5.1% in 1993 from an earlier version of the study ("Overlooking Her Shot," 2021). When removing the 2019 Women's World Cup, coverage time in 2019 drops to 3.9%, showing an inflation of 1.1% on local TV and 1.9% on SportsCenter ("Overlooking Her Shot," 2021; Miller, 2021). Over the last thirty years, coverage of women's sports dropped significantly 8.7% in 1999, likely due to the 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup, to a low of 1.6% in 2008, an Olympic year (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Since 1999, women's sports made up less than 2% of all coverage on SportsCenter, as only three of 199 teasers on SportsCenter referenced women's sports in any capacity (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Compared to local networks' one out of 145 referenced women's sports, SportsCenter marked an improvement (Cooky, Messner, & Musto,

2015). Research prior to the COVID-19 pandemic does not consider the rapid shutdown of all nonessential activities, including sports, or the increase in broadcast time for women's sports, especially the WNBA, with the rise of "tournament bubbles" with proper COVID-19 precautions and the added lens of the BLM movement in the summer of 2020 (Miller, 2021).

The rise of streaming services also affected women's sports coverage. Streaming services, secondary to major channels and run by major networks, primarily consist of women's sports, minor men's sports, and reruns of other sporting events. Generally, these broadcasts have a lower quality and difficult accessibility compared to live TV, often requiring a renewable subscription fee and compatible devices. Poorly financed, the mediocre commentary and quality reflect the differences between streaming services and live TV (Krasovitski, 2019).

However, social media and online sports coverage tends to cover women's sports significantly more, as women's sports get 10% of Twitter coverage and 9% on online newsletters (Miller, 2019). Even triple the televised coverage online barely reaches the double digits in percent of total coverage of sports, an atrocity when considering that profound women's sports success, such as winning a World Cup or Olympic gold medal, does not affect the amount of coverage time given to women's sports (Miller, 2021). Women's sports receive 5.7% coverage in newspaper sports stories, about the same as televised coverage, and less than 10%, regardless of the medium, in countries with large English-language media markets, (Schmidt, 2018, p. 59).

The discrepancies in broadcast time also connect with the male-centric world of sports within a male-centric society. The average male athlete receives more coverage than a female Most Valuable Player, depending on the sport, and the profit-oriented side of sports media sees men as more entertaining and marketable than women (Krasovitski, 2019). The coverage in the

off-season, in addition to in-season coverage, greatly varies. When networks cover men's sports year-round, in-season coverage of women's sports lacks the same quality and time both in and out of season, leading to men's off-seasons receiving more coverage than women's seasons (Springer, 2019; Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Always close to football season or "almost basketball season" on major networks, announcers rarely describe a time of year as "almost time for women's basketball." Human interest stories about athletes also display gender disparity. News and sports outlets and channels discuss male athletes' off-field contributions instead of the women's sports equivalent (Miller, 2021). Men's sports outside the "Big Three" of baseball, basketball, and football, also likely less noteworthy than a human-interest story about the "Big Three," remain more interesting than women's sports (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Existing sports programs exist in a wider context of Western entertainment media based on gendered roles and ideas that often prioritize the male audience for male entertainment, such as sports, and the silence around women's sports reflects the wider issue of gender inequality in the media with implications for gender relations (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015).

Similar discrepancies in broadcast time exist among NCAA college sports. The most profitable sports – basketball, football, baseball, soccer, and lacrosse – often receive prime spots on ESPN's three major channels (ESPN, ESPN 2, ESPNU), while other sports receive undesirable spots on major channels or a place on ESPN 3, the streaming platform. The NCAA women's basketball tournament unsurprisingly received uneven coverage compared to its male counterpart despite an increase in reporting time in the United States and an increase in live coverage (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Due to disproportionate spending, the NCAA Division I men's basketball championship receives a massive budget "to the exclusion of all championships" and monopolizes corporate sponsorships at the expense of the other

championships (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 11). The NCAA previously justified increased spending and sponsorships because the men's championships, with stronger fan bases and a longer history, receive better funding and financial and staffing support (*NCAA External*, 2021, p. 13). Women's sports, on the other hand, lack the head start, funding, and financial and staffing support, though they do have fan bases. Without the ability to further develop and push viewership ratings and statuses, women's sports at the college level will not have the chance to reach the level of the major men's championships without changes in the NCAA's policy.

Olympics Coverage and Commentary

The coverage of the Olympics gave NBC the highest percentage of broadcast time dedicated to women's sports, and "coverage of women's sports during the Olympic Games is about as good as it gets" (Jones, 2012, p. 217, as seen in MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 414). Although the networks try to equally cover men's and women's sports, the coverage lacks equal quality and respect. During the Tokyo 2020 Olympics women's soccer event, commentators repeatedly got the names of players and coaches wrong in multiple matches, an action which reinforces the sports broadcasting stereotype that no one watches women's sports (Fox, 2021). The blatant repeated disrespect towards the female athletes would have never occurred in a men's athletic event, a trend common in many aspects of sports broadcasting and Olympic coverage. Studies of the last nine Olympics, dating to the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics, have revealed trends of commentators' language highlighting the inferiority of female athletes and women's sports to their male counterparts. Phrases such as "Okay, ladies, where's that Olympics smile?" as well as high rates of racist and sexist microaggressions, especially towards female athletes of color, forcefully remind the audience that the athletes, and the viewers, should see

female athletes as women first, hence the descriptive prefix, and then as athletes (Taylor & Kennedy as seen in Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 2; Allen & Frisby, 2017, p. 7). The Olympics' commentary also seems to emphasize the female Olympians' traditional, domestic- and family-oriented roles over their athletic accomplishments and seem to indicate that they are "different" because they are female athletes. Olympic commentary about women's sports uses significantly different language to describe female athletes, as the commentators commonly describe female athletes' attractiveness and described the strength of male athletes twice as many times as they did female athletes' strength (Eastman & Billings, 1999, as seen in Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002, p. 298). Unsurprisingly, hyper-gendered sports, such as women's gymnastics or the decathlon in the Summer Olympics and various skating and skiing events in the Winter Olympics, have varying descriptions on NBC than less gendered sports such as snowboarding, surfing, and swimming (MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 415).

The linguistic differences vary by country; Canadian coverage of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics differed from the American broadcasts. In Canada, commentators referred to the female athletes' success in relationship to their experiences while commentators associated intelligence with both male athletes' success and failure, both extremely different associations from American broadcasts (MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 424). In the 2012 London Summer Olympics, commentators attributed male athlete success to their experience, which changed in the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in Canadian broadcasts (Billings et. al., 2014, p. 145). In a study of the "Big Five" 2012 Summer Olympic sports (swimming, beach volleyball, diving, track and field, and gymnastics), researchers found the most dialogue differences in swimming events, perhaps due to the dominance of athletes like Michael Phelps (Billings et. al., 2014, p. 141). Phelps' world-record-setting success perhaps influenced commentators in comparing other

swimming medalists, both male and female, to Phelps' performance in the 2012 Olympics, a sport with lower dialogue differences in an earlier version of the study.

The Olympics improved their balance between men's and women's sports coverage, and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics saw a record number of female athletes compete on behalf of their countries (Fox, 2021). This progress occurred slowly over a prolonged period; in the period from 1994 to 2014, the progress towards equitable Olympic coverage in Canada did not exist (MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 425). In the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, the lone female announcer covered rhythmic gymnastics, a female-only sport (Farhi, 2009). In terms of broadcast time, the 2012 London Summer Olympics marked the first time in Olympic history where women athletes received more coverage than their male counterparts (Billings et al., 2014, as seen in MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 414). Further study of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics may reflect a change in broadcast time for female athletes due to record numbers.

Considering the various instances of gender-based discrimination concerning uniforms, sexual harassment, and equal pay, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) released new media guidelines stressing gender equality in the upcoming Olympic coverage. The IOC particularly emphasized minimal sexualization of female athletes and focusing on equal integrity instead of an unnecessary focus on "looks, clothing or intimate body parts" (Fox, 2021). The changes in media regulations respond to the recent controversy over female uniforms, beginning with the Norwegian women's beach handball team's complaints over the bikinis they wore as part of their uniform. Not an Olympic sport, the International Handball Federation oversaw the response and chose to impose a team-wide fine. During the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics, the German gymnastic team wore unitards, an acceptable replacement for the traditional gymnastics'

uniforms. The fight over female athletes' uniforms dates to tennis, a century-long fight, and soccer. With the traditional excuse for overly sexualized uniforms being "It's the culture of the sport," female athletes have found changing uniform rules to be a challenge (Friedman, 2021). Technically, the IOC allows the national Olympic committees of each delegation free rein over their uniforms pending a "not offensive" design, a subjective requirement (Friedman, 2021).

As the only series of mega athletic events where women can compete at the same skill level, in the same or similar events, and at the same or similar venues as men, the Olympics has an immense influence on the perception of women's sports, but some events have institutionalized sexism built into the event itself (MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 411). During the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics, the network televised the most physically attractive women's sports events, notably gymnastics, diving, and sprinting, whereas comparatively unattractive sports like field hockey, shot put, discus, and softball, if covered at all, appeared in small segments (Tuggle & Owen, 1999, as seen in Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002, p. 300). Relative attractiveness, viewer ratings, and gender all affect the differences in clock-time for women's sports. The differences in Olympic clock-time shrank the most when women participated in female-acceptable sports like gymnastics or ice skating, while their participation in more masculine sports such as swimming or track and field saw a greater difference in clock-time (Davis & Tuggle, 2012, as seen in MacArthur et. al., 2017, p. 415).

The most obvious examples of sexism in particular Olympic events exist in events based on distance. The 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics added the women's 1500-meter freestyle and the men's 800-meter freestyle, the first instance in Olympic history where athletes could all swim in the same events. The Summer Olympics also host the men's decathlon and the women's

heptathlon with no equivalent for the other gender. The men's decathlon includes the pole vault, discus throw, and long jump, all of which are not present in the women's heptathlon. The distances on the running events vary; the women's running events include the 100-meter hurdles, the 200-meter, and the 800-meter, and the men's running events include the 100-meter, 400-meter, 110-meter hurdles, and the 1,500-meter. Throughout much of the twentieth century, people believed women could not compete in running events, as they would affect a woman's ability to have children and their figure. The sexist explanation created massive differences in the distances between male and female events when women could compete in track events.

Due to the same sexist misunderstandings of female biology and athleticism, the women's distances in the Winter Olympics' skiing and speed skating events are much shorter than the men's events, though women biologically have better endurance over longer distances. In short track speed skating, men and women both compete in the 500-meter, 1,000-meter, and 1,500-meter races, but the relay lengths differ, as the women's relay goes to 3,000 meters and the men's relay goes to 5,000 meters. A similar trend exists in speed skating; female skaters race to a maximum distance of 5,000 meters with the addition of a 3,000-meter race, and the maximum distance for male speed skaters is double that, with 10,000 meters for their extra event. Male and female speed skaters all race a 500-, 1000-, 1500-, and 5,000-meter race in addition to the mass start and team pursuit races. In the biathlon, every possible event has different distances for men and women. In the sprint, the men's distance consists of ten kilometers while the women's consists of seven and a half kilometers; the individual event distances are twenty kilometers for men and fifteen kilometers for women. The pursuit race lasts twelve and a half kilometers for men and ten kilometers for women while the men's relay is four by seven and a half kilometers and the women's is four by six kilometers. The organizers split the mixed relay events into two

by seven and a half kilometers and two by six kilometers. The mass start event events differ by two and a half kilometers overall, lasting fifteen kilometers for men and twelve and a half kilometers for women. In cross-country skiing, the male athletes compete in a fifty-kilometer race and with a four by ten-kilometer relay, longer than the women's four by five kilometers relay. The longest cross-country skiing event for women is only thirty kilometers long, only 60% of the longest distance for men (fifty kilometers). Women cross-country skiers also participate in a 10-kilometer race, and their pursuit lasts fifteen kilometers compared to the men's thirty kilometers. The shortest men's cross-country skiing event is fifteen kilometers, which is longer than the shortest women's cross-country skiing event.

The Role and Treatment of Female Sports Reporters

Female reporters, broadcasters, and commentators make up a minority in sports media, as 90% of all anchors, commentators, and editors in the field consist of men, and, at major newspapers and websites in the U.S. and Canada, 85% of reporters identify as white (Serazio, 2019; Springer, 2019). The number of female journalists of color remains low, and not only in sports; according to a 2016 report, Hispanic, Black, and Asian women consist of less than 5% of traditional and online newspaper employees (Pasha, 2017). In 1974, Lesley Visser became the first woman hired by the *Boston Globe* to cover sports, the first woman to cover the NFL regularly, and the first woman in the NFL Hall of Fame. She covered the Olympics, the NFL, Major League Baseball (MLB), NBA, the Triple Crown, and the Final Four (Ourand, 2016). When Vesser started working as a sports reporter in the 1970s, the press box and the locker room banned women (Serazio, 2019; Ourand, 2016). Women irregularly covered major league men's sports since, and Visser mentioned that she does not see much progress in sports media's

representation of women, though the younger generation of female sports reporters disagrees with her observation (Ourand, 2016). In 2017, the first female announcers for March Madness and Monday Night Football covered broadcasts, two of the “Big Three” sports (Serazio, 2019).

As Vesser and other female reporters noticed, the glass ceiling keeps most women from broadcasting by leaving them in traditional roles as sideline reporters. Few women call games or function as the second chair commentator, the most prestigious on-air roles on sports networks (Farhi, 2009). The discrepancy, according to ESPN’s top personnel executive, reflects fans’ wishes, as the – probably male – fans want to keep women on the sideline, in an acceptable role, and out of the booth, a threatening position towards male reporters (Orlando as seen in Farhi, 2009). Fans, according to the same executive, must accept women doing play-by-play commentary, and sports coverage by female broadcasters still does not completely satisfy fans (Orlando as seen in Farhi, 2009). The lack of women in high-ranking decision-making positions in the various networks that cover sports also factors into this exclusion of women sportscasters. Men most likely know other men in the industry, not women, so the automatic recruiting pool primarily consists of men, and higher-ups in the sports media world do not consciously try to recruit women and other groups historically excluded from sports media (Snyder as seen in Farhi, 2009). Unsurprisingly, both men and women see male sportscasters as more authoritative (Etling & Young, 2007, p. 126-7); men may have more negative attitudes towards female reporters, but women judge other women more harshly (Etling & Young, 2007, p. 124). The difference in speaking time, with male reporters talking more, reflects the greater number of male sportscasters and different gender roles; traditionally, men talk while women listen, observe, and add to the male reporter, highlighting the secondary nature of her opinions and observations in relation to her male counterpart (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002, p. 313).

The rate of employment for women reporters, especially in sports, also remains low (Schmidt, 2018, p. 59). In the last 30 years in the United States, women wrote 10.4% of newspaper sports articles, and women are “9.6% of newspaper sports editors, 11.7% of newspaper sports reporters, and 9.8% newspaper sports columnists” (Schmidt, 2015, Lapchick, 2013, as seen in Schmidt, 2018, p. 59). In Australia, similar numbers appear, as women reporters make up 10.2% of sports journalists and write 8% to 11% of all sports articles; both the United States and Australia have better numbers of female sports journalists than the United Kingdom, where female sports journalists, 3% of the total, write less than 5% of sports articles (Schmidt, 2018, p. 59). A cause of the sparse numbers of female sports journalists deals with the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling. While some women broke through, men still dominate the field. The influence of gendered ideas of journalism remains, as women frequently write more human interest or women’s sports stories than men’s sports stories due to the conventionally feminine nature (Schmidt, 2018, p. 65). Assignment to low-caliber reporting assignments means women lack the opportunity to cover serious, high-profile stories, often a base for promotion (Schmidt, 2018, p. 67). If women cannot work on stories that could lead to promotions, bosses overlook them in favor of a male journalist who worked on high-profile stories; the cycle of promoting men and keeping token female journalists in lower-status positions on lower-status stories does nothing to increase the presence of women in journalism.

Conventional social notions of beauty and attractiveness, as well as the resulting double standard, affect sports media. Physically unattractive men thrive where an unattractive woman could not get in the door; companies usually fire women sportscasters or pull them off TV at a certain age, while others call male commentators of the same age mature and experienced (Farhi, 2009). Viewers rank the physically unattractive and least knowledgeable male sportscasters

higher than the most attractive and knowledgeable women reporters, showing the effects institutionalized double standards of attractiveness have on credibility (Etling & Young, 2007, p. 124; DiCario, 2016). A woman twenty years younger than her replaced Lesley Vesser as a sideline reporter, further proving the double standard of beauty, and male bosses usually fire women reporters once others deem them unattractive (Ourand, 2016). The experience led Vesser to recommend that upcoming female reporters have something to fall back on when – not if – they lose their televised broadcasting careers (Ourand, 2016). Certainly, gender directly affects apparent authoritativeness due to the institutionalized association between men, authority, and credibility, though other items factor into the differences in perceived credibility.

Social media also allows viewers to target female reporters for perceived inability or threatening male sports with their femaleness, as the increase of female sports reporters threatens a traditionally male sphere (Tumino, 2020). Social media users, with the help of relative anonymity, express their lack of trust in female announcers and question their credibility and authority in a traditionally male arena, a consequence of their gender and the all-too-common ideas towards women in sports media (DiCario, 2016; Etling & Young, 2007, p. 121-2). Often using profanity and threatening death or sexual violence, harassing social media messages, often on Twitter, towards female reporters led to the establishment of the #MoreThanMean campaign, which started in 2016 to call attention to the culture of online sexual harassment and its impact on women in sports and sports media. Social media users target female reporters with deeply misogynistic language because of personal institutionalized gendered ideas and feeling threatened by women's advancement. The double bind of female attractiveness also acts as a contributing factor; female reporters need to look good to get the job, but others then devalue them and their credibility because their attractiveness factored into their hiring (Serazio, 2019).

Female reporters also have less leeway to make mistakes in their coverage of men's sports, which often angers the online hoard of hypermasculine sports fans into a frenzy of hateful sexual messages. "According to a 2013 study by the International Women's Media Foundation, almost two-thirds of female journalists" experienced sexual harassment or abuse while working, a number which depends on the historically underreported reported experience (Pasha, 2017).

Athlete Activism and Advocacy

In the last five years, athletes have become more visible in their acts of advocacy and activism. Some leagues, like the WNBA, began drawing attention to social justice movements since their inception, but the origin of their activism in a women's sports league lowered their publicity. The increase in broadcast time of women's sports during the COVID-19 pandemic made their activism more visible and necessary. More recently, athletes used championship White House invitations as a form of activism. During the Trump administration, the United States Women's National Soccer Team, the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles, the NBA's Golden State Warriors, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's men's basketball team all refused invitations to the White House, some more memorably than others (Blackistone, 2020). Many women's sports teams did not receive invitations, and some teams split over accepting the invitation, with some players refusing while others attending (Blackistone, 2020). Megan Rapinoe mentioned, in an interview before the culmination of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, that she would not go to the White House if they won, to which the president encouraged her to win first. Rapinoe and her other teammates on the Women's Soccer Team publicly discussed not accepting the invitation, though her comment, profanity and all, became the most famous (Robbins, 2020). The wave of social justice associated with the Trump administration's

poor handling of a variety of issues saw a massive increase in the summer of 2020 following the George Floyd protests and a wave of Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism by athletes (Blackistone, 2020). In Washington, D.C., the Washington Nationals extended a first pitch offer to Biden after booing Trump, the only president not invited to throw a pitch when Washington, D.C., had a major league team (Blackistone, 2020). These forms of athlete activism reflect public opinion and the priorities of the athletes who use their platform for political and social reasons.

The USWNT's equal pay suit against U.S. Soccer served as a form of athlete activism, highlighting the players' refusal to accept unequal pay and subpar treatment. However, the players chose to settle for an unideal payment without pushing for more, and their failed appeal limited the long-term success and implications of the suit. Hopefully, however, the lawsuit inspires other women's sports leagues and national organizations to consider how they pay and treat their male and female athletes (Robbins, 2020). Megan Rapinoe, one of the twenty-eight players named in the lawsuit, took on a dominant role in the sports activism world. One of the few out LGBTQ+ athletes, she became one of the first female athletes to kneel during the national anthem to protest police brutality, and she publicly credits Kaepernick in every speech she gives relating to her activism as an athlete (Lapnick as seen in Robbins, 2020). Kaepernick's hypervisibility as a member of a "Big Three" sports league (the NFL) and Rapinoe's hypervisibility and outspokenness led to the partial erasure of the WNBA's decades-long activism thanks to their lesser visibility (Cooky as seen in "Overlooking Her Shot," 2021). The pandemic and increased coverage time combined with the overlap between the WNBA 2020 "bubble" tournament with the George Floyd and BLM protests gave the athletes' activism a greater platform for their activism in league history. Kaepernick's activism broke a trend of silence around activism for both male and female athletes. Female athletes, due to the

intersection of their various identities as women, athletes, race, and sexual orientation, deal with persistent oppression and thus have a stronger association with words such as “vocalize,” “activism” (at 17.24% predictability), and “equality” (14%) than male athletes, demonstrating the prevalence of female athletes using their platform to speak up against various forms of institutionalized oppression within the contexts of sports and society (Whitcomb, 2021).

Female athletes continue to force major federations and leagues to change the culture and behavior of members in the organizations (Blackistone, 2021). Female athletes frequently protest sports organizations’ inaction towards sexual harassment and assault cases. In October 2021, members of the NWSL protested the hiring and lack of punishment or report follow through of coaches who sexually harassed and coerced players since the league former. Megan Rapinoe called for burning the NWSL, and other organizations that tolerated sexual harassment, assault, abuse, and coercion towards their players, down. Simone Biles and other gymnasts continue to speak out against USA Gymnastics over the botched handling of the Larry Nassar case, with Biles even holding her own post-Olympics tour unaffiliated with USA Gymnastics.

With partisan politics and social issues polarized, sports’ position as entertainment and politics became more critical than ever. Embracing “diversity, vulnerability, gender equity, and activism,” sports’ history of “abuse, homophobia, misogyny, and injury” begins to decline with the changes in coverage, treatment, and attitude towards men’s and women’s sports (Robbins, 2020). Though widespread change remains necessary, athlete activism and structural changes to sports federations begin to address serious issues. Changes in the actions, attitude, and language in sports media remain pressing, as institutionalized gendered ideas, language, and attitude have roots in larger social structures. Sportscasters need to consciously consider their word choice and

the implications of their verbal and nonverbal attitudes. Networks must also hire historically excluded groups and give them chances to work on important stories and in nontraditional roles.

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