



2019 FIFA Women's World Cup

Media, Fandom, and Soccer's
Biggest Stage

Edited by Molly Yanity · Danielle Sarver Coombs



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PART I

What the Media Learned



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Molly Yanity and Danielle Sarver Coombs

The 2019 Women's World Cup felt like a tipping point. No longer was the women's version of the world's biggest sporting stage relegated to an afterthought for the men's tournament. Instead, it was a media and cultural phenomenon in its own right. Fans from all over the world flocked to France to support their teams live and in person. For those who could not be there, media coverage allowed them to join in the fun. Record-setting audience numbers around the globe provided substantial evidence that this time—this tournament—marked the true embracing and celebration of a globally relevant, women-centered sporting event. Perhaps even more importantly: The athletes and teams represented in France were willing to take their heightened visibility and media platform to call for change. Rather than shying away from taking positions on political events or social issues, this tournament was marked by players and teams taking a stand for their sport, their people, and their rights.

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Perhaps no team better embodied this than tournament champions and perennial powerhouse, the U.S. Women's National Team. Standing in front of the New York City Hall at the conclusion of a ticker tape parade through Manhattan, the star of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup tournament gave an inspired speech. Megan Rapinoe, forward for the champion U.S. Women's National Team, implored a frenzied crowd, "This is my charge to everyone. We have to be better. We have to love more, hate less. We got to listen more, and talk less. We got to know this is everybody's responsibility, every single person here. Every single person who is not here. Every single person who doesn't want to be here. Every single person who agrees and doesn't agree. It is our responsibility to make this world a better place."

We have to be better.

That simple sentence resonated with us. As sport media scholars, as researchers of fans and behavior, as educators, we need to be better—as Rapinoe simply put it—to make this world a better place.

Rapinoe herself did not relent. In the weeks, months, and now years since she spoke in front of City Hall, she, her teammates, and many of her opponents have continued to use their platforms as celebrities and football players. In her 2020 autobiography, Rapinoe wrote:

...we weren't just playing for the US. We were playing for the right to be different and to still be respected. We were playing for equal rights, equal pay, and the glory of the women's game. We were playing to make an argument that didn't mean stomping on anyone else, but doing everything you could to support them (p. 196).

To be better moving forward, however, we must understand where we have been. To improve upon the past, we need to be clear what it was and where we need to go. Thus, we look back at what transpired in the summer of 2019 with the intent of being and doing better from the perspectives of those in the media, of fans, and of a global community looking to bolster the women's game, as well as the status of those who play it. We aimed to put together a collection that uses multiple theoretical and methodological approaches across disciplines to appeal to practitioners, as well as scholars and students. Sportswriters, broadcasters, enlightened fans with smartphones should glean knowledge and insight from these pages.

2019 FIFA Women's World Cup: Media, Fandom, and Soccer's Biggest Stage is divided into three parts: What the media learned, what fans learned, and what we all still need to learn. The authors of the edited collection are

scholars across the disciplines of communication, anthropology, sociology, political science, sport management, and physical education. With such a broad scope of areas of study (thus, also, a broad scope of theories and methodologies), the authors look at the 2019 Women's World Cup through several different prisms, pose different questions, and—ultimately—explore new answers in order to forge ahead as the mega-event and its actors to continue to make their mark on the global sports landscape.

In **Part I: What the Media Learned**, the chapters explore the mediation of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and delve into the modern media topography—one that includes news coverage of World Cup teams and controversies in print and television from across the globe, as well as socially produced memes shared worldwide. To explore the manners with which mainstream media outlets can be better, Barbara Ravel and Gina S. Comeau kick us off in the tournament's host nation of France and analyze media coverage of both the Cup and the French National Team by French sports outlets. As with most chapters in this first section, framing theory (Entman, 2004) is used, as well as seminal pieces about the coverage of women's sport (Cooky et al., 2013; Cooky et al., 2015; Messner et al., 1993). They looked at how female athletes and women's sport were depicted in various types of media, thus gaining a perspective with and without national interests involved. Framing and the intersection of race, gender, and sport are employed by Emma S. Ariyo, Ololade Faniyi, and Ryan Turcott to examine global coverage of a perceived controversy in a Cameroon vs. England Round of 16 match in Chap. 3. In Chap. 4, framing is used by former sportscaster and scholar Travis R. Bell to analyze broadcaster discourse of the newly instituted VAR, or video assisted referees. In Chap. 5, neoliberal feminist theory is further utilized in Eileen Narcotta and Anna Baeth's piece on post-colonial representations of the USWNT and the complex, duplicitous relationships between the colonizer and colonized in women's sport. Apryl Smith and Kayla Oyler, in Chap. 6, return to framing to analyze coverage of the popular U.S. Women's National Team—a team that seemingly made great strides to disrupt hegemonic masculinity. Mildred and Gregory Perrault, in Chap. 7, dive into the role of memes in social media discourse and how those memes contribute to the representations of women. Memes, they contend, are cultural objects that reveal a shared narrative among viewers. The chapter is a good segue to the next section of the book.

The text turns from media coverage to fans' experiences in **Part II: What Fans Learned**. Beginning with Chap. 8, rhetoricians Meredith

M. Bagley and Mary Anne Taylor draw upon critical field methods to compare cues from one author's experience of watching the USWNT throughout the United States to the other author's experience of being at the games in France in person. Fred Mason follows that in Chap. 9 with an autoethnography of his experiences attending the tournament throughout the years in Europe and North America. He offers insights into similarities and changes over time, as well as indications of growth and development in the women's game. Molly Yanity and Danielle Sarver Coombs use performative fandom in Chap. 10 to understand fans' reception and internalization of Megan Rapinoe's now iconic "Power Pose" (Osborne & Coombs, 2013). Rapinoe, with both her dominating performance in the tournament and her long-standing political activism, became a condensation symbol and fans had strong reactions to her, which also spilled into how fans viewed the activism of the USWNT. In Chap. 11, Katherine Harman questioned how fans understood lesbian images and visibility. Harman used the lens of queer theory after a USWNT defender Kelley O'Hara was recorded kissing her girlfriend after a victory.

The final section, **Part III: What We Still Need to Learn** offers a look ahead—for tangible opportunities to *be better*, to expand not only the game, but minds, as well. Dunja Antunovic uses the 2019 Women's World Cup as an entry point to examine the socio-cultural and media landscapes that shape gender norms around women's football in the Central-Eastern European region in Chap. 12. Antunovic situates the analysis in relation to feminist sport sociology and sport media studies to illustrate the ways in which perspectives from the region disrupt broader cultural narratives surrounding women's sport. Chuka Onwumechili and Kapriatta Jenkins in Chap. 13 examine the socio-historical context for women's football in Nigeria (Bichi, 2018). This insight is underpinned by traditional historical theorization about gender and social practices in the Northern African nation. As media coverage increases and the visibility of woman in soccer increases, the authors contend that spaces of ambivalence and marginalization still existed for the African teams that participated in the 2019 Women's World Cup. But, they wonder, will those spaces contract? Tracy Everbach, Gwendelyn S. Nisbett, and Karen Weiller-Abels return the reader's attention to Megan Rapinoe. While most female athletes are sexualized and feminized, Rapinoe defied the representation. The authors use intersectional feminist theory to explore how Rapinoe has set the stage for athletes and their activism to transform gender roles and

recast normative behavior. Finally, in the last chapter, Hillary Haldane looks at Australia and Aotearoa—sites of the 2023 Women’s World Cup—through an anthropological lens to posit critical question—namely, “who benefits?”—about FIFA’s efforts to improve the women’s game in the inherently unequal and exploitative system of capitalism.

As we approach the 2023 Women’s World Cup, we hope this book offers lessons derived from the experiences of 2019. We hope it provides insight to scholars, practitioners, and fans. And, of course, we hope we can all be just a little bit better.

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“Le Moment de Briller”?: Examining France’s Media Coverage of *Les Bleues* and the FIFA Women’s World Cup France 2019

Barbara Ravel and Gina S. Comeau

“*Le moment de briller*” which can be literally translated to “The Moment to Shine” was the French counterpart of the slogan for the FIFA Women’s World Cup France 2019, “Dare to Shine” being the English version. In a video revealing what “Dare to Shine” meant (FIFA, 2018), several current and former (female and male) players explained how it was meant to inspire the players involved in the 2019 championship. In French striker Kylian Mbappé’s words:

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I think about it [Dare to Shine] every time I'm in the tunnel, waiting to head onto the pitch. Each match has its own story and you can leave your mark on each one. It provides you with a chance to shine, individually and as a team.

With the eighth edition of the World Cup adopting the slogan “Dare to Shine,” individuals, countries, and media across the world were encouraged to seize the opportunity to make the athletes, teams, and sport shine. This chapter focuses on France’s media coverage of the event and more specifically on the different ways in which *Les Bleues*, France’s national women’s team, as well as other teams and athletes were portrayed before, during, and shortly after the tournament. While the primary interest was on *Les Bleues*, all World Cup content was examined in order to further our understanding of how female athletes and women’s sport were depicted in various types of media, thus gaining a perspective with and without national interests involved.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMALE ATHLETES AND WOMEN’S SPORTS

Numerous studies showed that women’s sports are largely underrepresented in mainstream media, whether on television (e.g., Cooky et al., 2015), in print media (e.g., Delorme & Testard, 2015), or in sports news websites (e.g., Coche, 2015), and that they are also marginalized (e.g., Bruce et al., 2010; Cooky et al., 2015). In their study of US televised news and highlights shows, Cooky et al. (2015) lamented the low quantity of coverage devoted to women’s sports and noticed the differences between the coverage of men’s sports and the coverage of women’s sports. In this regard, the same researchers have later introduced the concept of “gender-bland sexism” to illustrate how the media “frame women in uninspired ways, making women’s athletic accomplishments appear lackluster compared to those of men’s” (Musto et al., 2017, p. 573).

Changes are, however, usually observed in the context of the Olympic Games. Wensing and Bruce (2003), for instance, have examined the media coverage of Australian runner Cathy Freeman during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Their study indeed demonstrated that gender wasn’t necessarily the primary framing device when other aspects, like athletic achievements and national pride, were at stake. In the authors’ words, “In the context of Sydney 2000, with questions of national identity to the

fore, it was more important for the Australian media to represent Cathy Freeman as an ‘Australian’ than to frame her primarily as a woman” (p. 394). In another study, Bruce (2009) investigated the media coverage of New Zealand’s female medalists at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Once again, patriotism and success combined to disrupt the gendered discourses usually preponderant about women’s sports in mainstream media. In the same vein, Quin, Wipf, and Ohl suggested the existence of the “Olympic Games effect” (2010, p. 106) to allude to the increased media coverage of women’s sports during the Olympics in 2004. Their findings were, however, nuanced as they noticed that there was still more coverage for men’s sports.

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN’S SOCCER

Studies on the media coverage of women’s soccer have multiplied across the globe in the last decade (e.g., Agergaard, 2019; Da Costa, 2014; Ho, 2014). For instance, a Dutch study spanning 20 years found increased media coverage but men’s soccer was still perceived as the norm (Peeters & Elling, 2015). In England, with their 2015 World Cup third place finish, there was more attention to the team but the Lionesses were often positioned as “outsiders” and men’s soccer viewed as superior (Black & Fielding-Lloyd, 2019). Other findings for the same World Cup were more optimistic by showing that the coverage was largely positive (Petty & Pope, 2019). The authors then argued for a shift toward greater gender equality in how women’s sports are covered in the United Kingdom.

In France, one study focusing on women’s soccer showed how for the 2011 World Cup several sexist discursive strategies were used to portray *Les Bleues*, notably gender marking, infantilization, focus on non-sport-related aspects, and appropriate femininity (Ravel & Gareau, 2016). The situation improved, to some extent, for the 2012 Olympic Games. While gender marking and infantilization remained present, what differed was the focus on sport and players presented as serious athletes. More recently, several books on women’s soccer were published in France in 2019, tapping into the interest generated by an impending World Cup on home soil (e.g., Gaillard, 2019; Plaza, 2019). Krasnoff also seized the opportunity to discuss the legacies of France’s first women’s World Cup at home (2019).

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

We collected data from three different media sources from May 2 to August 7, 2019. The three-month period allowed us to study the coverage before, during, and after the FIFA Women's World Cup 2019. The three-month period began with the announcement of the national team's roster and ended a month after the end of the competition. The first source was the *Fédération Française de Football* (French Football Federation or FFF) which is the national organization responsible for soccer in France. The men's and women's national teams fall under its leadership. We collected data pertaining to the women's team and the World Cup from its website. The second source was *L'Équipe*, a French daily newspaper dedicated to sport, the only of its kind in the country. All the articles related to the World Cup were collected from its digital edition. Finally, we did the same thing for *Foot d'Elles*, a French organization and website explicitly and exclusively devoted to the promotion of women's soccer. For information, the name *Foot d'Elles* is derived from a play on the similar sounding "*foot*" (short for *football*/soccer) and "*fou*" meaning "crazy" in French ("crazy about them" with them being women in this context).

In total, we collected 131 articles for the FFF, 398 for *L'Équipe*, and 73 for *Foot d'Elles*. The data was submitted to a content analysis informed by Bruce's rules of media coverage for sportswomen (2016). Inspired by third-wave feminism and cultural studies, Bruce synthesized the ways in which sportswomen can be represented in the media. In the paper, the author notably identified major differences in the treatment of female athletes/women's sports vs male athletes/men's sports and a few similarities. In the difference department, five older rules (i.e., lower broadcast production values; gender marking; infantilization; non-sport-related aspects; and comparison to men's sport) as well as four persistent rules (i.e., sports-women don't matter; compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity; sexualization; and ambivalence) were highlighted. In contrast, four current rules portrayed female athletes/women's sports in a similar way as male athletes/men's sports: athletes in action; serious athletes; model citizens; and us and them. Finally, Bruce offered two "new rules for new times" (p. 368) which concerned social media as opposed to traditional media: "our voices" and "pretty *and* powerful" (p. 369, emphasis in original).

(DON’T) “DARE TO SHINE”: HOW *NOT* TO GENERATE TOO MUCH INTEREST IN *LES BLEUES* AND THE FIFA WOMEN’S WORLD CUP FRANCE 2019™ BY THE FFF AND *L’ÉQUIPE*

Ranked fourth worldwide before the biggest and most anticipated competition on the international stage, the host nation was allegedly a serious contender for the title. Yet, the FFF, the official voice of France’s national team, and *L’Équipe*, a sport newspaper notably famous for its extensive coverage of men’s soccer, generated a moderate level of enthusiasm around *Les Bleues*, the 2019 World Cup, and women’s soccer in general. With regard to the FFF, 131 articles were posted on its website during the three-month period, virtually all being published during the first two months of the data collection (the coverage stopped once France was eliminated in the quarter-finals). Among the 131 articles, more than half ($n = 73$) were videos with minimal text, almost a third ($n = 45$) were articles of various lengths, and the remaining articles, about 10% ($n = 13$), were articles with pictures and minimal text.

The articles with pictures and minimal text (often one sentence related to each picture) were after games (before and during the World Cup) or after certain practices or events. Despite the (occasionally) relatively high number of photographs per article and the fact that the large majority were action shots, their quality was sometimes debatable. The pictures regularly failed to highlight the players’ strengths or to capture the intensity of the moment. Several photographs were of athletes not executing a technical skill properly, with their eyes closed or in difficulty. Many lacked emotions and, overall, were not what could be expected from professional photographers assigned to an important soccer nation in preparation for or during a major tournament on home soil. One typical instance was an article entitled “*15 ans de France-Brésil en images*” which was a collection of 24 pictures illustrating 15 years of games between France and Brazil. The large majority were action shots (a few were team pictures during the anthems) but among them, only five could be classified as excellent shots, nine being average, and ten not great for different reasons (e.g., lighting, sharpness).

The articles, as mentioned, varied in length: several were brief (i.e., two short paragraphs, one or two pictures), others contained more text and pictures, some even included videos. The longer and more in-depth articles were usually reserved for match recaps and former World Cups’ retrospectives and were therefore fewer in numbers. France played seven games

during the data collection period: two in preparation for the World Cup and five for the actual competition. Each game recap article followed the same format: a detailed description of the game, the goal(s), and the atmosphere in the stadium as well as some relevant stats and a player's quote. Before 2019, France had participated in three other World Cups: 2003, 2011, and 2015. There were three articles dedicated to retrospectives, one for each World Cup, that were published on June 9, 10, and 11 respectively (i.e., between France's first and second games of the 2019 World Cup). The article about the 2003 tournament, for instance, included a few brief paragraphs for a total number of words of 192, six pictures (most with a short description), the results of the three games played, and the roster. Regardless of the type of articles, the written content in itself tended to be a little clinical and devoid of emotions. Even after a win, the excitement was limited and the team's or individual successes weren't celebrated with fervor. Worth noting was also the lack of new written content about the team, for example the recurring mention of "*Il était une fois les Bleues*," a traveling exhibit about *Les Bleues*, with seven articles in total on the topic, the first six practically identical word for word. The lack of new written content on the team was reinforced by a surprising focus on kids' tournaments vaguely related to the World Cup.

The articles that contained a video and minimal text constituted the majority of the articles collected ($n = 73$) and were the most diverse in terms of subjects covered. There were notably numerous videos of practices (e.g., goalkeepers, fitness), of press conferences with different players, of game highlights for non-World Cup games (the other highlights were available on the FIFA YouTube channel), of players' reactions right after each game and of more mundane moments (e.g., traveling, accommodations, jersey preparations). The editing on these videos was usually simple with little music and few words from players or staff. Once again, the end result didn't emphasize the team's or the players' strengths, nor build excitement toward *Les Bleues*, the World Cup, or women's soccer more broadly. Besides the many videos focused on soccer, others ($n = 12$) were designed to introduce or focus on certain players and were probably the most fascinating of all.

Four aspects were particularly striking about these videos: (1) the many non-sport-related questions and limited interest in talking about soccer (despite often being filmed in the middle of the tournament); (2) the fact that not all 23 players were involved; (3) the general lack of enthusiasm about the players, team, and competition; and (4) their very chaotic

nature. By examining what was posted, how, and when, we exposed a very incoherent media strategy that illustrated rather convincingly the FFF's mediocre efforts in promoting its women's national team. There were three self-portraits with Amandine Henry (9 min 36), Amel Majri (6 min 48), and Gaëtane Thiney (7 min 13) posted on May 23, May 27, and June 18 respectively. Players had, for instance, to answer questions about how they started playing soccer and who helped them along the way, and to provide three adjectives to describe themselves. There were two videos entitled "*Le Monde de...*" with Valérie Gauvin ("Valérie Gauvin's World," 6 min 54) and Wendie Renard ("Wendie Renard's World," 7 min 11) posted on May 30 and June 3 respectively. In these videos, examples of questions included: "Do you keep in touch with what happens around the world?", "A [French] athlete that is admired around the world?", "For a tv game show, 'Animals of the World' or 'Capitals of the World?'" Another video was called "*Au jour le jour*" ("From Day to Day") with Viviane Asseyi (6 min 10) and posted on June 11. In this video, Asseyi was asked if she was up-to-date with [popular tv show] *Game of Thrones*, the kind of music that she can listen to on a daily basis, and whether or not she calls her family every day (she *does* call her mother every day). There were also two episodes of a series of videos called "*De drôles de numéros*" ("Funny Numbers"): one with Maéva Cléméron and Pauline Peyraud-Magnin (3 min 40), and one with Sakina Karchaoui and Marion Torrent (6 min 46) posted on June 14 and June 21 respectively. During each episode, the duo discussed the meaning of different numbers for them, for instance their own jersey number for the World Cup. Finally, one article published on June 17 (i.e., hours before France's third game of the tournament) announced the presentation of all 23 players in the form of individual portraits lasting approximately one minute each but only four portraits were part of the article: Solène Durand, Delphine Cascarino, Griedge Mbock, and Wendie Renard (no additional videos were posted on the FFF's website nor on its YouTube channel). In these videos the players talked about the pride of representing France on the international stage and of playing a World Cup at home. Only their jersey number and position on the field were indicated, their club team was not identified.

With regard to *L'Équipe*, the three-month period allowed us to collect 398 articles. The large number accounted for the articles inside the newspaper and also included all front-page headlines and pictures ($n = 23$). The articles' size varied from small or very small (i.e., one short paragraph) with no pictures ($n = 69$) to long up to two pages ($n = 16$). While *L'Équipe*

covered the entire World Cup, there was a strong preference for France with half the articles about *Les Bleues* ($n = 205$), which explained the dramatic decline in numbers after the host was eliminated in the quarter-finals. The findings indeed revealed that the interest in the World Cup was high as long as France was in the tournament, suggesting that it was more about national pride than actual interest in the competition or women's soccer in general. This argument was to be taken literally since from June 7 when France opened the tournament to June 30 (i.e., two days after France's elimination and two days before the first semi-final), there were usually ten articles or more each day, creating an extended flow of information about the World Cup, at least for three weeks. Before and after these dates, there were considerably less articles. It was therefore obvious that not much "hype" was created in the build-up to the World Cup and that the end of the tournament didn't generate as much attention, despite being the culmination of weeks of competition.

Many articles about *Les Bleues* were however exciting to read: it was the World Cup, France was in it and had legitimate chances of winning it all, readers were thus provided with excellent visual and textual content. As a corollary, though, the other national teams were positioned as less important, an element reinforced by the majority of small or very small articles being about them and a similar number of articles for all the other teams combined as for *Les Bleues*. Besides, during the peak of coverage, it was often difficult to find this "hype" or excitement and not only because of the low number of words in small or very small articles. For instance, an obstacle to the creation of an exciting coverage across the board, regardless of the countries involved, was found in the form of several articles with almost exclusively quotes from so-called experts and limited text. In this context, it appeared difficult to really engage with the topic, whether it was the preview for an upcoming game or a match recap. Another obstacle was connected to the lack of in-depth content about players and teams, even in longer articles, sometimes including France's. In general, it appeared that there weren't many details relayed to the reader with regard to the players' club teams and notable achievements, nor was there any thorough knowledge of the teams outside of France. Criticizing on occasion the game in its multiple facets (e.g., level of play, coaching decisions, referees) and, albeit less frequently, using a mocking or condescending tone also contributed to paint the World Cup and women's soccer in a negative light, therefore minimizing the importance of the competition and the sport when played by women. One journalist, for example, didn't

hesitate to communicate his disapproval of several decisions made by Brazil's coach and accused him of being "passive" and "prone to inaction," before concluding that he probably didn't have a clear tactical plan in mind so wondering what he was going to do for their next game seemed pointless.

Two interconnected ways of devaluing the athletes were additionally found. The first one consisted in infantilizing the players (e.g., talking about "Jill Ellis' girls" when referring to the American players coached by Ellis; positioning them as daughters). The second one, slightly more common, entailed the recurrent mention of the players' family in relation to how they started playing soccer or to the support that they received as elite athletes. While obviously linked to the sport, thus relevant to some extent, these examples belittled the athletes by implying that they needed the help of a significant person, almost always a man, a father, a brother or a grandfather, to be interested in soccer and begin playing, as if their passion for soccer required a special justification. The idea of needing the assistance and support of their loved ones also came across in some articles suggesting how their family's presence was crucial to their well-being and overall performance. A two-page article notably focused on four players' parents, in particular Viviane Asseyi's mother, and highlighted the sacrifices made by Sidonie Asseyi over the last two decades for her daughter's career. Moreover, there was no explicit mention in the article of anyone's "mother" or "father." Instead, *L'Équipe* chose to talk about the athletes' "mommy" ("*maman*") or "daddy" ("*papa*"). This was an unusual editorial decision for a sports newspaper targeting an adult viewership that was repeated in other articles as well, with more than 40% of references to parents being made by using either "mommy" or "daddy."

"WE DON'T WANT TO COMPARE BUT..." HOW TO (NOT
SO SUBTLY) PRESENT *LES BLEUES* AND THE WOMEN'S
WORLD CUP AS LESS IMPORTANT THAN *LES BLEUS*
AND THE (MEN'S) WORLD CUP BY THE FFF AND *L'ÉQUIPE*

"We don't want to compare but..." was *not* the translation of something published in one of the articles in *L'Équipe* but it captured the newspaper's ambivalent relationship with women's soccer in the sense that many journalists didn't seem capable of writing about women's soccer without mentioning men's soccer and/or comparing the two, whether explicitly or

implicitly. More precisely, over one fourth of the articles from *L'Équipe* fell in this category with sentences like “Valérie Gauvin has a profile closer to Olivier Giroud—if one has to compare—with her passing game, body type and how she plays near the goal.” Or the tongue-in-cheek: “We’re going to stop comparing Gauvin to Giroud, since she scored in a World Cup. (Giroud actually scored a goal in Brazil, in 2014, and it is in fact not an unflattering comparison.)” Another example revealed how aware and somewhat apologetic the writers were with regard to employing this strategy: “Please forgive us for choosing the easy way out and comparing male players with female players,” before absolving themselves and stating that they were actually only following Phil Neville’s lead in his opinion about the importance of an England-Argentina match-up.

The frequent comparisons with or references to men’s soccer, regularly in the first few sentences of an article, concerned, as mentioned, players, teams, and games but extended to coaches, competitions, tv audiences, crowds, and salaries (while outside the scope of this chapter, we suspect that the reverse, mentioning women’s soccer while talking about men’s soccer, never happens). Comparisons and references served as the journal’s preferred (and easiest) way of explaining women’s soccer to an allegedly unfamiliar audience. This approach made sense in this context but it can be deemed hypocritical considering that *L'Équipe* was largely responsible for the lack of knowledge about women’s soccer in the first place. It is worth noting that it was a comparison that never presented women’s soccer as equal to men’s soccer, rather it was always positioned as inferior and less interesting. The superiority of men’s soccer is insinuated in many articles by the ways in which men’s soccer is described. The lyrical sentence that follows is from an article published before the round of 16 game between France and Brazil. This was how the piece started:

Thirty-three years and two days after the most important France-Brazil in history, an emotional and aesthetic moment in the white light of Guadalajara [1-1, France win 4-3 on penalties], France’s football is eagerly marching into Le Havre in tight rows, where adventure or emptiness awaits, at the end of a Sunday evening accompanied by twelve million viewers.

Les Bleus’ famous quarter-final win at the 1986 World Cup was the initial reference but the subsequent paragraph added another comparison, that time with the 2018 tournament: “We had vowed, however, not to compare anything, to add new chapters without weighing them down

with allusions [to men's football], but forgetting our memories is impossible and it is hard not to go back to last summer."

In an ironic turn of events, *L'Équipe* proposed a two-page article on June 14 that reported on a round-table about gender equity in the coverage of women's soccer and relayed, among others, the words of a female reader, a physical education teacher, and soccer player herself. The woman demanded "less 'beautiful stories' and more tactics." The irony was that an article entitled "*Italie, la bella storia*" (Italian in original) which can be literally translated to "Italy, the beautiful story" was published on June 15. It was indubitably unintentional but it demonstrated the importance the editorial team gave to women's soccer.

Gender marking was another illustration of the hierarchy between women's soccer and men's soccer. The strategy was used by both the FFF and *L'Équipe*. From the FFF's website, it was clear that the men's team was *the* national team. Visually, there was indeed a clear distinction between "*Équipe de France*," the men's team, and "*Équipe de France féminine*," the women's team. This applied to other national teams as well (e.g., U19), with gender markers only present when referring to the women's teams. There were occasional reminders in *L'Équipe* that France was the host of the *Women's World Cup*, that they were talking about *women's* soccer, and not just soccer. "Men's soccer," however, was never written when referring to the version played by men, confirming men's soccer as the standard, therefore rendering the addition superfluous.

Furthermore, on May 30, in a historic diner reuniting, for the first time, France's three star teams, the men's, women's, and men's under 20 teams, the hierarchy was once again clear in the identical articles that were posted in the three teams' sections of the website: one with pictures as well as one with a behind-the-scenes video. In the article comprised of pictures ($n = 24$), the majority were of men and women together ($n = 16$) but only one picture was with a woman as the focal point as opposed to seven with men as either the only individuals in them ($n = 4$) or the focal point ($n = 3$). Once again, the FFF marked the distinction visually by allowing less space to its women's team a week before the start of its own World Cup. In addition, the video in the second article reinforced the difference between the men's and the women's teams by emphasizing the World Cup title won by the men the year before and *Les Bleus'* status as keepers of France's excellence, as illustrated by an off-screen voice that could be heard asking Kylian Mbappé whether or not he had given tips to Amandine Henry in order to win the World Cup, to which Mbappé had seriously

retorted that they didn't need any. It is worth telling that the video "Wendie Renard's World" posted on June 3 brought up the joint event by interrogating Renard about her reactions to "meeting the world champions." As a result, for 30 seconds, the central defender took a background role in her own video, inferring in passing that *Les Bleus* were completely disconnected from and unfamiliar with women's soccer.

*"LE MOMENT DE BRILLER": HOW TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN
AN EXCITING COVERAGE ON LES BLEUES, THE FIFA
WOMEN'S WORLD CUP FRANCE 2019, AND WOMEN'S
SOCCER BY FOOT D'ELLES*

Foot d'Elles whose specialty is women's soccer published 73 articles on the World Cup from May 2 to August 7, all available freely to viewers like the rest of its website's content. The low number, as compared to the FFF and *L'Équipe* for the three-month period, didn't prevent *Foot d'Elles* from providing an expert coverage that was thorough and exciting, thanks to high-quality texts, photographs, and other visual material (e.g., players' summaries, standing tables). The articles notably consisted of individual portraits for each *Bleue*, game previews, game recaps, and experts' analyses. One individual portrait was posted every day from May 6 to May 28, therefore presenting an instalment of "Player of the day" ("*La Bleue du Jour*") for 23 consecutive days to include all 23 players on the roster in the lead-up to the World Cup. Each profile was built identically: a player's biography, career highlights both for France and their club team, and a fun fact or additional key words to describe the team member. Game previews were provided for each group before the start of the World Cup, for each game played by *Les Bleues*, and for the semi-finals and final. These multi-paragraph previews offered a detailed description of the teams' strengths, predictions on the starting XI, players to watch, and the teams' chances of winning. Game recaps followed a similar format: a two-paragraph summary of the match, one paragraph about the player of the match, and, occasionally, a quote from a coach or player. Both previews and recaps contained a lot of information, with superior knowledge of the players and teams involved, in-depth tactical analyses, and key moments dissected in a passionate and dynamic manner. This quote from the France-South Korea preview demonstrated *Foot d'Elles'* expertise and foresight [France won the opening game 4–0]:

The last exhibition games before an important competition are often meaningless, yet it is worth noting that South Korea only lost 0-1 last Friday against Sweden—with a goal at the... 91st minute of play. That is proof enough that the team is not without talent. First and foremost, there is South Korea's star, Ji So-Yun, midfielder for Chelsea. That being said, it seems that the team relies a little too much on her to generate any offense. On the defensive side, Yoon Deok-yeo's squad tries to remain compact but frequently breaks because of their lack of speed and poor reading of the game.

Foot d'Elles' talent was also apparent in how the turning point for the round of 16 game between France and Brazil was described:

Debinha is quicker than all the *Bleues'* defenders and eliminates Bouhaddi at the 105th minute. All of them except for one. Coming out of nowhere, Griedge Mbock is able, with one last effort, to cut the trajectory of the Brazilian forward's kick. The whole stadium is on its feet as the save is almost as important as a goal for France. The actual goal will come soon after.

The coverage of the World Cup spanned all the teams, not just France (even though there was a clear preference for *Les Bleues* as expected from a French website), and was maintained when France was eliminated. As evidence, the average number of words for previews and recaps of games involving France was 743 and the average for previews and recaps of the semi-final, third place, and final games was 859 words. For comparison, the FFF's average length for their game previews and recaps was 738 words (and they only provided video content for the group stage games). *Foot d'Elles'* knowledge and enthusiasm applied to non-French players and teams as illustrated in the following excerpts from different game recaps, starting with Netherlands-Canada in the group stage:

Dekker opens the score, the first goal scored against Canada since the beginning of the competition. Sinclair responds—and it is without a doubt the highlight of the evening, with an entire stadium celebrating the moment, regardless of allegiance—and it is her 182nd goal, now with only three goals remaining to eclipse the record held by Abby Wambach, her American counterpart.

Despite its slightly too optimistic ending, another example was the recap for Spain-United States in the round of 16:

This is how *La Roja*'s journey ends, after a hard-fought battle that managed to destabilize the American sense of calm and shake its seemingly unwavering confidence since the beginning of the competition. We will remember the always flawless Tobin Heath, Jennifer Hermoso's unexpected goal, and the confirmation that Nacher is unreliable when her team is under pressure.

The US team's play was not very convincing and, all of a sudden, the quarter-final game against France in Paris doesn't seem so out of reach.

Finally, the depiction of "Player of the Match" for Netherlands-Japan in the round of 16 was as eloquent as it was precise:

Yes, Lieke Martens scored two goals including a brilliant backheel. Yes, Seri Van Veenendaal saved her team on multiple occasions during the game. Yes, Yui Hasegawa kept Japan's hopes alive by scoring her country's lone goal. But what can be said about Mana Iwabuchi's performance? Her play constantly projected her team forward. The absolute leader of her team, the 26 year-old untiring Japanese striker was in a class of her own on the pitch on Tuesday night.

Each game recap for *Les Bleues* was accompanied by a comprehensive analysis provided by various experts in French women's soccer (e.g., former national team members; D1 coaches). Either in written or audio form, these analyses complemented the opinions circulated by *Foot d'Elles*' writers while adding depth and credibility to the overall coverage. With the "Player of the Day" profiles published prior to the World Cup as well as their extensive game previews and recaps, the coverage around *Les Bleues* was truly exhaustive and engaging for the fans of the host nation. Their few shortcomings were therefore more easily overlooked. The first one was very minor and concerned two "fun facts" in Eugénie Le Sommer's and Wendie Renard's profiles. While *Foot d'Elles* always focused exclusively on soccer, exceptions were made with the mention of Le Sommer's future nuptials with fiancé Florian and Renard's investment in a hotel property.

It is worth adding that these non-sport-related mentions were merely second "fun facts," the first ones being about soccer. Then, the articles sometimes contained typos and some pictures had to be removed due to copyright infringement, which can be attributed to limited resources. The numerous actions shots greatly contributed to the "hype" and having certain articles without any photographs certainly devalued the viewers'

experience. Finally, there were recurring examples of infantilization from one male journalist, the only man on staff. Despite this individual’s annoying tendency to refer to “girls” on a regular basis when talking about players or teams, it was hard not to find his articles excellent and on par with the rest of the website’s content.

LESSONS LEARNED

We examined three different types of media sources for their coverage of the FIFA Women’s World Cup France 2019™ and uncovered contrasting depictions of *Les Bleues*, the World Cup, and women’s soccer more broadly. On the one hand, it seemed that progress still needs to be done since Ravel and Gareau’s study on the 2011 World Cup and 2012 Olympic Games and the authors’ hopes of a less gendered media coverage for *Les Bleues* in the future (2016). As a matter of fact, the FFF and *L’Équipe*, despite their respective missions and the unique occasion, did not fully commit to the “Dare to Shine” slogan of 2019 and repeatedly exemplified Musto, Cooky, and Messner’s concept of “gender-bland sexism” (2017). Their coverage was, at times, worthy of the event but, more often than not, conveyed the impression that “sportswomen don’t matter” to borrow Bruce’s expression (2016, p. 365) or are less deserving of our attention than men’s soccer. What Bruce qualified as “five older rules” (p. 365) to illustrate the different ways in which women’s sports and female athletes are portrayed as opposed to men’s sports and male athletes were all present in the coverage from the FFF and *L’Équipe*: lower broadcast production values; gender marking; infantilization; non-sport-related aspects; and comparisons to men’s sport. Besides, with regard to *L’Équipe*, their interest in the World Cup seemed to be largely conditional to France’s presence and success on the pitch, echoing other findings suggesting that winning is the only way for women’s sports to be covered more equally (Bruce, 2009; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

On the other hand, *Foot d’Elles* demonstrated that it was possible to depict women’s soccer differently by treating the players as “serious athletes” (Bruce, p. 367) and giving them a platform to be acclaimed. With their smaller budget and lower number of articles, they managed to build and maintain a high level of excitement about the World Cup throughout the tournament, even after France was eliminated in the quarter-finals. Their recipe was simple: extensive knowledge about women’s soccer, high-quality content, and passionate writers that don’t adhere to the

dominant idea of a hierarchy between women's soccer and men's soccer. *Foot d'Elles'* last article about the World Cup, which was entitled "It was their moment to shine!" and focused on the tournament's most notable players, can be seen as a metaphor for how the team behind the website seized their chance to celebrate the athletes, the teams, the competition, and the sport. While the FFF and *L'Équipe* passed up a rare opportunity to cover *Les Bleues* and a women's World Cup on home soil with unparalleled fervor, *Foot d'Elles* brilliantly accepted FIFA's challenge for the 2019 World Cup and dared to shine.

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“Utterly Ashamed of Their Behavior”: Examining the Media Coverage of Cameroon Versus England in the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup

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On June 23, 2019, England defeated Cameroon at the Round of 16 knockout stage at the Women’s World Cup in Valenciennes, France, for the right to move on to the quarterfinals. Following several controversial Video Assistant Referee (VAR) decisions that ruled in England’s favor, Cameroon staged several on-field protests. The Cameroon players blatantly challenged the decisions and authority of the referee, Quin Liang, as the team felt they were unfairly treated based on several refereeing

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decisions and VAR reviews that changed the course of the game. The Cameroonian players lost their composure and showed signs of frustration that resulted in unsportsmanlike conduct including spitting on opponents, yelling at the referee, engaging in vehement tackles, and being unwilling to restart the match on two occasions. In the post-match interview, England Coach Phil Neville solely focused on Cameroon and vehemently stated:

I came to this World Cup to play a part in making women's football globally more visible, to put on a show that highlights how women's football is improving. But I sat through 90 minutes today and felt ashamed. I'm completely and utterly ashamed of the opposition and their behavior. I've never seen circumstances like that on a football pitch and I think that kind of behavior is pretty sad. Think of all those young girls and boys watching. (*FIFATV*, June 23, 2019)

Neville's comments staged himself and the Cameroon Women's National Team at the center of a global mass-mediatized spectacle, which led to a plethora of different media frames surrounding the match. We uncover the dominant media frames emerging from international media regarding the dispute and examine differences between coverage from major newspapers and football-specific news websites. In addition, we explore how African feminist thought and intersectionality contextualize the dominant frames across global sports media.

Ranked 49th in FIFA Women's World Ranking (FIFA.com, 2020), Cameroon Women National Football team qualified with a third place finish at the 2018 Africa Women Cup of Nations, punching their ticket to the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France. Cameroon reached the round of 16 for both 2015 and 2019 Women's World Cup, displaying the ambition and passion for women's football, notwithstanding the limited financial opportunities given at grassroots levels and the football league to develop women's game (Beswick, 2020). Most of the Cameroon players at the World Cup are not full-time professional football players (McCauley, 2019; Gibbs, 2019) but have worked as hard as other nations to get to the World Cup without substantial monetary backing (Bonsu, 2019). The most popular sport in Cameroon, football dominates at recreational and national levels due to the continental and international success the country has relished since "the 1990 World Cup [that] brought Cameroon and Africa into the global limelight" (Clarke & Ojo, 2017, p. 192). The

passion, resilience, and fight that the Indomitable Lionesses put up at the round of 16 match reflected what the sport of football means to the people of Cameroon.

The Cameroonians were underdogs in this match and needed to play their best football to advance to the World Cup quarter-final stage. The first injustice against the Cameroon side was poor ball control from defender, Augustine Ejangue, modified to have been a back-pass to the goalkeeper, Annette Ngo. Despite the protests by Augustine to the referee Liang, an indirect free-kick six yards from the goal line was awarded, resulting in the first goal for England. As the game and drama progressed, England's striker, Ellen White, scored the second goal, which was initially disallowed for offside by the assistant referee, but later awarded upon a VAR review. The Cameroonian players reacted frantically to that decision and pleaded for further review to no avail. The Cameroonian players subsequently huddled up, refused to restart the match, and threatened to walk off the pitch.

In the second half, their despondency increased after Liang reviewed VAR and disallowed Ajara Nchout's goal because of a tight offside. The Cameroon players completely lost their composure, came to the touchline, and continued protesting animatedly, temporarily halting play again until they resumed at the request of their manager Alain Djeumfa. In that match, the Cameroon team felt undone by the referees based on several refereeing decisions that went against them, a questionable back-pass, and the two VAR reviews. Mass media play an important role in influencing societal views about female athletes, creating definitive content that outlines the relationship between women, sport, and society (Villalon et al., 2017). Media representation of sport creates narratives of how athletes are supposed to behave and act (Strudler & Schnurer, 2006) on and off the field, creating gender role conflict within the dominant media frames. Media representation of women in sports is shaped by gender appropriateness (Christopherson et al., 2002), where “narrow views” (Martin, 2018) of Black women's imagery, actions, and fortitude are depicted as well as constantly scrutinized.

The Cameroon team protests and actions exist in the framework of increased debate about the perceptions/rhetoric surrounding the relationship between Black female athletes, cultural appropriation, stereotypes, and gender roles expectation. In this chapter, we present a correlational argument which juxtaposes the dominant media framing of the Cameroon women and the England Coach, Neville, to expose racist

and gender prejudiced tropes directed at Black women. (N.B: When referring to under-represented populations, Women of color, Black women, and African women will be used interchangeably.)

BLACK WOMEN'S INTERSECTIONALITY IN SPORTS

Black women in sport face intersecting oppressions/impediments of race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality (Martin, 2018; Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016; Cooky et al., 2010; Bruening et al., 2005; Pelak, 2005) placing them at the margins of society. Black women's oppression is institutionalized, making it harder for women of color to break barriers that prevent them from openly participating in the larger community. Hooks (1981) argues that "Black women were told that we should find our dignity, not in liberation from sexist oppression but in how well we could adjust, adapt, and cope" (p. 7). The influential sport culture dictates how female athletes should act (Villalon et al., 2017) within personal and public spheres, pushing them to conform to the sexist ethos that relinquishes women's resistance and agency. The Cameroon players' protests, voices, and displaced cultural appropriateness caught the attention of mainstream media, that eventually framed their behavior and athletic effort as "unacceptable," "destruction of women's football," "untamed African women," and "unknowledgeable athletes." In defense of the Cameroonians, Ashley (2014) describes the actions of "angry Black women" as survival skills and activism used to navigate the prejudiced socio-economic facets within society. Explaining the quandary of the Cameroonians, Cooky et al. (2013) contend that female athletes are ridiculed, scrutinized, and targeted if they do not conform to dominant views of femininity and socially acceptable female behavior.

The experiences and actions of Cameroon women were met with confrontation and disparaging responses because "separation of race and gender oppression is impossible" (Bruening et al., 2005, p. 83) in social institutions such as sport organizations. Critical of social institutions and the complexity of racism, Maulud (2016) describes how "every Black emotion is interpreted as aggression" (p. 1). Consequently, the Cameroonians' opinions contradicted the football viewpoints and ideologies that are strongly regulated by dominant groups (Villalon et al., 2017). However, the Cameroon women's defiance to conform to football sporting ideals that involved injustices and poor referee decisions is characterized as Black women's culture of resistance (Collins, 2000). The sporting

environment is an ideal platform to dismantle racial, gender, and masculine ideologies (Cooky et al., 2010; Christopherson et al., 2002), enabling African women to use competitive sports for agency and construction of new identities (Pelak, 2005). Arguing and questioning referees, hard tackles, spitting, and protests during the 90 minutes of a match, as displayed by the Cameroonian women, are conventional for any football game. McCauley (2019) further points to sexism surrounding the post-match events, claiming that Cameroon women were accused of “failing to uphold the high ideals of sport [and] to be good role models for little girls” (p. 1). A critical point for consideration is the appalling behavior in men’s football, such as diving, gruesome tackles, racist abuse, players arguing with and shoving opponents, coaches, and referees, is perceived at an individual level and not addressed as a collective fault (Aluko, 2019; Bonsu, 2019; O’Riordan, 2019). Uruguay footballer Luis Suárez was not accused of destroying the men’s game or contextualized as a terrible role model for the next generation despite biting three different opponents (McCauley, 2019) and using racist slurs on the pitch (Reddy, 2014).

Similarly, Martin (2018) describes some male tennis players blatantly destroy equipment, haul verbal assaults to umpires, while having emotional outbursts throughout the match yet when comparable, actions are epitomized in a “frame that is both Black and woman [the actions] are demonized and publicly admonished” (p. 92). Cameroonians were forced to “work within the taken-for-granted assumptions of Black female inferiority” (Collins, 2000, p. 254) and historical stereotypes. It should be noted that Cameroon women’s team deserves to be criticized for its dramatic unsportsmanlike actions and losing all composure during the match, but context is important. These athletes, at the peak of their careers at the World Cup, should be allowed to show emotion, passion, get upset, and ask the tough questions about something they have worked tirelessly to achieve. Recognizing stereotypical labels within sports culture, Carter-Francique and Richardson (2016) state that free speech and activism provide a platform for Black women to breed awareness to issues of sexism and racism. The decisions made by the referee triggered emotions that Ashley (2014) describes as “intense feelings regarding issues of power, authority, and privilege” that threaten the status quo of fairness and equality in sports (p. 29). Addressing gender and racial disparity in sport, Martin (2018) explains how Serena Williams was shown little respect and branded disrespectful on September 8, 2018, at the U.S. Open Tennis

Championship, when she demanded that the umpire explain his actions and decisions against her:

Serena Williams was essentially told what many other athletes of color are increasingly told when they seek to address what they deem evidence of unequal treatment in their sports and in the broader society. Shut Up and Play. (p. 93)

Given the social and economic magnitude of the Women's World Cup, the Cameroon women were expected "to conform to norms and standards dictated to them" (Martin, 2018, p. 93) coupled with biased refereeing. Within this paradigm, it is important to note that prejudgment triggered the feelings of disrespect and lack of acceptance among the Cameroonians, pushing them to portray behaviors underpinned within negative stereotypes. Black women who accept the stereotyped images imposed on them are rewarded, whereas those who challenge and reject dominant ideologies are "placed under surveillance and run the risk of being ostracized" (Collins, 2000, p. 254). Carter-Francique and Richardson (2016) argue that the media creates "negative stereotypes" (16) that are inaccurate and misrepresentative (Bruening, 2005) of Black women's experiences in sport.

BLACK WOMEN, MEDIA, AND SPORT

Centering the broad racial category of Black women inclusive of diverse nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, ability, and class, socially constructed images of Black womanhood differ significantly from White womanhood. Black women's historical and contemporary images characterize them as angry, ratchet, bossy, aggressive, talkative, brazen, ignorant, illogical, and overbearing (Ashley, 2014). The media often adopts an essentialist view in assigning these adjectives to Black women based on the expectation of their behaviors (Weitz & Gordon, 1993). Historically, Black women have been framed within three specific images; mammy, sapphire, and jezebel (West, 1995). *Mammy* justifies the link between Blackness and servitude, tropes not unconnected to ideologies that justified slave labor. *Jezebel* characterizes Black women as morally loose and lustful, while *Sapphire*, a term which meant angry Black women, transitioned into television in 1951. Bush (2008) argues that the tropes sustained during slavery which portray African women as hard workers and tragic victims, to justify their

inferiority and exploitation, have impacted on the post-slavery continuity of stereotyping and suppression of Black women.

Despite the misrepresentation that Black women share as a social class, decentering Global North narratives draw a lens of inquiry to the framing of African women. While research has attempted to bridge the gap in studies on popular images of African-American women, images of African women, on the continent or transnationals, remain largely understudied. The nature and evaluation of images of African-American and African women are closely similar. However, Black African women's images differ in that stereotypes of the Global South assign them multiple framings of prejudice. There is an expectation of cluelessness, simplicity, rawness, and unsophistication, which informs the representational stereotypes. African women are interpreted through a Eurocentric lens which serves to reinforce African inferiority and stereotypes of “beast of burden, oppressed woman, exotic creature, domestic worker” (Balonwu, 2019, para. 8). A case can be made for the arts as creative agents attempt to dispel stereotypical images and reclaim narratives that incorrectly portray them as underprivileged. The international fame of actor Lupita Nyong'o and her insistence of fashion magazines photographing her without smoothening or whitewashing her features was a liberating move for not just Black Africans but also Black Americans and African Caribbean women who share this physiological sameness. However, as much as these creative attempts try to dispel African women's stereotypical images, the media still works to validate these prejudices.

Due to the unique, multifaceted status of African women that is established as racial, gendered, economic, and colonial minorities, they experience barriers within a labyrinth that inhibit global visibility and acknowledgment of talent. With Eurocentric notions that control Black women's aesthetics and exercise (Purkiss, 2017), they also face scrutiny regarding body types, behavior, and appearances that are informed by sexism, (European) racism, and imperialism. Experiences of Black women and women of African descent have habitually been omitted from mainstream knowledge spheres (Collins, 2000). The limited coverage of Black female athletes from media outlets is attributed to what Carter-Francique (2014) describes as “double bind” [Gender and racial status] of Black women (p. 1081). Regardless of the overwhelming success and historical achievements of Black female athletes, they are marginalized in the sports industry through imagery, narratives, and limited representation in sports media controlled by White men (Martin, 2018; Coakley, 2017;

Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016). The media provides cues that influence human decision making, thought process, and interpretation of content by specifically framing the event for the consumer (Coakley, 2017; Cooky et al., 2013). For Robert W. Entman (2004, p. 5), media framing involves “selecting and highlighting subjective aspects of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.” Frames can be viewed as “structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some ideas as out and other as in” (Reese, 2007, p. 150).

When Global North sport stakeholders (athletes, coaches, and media outlets) frame a story with “abstraction from and denial of the racial component” (Entman & Rojecki, 2001, p. 345) national and cultural stereotypes are reinforced triggering discriminatory narratives of a social group (Ličen, 2013). The round of 16 match between Nigeria and Germany provides a case for this. Nigeria’s White European coach was praised continuously for taming and refining the raw skills of the Nigeria women national team because of his “benevolent discipline and knowledge” (Gibbs, 2019, para. 4). Multiple media outlets across Global North also branded the Cameroonians as immature, inexperienced, and unknowledgeable about the game and its rules. The British media highlighted narratives and imagery that aligned with their ideals (Coakley, 2017) by praising the England national team for their poise and hard work while demeaning the Cameroonians.

Black female athletes from the Global South acknowledge the “lack of voice and absence of spoken or written opinions” (Bruening et al., 2005, p. 85) at international sporting events and institutions where the Western media is self-authorized to define the narratives and experiences of athletes without context. Critical of the treatment given to African football players, Gibbs (2019) argues that the British media showed no respect to the Cameroonians as they were not given the “benefit of the doubt, the validity of their emotions, or the privilege of nuance” as a national team, instead were portrayed as angry, childish, and destructive to the women’s game (p. 1).

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

This chapter examines the intersection of race, gender, and nationality as it informs the media representations of Cameroon women’s national football team in British media. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) illuminates the

political and theoretical contours of intersectionality as a theory that draws critical attention to the systematic nature of racial, gendered, and class oppression women face as a social class. As a reactive theory to structural, political, and representational omission and misrepresentation of Black women in social justice movements and institutions, intersectionality seeks to highlight “intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Black women’s experiences cannot be examined within frameworks that present gender as a unitary social power construct because their lives’ complexities reveal a complicated intersection. The theory explicates how social categories within the global construct of Black womanhood must be illuminated, drawing its strength from the “attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, p. 1). This chapter redefines intersectionality hooked on an African feminist culture of reflection. African feminism explains the African women, providing guidelines to understand struggles that transcend gender and are informed by processes of discrimination and exploitation, including structural racism and oppressive globalization (Steady, 2005). African women face significant mountains of sexism, neo-colonialism, racism, colorism, class oppression, political repression, self-repression, cultural and traditional subjugation, and underdevelopment (Ogundipe, 1994).

However, the theorization of African feminism does not imply singularity, but is a resulting term of African feminist transversal politics. Steady’s model allows for a framework that explains how sports media represent Cameroonian football players while still making inferences that can inform explorations of athletes of other nationalities and identities within the continent. African feminism primarily operates within the context and continuity of colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial influences, intersecting history with modernity. Thus, this chapter critically analyzes the media treatment of the Cameroon women’s national football team to illuminate the construction and intersection of sexist prejudice, Eurocentric racism, and cultural imperialism.

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

This frame analysis examines mainstream media coverage following the Cameroon-England 2019 Women’s World Cup match and Phil Neville’s post-match comments as it appeared in international print media (newspapers) and football-specific news (FSN) sites. Beginning with the day of the

match, June 23, 2019, and continuing for a four-day period after the game, (June 27, 2019), this study affords an in-depth view of the mass-mediated spectacle between Phil Neville and the Cameroon players. Adopting a core intersectional lens, we expose the dominant frames emerging from international news media regarding the match and examine media frames' differences.

The mainstream media sources selected for this analysis were found using the website *4 International Media & Newspapers*, an international directory of worldwide newspapers ranked by web popularity from over 200 countries. Based on these rankings, we examined English- and non-English websites (via *Google Translate*). We then searched for some combination of the following keywords: "Cameroon," "Women's World Cup," and "Phil Neville." Third, we collected articles from popular international football-specific news (FSN) sites and added them to our database. This allowed for a different journalism perspective and revealed the dominant newspaper frames. The FSN sites were found using the *Top 100 Football Websites* list from Footballtalk.org. After removing duplicate articles and only counting articles once from their original place of publication, the analysis capped at 139 online articles from 33 countries. Our data is categorized into 104 newspaper articles and 35 FSN sites.

When coding articles, we first noted the major frames that appeared in coverage. Second, we tracked whose quotations were included in the news, and how subjective sourcing and quote selection swayed the article toward certain frames. To begin the analysis, two of the authors gathered and read all the articles to achieve a strong understanding of the details of the story and noted the predominant frames. In the case of disputes between frames, the third author was called to break the tie. After narrowing in on the main narratives, four distinct media frames emerged that were part of two "framing contests" (Gamson, 2004, p. 245).

The first "framing contest" revolved around Neville's post-match comments toward Cameroon being framed predominately as either: a savior for women's football or an overbearing bully who unfairly reprimanded a group of Black women (and the entire Cameroon fan base) in front of a live global audience. This "contest" took the form of two frames: (1) Savior Neville frame and (2) Intolerant Neville frame. The second frame contest concerned the on-field athlete protests being encapsulated as either: (3) *Seething Africans frame* or the (4) Black Female Athlete Activist frame. In step two, we returned to the articles and coded them with these

frames in mind. Specifically, we inquired how the global football media framed “Phil Neville” and “Cameroon” following Neville’s hostile post-match comments.

WHAT WE FOUND

Frame Analysis

Four central frames emerged from the mainstream press and alternative sports-media outlets to characterize the Cameroon players and England manager, Phil Neville. Overall, most football media, journalists, and bloggers subtly sided with Phil Neville’s post-game comments by framing Cameroon as “dangerous,” “shameful,” and “disgraceful.” While Neville was clearly the instigator in this kerfuffle, the media responded not by condemning Neville, rather by utilizing the balance norm to create an adversarial narrative between Neville and the Cameroon players. This, in turn, escalated the feud and overall media coverage. In a World Cup scenario, journalists, beat reporters, and wired news agencies alike pump out game summaries, op-ed articles immediately or soon after each match. The media frenzy surrounding the 2019 Women’s World Cup was like no other in the history of the tournament. FIFA issued around 1300 media credentials to print reporters and photographers, thus doubling the number from Canada in 2015 (*New York Times*, July 4, 2019). This rapid production of articles being published was reflected in our data collection timetable. Nearly all articles involving Neville and Cameroon were published within a four-day window (June 23–June 27, 2019). An article published from *SB Nation* on July 14, 2019 was granted inclusion given the particular focus on Neville and Cameroon.

In general, both international newspaper and FSN articles complied with Neville’s comments by eliciting stereotypical soft racial framing that demonized the Cameroon players.

Two distinct “framing contests” emerged inductively from the data. The first focused on Phil Neville and his comments toward Cameroon following the match. Did the media see Neville as saving the grace of women’s football from a “disrespectful” African team? Or as overstepping his boundary and unjustly, as a privileged White male in a woman’s game, lambasting African female opponents with subtle racism under the world football spotlight? The two frames were the Savior Neville frame and the Intolerant Neville frame. The second “framing contest” revolved around

the question of Cameroon’s character or motive for protesting (as told by the media) and took the form of either the *Seething Africans frame* or the *Black Female Activist frame*. Table 3.1 compares frame frequency for international newspapers and FSN websites. Newspapers intensified Neville’s outcry and serenaded him in savior fashion.

“Seething Africans” Frame

The *Seething Africans frame* was the most popular frame for both newspaper articles and FSN websites. This *frame* was considered in effect when Cameroon was excessively chastised for their “attitudes,” “emotions,” “behavior,” “recklessness,” coach with bad intentions, or complacency concerning VAR rules. For articles prescribed to this frame, the verbatim application of “Africans” was used by journalists to project anger, frustration, and even foolishness on Cameroon’s part for not “understanding” VAR rules. England was never referred to as “Europeans” within any of the observed articles. *Seething Africans* was apparent in 55% of all newspaper articles and 25% across FSN sites. This frame was often paired with the Savior Neville frame as both frames were praising Neville and condemning Cameroon as only 2 of the 57 articles for this frame did not also project the Savior Neville frame.

British newspapers led the overall quantity of articles categorized under this frame (see Table 3.1) comparatively to all other countries. Five notable newspapers—*The Guardian*, *Independent*, *Express*, *The Telegraph*, *The Sun*—each contributed a high volume of *Seething African* articles (four each). *The Sun* was particularly harsh toward Cameroon using the

Table 3.1 2019 WWC
Cameroon vs. England:
Highest article output
by country

Country	Newspaper	FSN sites
England	35	5
USA	11	10
France	7	2
Australia	6	1
Germany	3	3
Ireland	3	3
Canada	6	0
Nigeria	5	0
Iceland	5	0
Cameroon	5	0
Mexico	2	2

front-page headline title of “Camerloons.” Similarly, in Australia, the *Herald Sun* embedded a disparaging tweet from English broadcaster Piers Morgan, stating “Cameroon’s women were a shameful bunch of spitting, elbowing, snarling, sobbing, fouling, ref-striking bad sports. Great to see the women’s game show we ghastly men how it’s done! #WWX2019 #engcam” in an article that was visibly pro-Neville and pro-Cameroon. The *Herald Sun* published a cartoon of Serena Williams as an angry Black woman stomping on her racket, as the umpire addressed Osaka, saying “Can you just let her win?” following the 2018 U.S. Open title match. The cartoon was explicitly racist and sexist, despite counter-claims by the Australian Press council which suggested otherwise. Similar to Williams, Cameroon was subjected to a sports mediasphere where African women’s Black bodies are rendered “primitive” and never given the “respect or dignity” that they deserve (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 53).

Additionally, under this frame, highlighting Cameroon’s frustrations with VAR as a “lack of understanding” became another opportunity for journalists to frame the Cameroon players in a negative light. Both newspaper and FSN sites were prone to criticize Cameroon for not being “more familiar” or “capable” of understanding VAR.

It does nothing to enhance the reputation of women’s football when players do not seem to understand the offside law and how VAR is used. It makes a mockery of the idea this is a serious, professional tournament. (*The Telegraph (England)*, June 23, 2019)

The Cameroon players’ apparent inability or unwillingness to understand or accept the video assistant’s technology-assisted decision was frankly embarrassing. (*DW (Germany)*, June 24, 2019)

Specific word selection of “embarrassing” and “mockery” by media outlets resurface media stereotypes of Black athletes as being intellectually inferior to Whites (Turcott & Boykoff, 2020; Mercurio & Filak, 2010). Since its inception at the 2018 Men’s World Cup in Russia, the use of VAR technology has raised queries from lower-ranked teams, who have questioned the effectiveness of VAR system. Both Morocco and Nigeria had complaints of unfair treatment with VAR at the 2018 Men’s World Cup. For the women’s game, the rapid implementation of the VAR system can be viewed as undermining the efforts of the referees, changing the outcome of numerous matches, and altering the history of teams such as Cameroon “because a blown call in women’s soccer can make or break an

entire national program” (Markgraf, 2015, p. 8). In addition to England, the Seething Africans frame was ubiquitous for both newspaper and FSN sites in Australia, Germany, and the USA.

Savior Neville Frame

Phil Neville’s post-match comments dominated and overshadowed almost all other media narratives surrounding the match. Article narratives for the Savior Neville frame commended Neville’s post-game outlash and used his quotations to further bury the reputation of Cameroon. This frame was observed in 52% of all newspaper articles and 49% of all FSN sites. Journalists applauded Neville by showing support for his claims, such as this Finnish newspaper:

The tantrum of Cameroon’s players rightly made England head coach Phil Neville nervous, one of the world’s most prominent advocates of women’s football. The Cameroonian players made themselves look stupid against England. (Yle, June 24, 2019)

British newspapers were particularly supportive of Neville, more so than other countries covering the match, with 36% of all *Savior Neville* articles coming out of England. Image 3.1 showcases the notable front-page British newspapers and the times to provide some insight into how Cameroon and Neville were being perceived from a news-media perspective. Using Neville’s direct quotations used as headlines such as “Disgraceful,” “Shameful,” “This Wasn’t Football” showcase the Savior Neville frame in action. Image 3.1 also highlights that the photo shown of Neville kneeling beside an injured English player was widely used within articles projecting this frame:

This was some of the worst, most petulant and possibly damaging behavior seen at a World Cup. (*The Telegraph*, June 23, 2019)

(Neville) won numerous plaudits for a candid, yet measured, deconstruction of Cameroon’s appalling behavior. (*The Guardian*, June 26, 2019)

For FSN sites, the Savior Neville frame was apparent in 17 of the 35 (49%) articles collected. Adoration for Neville was more evident under FSN articles with multiple articles mentioning the fans’ approval and Neville’s days as a footballer:



Image 3.1 British print newspaper headlines June 23, 2019. From Top, Left to Right: *Sun Sport*, *Mirror Sport*, *Mail*, *Metro*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*

England fans applauded his (Neville) passionate interview. (Sports Bible England, June 24, 2019)

If the coach who made this statement is also Phil Neville, then you have to pay attention to the whole thing. After all, the coach of the “Lionesses” has completed over 500 Premier League games as an active player. (TZ (Germany), June 27, 2019)

For media outlets in the Global North to overwhelmingly support Neville and place him on a pedestal for “saving women’s football,” after his condemnation toward Cameroon, conveys tropes of the White savior complex. This essence of this complex “portrays other countries, cultures or people as incapable of caring for themselves and therefore in need of saving” (Bandyopadhyay, 2019, p. 329). This is further reinforced by

expectations of brutality and cluelessness of Africans, which is doubly heightened in cases of African women. In the past decade, dominant media narratives of the White savior have saturated blogs, social media, newspapers, and TV (Hughley, 2014). In addition to England, the Savior Neville frame was ubiquitous basically for both newspaper and FSN sites, particularly in Iceland, Australia, New Zealand, France, and Romania.

Black Female Athlete Activist Frame

The *Black Female Athlete Activist* (BFAA) frame epitomized articles that showed empathy to the Cameroon player protests and the injustices facing Black female athletes, such as disparities in budgets, facilities, and access to VAR. Sport is a site where dominant groups exercise their privilege, pushing minority groups such as Black female athletes to be marginalized as their opinions are unheeded (Martin, 2018; Cooky et al., 2013; Carter-Francique, 2014; Bruening et al., 2005). Journalists showed empathy to Cameroon for expressing themselves and standing up to what Djeumfa described as a “miscarriage of justice” (*Independent (England)*, June 24, 2019). Overall, the BFAA frame appeared in only 14% of all newspaper articles and 31% of all FSN sites. Articles under this frame applied more critical thought to counter Neville’s remarks by looking at the historical and contemporary inequalities (i.e., budgets, facilities) that underpin women’s global soccer. Articles that described Cameroon’s actions as “on-field protest” proved to be strong indicators for whether the article adhered to the BFAA frame or not.

While this frame was not highly represented compared to the aforementioned frames, important works emerged in defense of Cameroon, perhaps most importantly from *Journal du Cameroun*. Cameroonian football journalist Francis Ajumane delivered one of the most important contributions, from any country, across this study, as he gave specific rebuttals to Neville’s accusations. The singling out of Neville in such rebuttals was a common distinction of this frame:

Neville has been extremely privileged as a player and manager. He had the best facilities and coaches that you could want as a footballer, and he was handsomely paid while getting to live out his dream. His knowledge or experience of what the Cameroonian players have had to do just to get to this point is certainly nil. (*The Football Faithful (Ireland)*, June 24, 2019)

Phil Neville was disrespectful to a nation and Cameroon people as a whole. Phil Neville does not understand what football means to Cameroonians. Because if he did, he wouldn't have said that. Neville was also dishonest for what he said about Coach Allen Djeumfa. (Journal du Cameroun [Cameroon], June 25, 2019)

As for the on-field protests staged by Cameroon, FSN sites, particularly from the USA, were more willing to show support for Cameroon compared to newspapers.

Women are allowed to get pissed off at times. And if, for God knows what reason, you do feel compelled to criticize women for getting pissed off, it's probably worthwhile to consider *why* they might be so angry. (SB Nation, June 24, 2019)

As notable as this tournament has been for women's football in Africa, it has also shone an ugly spotlight on the racist stereotypes that so many in the media cling to when discussing female football players from African countries, both on the field and off. The commentary on both matches was redolent of exhausting colonialist cliché. (Think Progress, June 24, 2019)

In this light, we felt Cameroon's on-field protests against VAR can be viewed as activism given their “specific actions taken to alter and mitigate the hegemonic nature of structural arrangements, rules/policies/bylaws, and practices through sport organizations (FIFA) that serve to reinforce subordination, marginalization, and exploitation of certain groups” (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 172). Journalists applying critical and historical contexts were extremely rare for nearly all countries, as most media outlets chose to blame Cameroon. Lindsay Gibbs at *Think Progress* (USA) criticized FIFA for using the 2019 Women's World Cup as a test run for the VAR system and new penalty rule that had not been used at any women's match either at club level or national team engagement prior to the World Cup. USA defender Kelley O'Hara was also vocal about the use of VAR at the World Cup:

We're getting introduced to VAR for the first time in the World Cup, which is kind of crazy [...] to be introduced to something brand new on the biggest stage in the biggest games of your life. But the overall sentiment that we were talking about was we're just going to have to be able to deal with it. If something goes wrong, just move on to the next thing. (Bonesteel, 2019, p. 10)

Therefore, the Cameroonian protests on and off the field should be understood within the context of the injustices that African teams and athletes, especially African women teams, have endured/suffered at the World's biggest sporting event. FSN networks across the USA, France, Ireland, and England were much more common to implore the BFAA frames compared to other countries.

Intolerant Neville Frame

Opposing the Savior Neville frame is the Intolerant Neville frame, which represented journalists being critical of Neville by highlighting his bigoted and prejudiced comments toward Cameroon. The naming of Savior Neville frame originated from British FSN sites, *All for XI* and *Give Me Sport*, who both scoffed Neville as “the savior of women’s football” (June 24, 2019). Articles of this category usually came two or three days after the match in the form of football columns or op-eds. This frame appeared in only 2.8% of newspaper articles but in a whopping 26% of FSN site articles. One of the most outspoken critics of Neville was *ESPN FC* broadcaster and former U.S. National Team player, Kate Markgraf. Her comments were printed across newspapers and FSN outlets worldwide. In fact, several articles utilized Neville versus Markgraf adversary narratives to prescribe journalism balance and perspective. Markgraf was quoted in England’s *Daily Express*:

I don’t understand what Phil Neville was doing after the game. This is what every World Cup is like, every team will do whatever they can to beat you. The time wasting, the kicking behind when the referee isn’t looking, the grabbing, the clawing, this is all part of the game, and it doesn’t seem like England were ready to handle it. (June 24, 2019)

Fellow ESPN commentator Steve Nicol agreed with Markgraf, telling Neville to “worry about your own team” (*Daily Express*, June 24, 2019). More critically, several FSN sites were able to reflect on more historical or sociological frameworks in their writing concerning Neville’s comments:

As a white British male, Neville assumes he is in a position to lecture African women on their sporting conduct. “England players would never behave like that,” was his lamentable and patently false claim. (The Africa Report [France], Whitehouse, June 27, 2019)

Neville’s post-match press conference was filled with comments that, quite frankly, were fueled by racial stereotypes and leaves a bitter taste in the mouth of anyone who has any morality on what is right and what is wrong. (Give Me Sport [England], June 25, 2019)

Similar to the *African Female Athlete Activist frame*, the Intolerant Neville frame was seldom utilized by newspaper coverage. Given the low representation of these frames, it is clear that journalists need to better spotlight subtle instances of racism (Neville’s comments) and become more “fully aware of its existence and develop the analytical and interpretive know-how to dissect color blind nonsense” (Bonilla-Silva, 2002, p. 63). This ties to arguments that media and sport journalists often do not share the standpoints of marginalized sport teams, which thus contribute to poor gender/racial sensitivity in media coverage (Dorer et al., 2020). However, FSN sites, particularly those in the USA and England, were more willing to counter Neville’s anti-Cameroon narratives.

No Frame

Articles that did not fit into the four established frames did not label Neville or the Cameroon players one way or another and were categorized as *No frame*. This frame appeared in 14% of newspaper articles and did not appear in any (0%) of the FSN articles.

Source Analysis

In addition to tracking the predominant frames, we also tabulated whose quotes made the news articles. The sources that journalists turn to for quotations reflect a multitude of factors: the topic at hand, the availability of informed individuals, the agency and creativity of journalists, and wider societal power relations. Time-based considerations, such as deadlines, also affect source selection. With the rise of social media, especially Twitter, journalists can draw expeditiously from the feeds of prominent individuals to build a storyline without having to lift a telephone or send an email. In the 139 news items we analyzed, 438 sources were directly quoted, so approximately three per story. The four most quoted sources were Phil Neville (43.3%), Allen Djeumfa (14.5%), England players (12.5%), and Isha Johansen (9.1%).

Neville completely dominated the overall quotations, showcasing a clear case of inequitable sourcing. For instance, *Dagbladet*, a newspaper in Norway, quoted Neville seven times compared to one quote from Djeumfa. Such sourcing was common practice as Djeumfa was the second most quoted source, but he only received approximately one-third of the quotations that Neville received. Newspapers often implored the balance norm where Neville's "ashamed of their behavior" quote was paired with Djeumfa's "miscarriage of justice."

England players who racked up the third most quotations (12.5%) across newspaper and FSN articles. While 12.5% seems like a low percentage for the winning team, Cameroon players were sourced only in 7.1%. Being the winning team in the match, almost all England players agreed with Neville's assessments aside from star player Lucy Bronze. Bronze offered a much more professional and less controversial take on the match compared to Neville and her England teammates:

I think the most important thing is that they didn't (walk off the pitch). They respected the game and their opponent, and they still got on with it. I respect them for that. (Sports Mole [England], June 24, 2019)

Bronze's quote was hardly mentioned across the mediasphere as her views did not fit the major narratives. Why would the media focus on a coach who slanders and shames an opponent rather than the star player who shows respect and empathy? Perhaps this can be explained through journalism "first-order" norms like dramatization and personalization where quotes emphasizing conflict (Neville) become the focus in their coverage.

Isha Johansen, chair of the women's football committee for the African Football Confederation and President of Sierra Leone Football Association, was the fourth most quoted source (9.1%). Johansen's initial response after the match clearly was anti-Cameroon, stating: "not only made women's football in Africa look bad, but African football as a whole" (ESPN, June 24, 2019). Conversely, FIFA Security General and Senegalese native, Fatma Samoura tweeted after the match that Cameroon "inspired many young girls," with "passionate and talented play on the field that made your fans proud and your country is proud of you" (ESPN, June 24, 2019). While Samoura's tweet was only sourced in 4.5% of the articles, she was positioned as an adversary against Johansen in nearly all these articles. Johansen's quick call for FIFA to investigate and suspend Cameroon was sourced two times more than Samoura's with many newspapers such as

Visir (Iceland) solely quoting Johansen in two separate articles, thus commending both *Savior Neville* and *Seething Africans frames*.

Given this was a football match, numerous former World Cup players were utilized as sources in 4.3% of the articles. Quotes from Kate Markgraf (USA), Hope Solo (USA) Rachel Brown-Finnis (England), Sue Smith (England) generally focused on issues of VAR and did not get into attacking Cameroon like Neville and other media pundits. This research provides evidence that suggests Neville’s comments exert a sizable influence on the media—both newspapers and FSN sites—as it provides easy access to quotes that are dramatic, personality-driven, and occasionally placed in balance with other football figures.

LESSONS LEARNED

The England victory and advancement to quarter final of World Cup was a chance to celebrate women’s sport but the England manager Phil Neville and mainstream media opted to shame and disrespect the Cameroon national team (Bonsu, 2019; Gibbs, 2019; McCauley, 2019), echoing narratives of post-colonial cliché and White privilege. The Cameroon women activism/protests on the field were depicted as “shaming football” (*The Guardian* [England]), “damaged the reputation of women’s football” (*The Telegraph*), “childish and unprofessional” (*Visir*), and “behavior that set a poor example to children” (The Africa Report). An antagonistic perspective on the lived experiences and narratives of Black female athletes that Dixon (2009) describes as “demeaning Western attitudes toward Black Africans, particularly women” (para. 4). Sport culture creates a platform that reveals how African women’s Black bodies are rendered “primitive” and never given the “respect or dignity” that they deserve (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 53). The Cameroon women were weighed down by the constraints of football traditions created by the dominant groups (Bruening, 2005) and “silenced by mainstream culture” (Bruening et al., 2005, p. 84). Bonsu (2019) argues that only one side of the story was portrayed, while ignoring the fact that both Black and White girls were watching and using the event as a teachable moment. Opting to patronize the image of African female athletes (Ličen, 2013), the Global North media failed to contextualize the Cameroonians’ display of raw emotions (Bonsu, 2019).

Their fight for fair treatment and equality, exposed a system that has often favored the dominant and powerful groups on and off the football

field. Bruening (2005) calls for a deeper understanding of the power structures that preserve issues of discrimination, racism, and sexism embedded in sport. The events of this one match Cameroon versus England will serve as an opportunity to raise awareness of the unequal global sporting system and create a platform to educate the sporting community about gender, racial, and national discourses embedded in sport.

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“Perhaps Take Back Whether Everyone Likes VAR”: An Analysis of Broadcaster Discourse of 2019 World Cup VAR Reviews

Travis R. Bell

The 2019 World Cup included a new team, and it had arguably the most immediate impact in the tournament’s 28-year history. The video assistant referee (VAR) was a team of three officials assigned to every match to watch the broadcast just like the tens of millions of people around the world. However, unlike the broadcast audience, the VAR impacted all 52 matches without ever touching the ball or even being on the pitch. While watching sports, a desire to question decision-making by referees has a long history from philosophical debates to scientific testing of accuracy (Bordner, 2015, p. 115; Mather & Breivik, 2020, p. 8). Edgar (2018, p. 239) explained, “Sport is, after all, unfair.” That goes for the players as well as all other participants who are heavily scrutinized.

Game officials have historically been a group of individuals who receive significant scrutiny for on-field decisions, interactions with players and

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coaches, and accused at times of wielding too much influence over game outcomes. However, referees are tasked with making split-second decisions to assess whether an infraction occurred. The 2019 World Cup provided a possible exception with the VAR team, who had access to real-time and slow-motion perspectives and an ability to stop any match. Thus, their take on whether a player was offside or a foul occurred inside the penalty box carried real consequences. VAR was a significant discussion point in the 2019 World Cup from the opening match to the championship finale. The technology was used in several FIFA men's tournaments, beginning in 2016 and including the 2018 World Cup, but this was the first time it was used in a women's competition.

An assessment of VAR was offered before the quarterfinal round by Lewis (2019, par. 5) who wrote, "cue minutes of delay and cue questions being asked about the ability of referees at a tournament being described as the most important in the history of the women's game." According to FIFA, 535 incidents across all 52 matches were checked and considered for possible review by a VAR team assigned to each match. Official VAR reviews were used 33 times with 29 calls overturned. Regardless of the decision, technology offered significant assistance to an all-important human element in sport that has historically been a core value in the debate over what impact technology should or should not have (Bordner, 2015, p. 102; Morgan, 2019, par. 1). VAR used the same visual perspective that FOX Sports provided to viewers at home. While VAR decisions were immediately implemented, the outcome and its impact were scrutinized before, during, and after the decision-making process.

This chapter offered a televisual analysis of how the 33 VAR reviews were framed during the live game telecast where the incident was involved. This research examined VAR across three contexts: (1) announcer discourse, (2) time allotted to the review process, and (3) on-screen display. The purpose of this qualitative analysis was to understand the technological impact on the process of sports broadcasting (Altheide & Schneider, 2013) and how announcer discourse framed VAR across time. VAR was proposed as the technological mechanism to assist on-field calls by referees in real-time. Bordner (2015, p. 102) argued that "technology ought to be used *when it would do better* than unaided human perception." The findings are presented for how broadcasters grappled with Bordner's philosophical statement as they interpreted VAR decisions and the televisual discourse used to present the impact of those decisions.

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

Framing and Discourse

Framing is a useful theoretical concept in many forms of communication analysis because it is often abstract and unfolding (Gamson et al., 1992, p. 385). Framing analysis creates a space to locate and index meaning from any communicative message (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Framing theory frequently applies to how media report on topics of public interest, and within that reporting, the inclusion, emphasis, and omission of storylines and characters help position salient features within the frames presented to an audience (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing analysis is arguably more helpful than ever before because of the nearly ubiquitous forms of communication that are available to produce and consume information (Bell et al., 2019, p. 13).

This ever-present availability of information offers space for issues to arise for analysis. All issues have a relevant discourse that helps construct meaning (Gamson, 1988, p. 165). Issues arise across varying cultures of significance, for example, politics, popular culture, and sport. Multiple communication processes create discourses that construct frames and produce a narrative, or discourse of understanding, for any issue. Thus, a discourse of shared beliefs and common sense can take shape, often influenced by media and public opinion (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 57). Discourses in sport can range from nation to gender to technology and have spokespeople to serve as a guiding force.

The conceptual approach to framing also applies to the interaction between performative characters, for example, on-stage in a theater or on-field in a competitive athletic arena (Goffman, 1956, pp. 107–108). Goffman (1956, pp. 109–111) offers that audiences and performers engage in two forms of discourse during a performance: praise and derogation. Praise is often visibly or audibly evident. Goffman suggests that derogation often occurs not in face-to-face interaction but behind one’s back. Advances in technology increase the range of audiences, especially through live broadcast of sporting events. This addition provides new layers of discourse to interpret between audience and performer that once was relegated to in-stadium viewers. The disruptions that these discourses produce within those performative spaces, and the influence on those characters, are of interest to this chapter, especially when considering

broadcast announcers as an audience of interrogation and referees as performers (Goldlust, 1987, p. 84).

Televisual Alteration of Sport

Before outlining the relationship between sport and television, it is necessary to explain the television process that forms a distinct relationship between production and consumption. This discursive process produces what Hall (1973, p. 2) calls a “televisual language” that regularly centers on historical events. Hall discusses these events within the context of a newscast and outlines the role of television to translate an event from its original raw form that produces meaning by elevating the event to a story that eventually becomes a communicative event. He further explains that the televisual process encapsulates two discourses: aural and visual.

With the rise of satellite and cable technologies, the televisual language of news media elevating stories to communicative events further fragments to broadcast networks guiding the process through real-time production and consumption (Gamson et al., 1992, p. 386). Beyond spontaneous events that are deemed as newsworthy, broadcast networks play a significant role in constructing media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1). Thus, to be televised, an event often takes shape as a symbolic and privileged position of significance to a network and its audience (Hall, 1973). Broadcast networks were quick to situate sport as a hallmark worthy of television production (Goldlust, 1987, p. 86) and elevate the status of sport to a ritualized and privileged spectacle of consumption (Jhally, 1984, p. 53; Sullivan, 2006, p. 131).

At this point, assemblage becomes a critical characteristic with any combination of audio and visual information offered to viewers (Whannel, 1992, p. 104). Building on the use of individual “raw material” (Goldlust, 1987, p. 106) in production, Whannel (1992, p. 104) explains that examination of how these production elements are combined “demonstrates the privileged place occupied by presentation and the space constructed in the text for the setting up and framing of sport.” This presentation of varying sensory details constructs a media space that is unique to live sport. However, it must be noted, the live broadcast impacts the mediatization of sport, especially in how media produce sporting events and the volume of attention that follows (Mauro, 2020, p. 3).

Altheide and Snow (1978, p. 190) explain that sport is a professional business with a set of rules to govern play, but “when television enters the

relationship, the character of the game changes” through a multitude of influences, with rule changes and the rise of sports announcers as two central characteristics. Whannel (2005, p. 419) further outlines that broadcast technology allows for replication and alteration that negatively impacts the authenticity or “‘truth’ of image.” His explanation is about adding color to an original black-and-white transmission of England’s 1966 World Cup victory. However, this concept aligns well with the impact of advanced technologies in live sport broadcasting. The creation of instant replay, slow-motion playback, and split-screen possibilities all work to alter the reality of what the viewer sees on a television, computer, or mobile device (Sullivan, 2006, p. 138). Additionally, on-air commentators use these technologies to further convey the story that advances the sporting competition into a communicative event (Barnfield, 2013, p. 331; Sullivan, 2006, p. 139).

Soccer and Video Technology

Greater televisual emphasis shifted to mega-sporting events as sport became ubiquitous as a visual, somewhat benign daily media event (Billings & Wenner, 2017, p. 3; Whannel, 2009, p. 10). The World Cup is such an event, with its global reach and every four-year cycle. Whereas productions of World Cup tournaments were once the product of an individual host nation, the World Cup now achieves a standard to reach a global audience with the same look and feel, regardless of where or how they watch the match. Benítez (2020, p. 42) notes that cultural differences have existed in how different countries produce broadcasts of soccer matches (e.g., La Liga, Premier League), but he further indicates that “TV sports broadcasting is, first, a show and then sport.”

Part of that televised show is the use of new technologies to engage an audience and attempt to achieve accurate and fair officiating, or more accurately, avoid “blown calls” from impacting game outcomes (Bordner, 2015, p. 108; Ugondo & Tsokwa, 2019, p. 1059). With soccer’s limited scoring compared to most team sports, FIFA historically tinkers with new technologies, including microchipping balls (Leveaux, 2010, p. 6) and goal-line technology (Spagnolo et al., 2014, p. 69), with the goal to improve a status quo of officiating errors (Bordner, 2015, p. 111). Video replay using these technologies provides a holistic stoppage of play to determine accuracy of refereeing decisions (Mather & Breivik, 2020, p. 2). These new devices impact the communicative processes for referees

and control granted to them within the “laws of the game” (Bacigalupe, 2020, p. 186).

The next step in FIFA’s relationship between broadcasting and soccer rules is the introduction of VAR, which was first used in the 2016 Club World Cup semifinal matches (Mather & Breivik, 2020, p. 2). Other international soccer federations use of VAR indicates a global push for further implementation. An experimental study of referees by Mather and Breivik (2020, p. 8) finds that replay speed influences decision-making but that the order of video offered to referees (real-time speed vs. slow-motion) had minimal influence. The use of VAR in the 2018 World Cup suggests a significant leap by FIFA as “an opportune moment to apply current technology in order to reach the highest standards of decision-making by referees” (Bacigalupe, 2020, p. 183). In the 2018 World Cup, VAR impacted timeliness of refereeing decisions and the autonomy given to the match referee (Zhang & Liu, 2020). This philosophical debate about human-error versus a desire for correct and fair decisions to maintain the integrity of sport through technological innovation has been central to the sporting culture of referees and a reflection of human imperfections (Bordner, 2015, p. 110; Edgar, 2018, p. 239).

In the 2019 World Cup, a few alterations to the VAR protocol suggest a need to simplify expectations for referees, fans, and announcers within the media event of each game broadcast. Only decisive plays perceived to impact the outcome of the game warrant a VAR review across four protocols: goal/no goal; penalty/no penalty; direct red card; and mistaken identity of a player removed from a contest for a red card (Bacigalupe, 2020). Reliance on the type of precise technology fostered by FIFA aligns with why Postman (1992, p. 158) suggests a use of technology could help resolve a “dilemma of subjectivity.” However, debates must weigh the possible scrutiny of the referee and technology against a value of accurate and fair officiating decisions.

The current research cannot answer the psychological impact on referees or the technical use of VAR. However, it can examine the communicative scrutiny of VAR through its televisual presentation and the discourses in the broadcasts. Thus, the chapter asks two research questions.

- RQ1: How do on-air commentators frame VAR reviews in the 2019 World Cup?
- RQ2: How does the televisual process frame performative characters in the VAR process?

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

A qualitative approach considering Hall’s (1973) televisual language was used to examine VAR reviews in two parts. First, a textual analysis provided the aural examination of broadcaster discourse that helped to understand how the announcers discursively framed the VAR reviews. Second, a visual analysis outlined how the VAR review process was framed across time and space for a broadcast audience. While each of these analyses vary in what they examined, they aided to holistically understand how VAR reviews were produced and consumed.

Data Collection

All 52 matches from the 2019 World Cup were recorded on YouTube TV. Each broadcast was saved as a separate video file after it finished. Since VAR was not a scheduled event within any of the broadcasts, specific VAR data collection for this chapter occurred after the World Cup finished. FIFA produced a summary document of refereeing statistics from the 2019 World Cup (“Refereeing at” 2019). This document was used to identify the 33 VAR reviews included for analysis. Within that report, FIFA outlined that 535 incidents were checked by VAR across the 52 matches. However, these incidents were rarely identifiable during a broadcast, and thus, provided minimal, if any, discussion or visual alteration to the broadcast presentation. Therefore, to maintain consistency of the data, only the 33 incidents that resulted in official VAR reviews were included. The 33 VAR reviews were highlighted within the FIFA summary report. Details included which teams were playing, the minute when the review occurred within the match, the on-field decision (goal, penalty, red card), the type of review (on-field review or only VAR), and the final decision (change or confirm).

The unit of analysis was each VAR review. This was defined from when the on-field infraction occurred until the broadcast announcers and the visual broadcast finished its discussion and presentation of the VAR decision and outcome. However, when a play-on decision occurred during a match, and it was later identified by VAR for review, the VAR review examined in this research started from the infraction in question. The duration of each unit varied. Informed by the FIFA report, each VAR review was identified within the recorded broadcast. The author watched each broadcast to ensure that all televisual elements specific to each review

were included in the data collection. A separate video file was then created for each VAR review.

Data Analysis

The VAR reviews were transcribed in a multi-step process. First, Transcriptive software was used to generate an initial transcription. Transcriptive is an artificial-intelligence, subscription-based software interfaced with the Adobe Premiere editing software used to create the separate video files. The author then watched each VAR review and compared it to the initial transcription for accuracy. Most transcription errors were impacted by crowd noise within the broadcast production or were to correct names of players, referees, coaches, and stadium venues that might be unfamiliar to the AI interface. In total, 26 single-spaced pages of transcription were produced from the 33 VAR reviews.

The author then did a close reading of all the transcripts to explore how broadcaster discourse should be considered for analysis. Following this close reading, it was determined that only comments related to the VAR review were included for textual analysis. Broadcaster discourse directly related to the VAR review included three primary categories: (a) positive or negative comments about the review process, the referee or VAR team, or the decision; (b) how the VAR process revealed unseen opportunities, and (c) impact on the game, referee, or sport. Therefore, when broadcasters discussed the game action or what they were seeing in replays outside the context of VAR, those comments were excluded from this analysis. This maintained a clear focus on the VAR review process.

The visual analysis consisted of two parts to explore how time and space were constructed on-screen for the VAR review process. First, the time for each VAR review was considered across three elements: (1) time from infraction to review, (2) time devoted to the referee, and (3) total time from infraction to when the VAR presentation concluded. FIFA offered in its summary report that 1 minute, 33 seconds was the average time a match was delayed during an official VAR review. The time analyzed in this chapter provided context to *how time was devoted* to the VAR process. Second, the visual presentation of the VAR process was analyzed for who and what were offered on-screen, and how this process introduced performative characters involved in the review process. The findings are presented through three themes that were “realized” as emergent discourses within the televisual analysis.

WHAT WE FOUND

“Clear and Obvious”

It must be reminded that the VAR team was a collection of three people in a remote broadcast location that would review the live video feed of the camera angles available from the FOX Sports broadcast. They had four options of plays to review: goal/no goal, penalty/no penalty, red cards, and missed identity for a red card. The first theme that emerged in the VAR review process was a recommendation for a “clear and obvious” review identified by the VAR team to assess whether an on-field decision should be re-evaluated. The VAR would communicate to the on-field referee through their headset to stop play. This was evident on-screen as referees would often hold a finger to their ear as a visible cue that the VAR was offering clarification. Following a presumed discussion of what the VAR interpreted as a possible error, one announcer explained, “the referee can go over and take a look herself or she can take the information from the VAR. She makes the final call though.” If a referee elected to conduct her own review, she had sideline access to multiple camera angles provided by the VAR. It could be interpreted that the VAR process accomplished its intended goal since 29 of 33 VAR official review decisions were changed, with a goal to “get it right.” However, when considering the broadcaster discourse related to VAR, a consensus was not as evident.

The consistent verbal crutch for broadcast announcers was that reviews should consider “clear and obvious” errors in an on-field decision. However, announcers generally failed to educate the audience on what that meant, especially which decisions could be reviewed and the criteria that defined the review process. Only once, for example, announcer Derek Rae described “one of the new tweaks” since the 2018 World Cup was that goalkeepers would receive a yellow card if they failed to keep one foot on the goal line during a penalty kick. This alteration to the “laws of the game” was glossed over despite the impact it had throughout the tournament as a permanent alteration for how to visually judge an important characteristic of soccer (Altheide & Snow, 1978, p. 190). FIFA announced this new rule would not apply if a game went to a shootout starting in the round of 16. This was briefly mentioned as an “unprecedented move” midway through the tournament without explanation as to why or how that significant decision could be applied to some but not this particular “clear and obvious” error across all matches. Otherwise, announcers

focused on basic analysis that VAR asked for a review and on several occasions did not seem to understand how rules were interpreted and applied.

While the announcing teams provided minimal clarity, a unique perspective was constructed by rules analyst Christina Unkel. She was not assigned specifically to any of the five announcer teams, but she joined each broadcast when a VAR review was considered, with a few exceptions primarily for the “tweaked” goalkeeper penalty. Unkel was a former professional player and a certified referee who had served as VAR for a few Major League Soccer games in 2017. She was the broadcast voice who shepherded the “clear and obvious” dialogue and provided specific evidence from the laws of the game on how to interpret the rulings. For example, Unkel said, “First instinct, I had no penalty... Probably the same position as the referee. But after looking at the review, none of the ball was touched. It was all foot... the VAR will be showing her that, will be showing her the point of contact and play.” Her interpretations were detailed and situated her as the VAR expert, largely because she had access to the reviewed camera angles, and her suggested outcomes of VAR reviews were nearly spot-on but often clashed with the in-game analysts. Overall, Unkel provided a bridge across all game broadcasts that offered “teachable” moments to the audience and the announcers.

While Unkel added stability in analysis, the announcer teams had one primary issue related to “clear and obvious” reviews: time. On average, it took 1 minute, 21 seconds from the time an infraction occurred until the referee either decided to conduct an official on-field review or agreed with the VAR recommendation. That time was filled with confusion from the announcers wondering why there was a delay, but they did recognize these calls as “critical” in “huge” matches and how a decision “could be the game.” These descriptions elevated the significance of VAR and was used to fill time, including a staggering average of 3 minutes, 50 seconds devoted to discourse surrounding each VAR discussion from infraction to moving the broadcast to another topic or resumption of play. Announcer JP Dellecamera said, “this is one of my pet peeves with VAR. It is not clear and obvious if you have to take a look at it this long. It’s not.” Thus, time became a significant marker for whether VAR could be “clear and obvious” without too closely scrutinizing the “truth” (Whannel, 2005, p. 419) of a real-time decision in slow-motion and from multiple angles.

VAR was used in previous FIFA events, including the 2018 World Cup, but this was recognized only twice. First, VAR was described in the opening match as “fantastic on the men’s side.” Then in the round of 16, the

length for a VAR review was offered as comparison: “I don’t remember lengthy ones like this at the men’s World Cup in Russia.” With minimal reference to previous use of VAR, the announcers framed VAR as unique for the 2019 World Cup through their collective omission of reference to the past (Entman, 1993, p. 52). While this helps contextualize its significant inaugural use to elevate the women’s event, the announcers glossed over the impact that VAR could have based on prior knowledge.

“Stakes Are Higher”

Beyond the verbal discourse of reviews, which were crucial in assigning significance to VAR moments, the televisual production process of VAR introduced the on-field performers who were central characters directly involved and embedded in those VAR moments (Goffman, 1956, p. 60). Before explaining how these individuals were thrust into this performative space, it is helpful to outline the visual presentation of a VAR review. One of two visual clues indicated if a VAR review process was beginning. First, the on-field referee provided visual verification when it was evident that there was stoppage in play. Wearing a headset to communicate with the VAR, she would either point to the headset or hold a finger to her ear to presumably listen closely to the VAR. This signaled to players on the field, announcers, and the audience that a review was underway and positioned her as the frontstage director of the VAR review process (Goffman, 1956, p. 60). Second, a textual clue was a small, rectangular box that appeared in the lower left corner of the screen. Outlined in white, it simply said “VAR” and was followed by two signifiers. The first signifier identified the stage of the VAR process as a “check” that shifted to “review” when further consideration was needed. In the 2019 World Cup, only one of the 33 VAR reviews was used for a red card. Therefore, the second signifier(s) to appear was “goal,” “possible penalty,” or “penalty.”

In FIFA’s summary of refereeing in France, they separated VAR reviews into “on-field review” (OFR) and “only VAR” (OVAR). There were 20 OFRs and 9 OVARs, which highlighted different on-screen characters and will be discussed. OFRs produced a heightened level of drama in both the amount of time allotted to the process and production value. The time between infraction and review was 14 seconds longer for OFRs, and the total time OFRs were discussed by announcers was 43 seconds longer than OVARs. Thus, the discursive time alone heightened the moment. However, it was the visual production that elevated the OFRs to greater

televisual prominence because of all the characters involved, and it generated a microgeography of verbal and visual discourses within the broadcast (Barnfield, 2013, p. 331).

OFRs offered the only time in the 2019 World Cup that the VAR team appeared on-screen. After hearing from the VAR off-screen, the on-field referee indicated she would take a closer “look at it” by tracing a fictional box in the air while standing on the pitch. This signaled an official OFR, and the FOX broadcast immediately split into an altered perspective of three screens (Sullivan, 2006, p. 138) as the referee jogged to the sideline where the VAR would provide video replays. The traditional broadcast perspective was positioned to the left side of the screen, and it occupied approximately 51% of the on-screen display and remained as the dominant image. It was filled with slow-motion replays from different angles or showed the on-field delay of players standing around and cutaways to the crowd. The referee was positioned in a box toward the upper right side of the screen. This screen could be labeled “ref cam” as it never changed and reinforced her role as director of the VAR review process. This screen focused solely on the referee regardless of whether she was on the field or sideline. This display accounted for nearly 10% of the screen. The VAR team was located directly below the referee on-screen. Viewed from a fixed camera angle that showed multiple people sitting in a production control room, this screen elevated the VAR team from backstage to front-stage performers (Goffman, 1956, p. 72) with multiple video monitors and complex technical equipment used in the review process. The box that outlined this visual perspective on the FOX broadcast was the same size as the one for the referee. However, the actual display of the VAR team was smaller than the text “FIFA VAR ROOM” occupied to bottom of the box, which visually constructed the VAR team as secondary to the referee.

Announcers discursively framed VAR as a thing (e.g., “VAR, you’re up,” “VAR to take a look”) when a decision was in “check” but during a formal review, announcers referenced the visual display of the review process that showed the VAR team (e.g., “see the crew in the VAR room,” “at the VAR control center”). Interestingly, the VAR team only appeared on-screen until the referee finished viewing all necessary camera angles. At that point, FOX returned to a single-camera perspective to announce the official decision. However, after the ruling, announcers assessed VAR as a primary performer in the decision-making process, and the VAR team received the bulk of positive and negative comments in this study. Positive praise included “VAR has been a big star in this tournament already” and

“VAR already making a difference.” Examples of derogation included “if it’s not something we can look in an instant, make a decision instantaneously, (reviews) should not be sent down” and “perhaps take back whether everyone likes VAR.” Thus, the judgment of VAR was not relegated to backstage interrogation, as announcers placed the VAR team central to how they offered the referee a “vocabulary of signs” (Goffman, 1956, p. 113) from the control room to use in the VAR review process despite their location away from the field.

What was minimally offered in the televisual process of the VAR review was the relationship between the on-field referee and the actual VAR, who is the lead member of the three-person VAR team. As Bacigalupe (2020, p. 187) explained, this can be a “discretionary way of working as a team” if the VAR and the on-field referee have different interpretations of the review protocol or varying grades as match officials. Lost in the announcer discourse was the identity of the VAR, as only two were named. Those introductions connected the VAR with the referee (“Bibiana Steinhaus with a finger up by her ear, and again Felix Zwayer, fellow German, is at the VAR control center”) or defined roles in this working relationship (“Kate Jacewicz again, the final decision is hers, only taking the recommendation from the VAR Jose-Maria Sanchez”). Otherwise, the VAR remained an anonymous, yet vital part of the review process.

Announcer Lisa Byington summed it best, “Stakes are higher for these players, for these managers. Stakes are higher for these head referees as well.” By offering minimal connection to an ambiguously constructed VAR, the televisual process provided a primarily unseen and unnamed VAR perspective that merely produced video replays. This failed to connect an important working relationship between the referee and the VAR as “a system of control communication” (Goffman, 1956, p. 114). For example, the nine OVAR decisions were dictated by the VAR but glossed over for their role in the check and review decision as the VAR team never appeared on-screen. Thus, the overall televisual production paired the referee with the VAR team in the review process, but the outcome impacted only those on the pitch and maintained the referee’s authority.

“VAR Should Not Be Used to Re-referee the Game”

The final element of discourse surrounding VAR considered the impact of technology on the beautiful game where a collective tension hinged on “a decision knowing that millions of people are hanging on their every

gesture, comment, or indication” (Bacigalupe, 2020, p. 201). The FIFA summary of refereeing balanced “time vs accuracy” in its report that heralded an increase of more than 5% in accurate decisions (93.08% without VAR, 98.5% with VAR) for the 535 checked incidents. This seemed to support Bordner (2015, p. 102) who argued for use of technology if it *ought to be better* than human decision-making alone. For decisions that warranted closer review, this chapter grappled with whether announcers discussed VAR as better to “fix these game critical decisions” and overrule 29 of 33 decisions across 52 matches. In the 2019 World Cup, three groups of people emerged as impacted by these tense moments: defenders, goalkeepers, and referees. Announcer discourse largely defended these unmarked recipients of increased scrutiny and questioned the betterment of the game with VAR.

There were two overriding examples of how technology and multiple camera angles available in slow-motion were debated by announcers regarding how VAR impacted the entire sport and whether it could solve a subjectivity dilemma (Postman, 1992, p. 158). First, it must be noted that only one new technology was used in making VAR decisions. Hawkeye technology generated gridlines on-screen to examine if a player was offside during a goal-scoring play. Second, multiple camera angles were used to assess handballs and decisions involving goalkeepers for interference or whether they maintained one foot on the goal line during penalty kicks. While afforded four categories for review, the technological part of VAR was applied and discussed almost exclusively for offside/goal disparity and penalty kick retakes, which highlighted reliance on visual technology to “determine” whether those on-screen (not on-field) boundaries were crossed. Unkel raised a pointed thought about the purpose of VAR after a one of the four confirmed on-field reviews: “I do think this is a right call. *VAR should not be used to re-referee the game.* It should be used to correct clear and obvious errors.”

This ethical dilemma about getting it right versus relying on production of the “unseen” that was not noticeable during the real-time flow of the game impacted how the game was played and officiated. Announcers took issues with many of these technological interruptions and occasionally presented their own philosophical debates of whether this visual assemblage of replays (Whannel, 1992, p. 104) was good or bad for soccer and how it artificially impacted players on the field. Regarding the Hawkeye technology, Unkel was the only announcer to name the technology and explain its purpose, “So with VAR, the ability to draw those lines with

Hawkeye, you’re able to look at the actual position, trace those lines to see if she’s offside.” How those lines were applied to on-field decisions was often discredited by the analysts with sarcastic refrains regarding accuracy (e.g., “I don’t know if I believe those gridlines”) and validity (e.g., “is it her right toe?” “I think there is a wrinkle on her right elbow that was in an offside position”). This announcer discourse could be supported by Mather and Breivik (2020, p. 8) who identified that replay speed influenced referee decision-making, and thus a freeze frame of one moment was open for varying influence in interpretations.

While many penalties were reviewed and generally accepted by the announcers, handball was the contentious decision. The rationale from announcers was that as defenders move their bodies to maintain position that their hands are naturally moving. Thus, VAR minimized defensive performance and opportunity in a form of slow-motion, frontstage derogation. Analyst Aly Wagner said, “I think as a player, it’s too reactionary, and it’s too quick. You let the judge on the field see it in real time. You don’t let anybody go back and try to dissect it.” Analyst Danielle Slaton explained that from a player’s perspective, “It’s frustrating. How do you expect me to defend?” Analysts offered universal support for defenders that VAR as a form of technological determinism was wrong. However, it is important to identify that the five broadcast analysts included three defenders and two midfielders, so there could be a sense of discursively fighting for on-field justice for their position.

Goalkeepers and referees received support for challenges of the “unseen” regarding the new goal-line rule for penalty kicks and how or why a referee might have missed a call. Yet, neither was offered the same level of support as defenders regarding a need to adhere to the laws of the game. It was regularly reminded that “teams were well briefed about, not just VAR, but the tweaks to the laws prior to the tournament.” Therefore, players debating the on-field merit of these new rules and how they were applied could not be justified because “like it or not” these new and reviewable rules would remain. As a certified referee, Unkel offered more concrete insight into how VAR offered “unseen” camera angles behind the goal where the referee “would obviously not be standing” but also that referees were positioned as “trying to be proactive” in explaining and applying VAR. Thus, the referee juggled between serving as an interpretivist and punitive decision-maker when VAR was utilized.

The impact on players and the sport was described in great detail by the announcers following VAR decisions for the “roller coaster of emotions

for both these teams, for these players.” These emotions were fueled by 29 overturned on-field decisions that without VAR would have been discursively dissected and historically debated but never changed in previous World Cups. In 2019, “although the calls are correct, (the players) don’t feel like that on the field,” and that sentiment reinforced the unfair nature of sport (Edgar, 2018, p. 239). So, the question remained, was VAR “better than the status quo” (Bordner, 2015, p. 111) versus the disruption seen and heard on FOX during the 2019 World Cup? For the players negatively impacted by VAR reviews, the answer would be no because it produced a “heartbreaking sequence for South Africa to endure,” and in another instance, the “Nigerian players... are absolutely incandescent.” For the announcers who interpreted these visual displays of disruption, one could “understand the emotion of Cameroon, but I think you also may be able to see what we have seen to have the precision of VAR at our disposal.” VAR became a taken-for-granted, yet “unseen” assumption within the framing of VAR that it was there to perform a duty (Gamson et al., 1992). Once that duty was established, the emergent subtexts were debated whether it improved the status quo or altered the course of refereeing in the future.

LESSONS LEARNED

Across the month-long 2019 World Cup, each VAR decision was weighed independently based on its own merit and impact on a given outcome. However, as more reviews were completed, a body of knowledge formed regarding how rules were interpreted, decisions were made, and central characters were constructed in the review process. VAR started as a raw material (Goldlust, 1987) available for use in officiating the 2019 World Cup, so it had to take shape within the individual broadcast and the overall media event to earn meaning (Hall, 1973, p. 2). VAR was constructed through all the televisual language of the broadcast, including announcer discourse and visual framing that made it “subject to all the complex formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies” (Hall, 1973, p. 2). Thus, VAR transformed into a “communicative event” and a significant language for use within the World Cup media event.

This televisual analysis leaned on framing theory to contextualize broadcaster discourse and identified salient themes that emerged surrounding the impact of VAR reviews in the 2019 World Cup. This approach also helped construct meaning for the visual presentation of the

soccer stage (both on-field and on-screen) during the VAR review process. This analysis revealed “unseen” elements identified through a discourse of technology that emerged through the televisual presentation of sport. This discourse was problematized by the broadcast announcers for its lasting impact on the game but also positioned as a new frontier that must be improved for use in future events.

It must be reminded that VAR was not a nebulous video technology that determined whether a call was right or wrong. Instead, VAR was a technological aid intended to avoid “blown calls” in a televisual, mega-sporting event. The VAR team of people still relied on human decision-making assisted by advanced technology and camera angles not previously provided with the intent to improve the status quo of officiating. Numerically it did that. For the audience and the broadcast teams calling the games, play-by-play announcer Jenn Hildreth explained, “sometimes it’s not even necessarily what we thought they’d be looking at.” Thus, this televisual analysis was outlined in a way to understand how VAR as a new technology was interpreted and applied to new laws of the game, and raised ethical and philosophical questions of whether VAR *ought to be* used amid its impact on a “re-refereeing” of World Cup competition.

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“You Come at the Queen, You Best Not Miss”: Post-Colonial Representations of the U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team During the 2019 World Cup

Eileen Narcotta-Welp and Anna Baeth

The 2019 Women’s World Cup (WWC) was the third time the U.S. women’s national soccer team (USWNT) had the opportunity to defend their status as reigning World Champions. Despite the USWNT’s global success since 1991, early 2019 proved a tumultuous time. Amid national team camps becoming a revolving door of talent and the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) attempting to build cultural saliency after two failed attempts in the sports market, the team also filed a lawsuit against the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), their sole employer, for gender discrimination (Wahl, 2019).

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After the 2015 WWC, European federations committed to a professionalized structure of women's soccer, resulting in better resourced, more competitive National Teams and professional clubs in England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Financially supporting the expansion of domestic leagues and investing in training facilities and grassroots programs for women (Baxter, 2019a), countries were fielding teams with better technical and tactical skills than ever before. While the United States remains the most well-resourced women's program in the world, the 2019 WWC had the deepest and most talented pool of teams in history. As a result, the USWNT's ostensible international superiority has eroded; simulations by Gracenote gave the United States a mere 14% chance to win the WWC (Bachman, 2019a). Regardless, the USWNT remained a favorite among sport reporters and fans globally. Still, the most successful women's national team in history and in the world had a target on its back.

Meanwhile, the USWNT was in the midst of a highly scrutinized lawsuit against the USSF for gender discrimination (Dure, 2017; Wahl, 2019). Citing institutional gender discrimination, the USWNT was seeking damages for treatment regarding individual pay, financial support, and medical resources. A potential backlash against the USWNT could have resulted in loss of access to participation, finances, and resources for the 2019 WWC. As such, the 28 players who eventually filed suit against the USSF incorporated punitive damages in an effort to deter discrimination leading up to the WWC (Murray, 2020). Given the precarious position of the USWNT as the highest-ranking team in the world going into the tournament, the 2019 WWC was a contentious and crucial historical moment for women's sport in the United States.

Examining articles and promotional ads from major outlets, this chapter outlines the ways in which the USWNT was mediated prior to and during the 2019 WWC. On the one hand, the USWNT is positioned as the team to beat as they continued to be ranked number one in the world. On the other, the USWNT is perpetually othered by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the USSF who unabashedly provide insufficient funding to the women's game. The USWNT, considered the poster girls of gender equity in soccer, sits precariously at the intersection of being power-full and power-less.

Following theorists Gayatri Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1994), we use a post-colonial framework to interrogate how such power dynamics around the USWNT, the USSF, FIFA, and other women's national

teams are portrayed in the media prior to and during the 2019 WWC. Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) offer compelling arguments to the ways power manifests in and through cultural structures—in the case of this project, sport. While Spivak’s (1988) focus is on the experiences of women of color in the Global South and Bhabha’s (1994) centers racialized identities among colonized peoples, both contend our current global reality can only be understood when related to the history of colonization. Power relationships are defined by, and persist when, the colonizer is offset by the *other* (e.g., the colonized). Since its inception, the USWNT has been embedded within a global soccer structure built upon a capitalist system that favors men. This chapter outlines the ways the media constructs the USWNT as both colonizer and colonized in the current 2019 geopolitical climate.

FOLLOW WHICH LEADER? LOCATING THE USWNT WITHIN THE GLOBAL SOCCER COMPLEX

The USWNT is the first women’s team to defend a World Cup title and has led the world rankings in the number one spot for the last 12 years (Jenkins, 2019). Such competitive dominance, however, should not be conflated with the cultural meaning of the USWNT. The USWNT cannot be divorced from the past and present sociocultural and economic practices of FIFA. FIFA includes six world regional confederations and 208 national federations—a massive infrastructure through which FIFA wields tremendous regulatory power over the soccer masses and female athletes in particular.

Only reluctantly has FIFA created a place for women’s soccer within its male-dominated structure. It was not until 1995 that the women’s championship was granted a FIFA *World Cup* title—65 years after the inaugural men’s cup—a small insight into the injustices women face in the beautiful game (for more information on the development of the women’s game prior to FIFA, see Narcotta-Welp, 2016).

These injustices trickle down into national federations. Considered the backbone and inspirational force of soccer in the United States, one Fox executive labeled the USWNT as the “crown jewel” of the USSF for its legendary on-field dominance and off-field global appeal to soccer crazed fans (Jenkins, 2019, para. 5). Still, the USWNT lags well behind the U.S. men’s national team (USMNT) in pay, medical

treatment, and workplace conditions (Keh, 2019). As McManus (2019, para. 11) states: because the USSF "... fundamentally values men's soccer more[;] It doesn't matter how many World Cups the women win." The USSF and FIFA's lack of support marks women's soccer programs, even the best teams in the world, as an outlier within their overarching male structure.

PUTTING THE COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

The USWNT is not only burdened with maintaining an on-field dominance, attempting to dismantle FIFA's sexist stance on the women's game, and role modeling gender equality globally, but also doing so under the scrutiny of a media complex that favors men (Messner et al., 1993). In an effort to unpack these compounded and interrelated narratives of the USWNT in 2019, it is necessary to draw upon Alan McKee's (2003) methodological approach of textual analysis, a data-gathering process in which mediated texts are read and reread to examine the ways they take on and produce cultural meanings. Upon completing an extensive search for any articles containing the phrases "Women's World Cup," "United States National Women's Team," and "USWNT" published between October 1, 2018 and January 1, 2019 via a web-based portal, 96 texts were identified. In total, 75 newspaper articles related to the USWNT were published in 2019, one was published in 2018, one magazine article was published in *Sports Illustrated* in 2019, and both Fox and FIFA created and featured short documentaries about the team in 2019. Media presentations were deemed irrelevant if the USWNT was not explicitly discussed, the USWNT was referenced but not in the context of the 2019 WWC, or if a piece was published multiple times (e.g., by the *New York Times* and then in the *Los Angeles Times*).

We then turn to Stuart Hall's (1973) reception theory and the process of encoding and decoding. Hall (1973) contends that producers initially encode messages in a text, and though a process of circulation throughout culture these texts keep reproducing dominant messages. Hall (1973, p. 128) argues, unlike a content analysis, in which words are drawn from texts and quantified, decoding media relies upon "discursive formations within [a] wider socio-cultural and political structure." Decoding texts is not devoid of power or context and should not be read as such. From our decoding, three surface narratives emerged: the USWNT is the team to

beat; FIFA is wholly unsupportive of women's soccer; and the USWNT is a model for other women's soccer programs.

The USWNT as the Team to Beat

The USWNT as the team to beat in the 2019 WWC is the most pervasive narrative. Most often, the USWNT team is labeled a superpower. Regularly considered *the* leader in the international game going into the 2019 WWC (Kuper, 2019), nearly every article notes that the USWNT has won three World Cups. Regardless of player turnover, Sally Jenkins (2019, para. 9), a reporter who has covered the USWNT for over 25 years, notes: the team maintains "a steady drumbeat of success" leading up to the 2019 tournament. The USWNT is also identified as ruthless, arrogant, merciless, and, in many ways, non-human and inhumane. In 2019, Rory Smith (2019, para. 6), a sport reporter, comments, "That reputation, that lofty ambition, is not allowed to bleed into complacency when faced with mere mortals." Mid-tournament, Allysia Finley (2019) states, the USWNT players:

were criticized for their unapologetic displays of supremacy ... Defender Ali Krieger was slammed for saying the U.S. has 'the best team in the world and the second-best team in the world'—meaning that America's benchwarmers could beat any of the other 23 team's starters. 'Arrogant, entitled and self-centered, the U.S. women's soccer team couldn't be more Trumpian,' seethed one Irish columnist. (para. 3)

Fox Sports (2019) echoed this rhetoric in their short documentary on the team. Commentator, Alexi Lalas,¹ states: "Love them or hate them, they answer to no one but themselves. They are arrogant; they are provocative, but ultimately, this is a team that wins."

Conversely, Steven Goff (2019a, para. 5–6) offers a more complex understanding of the team: "America loves a winner, regardless of gender or sport, and the U.S. women's footballers ... have won a lot over 30 years. But they have another purpose here ... they are continuing to raise issues of equality within both U.S. circles and the soccer world." Reminiscent of C. L. Cole and Michael Giardina's (2013) celebration of the white, *suburban girl-child*, the USWNT team is portrayed as not only dominant but benevolent. As Eileen Narcotta-Welp (2015, p. 386) notes, the USWNT is a mediated representation "of the contemporary female sporting icon

[and a] manifestation of a broader discourse that works to celebrate the American way of life ... sportsmanship and 'true' suburban womanhood came to represent U.S. conduct, performance, and moral superiority." The USWNT is characterized as not only bodies that dominate but bodies that protect and fight for an American standard of morality (e.g., gender equality). In this case, that fight is morally pushing women's soccer forward, so it might one day contend with the men's game.

This notion is most apparent after the USWNT defeated Thailand 13–0 in their championship opener. As Rachel Bachman (2019b, para. 4), a sport reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, describes: "The U.S. was up 7-0 early in the second half ... and by the end the goals came so quickly that one wondered if FIFA should consider a mercy rule." More interesting, however, are the media responses to what happened after the match. The U.S. team approached and consoled the Thai team, most notably with American forward Carli Lloyd pulling aside the Thai goalkeeper, Sukanya Chor Charoenying, which later prompted a thank-you from Charoenying on Twitter: "'Your words that you told me make me strong,' the goalkeeper wrote. Though she was disappointed by what she called the 'worst situation,' she said, 'this is the biggest experience in my life'" (Lyll, 2019, para. 14). The USWNT's pursuit of physically outplaying their opponents is linked with the sense that they must protect their weaker opponents by fighting for equality. However, as Jane McManus (2019, para. 28) aptly notes, this fight is distinctly U.S. centric; "There's nothing more American than the ideal of equality."

The USWNT as the Team Being Beaten by FIFA and the USSF

As their lawsuit against the USSF emerged on the precipice of the WWC, Clarke (2019a, para. 4) described:

They acknowledged that the burden would be great. So, too, was the risk, just 93 days from their opening match in the World Cup. But that was largely the point. So, when the news broke the following Friday, on International Women's Day, that all 28 members of the squad had filed a class action, gender discrimination lawsuit against their employer, the [USFF], it was the timing—as much as the substance of their grievances—that shocked. Rather than wait until after the global quadrennial, the defending World Cup champions chose the run-up to the tournament to

pick up a megaphone and shout, via a 25-page legal complaint, that they are being treated unfairly.

As FIFA controls the broadcasting rights of the WWC and how much money is allocated to women’s teams, FIFA, in tandem with the USSF, incentivize male-centric thinking by pitting men’s and women’s programs against each other.

The sports media commercial complex reproduces narratives that regularly usurps the voices of female athletes. Feminist scholars have long documented the ways sportswomen have been, and continue to be, contained by specific types of media (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Markula, 2014; Weber & Carini, 2013). This notion is what Entman (1993, p. 52) classically defines as *framing*, the process of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and [making] them more salient in communicating text and promot[ing] a particular ... moral evaluation.” Framing the accomplishments of women athletes in demeaning or marginalizing ways, sports media—whether written, spoken, or visual—contributes to the construction of gendered and racial hierarchies that privilege men (Cranmer et al., 2014). Women’s sports are perpetually othered while men’s sports are the standard (Messner et al., 1993). The 2019 WWC was no exception. The ways the USWNT players and staff are portrayed in articles and on television favor the media, and more significantly, the bottom line of Fox Sports.

In spite of the mistreatment of female athletes historically, the media (e.g., Fox Sports in the United States) are the ones benefiting most from the USWNT. Because FIFA so highly disregards the women’s game, they have “been handing out broadcast rights to the Women’s World Cup kind of like tote bags to broadcasters willing to pony up for the men’s cups. In the United States, Fox Sports and Telemundo long ago snapped up the 2015, 2019 and 2023 cups, and they have been shaking the money tree ever since” (Women’s World Cup, 2019, para. 7). As the WWC draws more spectators—on the backs and bodily performances of female athletes—it is the structures, and people, of FIFA, the USSF, and Fox Sports who continue to thrive.

The USWNT as a Metonym of Gender Equity

Finally, media outlets circulate a third, palatable surface narrative—the USWNT and their gender discrimination lawsuit as a noble form of

advocacy (Clarke, 2019b; Elliott, 2019; Goff, 2019a; Keh, 2019). The USWNT becomes a metonym for gender equality; Meg Linehan articulates in a 2019 FIFA documentary, the team champions women's equality through bodily performance:

Megan Rapinoe celebration where she expands herself. She takes up space in a way that is challenging and is in your face. That's what is really exciting not just about Megan Rapinoe but about the team in general; is that they are uncompromising in the way that they want to take up space. There is still ... work left to do not just for them but then to take that next step and say we fought; here's how you can fight, too. (0:23:54)

In this way, the USWNT has taken on meaning as not just a symbol for gender equity in sport, but also for white, Global Northern sentiments of equality, and Western feminist activism.

Yet, the promotion of the way the USWNT advocates is misplaced. For federations in the Global South, where soccer remains the epitome of masculinity, the funding differences between the men's and women's national team programs are even more stark than in the United States. The Jamaican women's program disbanded in 2011 due to a lack of funds. The program managed to regroup, thanks solely to the private financial support from Cedella Marley, Bob Marley's daughter, and became the first Caribbean team to qualify for a WWC (Lewis, 2019). The experience of this program is in unfortunate company with federations world-wide that refuse to provide adequate financial support to develop a successful national women's team and infrastructure (Ackerman & Asquith, 2015; Harris, 2019; Lawson, 2019).

“READING” WOMEN’S SOCCER: REVEALING POST-COLONIAL COUNTERNARRATIVES

Born out of these narratives, further questions arise about the power relationships between the USWNT, FIFA, the USSF, other national women's sports teams, and the media. In a search to analyze these texts further, we build upon McKee's (2003) textual analysis and turn to Mary McDonald and Susan Birrell's (1999) methodology of “Reading Sport.” This approach helps to expose counternarratives lying beneath the surface of mediated texts. The concept of *text* here means not only written language, but anything that can carry a meaning (e.g., television commercials, film,

etc.). *Textuality* constitutes the actions of not just reading written words, but reading the placement of words, interpreting the texts within which words are written, and deciphering the cultural implications of those texts (McDonald & Birrell, 1999).

Aligned with Hall (1973), "Reading Sport" is a poststructural analysis of mediated texts constructed around a particular event or incident. This method underscores that narratives matter because they do ideological work and reinforce that cultural values have material consequences. One would be remiss to assume there is only one grand narrative (or in this case, the three grand narratives above) at work. Hidden within texts are multiple, competing narratives as an event is shaped by the past even while it produces new discourses (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). McDonald and Birrell (1999, p. 295) implore us to uncover counternarratives, or "alternative accounts of particular incidents ... that have been decentred, obscured, and dismissed." In this analytical space, academics can unleash political potential by *making visible* the invisible social and cultural inequalities that surround us.

Using a post-colonial lens, we interrogate media productions of the USWNT with particular attention to the ways the voices of USWNT players, USWNT coaches, and rival athletes are constructed as the WWC approaches. We examine visual media as it is a vital circulator of ideological messages to consumers. Of importance is one Fox Sports pre-World Cup promotional ad that rallied fans: a 55-second commercial titled *All Eyes on US*. In this commercial, the USWNT is positioned as a colonizer of women's soccer and a colonized entity of FIFA. The commercialization of the USWNT reveals and conceals the structures that give shape to the persistent, insidious discourse on which women's sport operates.

All Eyes on Us: The USWNT as the "Visible" Colonizer

To most, the term colonizer conjures images of a powerful individual or nation state of yesteryear. While this colonial past no longer exists, colonialism continues to structure modern life through coloniality—an ideology, yoked to an absolutist binary between the Global North and Global South (Mignolo, 2011). FIFA and the USWNT can be identified as institutions that reproduce Global North structures and ideologies. The Global North remains in a position of superiority, giving way to systems of exploitation, discrimination, domination, and alienation while ensuring white, Eurocentric, capitalism by centering Global North products and

knowledge production (Quijano & Ennis, 2000). Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis (2000, p. 543) argue this global trajectory is significant not because Europeans imagined themselves as the creators of modern civilization, but because they "... were capable of spreading and establishing that ... perspective as hegemonic within the new intersubjective universe of the global model of power."

As systems of capital have become more globalized, coloniality undergirds the decision-making process of multinational corporations and organizations. The "colonizer" is revealed in the structure of FIFA, the USSF, and more specifically, the USWNT. Ever present on the global stage, the USWNT has dictated the path forward for women's soccer as it dominates sites of cultural production and structural resources. Moreover, the USWNT seemingly understands the media would recirculate and sell the narratives they espouse. Specifically, they consistently reproduce their own narrative of American exceptionalism. As superstar forward, Alex Morgan, states: "This team just prides itself on that No. 1 ranking and on the mentality that we put forward and...you think about us setting high expectations for ourselves, our fans setting high expectations, the history of this program ... We're going to continue to believe that we're gonna come out on top" (Delgallo, 2019, para. 10). This on-field dominance is further explained by Abby Dahlkemper, starting center back for the current USWNT. Winning, she says, just seems to be "... in our team's DNA ..." (Goff, 2019b, para. 5). This privileged narrative of American exceptionalism—the assumption that America is unique and destined to play a positive role on the world stage—points to values only a few can access. In this case, the USWNT embodies these values to reinforce a binary of difference.

Carli Lloyd's statement "... when people are talking about you, you're doing something right" (Baxter, 2019a, para. 5) strikes a savvy chord as she seems to understand the power revealed in Hall's (1973) process of encoding and decoding. Ensnared in this example of American exceptionalism is the power of visibility. The USWNT's constant presence in the media centers them as the program with the most influence and prestige. Moreover, it discourages competing narratives about other women's programs that may add nuance and complexity to women's sport.

As Kevin Baxter, a reporter for the *L.A. Times* (2019b, para. 6), so deftly states, "In many ways the rising tide of global support for women's soccer has not raised all boats. Instead it has swamped, then capsized many of the smaller ones." Jill Ellis, head coach of the USWNT during the 2019 WWC, and the players implore that they did not ask to be the leader in

how the game should be played or what the women's game should look like in the future. Yet, they seem to embrace this status, with all the conviction of Megan Rapinoe's famous goal celebration.

The role of the USWNT as the colonizer is most visible in the pre-World Cup Fox Sports commercial which begins by focusing on a team walking out of an empty tunnel (Fox 47 News, 2019). Initially, the viewer does not know who they are, but what we do know is that they are formidable. The camera quickly shifts outside of the tunnel to shine light on the USWNT. Centered in a medium shot are the team's most notable faces heading into the 2019 WWC—Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe. The non-diegetic statement of "... a crown on their head and a target on their back ..." plays over two shots of Morgan and Rapinoe, first from the front, then from the back. As the stars continue to walk into the light, we see the rest of the team positioned in a flying wedge—a triangular military tactic used to breach enemy lines with the least number of casualties—encroaching upon their opponent on the field below. When placed in context with the quote, "... the ones sitting atop the throne ..." a low angle shot provides the literal and figurative height of the team. These players are the yardstick for which every other team is measured. Fox Sports constructs the USWNT (the colonizers) within a binary to the other, their opponents (the colonized). In this power struggle, the colonized is made visible, but only to maintain the USWNT's discourse of domination. In the next long shot, the USWNT's competitors are small and faceless, and are in Bhabha's (1994, p. 46) words, "encased in the shot/reverse shot strategy of serial enlightenment" as they are juxtaposed with the USWNT. The USWNT's competitive *others* are simply a foil to advance their colonial, global domination.

In the final segment of *All Eyes on Us*, a ball is launched across the field to the USWNT, who play it in a series of quick passes, feints, and aggressive tackles. Undergirding this scene, a voice contends "...if you come at the queen, you best not miss" (Fox 47 News, 2019). In this final sentiment, presumably born out of Ralph Waldo Emerson's quote: "When you strike at a king, you must kill him," the reader is reminded of the inevitable and necessary risk associated with contesting the USWNT. A background noise of "I believe that we will win!" rises in the last five seconds. The goal of the fans and the USWNT, seemingly, is plain: conquer all. The USWNT is mediated as the team that must win the cup, reinforcing the idea that, in fact, all eyes should be on *US*.

Opposing teams' post-game interviews reveal a blatant, colonial deference to the USWNT; one that makes losing to the USWNT a rite of passage. Bhabha (1994, p. 3) notes "the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation." The up-and-coming women's teams, even in the midst of domination, underscore the influence of the USWNT, and reinscribe American values of progress and a "never give up" attitude into the way they play. The game between the United States and Thailand (re)offers a rich example. After the lopsided win by the Americans and many questions as to whether the women's game had evolved enough for teams like Thailand to compete (Goff & Bogage, 2019), the Thai team seemed besotted. "'It was an amazing experience' said Thailand midfielder Miranda Nild, a Thai-American who played at the University of California, as she teared up. 'They're the reigning champs for a reason'" (Bachman, 2019b).

Moreover, Nuengrutai Srathongivan, Thailand's head coach, states "Playing such a dominant team ... inspired Thailand 'to improve ourselves and keep on fighting'" (Lyll, 2019). Here, we read the competing narratives at play relative to the USWNT. This quote underscores the narrative of the USWNT morally pushing forward women's soccer. By "Reading Sport," we are able to reveal a post-colonial counter-narrative: the USWNT is reliant upon their opponents—the colonized—to reinforce a relation of domination and to reproduce an uneven, and sometimes violent, binary of power between colonizer and colonized.

*"I Have to Somehow Justify Myself": The USWNT as the (In)
Visible Other*

Beyond the United States, soccer is considered a manly game, one that reproduces the myth of male athletes to transcend culture, language, and identities (Markovitz, 2007; Sugden, 1994; Watt, 2010). This practice of mythmaking is embedded within global capitalist practices (including those of FIFA), packaged and sold to sport consumers throughout the world. FIFA, just as other colonial powers have done in the past, preserves masculinity through the process of othering. FIFA's addition of women's soccer is a grandiose gesture, one that seemingly provides opportunity. Yet, this space of opportunity is still laden with FIFA's colonial rule; it is highly surveilled and positions women's soccer as a "... population of

degenerate types ... in order to justify conquest and establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 101).

FIFA justifies a lack of financial support through an economic discourse stating an investment in the women's game signifies a potential economic loss. As Jean Williams, a women's soccer scholar, argues, "It's the view that men's sport is an economic benefit, and women's sport is an economic drain, and whatever you give women is a charitable donation. [FIFA] can't see where that value is going to come from" (McManus, 2019, para. 19). As women's soccer remains an afterthought for many administrators, the funding most programs receive is not robust enough to make up for the decades of neglect to those programs. Tatjana Haenni, former FIFA head of women's soccer, notes the "challenge lies in ensuring that FIFA's riches don't all go to men's soccer" (Harris, 2019, para. 24).

This struggle exists widely in Global North federations, and uniquely in the United States, where soccer—the world's game—has found a welcoming space in women's sport (Narcotta-Welp, 1). The historical success of the USWNT is unequivocal and especially stark when compared to the USMNT which has, and continues to, struggle in international play (Bachman, 2019a; Bondy, 2019). Yet, FIFA's ideological commitment to gendered practices continues to shape how the USSF distributes funding to the men's and women's national teams. The USMNT, no matter how abysmal, is funded equivalently to other globally successful men's national teams, leaving high performing USWNT players earning "38% of the compensation of a similarly situated [USMNT] player" (Kelly, 2019, para. 21). Still, the 2019 WWC was the most commercialized FIFA women's tournament to date. Corporate sponsors, national federations, and a few private football clubs spent large sums of money to help expand the women's game.

Nonetheless, marred by seating errors that led to children separated from parents and recalled tickets, the 2019 WWC was disappointing in ticket sales and atmosphere (Wrack, 2019). Surprised by the lack of excitement for the tournament, Paige Phipps, an American attending the World Cup, stated she "...didn't realize that in Europe women's soccer isn't really that big yet, which is kind of disheartening because it is so much bigger here in the United States ... some people we would talk to in Europe, they had no idea the World Cup was going on there" (Sullivan, 2019, para. 17). In fact, advertising for the French Open, a professional tennis tournament held in early June, had more of a local presence in Paris

than the WWC (Wrack, 2019). Here, FIFA reproduces colonial power as the women's game is given space to exist, but not allowed to flourish as seen through lackluster on-site promotion and advertising. FIFA's ability to surveil and control these aspects of marketing reduces the visibility of the women's game, even in the most visible of spaces—the nation hosting the tournament.

FIFA's manipulation does not stop at the host nation's doorstep; rather, FIFA is global in its efforts to reduce the visibility of the women's game. One of the more innocuous, though sexist, decisions FIFA made was to schedule men's tournaments during the 2019 WWC. The final game of the WWC was played on the same day as the Copa America final and the CONCACAF Gold Cup. Ellis spoke about the competition for viewership FIFA concocted between men's and women's soccer: "playing three big matches in one day isn't supporting the women's game" (Peterson, 2019, para. 17). Bhabha (1994) might mark this incident as a form of colonialism that "directs and dominates [women's soccer's] various spheres of activity produc[ing] the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely visible" (p. 101). By staging the men's tournaments on the same day, FIFA embodies a benevolent, but vindictive colonizer.

LESSONS LEARNED

"You Come at the Queen": The Precariousness of Being Colonizer and Colonized

So, where does the USWNT reside in the global soccer complex? The team sits at a precarious intersection. They are neither wholly colonizer nor colonized, but rather both at the same time. FIFA and the USSF are colonizers as they govern the women's game with little fanfare or expectations from federations to develop robust programs. The USWNT is subjugated to this rule but continues to battle the historic and systemic power of these male-centered structures compelled by economic profit. Simultaneously, the USWNT is a colonizer; echoing the rhetoric of Caesar's *vini, vidi, vici*, Bachman (2019a, para. 29) quotes Rapinoc after their first tournament win, "The U.S. has played,' she said ... 'and we've arrived.'" As the poster girls for women soccer globally, the success of the USWNT dictates the future of the game. A Global North white woman remains the steadfast symbol of global gender equity. This narrow identity implies all non-USWNT athletes are inferior on and off the field.

Yet, winning the 2019 WWC did not make the USWNT superior. Atop the 2019 WWC stage remains a delicate space that can be upended at any time—the USWNT can either be read as the darlings of women’s soccer and gender equality or the perpetual “other” of FIFA. While winning the cup may have reduced the precariousness of their position in their legal battle against the USSF, the forthcoming outcome of the lawsuit will not erase the sociocultural history or overwhelming power structure that is global soccer. With any attempt to reduce their position as the colonized—even after winning a World Cup title for a fourth time—the USWNT is still subjugated and contained by a system of power that will never set them free.

What remains of interest, and further inquiry, is the stability of the USWNT’s role as the colonizer. As the level of women’s soccer increases (Baxter, 2019a; Clarke, 2019a; Goff, 2019b; Robinson, 2019), the visibility of the USWNT is reliant on the othering of their opponents to reinforce difference, and therefore, their superiority. As McDonald and Birrell (1999) implore us to uncover counter-narratives by “Reading Sport,” they, along with Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994), ask us to make visible the invisible.

Revealing the counter-narratives that demarcate FIFA, the USSF, and the media as colonizers, we not only articulate the matrices of disparate global power structures surrounding the USWNT, but also employ those matrices as sites of resistance to colonial narratives. As Bhabha (1994, p. 49) notes, “in the very practice of domination the language of the master becomes hybrid” and produces a site of potential resistance. Such was the case with the media in this project. Women’s national team programs (the USWNT included) would be what Bhabha (1994, p. 49) calls, “the incalculable colonized subject—half-acquiescent, half-oppositional.” Reading these programs, as well as the texts that mediate them, could produce a similarly resistant narrative—a new version of what it means to be a (perhaps a non-white, non-Global North, non-suburban girl child) female soccer player on the global stage.

NOTE

1. Lalas gained notoriety after playing one season in the Italian Series A with club Padova who finished the 1994–1995 season in last place. Lalas was a mediocre American male player who never advanced beyond the round of 16 in the men’s World Cup. In spite of this, he has managed to garner positions of power in sports media as a commentator on the women’s game.

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“Let Us Have Our Tea”: News Coverage of the U.S. Women’s National Team: Reinforcing or Negating Perpetuated Discriminatory Standards

Apryl Smith and Kayla Oyler

Mega sporting events are a spectacle inducing some of the highest viewership numbers and television ratings within each participating nation. Media landscapes can embody any and all narratives pertaining to the event, even minimalistic ones. Those riddled with controversy or significance headline coverages until irrelevance. The 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup total tournament viewership numbers hit 1.2 billion globally (“FIFA Women’s World Cup”, 2019; Glass, 2019). Viewership of the final match in the United States reached 14.3 million which is 22% higher than the Men’s 2018 FIFA World Cup viewership (Hess, 2019). Presumably, these numbers would act as a microcosm for the media landscape narrative

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naturally bringing up feminist issues of equal pay along with the increasing popularity of women's soccer. Instead, media coverage was more focused on criticizing U.S. women's national team member Alex Morgan's goal celebrations, head coach Jill Ellis' coaching abilities, and other stories. Headline selection surrounding the 2019 World Cup suggests extensive framing in media coverage perpetuating sexist norms of men and men's soccer being superior to women and women's soccer. Analysis of coverage surrounding the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup will investigate themes and framing techniques through the lens of postmodern feminism to create a basis for further research and a roadmap for identifying discriminatory practices.

With sports strongly embodying hegemonic masculinity practices and anti-feminism standards, there is great importance in understanding framing in reporting of women's professional sports to combat perpetuated norms. Media narratives can influence society's perspective on women's sports and female athletes making reporting and media coverage vital (Villalon et al., 2017). That impact enables mega sporting events like the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup to be a platform for advancement or regression of women's sports. With a lack of research being done covering mega sporting events like the World Cup in the communication discipline from feminist perspectives, our research aims to identify themes in sports broadcast coverage regressing feminism principles and promoting discriminatory standards of women's sports.

This research aims to investigate and identify framing and themes from a postmodern feminist perspective. To better understand the visibility in the context of the 2019 FIFA World Cup, a brief background is developed to understand framing and the current state of feminism in sport communication scholarship. This will be done by researching articles describing framing methods along with framing feminist narratives identified in previous sport communication scholarship.

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

Framing Methods in Sports Media

Framing involves focusing on certain pieces of information in a story or specific characteristics of a group to make aspects more meaningful or noticeable (Entman, 1993). Arguably, every sports news story is framed. Recaps of games and events only include highlights and pertinent information. The more selective and concise a recap/story is the more games

or events that can be covered in a sports news cycle. That is why the question in sports research should not be how much framing is done, it should be what information is chosen and how it is being presented. Leaving out or including certain information can alter society's perception of an event, game, person, or group (Lewis & Weaver, 2013).

About 40% of women account for sports participation, while only about 3–5% of women's sports are covered nationwide (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). When the media decides the coverage of female athletes, "Americans do not think they like women's sports because the media has not convinced them that they should" (Burris, 2006, p. 88). Female athletes are only able to assert cultural authority through social media where the viewpoints and voices of male athletes are still privileged (Olive, 2015). Mass media plays an important role in influencing society's perspective about female athletes and shaping the perception of women and sports. According to Coakley (2004) and Kinnick (1998), popular sports websites suggest that female athlete's news coverage contains a lack of importance and non-newsworthy achievements. Most leading stories on television or in major newspapers surround men's sports. Previous studies researching how female athletes are represented online suggest patterns of men's sports receiving more coverage than women athletes (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018).

In the Olympic Games, female athletes compete in the same events as male athletes. However, the media coverage is focused more on male athletes. Female athlete's media coverage in the Olympic Games focuses on what is "socially acceptable" in society (Baroffio-Bota & Banet-Weiser, 2006; Coche & Tuggle, 2016). Research on the 2012 Olympics highlighted five main sports for men and five main sports for women that received the most media attention (Billings, 2008; Billings et al., 2014). Both cases represent the basic form of framing. Media and broadcast providers are establishing a narrative of men's sports being more important than women's and events like swimming being more important than fencing. Selecting which sports to cover is obvious, and the motives (i.e., monetary value of certain sports) are predictable.

Other cases exist using more complex methods of framing making it harder for audiences to identify the narratives produced by media outlets. Framing can be accomplished through selective camera angles, interview questions, and commentary storylines. ESPN's annual body issue is a continual example of camera angles while coverage of the 2016 Rio Olympics exemplifies framing through commentary storylines. Photographs of the female athletes in ESPN's body issue focused on grace and femininity

shying away from muscular feats and athleticism. The camera angles were selectively chosen and used to hide muscle definition (Hull et al., 2015). Similarly, commentary on women's gymnastics during the 2016 Olympics discussed primarily graceful technique and attributes shying away from terms like "powerful" and "strength" (Villalon et al., 2017). Not only did these articles showcase framing techniques, but they also highlighted common themes in the framing of female athletes and women's sports. Both themes contradict the current feminist perspective in sport potentially perpetuating discriminatory practices in the media.

Framing and Feminism

The feminist perspective in sport argues for equal representation, respect for women's sports, and an end to sexism (McClearen, 2018). Using this perspective to analyze the cases above, feminism in sport is rare. Women's sports receive less coverage than men's, and media coverage rarely refers to female athletes as anything other than graceful and feminine (Villalon et al., 2017). Individual sports can represent "grace and flexibility" which are commonly referred to be the natural tendencies of women (Baroffio-Bota & Banet-Weiser, 2006; Coche & Tuggle, 2016). The individual sport of women's gymnastics accounts for more airtime in the Olympics over the top three women's sports of basketball, soccer, and softball (Davis & Tuggle, 2012). It is common for the top women to be compared to the top men in sports. An example would be gymnast Simone Biles referred to as the Kobe Bryant/Michael Jordan/Michael Phelps of gymnastics (Visser, 2016).

Comparing female athletes to male athletes in this regard negates feminism principles. While one could argue comparisons between genders represent equality in feminist standards, these cases are still highlighting men as the epitome of athletic achievement by stating a female athlete is like a top male athlete (Villalon et al., 2017). Some in the sports industry attempt to argue the industry is in a stage of post-feminism (McClearen, 2018). Post-feminism being that individuals are arguing feminism has already been achieved. However, the cases above and cases that attempt to equate male and female athletes still employ anti-feminist framing techniques and themes.

Postmodern Feminism

Some sports scholars have integrated post-feminism into their research as an analytical lens (McClearen, 2018). For the sake of this research, we employ postmodern feminism theory as a means for interpreting media coverage. Since qualitative research values interpretation, theory is used to conceptualize observations and analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Postmodern feminism seeks to break down power configurations and critique construction of gendered identities (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Prasad, 2005). Further it seeks to dissolve discriminatory practices regimented in society and reverse the “masculine model” (Heckman, 1990). This research aims to identify themes and framing techniques in sports media which continue to employ discriminatory practices against women in sports. Postmodern feminism’s aim in removing these practices directly correlates with the purpose of this research. This theory will be used as a lens in the analysis stage along with the methodological tool of critical discourse analysis. CDA has increasingly been used in conjunction with feminist theories to identify framing techniques promoting discriminatory practices (Lazar, 2005).

Coming from a qualitative communication research perspective, we analyze the media landscape in the United States surrounding the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup. The focus of the research aims to utilize critical discourse analysis from a sport feminism perspective to identify themes and narratives of the U.S. national team framed within broadcast television coverage. Using the scholarship above as a guide, two research questions emerged. The research looked to discover: (1) what identifiable themes exist among ESPN’s coverage of the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup and (2) what framing techniques or methods are employed.

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

In our research, media coverage of the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup is analyzed through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The method examines the relationship between discourse and society looking at power dynamics one of which being male power (Van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 2004). The literature above established a precedent for more research on male power in sports, specifically hegemonic masculinity and postmodern feminism. Feminist scholars have increasingly employed CDA in research highlighting the gendered social order and its complexities (Lazar, 2005).

Further, its focus is on cases of women subjected to male dominance like the discrimination women in sports face in popularity and characterization today (Van Dijk, 1993). With women's sports representing only 3–5% of sports media coverage nationwide, a power imbalance between men and women is evident (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). The aim of our research is to identify how perpetuated power dominance is manifested in sports coverage. Gender ideology does not always outwardly appear as dominant as it typically is perpetuated through society making CDA a favored methodology among feminist scholars (Lazar, 2005). Critical discourse analysis examines how power is enacted by the dominant group through controlling the context, paralanguage, hesitations or silences in language, structural emphasis of actions, and others (Van Dijk, 1993). The aim and techniques unique to critical discourse analysis provide a basis for implementation in our research of the 2019 FIFA World Cup.

Data Collection

To analyze the research questions above using CDA, clips were found using YouTube, a free online platform where anyone can upload or watch videos posted to the site. The platform allows accounts from major broadcast networks like ESPN to upload popular clips on certain topics each day. ESPN posts the most popular clips from shows broadcasted on their network channels each day. ESPN was the sixth most watched network of 2019 by total viewers and is the most watched sports network by a substantial margin (Ourand, 2018; Schneider, 2019). Justifiably, ESPN publishing the highest volume of clips and holding reign as the top watched sports network provides reasoning for its selection for our research.

As previously mentioned, clips were found via YouTube. ESPN was selected as the media platform because of popularity and the ability of its narratives to have the biggest impact on an audience. The videos ESPN uploads are taken from shows aired on the network's cable channels, meaning these videos reach both cable and online audiences. Clips were found through ESPN's personal channel/account. Criterion sampling, the sampling method used to select observable subjects based on established criterion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), was used to select videos for analysis. All videos dating back four years are stored on their channel. We selected for analysis clips during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup with the U.S. Women's National Team as the title for the video. Omitted were

simple recaps of games as they solely provide box score stat line regurgitation. More specifically, our criterion when selecting videos included (1) the title must have U.S. women's soccer visible in some form, (2) a publish date from June 7 through July 14 (the dates of the World Cup), (3) videos with anchor and analysts' debate, and (4) videos of at least 3 minutes. There were eight clips selected totaling about 45 minutes. Since controversial topics typically receive more coverage, there was repetition in topics. The videos were watched and analyzed three times by both authors. This was done to achieve thorough and critical analysis of the videos to find themes and framing techniques through CDA's lens. Both observers compared analysis and re-watched videos to resolve any discrepancies.

Data Analysis

The main goal of critical discourse analysis is to interpret how people are employed by public discourse. Critical discourse analysis has three distinct stages to analyze content (Scholes, 1985). These stages will be used to examine ESPN's coverage of the World Cup from a postmodern feminism perspective. The first stage looks at how the viewer should react to the given piece of media. This stage requires the viewer to examine what the media outlets are trying to present or persuade. The second stage allows for further analyses. At this second stage, it requires the observer to look at the first reaction and analyze the message itself. The second stage examines what exactly is being portrayed and how the message is being phrased. The final stage requires a higher-level analysis. This stage is a vital point to closely inspect the message being conveyed by the news media. This final stage is where framing concepts start developing (Scholes, 1985).

With each stage, inductive, deductive, and abductive coding was used as a method for developing themes. Inductive coding, developing principles for classifying analysis into categories through previous research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), was developed through previous sports and postmodern feminism scholarship. Categorical ideas for themes and framing techniques were established through previous research. This coordinated with the first stage of analysis. Deductive coding, which means testing established themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), was then applied by placing identified themes with observations in analysis. Alignment of observations in each thematic category strengthens or combats development of finalized themes. This coding correlated with the second stage of the CDA three-stage process. The last stage and coding process, in part,

included abductive coding, establishment of new insight in findings (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The third stage finalizes identification of themes and framing techniques (Scholes, 1985). Since themes and framing techniques identified had basis in previous scholarship, observation of new ideas different from previous research established provided new insight in sports scholarship.

WHAT WE FOUND

The three distinct phases of CDA mentioned above were used to identify themes and framing techniques. Analysis of the eight ESPN clips used in our research produced three themes visible during coverage of the 2019 FIFA World Cup. Those themes include: (1) hegemonic masculinity perpetuation, (2) lack of equality (anti-feminist standards), and (3) proactive argumentation for equality. Each theme is further broken down below discussing framing techniques such as controlling the context, facial expressions and paralanguage, and hesitation through reclarification. Controlling the context explained by Van Dijk (1993) includes managing the situation or narrative through headline selection, allotted time given for discussion, interruption, and reintegration of topics. Facial expressions, gestures, and paralanguage are nonverbal cues that can reinforce or contradict spoken language. Hesitations or interruptions are pauses or interludes which can show power dynamics between speakers (Van Dijk, 1993). Each of these techniques were used to identify the three themes in ESPN's coverage of the 2019 World Cup.

Hegemonic Masculinity Perpetuation

The most common theme found in terms of repetition through analysis of the videos was perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity standards. Hegemonic masculinity, the "masculine model, values and practices preserving male supremacy over the female class" (Connell, 1987; Heckman, 1990). This theme was enacted through control of the context, facial expressions and paralanguage, and hesitations or silences.

Controlling the context. In this thematic technique, interruption and reintegration of topics were most prevalent. A video discussing the performance of the women's national team in their 13–0 win over Thailand presents a concrete example. This video centered around discussion as to whether or not the score and goal celebrations by the United States were

disrespectful and controversial. Three analysts, one woman and two men, debated the topic. One man was strongly against the goals and celebrations that whenever one analyst began counter-argumentation he reiterated the phrase, "you would get beat up if you celebrated like this in the men's game." Each time the phrase is restated, emphasis is placed on the main headline/narrative of the story being men would put a stop to supposed disrespect through masculine violent qualities. This consistent reintegration alludes to hegemonic masculinity in soccer by emphasizing masculine traits superior to those of women as men are strong enough to end any disrespect on their own.

In this same video, reintegration of the phrase was done through interruption. The emphasis on a man enacting violence to stop celebrations was created by the male analyst interrupting the female. The women discussed differences in the women's game when it comes to opponents in her justification of the goal scoring and celebrations. The man interrupted right as she was arguing a more competitive nation like France would have put a stop to it. Interrupting the woman's main point means her interpretation/narrative was not a priority to the male counterparts throughout the debate. Hegemonic masculinity, male standards favored over women's, is present here by a male interrupting a female taking away her voice and the voice supporting the women's national team.

Another video in which the 13–0 win versus Thailand is discussed employs reintegration tactics. This video includes one male analyst, the head anchor, and two female analysts, and former U.S. soccer players. Conversation through the first half of the video solely focused on skill and strategy when the male asked how the women felt about excessive celebration. The women quickly shot down the question resorting back to athletic performance and achievement in the match. The male anchor proceeded to reintroduce and integrate the celebration topic two more times. This interruption framed the narrative and headline away from team performance and toward excessive celebratory events. Not only is this again a man interrupting a woman placing the spoken word of the male in sports above the female, it is also taking away from the athleticism and achievements of the women's team. Framing taking focus away from athleticism and strength is commonplace which perpetuates hegemonic masculinity standards (Villalon et al., 2017).

Facial expressions, gestures, and paralinguage. The video first referenced above correlates hegemonic masculinity perpetuation with facial expressions, gestures, and paralinguage. One male analyst, when

discussing the goals and celebrations, had very animated facial expressions and vocal tone. When anyone disagreed with the oldest male analyst, his facial expression produced feelings of confusion and disgust. Echoed by paralinguistics, specifically elevation in the tone in his voice, the man feels his storied and sustained opinion should reign supreme. With hegemony's basis being historic and masculine opinions superior to others, the clear confusion and disgust over dissenting opinions evidently showcase hegemonic masculinity.

In most videos analyzed, tone was indicative of opinions and feelings surrounding topics. The first instance is in one anchor's introduction to the segment saying, "let us have our tea" in a clearly judgmental and sarcastic tone. The phrase is in reference to Alex Morgan's celebration following one of her five goals against Thailand where she gestures sipping tea. Starting the news coverage with a judgmental tone suggests a disgruntled opinion one of which being a storied discriminatory opinion surrounding confidence and cockiness in female athletes. It also sets a framed precedent for the following story, of which being women should not enact celebrations perceivable as arrogance. With the basis of hegemony being rooted in tradition and masculine superiority (Villalon et al., 2017), the anchor's opinionated tone perpetuates these gendered characterized norms established in historic implementation in sports.

Lack of Equality (Anti-Feminist Standards)

Lack of equality through framing can be seen simply through the amount of coverage in comparison to the men's game. Since we are only looking at women's coverage, amount will not be discussed below. Other framing techniques of time allocation and paralinguistics will be used.

Controlling the context. In this theme, controlling the context was discovered through time allocation. One video with the headline "Will the USWNT's World Cup win help drive up interest in the NWSL" has a total duration of 9 minutes. Presumably, the headline would indicate full discussion of women's soccer. The actual time spent discussing women's soccer was about 3 minutes with the rest discussing male sports. The time disparity in this video is indicative of the women's place in the sports industry. With the World Cup being arguably the biggest event happening in the world, one would assume 9 minutes of coverage could be filled discussing women's soccer. The time allocation alludes to not a lack of

topics but actually an inequality in the amount of coverage. Significance is being placed on men's sports even if they are not the most notable event.

Other instances of time discrepancies involve allocation away from women's sports even if it seems minimalistic. A few of the videos discussing goal celebrations and the injuries sustained by the women's team during matches included comparisons and discussions of similar instances in male sports. Male focused discussion lasted about 1–2 minutes in two videos 6 minutes and 4 minutes long. While the message of these discussions had pro-feminism qualities, to be discussed later, time allocation from women's sports in any context frames the story in unequal ways. Rarely are women's sports brought into conversation when the focus is on the men's game. For example, as mentioned previously, female athletes like Simone Biles are referred to as the Kobe Bryant of gymnastics (Visser, 2016). The reverse does not occur in sports communication. That is why bringing up men's sports even for a positive message conveys inequality in sports as the men's game does not experience comparisons.

Paralanguage. With this technique including identification of tone, vocal rate, pronunciation, and volume, many instances in the videos could be hyper analyzed. The focus in this research surrounds more present yet still subtle paralanguage instances. In most videos referenced, tone and pitch were indicative of opinions and feelings surrounding topics. One video had analysts questioning each other on their opinions surrounding the goal differential and celebration controversy from the women's team's 13–0 win against Thailand. In this video, two of the three male anchors spoke for all but 30 seconds of the video. Both argued there is no problem with goal celebration giving the appearance of complete support of the women's team. One analyst compared commonplace celebration in the men's game as a narrative arguing that the women's game should not be any different. Directly following that comparison, the third and final analyst was asked his thoughts and whether he found celebration problematic. His response was "no not really" with an increase in pitch with each word said. A higher pitch reveals a questionable opinion that he likely does not even believe. Juxtapose that with mentioning of celebration in men's sports not receiving criticism, and inequality among men and women in sport is constructed.

Proactive Argumentation for Equality (Pro-Feminism)

This theme is a complicated one. Visible argumentation for equality is an introductory step toward achievement of feminist principles. Any progress indicates positive steps toward postmodern feminism and deconstruction of discrimination in sports. For this research, however, this theme will identify ways equality is being promoted while also identifying how the argumentation is indicative of the current state of inequality.

Paralanguage. Mentioned previously, tone, vocal pitch, and volume have the ability to reinforce or contradict the narrative. Instances in the realm of this pro-equality theme contain paralanguage that works to reinforce the spoken word. The video which debates FIFA's injury guidelines following a match where Alex Morgan exhibited symptoms of head trauma (i.e., concussion like symptoms) included intense heightening of volume. The analyst, a former male soccer player, argued for FIFA to "wake up and alter concussion protocols." Phrasing of this statement already expresses passion in the speaker. The yelling equivalent volume reinforces and intensifies the speaker's passion for equality across men's and women's sports. Further, the annoyed and disgusted tone when expressing lack of concussion protocols in women's soccer points toward both the passion some have for equality and the discriminatory state women's sports currently face. This even points toward the views postmodernism feminists proclaim in the need for deconstruction of hegemonic and discriminatory views like preconceived notions women's sports do not need strict injury protocols as their sports are not as violent.

Hesitation through reclarification. This framing technique points toward careful language consideration needed to not inadvertently frame a story in a negative light. This hesitation and reclarification can be seen through the use of pauses and backtracking. Two videos included prominent examples of this. In the video titled "Will the USWNT's World Cup win help drive up interest in the NWSL" a plan to increase National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), the women's professional soccer league in the United States, attendance was introduced. That plan included double headers of Major League Soccer (MLS), the men's professional soccer league in the United States, and NWSL games. One analyst mentioned how "no one would want to sit through 3 hours of soccer." The pause and reclarification occurred when the analyst backtracked ensuring his point was not to imply the inability to watch women's soccer. His rephrasing entails his understanding on the importance of inadvertent opinions

framing headlines and perpetuation of inequality in men's and women's sports.

The other instance is visible in the video debating FIFA's injury guidelines. As mentioned earlier, the analyst showed passion for equal injury guidelines across men's and women's soccer. His main argument partially relies upon women being as if not more susceptible to head injuries. At first, he simply states, "women are more likely to experience concussions than men." The hesitation and reclarification came when the analyst realized the narrative produced if he only said women are more susceptible to concussions. That statement would produce the headline of women being weaker than men meaning they are unable to handle physical contact like men. The analyst instead clarified that science not personal opinion argues women are just as likely if not more likely to experience concussions. His resolve showed that some individuals understand how simple changes in language change the way a narrative is framed and can promote inequality. This hesitation also points toward commonplace hegemonic masculinity and anti-feminism ideals that already exist. The ideas that women would be more likely to succumb to concussion symptoms because they are weaker or women are less likely to experience concussions because the game is less violent allude to discrimination women face in sports at every level.

LESSONS LEARNED

This research looked to discover: (1) what identifiable themes exist among ESPN's coverage of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup and (2) what framing techniques or methods are employed. Argumentation of previous literature predicting themes of hegemonic masculinity and inequality translated into our research findings as two of the three themes. Even though discrimination was not found in total viewership as the Women's 2019 FIFA World Cup had a 22% higher rating than the Men's 2018 FIFA World Cup (Hess, 2019), discriminatory practices still existed through media coverage with framing techniques. Techniques included controlling the context, facial expressions and paralanguage, and hesitations through reclarification. Those framing methods contributed to the identification of the three themes which included: (1) hegemonic masculinity perpetuation, (2) lack of equality (anti-feminist standards), and (3) proactive argumentation for equality.

As mentioned previously, themes of hegemonic masculinity and inequality were predicted in previous research. Framing method like controlling the context was predicted the most. Controlling the context includes time allocation and headline selection. Previous sports scholarship on the Olympics alluded to men's sports taking coverage away from women's sports (Billings, 2008). Even though the Women's World Cup is solely a women's event, analysis uncovered time allocation taking focus away from women's soccer when storylines were compared to men's sports. This is indicative of framing used in media every day. If time is allocated away from an all-women's event, one can argue that combined female and male events or news coverage with both women's and men's sports leave little to no time to discuss the women. This is a clear representation of inequality that postmodern feminists look to reconstruct. Simply, this could be achieved through devotion of more time to women's sports.

Equality from the standards of postmodern feminists can also be achieved through individuals arguing for equality between men's and women's sports. Unexpectedly, framing in this research pointed toward the establishment of argumentation for equality as a theme. The theme represents a starting point toward postmodern feminism principles even though it is minimalistic in scope in our research. This was done mainly by hesitation through reclarification and paralanguage. Male anchors who argued for equality did so through passion visible in tone, pitch, and volume. They also carefully selected words to ensure their points were not misconstrued in a discriminatory way. Tactics like these could be employed more and more by anchors and analysts to frame narratives in media as pro-feminism and equality in sports between genders.

This study has potential limitations. One of them is examining a small selection of news reports. Both researchers focused on 8 different news reports regarding the 2019 FIFA World Cup. These news reports were a small section of the actual 30 minutes to an hour report. This study was also created to look at one media platform surrounding the topic. Therefore, the findings cannot serve as a basis for all media surrounding the controversy of the 2019 FIFA World Cup. Online media such as social media and digital newspapers could have a different outcome in interpreting the controversial issues. With this type of study there is a possibility of the researchers getting a flawed interpretation. Before the study, each researcher had their own bias to Women's professional sports and the controversial topic surrounding the recent World Cup. This bias could affect the final interpretation of the results in the study.

Since this research only examines small segments of the episode, it does not touch on watching the full broadcast. Therefore, future research would be watching the entire post game coverage. In addition, looking at other major sporting events such as the Super Bowl, World Series, or Olympics could be analyzed in comparison to FIFA. Comparing other major sporting events to FIFA could lead into examining how the media portrays FIFA to other sports championship games. Future research could look into analyzing different media networks covering the FIFA World Cup. It would be critical to look into the major news stations such as ESPN, NBC Sports, CBS Sports Network, and so on. An extra research opportunity would be to research multiple media outlets covering the men's and women's soccer championship. Analyzing different media outlets surrounding both men and women's championship will allow the researcher to recognize what feminism and masculine themes are present during each broadcast. Lastly, an additional research subject is looking into different nations and their media coverage surrounding the FIFA World Cup. This study could look into multiple mainstream media outlets in comparison to top U.S. media outlets covering the World Cup. In closing, much research still needs to be achieved before making further rationalizations.

This research acts as a starting point for communication research in the sports sector surrounding mega sporting events, specifically the World Cup. Previous communication scholarship surrounding mega sporting events discussed framing in viewership numbers and headlines surrounding the Olympic Games. This research used past scholarship as a guide to analyze media coverage of the 2019 FIFA World Cup. Three themes of (1) hegemonic masculinity perpetuation, (2) lack of equality (anti-feminist standards), and (3) proactive argumentation for equality were developed through critical discourse analysis and postmodern feminism as lenses. This research had limitations in terms of scope, but it provides new analysis to sports communication scholarship as little to no research existed previously covering women's soccer and the World Cup. Future research surrounding mega events could be done building off this research to further explore themes in media and framing techniques filling the gap in the sports communication sector.

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“I Stand by the Comments I Made”: The 2019 FIFA Women’s Soccer Championship: Images, Commentary and Narratives Made with Memes

Mildred F. Perreault and Gregory P. Perreault

Throughout the FIFA tournament, the US Women’s National Soccer Team (USWNT) and other teams weathered insults and ridicule, yet also received support and praise on social media, specifically with enhanced images shared by team members, fans, supporters, nay-sayers and media outlets alike. In particular, when soccer captain Megan Rapinoe responded negatively to United States President Donald Trump following his comments about the team, memes documenting their conflict proliferated on Twitter. As with many things on social media, the conversation via memes

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took on a life of its own, but referenced throughout this individual case was a much deeper, long-standing conversation about the nature of women's sport and female athletes.

Prior research has established that through the medium of memes, narratives about the individual athlete can sometimes spiral out of the athletes reach and become at best, an avenue for critique (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019) and, at worst, a way of amplifying hate speech (Page et al., 2016). The team's visible, inarguable athletic success created a social media "echo" in which the performative presentation of gender necessitated a discursive conversation through memes. Through the lens of performativity and narrative, this chapter examines the memes regarding the women's soccer team distributed in June and July 2019 during the FIFA World Cup. We find that while women are visually narrated in a manner more akin to that of male athletes—emphasizing strength, competency and confidence—this is in part a result of a heteronormative discomfort with Megan Rapinoe's sexuality. Hence, the memes—in an attempt to address this discomfort—narratively place her in a male role. This continued connection to masculinity further evidences that even when strides are made in female representations, the strides occur within familiar, acceptable frames—those in which men still have a central role to play.

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT

Narrative Theory in Memes Research

Considering the narratives created and shared through memes is not innate a social media phenomenon. Exchanging words and images creates a narrative or storied form of communication, which allows for audience and creator engagement (Abbasi et al., 2010; Huang et al., 2010; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Perreault & Paul 2018; Simon et al., 2015). Memes are often user-generated and therefore seen as empowering to those who post them, and allow for a small amount of information to tell a much larger story. Often memes are reproduced and repurposed in efforts to change the narrative created by one group in exchange for another, slight changes in an image or wording can engage people who come from different interests, niches or even political perspectives. If a meme is accepted, shared or altered by a person the meme becomes a smaller piece of a larger conversation. Whether the meme is adopted or not by a group is described as fitness. Fitness is dependent on timeliness,

and similar to news, loses flare as the event it references becomes less timely (Yang & Wang, 2015). Memes often mimic the news in the news cycle in that they are born out of current events.

In addition, the very act of reposting or sharing a meme on social media can “validate and encourage others” who think or feel similarly about the issue, but also inform others about specific issues (Boyd et al., 2010). However, the purpose of a meme is often to be lighthearted or funny about something that seems too serious—hearkening to the innate desire people have for satire and humor (Brown et al., 2010).

The lens of narrative theory and analysis has been used frequently to unpack trends and depictions of female characters. Narrative theory (Foss, 1996) relies heavily on the ability of people to tell and interpret stories. These stories contain certain narrative roles and plot lines, often familiar to other literary or mediated stories. By viewing the world according to varied heroes, villains and plotlines, individuals gain understanding of the characters and their situations (Foss, 1996). It is important to understand that even celebrities and celebrity athletes, being real people, often take on a characterized role.

Often our understanding of a story or event relies on the stories we have read or interpreted before we come to the current story. The retelling of stories provides a sort of catharsis—often stories provide enough familiarity for the audience to identify, but integrate nuance as to keep the audience engaged (Bascom, 1965). Therefore, in order to understand the characters, their performativity and the way the audience identifies with them we propose using narrative theory as a lens through which to unpack the characters’ embodiment.

Women’s Sports in the Media

Studies have examined women’s sports and the way fans watch, interact with and discuss them on social media and how they have been covered in the mainstream media. Studies examining the promotion of the women’s soccer 2011 World Cup on Twitter by the World Soccer Federation (Coche, 2016), and the significance of women in sports and sports media (Duncan, 2006). Women’s soccer faces a number of challenges, specifically because of the stereotypical traits of masculinity often associated with sports (Coche, 2016). In a survey of editors in the southern United States, researchers found that the editors found many believed female athletes to have less athletic potential than male athletes (Hardin & Shain, 2005). A

study of college students found that even though more women are playing sports, the degree to which women's sports are more common has not made a difference in gender stereotyping of sports (Hardin & Greer, 2009).

Women's sports are often under-represented in mass media, and this under-representation occurs even when the sports featured in mass media are acceptable and demonstrate stories that focus on the elegance and agility of athletes (Baroffio-Bota, Banet-Weiser, & Bryant, 2006; Coche, 2016). While sports media has developed significantly with the addition of user-generated content (Perreault & Bell, 2020), some scholars still see the narratives in the public sphere as a hindrance to progress (Fink, 2015). And even more recently social media and sports images have begun to be studied. In fact, a study of the 2015 Women's FIFA World Cup also evaluated posts on Instagram to communicate the social and political dimensions of sports and competition (Toffoletti et al., 2019).

Scholars have found that women's sports receive less media coverage than men's sports; this is widely thought to be an issue of gender identity associated with women's sports (Caudwell, 2011). Images can often change the way we think about information, and in this case, memes hold the power to grab viewer attention. Memes have also been found to change the way the news cycle works, specifically concerning social media (Leskovec et al., 2009). Social media also allows minorities and other groups to rally a group around certain causes with the assistance of hashtags and social media search functions (Thrift, 2014). While social media messages can be segmented they can also reach broader audiences—an odd and sometimes chaotic dynamic unlike any other medium.

In this case, a broader public was aware of the women's team because it was widely covered by mainstream news media as well as sports next works, but also because of the politicized response of Megan Rapinoe on social media to President Donald Trump. While the general messages were shared widely on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, they were often shared with segmented publics and by niche publications, as well.

Memes as a Medium of Politics

Memes often indicate a deeper and more complex political discussion. For example, often “cultural practices and logics of ‘sharing’ political memes and conceptualizes memes as part of an agonistic public sphere and media ecology” which forms to educate and rally support for a certain perspective (Burroughs, 2013, p. 258). During the 2012 presidential election,

many memes evaluated and critiqued President Obama, sometimes depicting him as unpatriotic, subversive and anti-American (Burroughs, 2013). These memes were shared on social media networks like Facebook and Reddit as they openly challenged campaign messaging, by piggybacking on well-known pop culture references and other trending memes. Because memes are a developing and user-generated medium, they are susceptible to hoaxes and misinformation (McLeod, 2011).

The personalization of politics online has only become more common since studies done in 2008 and 2012; however, research has shown that memes can heighten spectacle and contribute to political discourse (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Burroughs, 2013). In addition, memes have been found to be a "pleasurable" creative activity for those that make and share them on social media (Burroughs, 2013, p. 264).

Memes represent cultural conversation and are often used to mitigate challenging issues by using images and text to defuse political or social issues. Memes are often indicative of larger social conversations and often span multiple perspectives. For example, the memes following Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman's comments at the 2014 AFC Championship Game at once appeared to get in Sherman's corner and support him, but simultaneously, developed an undercurrent of racial hate (Page et al., 2016). Similarly, following the Deflategate controversy, memes regarding New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady at once reveled in his public scrutiny and challenged the integrity of the NFL in accusing him of wrongdoing (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019).

PERFORMATIVITY

This chapter deals with two concepts of performativity. Performativity according to Shifman (2013) is inherent in memes, and faces and bodies often present to help audiences identify with the meme. The evolution of the front-facing camera on cell phones as well as the development of social media applications has led to a significant increase in photo sharing and selfies (Senft & Baym, 2015). The challenges of performativity are that although a person may perform a certain way, social media may repurpose content so that people appear to "perform" in a different way than was intended and for the public to develop a different idea of that person's character and role based on what is shared. Performativity is often found in emancipatory research as a central component which empowers the participants who make messages, and detaches them from societal

constraints on gender and race. Internet spaces and social media have allowed marginalized individuals like women, LGBTQ+ and ethnic minorities to be able to participate in traditional media, and express their beliefs and perspectives (Barnard, 2016; Johnson, 2012). Social media also allows for the intersectionality of identities to “fluctuate” based on the fluidity of the medium as well as those who post content (Johnson, 2012, p. 166).

In addition, this chapter examines gender performativity. While similar, Judith Butler, in her texts *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies* discussed how the performativity of gender by examining how certain genders are presented (Salih, 2007). Butler’s main point was that gender is performed and no gender representations or performances can be separated from societal constructions of those genders. According to Butler, gender must be created by “performing particular acts” to reestablish how “masculinity” and “femininity” are defined and interpreted in society (Brickell, 2003, p. 167). Because social media afford the opportunity to represent gender through images and the manipulation of text, often the images perform as a mechanism of this reestablishment of gender norms.

MEMES AND ENGAGEMENT ONLINE

While memes are simple, they are often made from what is readily available online. Websites like meme generator (<https://memegenerator.net>) or img flip are common, but people can also create memes with social media editors. Because anyone can create a meme, and use readily available online images without knowledge of computer graphics, photography or coding memes have become very simple and easy to use (Shifman, 2013).

In addition, marketers and public relations writers are using memes to create viral traction for statements or events (Jenkins et al., 2018). Research on marketing and Internet communication has found that sometimes the very act of labeling something as viral can be problematic, as it creates a false understanding that the meme might be valid or represent truth. Jenkins and colleagues (2018) also called this “spreadability” or the idea that people share things with their social network that they think will be spread to others. This is also what Lankshear and Knobel (2007) termed “contagion,” or a small action which can create a large-scale impact.

In popular culture, images are often more powerful than texts, but images with text provide a double chance for audience engagement. Memes have been found, like satirical television shows, to provide a platform for deconstructing politics (Street et al., 2013). Because of their

engaging nature, memes provide citizens with a platform through which to reflect on what they believe in a more fun and engaging manner (Dahlgren, 2009). Memes provide a place for political thought and discourse:

the humour, not least the parodies of established forms of political communication that strip away artifice, highlight inconsistencies and generally challenge the authority of official political discourse, offers pleasurable ports of entry to current political topics, as it contributes to the evolution of mediated political culture. (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 139)

Memes provide a central locus for where people can align and relate. When a person shares a meme they associate with that image, they are often making a statement. This process of "encoding" using identifiers like race, class, gender, sexuality helps to augment their alignment and becomes central to what they choose to share (Phillips & Milner, 2017). For example, a study of the #yesallwomen memes during a campaign in 2013 encouraged conversation around the roles of women and society, and specifically created conversations around women's equality issues (Phillips & Milner, 2017). Other times, memes like other publicly shared images are used to create a constructed reality for those viewing them (Bormann et al., 2003; Durand, 1970). In a study of female soccer fans in 2015, Instagram pictures containing the event-related hashtags #FIFAWWC, #LiveYourGoals, #SheBelieves and #CanadaRed to show their support and perspective on different statements made by soccer players and commentators (Toffoletti et al., 2019).

Overall, the role of conversation around social media is sometimes disjointed given the public following the messages. Additionally, people may develop a network outside of their intended network as followers share with their personal networks. These sometimes result in the misuse of images or use of images with words or phrases that are unconnected to the initial image.

The Situation

Memes were made concerning several incidents; these include the playoff game between the Women's Teams from the United States and England, Megan Rapinoe's reactions to President Donald Trump on Twitter, numerous memes of goalies Ali Krieger and Ashlyn Harris and the social

media response after their wins across the world. Rapinoe, Krieger and Harris all became quickly recognizable in social media, and Rapinoe became an icon for the team. In fact, Rapinoe herself almost became a central character to the creation of social media posts and memes, and as the captain of the women's FIFA team in 2019 became a recognizable sports celebrity.

FIFA 19, the popular Electronic Arts video game acknowledged this difference by adding 12 women's teams to their annual release video game, which was only scheduled to have 2 women's teams before the popularity of the women's teams (Webb, 27 June 2019). ESPN praised FIFA in 2019 for its emphasis on building up the women's program with internationally known players like Rapinoe and US citizen Tobin Heath who played for France (Hays, 26 June 2019). ESPN's Simon Kuper also called Rapinoe and her work with women's sports and social justice iconic, noting she was the first white athlete to take a knee at the national anthem in 2016, following the anti-racism campaign of NFL player Colin Kaepernick (Kuper, 2 Dec 2019). The memes were viewed and analyzed with these studies as context.

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

With these narratives in mind, the study evaluated and explained the ways narratives complimented and differed in feminist understandings of women's soccer in society, in the media and on social media. Using narrative lenses, and image analysis the researchers did a Google search for memes concerning Megan Rapinoe, women's soccer and the Women's FIFA World Cup in 2019. After searching for FIFA and women through Google Images, researchers found more than 30 memes that were consistently used and reposted in June–July 2019. Some were images with text and others were screenshots of Twitter or Facebook posts with images. They looked at the way these memes were used and what people, news organizations and social media sites they were posted on.

The following is an analysis of these memes and how they created three main functions: Women as Impactful Beyond Soccer, Equal Recognition for Women in Sports and Taking a Political Stance.

Within these three main functions there were multiple narratives, but for the sake of the study the researchers focused on the top two in each category.

Women as Impactful Beyond Soccer

Women playing sports, and playing them well is an indicator of women society changing the narrative about women in sports. Specifically the two themes in this category deal with equal pay and patriotism.

#EqualPay for Women

For the sport of Women’s Soccer, there are a number of challenges. The popularity of Women’s soccer bloomed in the 1990s with the success of Mia Hamm and teammates at the inaugural women’s FIFA World Cup in 1999, and women’s team and gold medal wins at the Summer Olympic Games in 1996 in Atlanta and 2004 in Athens. The role of women in sports is one that has often pushed boundaries of cultural representation in that it provides. However, a lot of the conversation around women in sports has looked not only at news coverage and funding, but the actual problem with inequity in women’s pay. Organizations like Ladies Get Paid hosted watch parties for the FIFA Women’s games in places all over the country to emphasize this point. Ladies Get Paid is a network of professional women that according to their website (<https://www.ladiesgetpaid.com/>) “provides the tools, resources, and community to help women negotiate for equal pay, and power in the workplace.”

Rapinoe and other female athletes shared a number of messages on social media with the hashtag #equalpay, including Billie Jean King a tennis player who was known for her wins in the 1960s and 1970s, her 1973 “*Battle of the Sexes*” tennis match against male tennis player *Bobby Riggs*. King is also the founder of the *Women’s Tennis Association* and the *Women’s Sports Foundation*. King offered her congratulations to the team and to (Image W). Another person who shared this content is Alexandria Ocasio Cortez who posted a reminder of the lawsuit between the US Women’s National Team and FIFA for equal pay.

One meme has an upper half featuring Rapinoe with the quote from her appearance on NBC’s Today Show: “When they are ready to have a conversation about equal pay, I think conversations will go better” and the bottom half with a photo of Christen Press—“Unfortunately, It was just the concept of paying us equally. We never got past that, posted by Bleacher Report Football.

This shows a broader context for what Rapinoe has said, and that her conversation in the light of the team’s win is one that has been taking

place for a long time for women in sports as well as professional women. While many other women are part of this conversation and are featured in these memes, Rapinoe is the central figure during the summer of 2019. She is characterized as a central figure for the #equalpay movement perhaps because of her outspokenness on social media.

Soccer as a Cultural Indicator of Patriotism

Rapinoe's interaction with President Trump on social media garnered a number of discussions about patriotism. Since 2016, Rapinoe had been outspoken about how the US national anthem was not inclusive, and aligned with Colin Kaepernick's #takeaknee in solidarity. The popularity of soccer, specifically as women's sport has become more common in the United States as the sport has become more widely viewed. Many of the WNT are also members of the women's soccer Olympic team, and there is already a lot of patriotism associated with the Olympics. For this case, the fact that the women represent the United States at international soccer tournaments wearing United States colors and with a US flag flying at the stadium frame the event with patriotism. But the conversation as to whether or not the actions of players are patriotic or political continues to be highly debated on Twitter and by sports commentators.

On June 26, then-President Trump stated on Twitter: "Megan should never disrespect our Country, the White House, or our Flag, especially since so much has been done for her & the team," continuing, "Be proud of the Flag that you wear." While this was in response to a video Rapinoe made several months before the actual game being played the week of June 16th, it was fuel for an intense social media conversation between Rapinoe and Trump and their respective supporters.

During this Twitter tirade, the account @Realdonaldtrump tweeted at the wrong Megan Rapinoe; instead of the soccer superstar, he tagged a different Megan "Rapino" (her account is now renamed with a handle "maybe megan rapinoe"). The tagged Rapino made light of the situation while also voicing support for Rapinoe's positions. The image of this interaction pictures Megan with her fist high and a text box from Megan Rapino stating "and she was right to say so cry me a river plus this isn't even her acc" and later "mom come pick me up old men are attacking me." The "real" Megan Rapinoe is extremely politically active on her Twitter account, and has been vocal concerning her status on different political issues like #equalpay, #takeaknee and more recently

#blacklivesmatter campaigns. While her account tweets often, only a portion of the tweets are original (not retweeted) and sent directly @ other accounts. Another response to the @RealDonaldTrump tweet by Jonah Hermann with an image of Rapinoe was repurposed as a meme. In this meme, Rapinoe has her arms raised in a V with the Tweet to the left reading “Jokes on Megan Rapinoe because she has to go to the White House because now she’s our president.” This tweet launched a number of speculative conversations about the potential of Rapinoe running for president or another political office.

Equal Recognition for Women in Sports

As mentioned earlier, women athletes are held to an unequal standard regarding pay and many of the conversations pertaining directly to women and men in soccer. One tweet with a gif (shared several times) has the statement “NOW PAY THE WOMEN” and is shared from the account @MeninBlazers from NBC Sports on Twitter: The account bio reads “Proud Purveyors of All Things Sub-Optimal. Find @rogbenett and @embassydaries on @NBCSports. If you send us a tweet, it could be used in any media, worldwide.” This is interesting because these sports commentators are taking a direct stand concerning women in sports and #equalpay although they did not use the hashtag. These sports journalists cover a variety of sports, including men’s and women’s soccer.

One big question surfaced on social media “Why do more people care about men’s sports, when the women win more?”, which brings us to the second part of the equality theme. Perhaps this is something challenging to examine, because the majority of our memes pertain to the women’s team, but there are a few additional references to men versus women during the FIFA World Cup in articles shared with the Tweets and images.

Political and Social Threat

Narratively, Megan Rapinoe is the dominant character in the memes, typically as the primary subject of the image and often centered both visually and referentially—even when other characters are present (e.g. US President Donald Trump) they are typically responding the visual impetus of Rapinoe. Yet a common plot tension reflected in the images regards a heteronormative discomfort with the presence of Rapinoe—diminishing her femininity and emphasizing masculinity through comparison.

Rapinoe's dominance in the memes is reflected visually in that only two of the images in the sample reflect any other central character. And even when she's not pictured, she can still maintain focus; in one of those two images, Rapinoe is the subject of the text placed over the image. Throughout the rest of the images, Rapinoe is placed in a visually dominant position—level with the viewer, with her gaze over the head of the viewer. For example, in one image, Rapinoe is placed on the left-hand side, looking into the camera with her gaze looking over the head of the viewer. This gaze is often used to reflect a character's confidence (Thomson et al., 2018) and the text, a Twitter exchange, acts to put someone challenging Rapinoe in their place.

Jake: "We don't dislike Megan Rapinoe because she's gay we dislike her because she's an arrogant wanker."
 Mrs Olson says: "Strong women have that effect on weak men"

Taking the text and visuals together narratively argues that the presentation of Rapinoe as "arrogant" is inherently tied to a classic piece of gender double standard—what would be considered "confident" by men, is "arrogance" in women. Leaning on this double standard then is an act of weakness, through the lens of this meme. Other times, this dominant position is used to celebrate her identity. For example, another image depicts Rapinoe celebrating a win, eyes squinting in the midst of a celebratory yell, but gaze again looking over the top of the viewer. The subtext references to the headline accompanying the image "Purple-Haired Lesbian Goddess Flattens France like a Crepe." In both cases, Rapinoe's dominance is not only accepted, but welcomed and references are made to her strength.

However, this dominant position also results in other characters reacting responsively in the images. Most often the plot conflict is placed between Rapinoe and US President Donald Trump. For example, one image shows Rapinoe celebrating and in another celebratory yell. The response—indicated through a speech bubble coming from out of the image—is from Trump who writes "but Megan should WIN first before she TALKS!!! Finish the job!" The meme of course very clearly depicts Megan having just won, thus placing Trump in a jester role—making a statement that from the context is innately ridiculous. In another celebratory meme, Jonah Hermann responds to Rapinoe's celebratory position, saying "Lol jokes on Megan Rapinoe cause she actually has to go to the

White House cause now she's our president." Referenced implicitly is Rapinoe's controversial decision to decline a White House invitation, should her team successfully win FIFA. This invitation was the subject of another image in our sample, which places teammate Ali Krieger in the center role visually. The meme is constructed using a picture of a smiling Krieger with her hands making a heart shape over her head. Two text boxes on either side of her torso in the picture are centered on showing support for Rapinoe, using the left side to quote Trump; the right, Krieger's response:

Trump: "Women's soccer player [Megan Rapinoe] just stated that she is "not going to the F...ing White House if we win." Other than the NBA, which now refuses to call owners, owners (please explain that I just got Criminal Justice Reform passed. Black unemployment is at the lowest level..."

Ali Krieger: In regards to the "President's" tweet today, I know women who you cannot control or grope anger you, but I stand by [Megan Rapinoe] & will sit this one out as well. I don't support this administration nor their fight against LGBTQ+ citizens, immigrants & our most vulnerable."

Again, this places Rapinoe as a central character, requiring response from those around her both by opponents as well as supporters.

Finally, numerous homophobic memes also emerged in the sample which clearly displayed a discomfort with her lesbian sexuality. For example, another Tweet in this sample shows Megan Rapinoe in a celebratory position, with the accompanying text "I really liked the women's world cup until this guy ruined it for me." The text is an obvious dismissal of Rapinoe's femininity. Similarly, another image places Rapinoe opposite actor Zac Efron. Efron's hair is fluffed and white in the photo—made to look at a copy of Rapinoe's hair after she has finished a game. The placement, with a tweet from Efron about dying his hair pink, is clearly meant to argue for the visual similarities between Efron, a man, and Rapinoe, a woman. This side-by-side comparison of Rapinoe and male counterparts appeared throughout the sample, even in cases where the intentionality appears celebratory, the images nevertheless carry other messages that are more insidious. For example, one Tweet places Rapinoe opposite Jonathan Bairstow (a cricket player) and both of them are offering similar body language, clearly celebrating a win. On Rapinoe's side of the image, a tweet

from Trump reads “Ms Rapinoe sure does love herself. Can’t wait to see our Lioness dent that stupendous ego.” On Bairstow’s side of the image, Piers Morgan tweets “Brilliant century for [Jonathan Bairstow]!” Clearly there’s a political message here about the gender double standard, but that also begs the question of why Bairstow was present in the first place.

Throughout this sample, Rapinoe is placed in a dominant, commanding position but often placed visually and narratively opposite of men. While some of the images were more explicitly homophobic than others, there was clearly an undercurrent of comparison—as if viewers were being asked to consider “does Megan Rapinoe look and act similar to these male figures?” But to which the authors would ask why it matters. Clearly, if Bairstow’s win occurred in a vacuum, the memes that follow wouldn’t place him opposite a female to compare the visuality. It would be taken in a singular form.

In the next section, this chapter will contextualize the current data in prior literature and consider how these findings build on our theoretical frameworks.

LESSONS LEARNED

This chapter sought to understand the narration of the memes regarding the FIFA women’s cup. The process of sharing a meme is perhaps deeper than popular commentary often grants credit for; we share a meme because we agree with it, because it is funny or even because we disagree. Implicit in all those reactions, however, is a fundamental understanding of the visual code written into the image. People can’t, of course, find a joke funny if they don’t fundamentally, understand the language or the context. So, then it is through that lens that this study positions the memes; memes are objects of culture that while fleeting and—on the surface—shallow, they nevertheless reveal a narrative language and context that is shared among viewers.

This research found three narrative themes written through the sample of FIFA memes. The first theme presents the woman as impactful beyond soccer. The memes in this theme take a moment of celebration and achievement in women’s soccer to acknowledge the wealth of contributions women make that—like the successful women’s soccer team—tend to be undervalued and underappreciated. The second theme presents the woman as seeking equal recognition in sport. The women’s soccer team was contextualized as funded less and publicized less than men’s soccer

and yet volumes more successful. The final theme presented the women's soccer team, particularly through Megan Rapinoe, as a political and social threat. This is done by placing Rapinoe as the central character, deemphasizing her femininity and likening her to male figures—figures that she placed at odds with both visually and rhetorically.

On one hand, these memes present an image of women's soccer that is more empowering than much of media research on women's soccer (Baroffio-Bota, Banet-Weiser, & Bryant, 2006; Coche, 2016); the women are visualized as strong and competent. As has been demonstrated to be the case in many other instances, sport at times works as an avenue for deeper discussions on politics and gender (Toffoletti et al., 2019). Certainly, memes have in the past been used with political and social intentionality, but this sample is far more organic—more akin to the memes of differing perspectives from the Deflategate controversy (Perreault & Ferrucci, 2019) or the "19 kids and Counting" Duggar scandal (Perreault & Perreault, 2019) than the calculated, politically savvy memes put out by former first lady Michelle Obama's team (Paul & Perreault, 2018). Although the memes take a variety of perspectives of the women's soccer team, and as noted earlier, they contain shared narratives that allow us to *understand the joke* of the meme. In this case, the narrative places women's soccer players as men is in many ways an improvement over the *othering* of years past (Coche, 2016). It emphasized the traits that often are underrepresented in female athletes: competence, skill, determination and strength. Worth emphasizing here are that these are traits much more common in presentation of male athletes; hence, it is then noteworthy to see them applied to female athletes.

However, the undercurrent—context behind the joke—of these memes is the public presentation of Rapinoe's sexuality. Rapinoe is clear and unapologetic for her lesbian sexual preference, and many of the memes at least implicitly presented her sexuality. Narratively, her sexuality is used, in a way, they *explain* her competence, strength and success—it is because of her sexuality. Her gender identity as a woman is then subsumed by a presentation of her sexuality identity.

This is not to say that the social media conversation was taken completely out of the influence of Rapinoe and the women's soccer team. From the standpoint of performativity, Rapinoe's overt performance visually—as captured in these memes—presents her as an unapologetic and acclaimed sportsperson. Even as the context—in text and Twitter content—shifts in its portrayal of her (Senft & Baym, 2015), Rapinoe

nevertheless makes certain portrayals more difficult to support if only because of the images she presents to the camera.

Taken together narrative theory and performativity present a picture of a subversive moment in social media in which many of the narratives about women were upended; however, the narratives nevertheless expressed a heteronormativity in their portrayal and kept the portrayal of women within certain bounds (e.g. requiring the response or the visual connection to male figures).

As a piece of qualitative research, the research is considered to be an integral part of the research toolbox—indeed, it is through the researcher that the *understanding of the joke* can occur (Yin, 2015). That said, it is by no means to be considered generalizable beyond the scope of this study. This research is valuable to scholarship on memes and gender and sports by presenting a case that at once challenges and confirms existing wisdom. Future research might consider the production process of such memes—much is written on the content and reception of memes, but little attention in scholarship is given to the production process. Understanding the encoding process of these memes may aid future researchers in conducting research in this topic.

With the understanding that social media images, and specifically memes, can influence the way which the public perceives a certain athlete or sport athletes, sports organizations and marketers will continue to integrate images into their online and social media campaigns. Images coupled with text, like memes, allow for people to say something without having to write a long post or analysis. They also may reach outside of niche sports audiences because of the political movements associated with them, like the #equalpay movement and #takeaknee. Hence, this research makes a valuable contribution to understanding the role of memes in social media discourse and the representations of women.

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PART II

What Fans Learned



Being There, Being Here: What Critical Field Methods Can Tell Us About WWC 2019

Meredith M. Bagley and Mary Anne Taylor

While studies of rhetoric and discourse have recently embraced a turn to “field methods,” studies of sport discourse have remained reliant on textual or mediated artifacts. This is concerning to the authors given the ability of rhetorical field methods to capture “live” and “processual” rhetoric such as that occurring in and around live sporting events (Middleton et al., 2011). In this chapter, we leverage the authors’ experiences “being there” for the 2019 FIFA World Cup to ask what the women’s soccer World Cup meant on social, cultural, and rhetorical levels.

Drawing from Rai and Drushke’s (2018) guidance in bringing field work to critical rhetorical studies, we agree that “immersing oneself in the dynamic, living, breathing ecologies that give rise to rhetoric and its work enhances the capacity to understand and observe rhetoric as a

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three-dimensional, situated force” (p. 1). Specifically, we build on critical scholars’ use of rhetorical field methods to explore dynamics of gender and sexuality within powerful cultural forms (e.g. Chávez, 2011; Dadas, 2016). In this chapter, one author was able to attend games in France, observing oppositional and queer rhetorics in action within stadiums and other fan spaces. Another author watched stateside in Alabama, California, and Texas that provided complementary insights from the field as gender, race, sexuality, and nation collided on the pitch.

After introducing the theory and methodological intervention afforded by “field rhetoric,” this chapter provides alternating narratives from a diverse set of experiences that provide in-depth assessment of the impact and complexity of FIFA World Cup 2019. We argue that rhetorical field methods partially answer Wenner’s call for more rigorous attention to the ways we engage in sport communication research, specifically his urging that “to get at better understandings about how inequities and social problems may be facilitated by mediated sport content, we need to look beyond content to why, how, and under what conditions that content is created *and how it may be received, embraced, and/or resisted*” (2015, p. 252, emphasis added). We hope to demonstrate to sport scholars the value of emplaced, embodied, critical rhetorical analysis of sport, with particular attention to queer and feminist resistance in fan spaces of FIFA World Cup 2019.

ROOTS OF RHETORICAL FIELD METHODS

The turn in rhetorical studies to methods broadly located “*in situ*” has disparate roots. As early leaders Middleton, Endres, and Senda-Cook (2011) explain, “Most basically, rhetorical field methods are a practical and theoretical synthesis of [critical rhetoric], performance studies, and ethnography that function as an orientation that utilizes methodological tools from (but is not bound by) these subdisciplines in order to understand ‘live’ rhetorics” (p. 388). As speech and communication scholars embraced critical theories of power, language, and culture, for many this led to a reexamination of methodologies. As the authors continue, “Rhetorical field methods offer a productive articulation of the careful textual analyses characteristic of [critical rhetoric] with the provocative insights uncovered by *in situ* research common in ethnography and

performance studies” (p. 388). We see this methodological hybrid as well suited for critical studies of sport: sport provides powerful words, symbols, and performances unfolding in highly emblematic spaces.

A significant coherence among rhetorical field methods is in challenging the notion of the text. Put simply, methods “in situ” or “in the field” attend to the ways lived experience (through bodies, spaces, and objects) exert rhetorical force. As field practitioners Rai and Drushke (2018) state,

We understand rhetoric as multidimensional, existing as and tethered to the many forces and tools, histories and consequences, ideas and discourses, things and processes, desires and hopes, public memories and cultural narratives, people and other beings, symbols and materialities...that constitute and enable the powers of persuasion in any particular place. (p. 2)

That is, rhetoric is not constrained to words recorded on paper (or other digital means)—rhetoric is invented, contested, and experienced well beyond the page.

The booming field of public memory studies is an example of a sub-area of rhetorical analysis that embraced field work with success. From Blair’s early articulations of the value of “being there” (1999), we now benefit from many studies illuminating ways public memory spaces utilize space, emplacement, or movement to achieve persuasive effect. Dubbed “memory places” by Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, scholars of public memory carefully established the ways that “particular spaces become specially imbued with meaning, via material and symbolic supports, that create meaningful experiences when bodies move through them” (2010, p. 32). The authors provide polling data that more Americans trust “going there” to learn about a historical event or site than any other mode of learning (Dickinson et al., 2010, p. 25)—we argue that sport discourse reveals similar notions among sport fans. The power of place in sport points us toward an embrace of field methods to assess sport rhetoric.

In addition to challenging notions of text, field approaches to rhetorical study align with feminist epistemologies. Feminist rhetorical scholars were early adoptees of methods that brought bodies, spaces, and movement into the rhetorical fold. Pezzullo and de Onís (2018) recount that “In the early 2000s, the turn of rhetorical studies toward field methods was heralded as a latent approach to research worthy of our attention for multiple reasons, including: ‘the opportunity to witness and record discourses that are left out of traditional written records ... [and] an opportunity to study

public discourse that is not yet recorded” (p. 104). The emergence of feminist field methods extended work of prior feminist scholars who demonstrated the ways female (and other) voices were left out of the rhetorical record as it was narrowly defined (see Campbell, 1989). The move to field methods allowed scholars to investigate spaces and experiences of these neglected voices instead of relying on official recorded accounts.

This tradition has natural continuities with studies of other marginalizing experiences such as queerness. Chávez (2011) demonstrates how her scholarly participation with a queer/immigration solidarity movement revealed new insights into “enclaves” of activism that form and dissolve during the course of social change. Pezzullo and de Onis remind us that “While culture, meaning-making, and a sense of presence can be studied through archives, they also can be explored through rhetorical field methods that seek out underheard or unheard voices” (2018, p. 111). Sport spaces continue to be tenuous for queer bodies to navigate, be it as athlete or fan (Ziegler, 2016). For every Megan Rapinoe shouting from the rafters, there are a half dozen LGBTQ+ athletes unable to come out. Queer sport fans still monitor their safety in many sporting spaces, fearing physical, verbal, or other forms of harassment in a cultural practice tightly associated with heteronormativity if not outright homophobia (Caldwell, 2006). Progress has been made, but we see value in field methods to more fully discover and illuminate queer experiences in sport.

A final challenge posed by field methods is to the role of the researcher. Dubbed “participatory critical rhetoric,” this methodology argues that the embodied, emplaced experience of being present *and active* within a rhetorical moment or event provides key insights and stronger understandings of its effects and dynamics. As leading theorists of this approach state,

Participatory critical rhetoric builds from the theoretical work that has deconstructed the notion of a stable text that records and makes available rhetorical practices to the expert critic after the fact. Instead, participatory critical rhetoric embraces the fragmentation of discourse and uses the insight gained from embodied participation in emplaced rhetoric to draw together meaningful fragments into a text suitable for criticism. (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 15)

Rather than being a risk to methodological rigor, Pezzullo and de Onis argue that this participatory critique exposes the “interconnectedness” of rhetoric: “At these sites, identifying the interconnections between, for

example, everyday people and decision-makers, hosts and guests...are vital to identify” (2018, p. 109). We see value in this aspect of rhetorical field methods for studying sport’s cultural and ideological impacts. We know that sport mega-events mean much more than the official sponsors and host organizations tell us they do, and we see these methods as a way to explore that richness.

BRINGING FIELD METHODS TO SPORT COMM

If fieldwork approaches to rhetorical studies have arrived, where are they in critical analyses of sport? We find their absence surprising and worth rectifying. We are told that “you had to be there” to fully appreciate or witness sport excellence (Grano, 2017; Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005); live sporting events consistently rank at the top of television viewership (Crupi); we celebrate, if not reify iconic places of sport competition (Borer, 2008); and we are slowly bringing critical analysis of the athlete or fan body into our explorations of sport rhetoric (Butler & Bissell, 2015) yet we see few sport studies utilizing field methods in their full scope.

Thus, we offer the following analysis as demonstration of the value of emplaced, embodied critical rhetorical analysis of sport. We examine the ways FIFA World Cup 2019 created queer and feminist resistance in the spaces and places that we experienced it: Alabama restaurants, California gay bars, Texas living rooms, and live game experiences in Lyon, Reims, and Paris, France. Planning this study prior to travel, we each collected field notes of the final four rounds of games (called the “knockout” round since a team is eliminated from championship contention if they lose), then in our analysis process we have selected themes that attend to gendered/feminist and queer moments, enlivening the feminist and queer body amid sport discourse. In addition, the authors were able to communicate via text message during the games and we have included these where they add value to the analytical power of “being there.”

For our respective analyses, we each draw from contemporary field method practitioners whose methodological terminology unlocked powerful insights from our World Cup experience. For Mary Anne, this was Dickinson and Aiello’s work on materiality, bodies, and movement in the built urban environment (2016); for Meredith, it was Grabill, Leon, and Pigg’s system of mediators, resonances, and termini (2018).

Dickinson and Aiello (2016) provide for an experiential rhetorical approach to critically engaging, “as fully embodied communication scholars” (p. 1294), with a physical environment. Situated in urban communication research, and looking at experiential spatiality in city environments, the authors define physical and performative dimensions as a material “set of media” that is not only observable, but also has the ability to transform the conditions for which future media can be interpreted and produced. Drawing from Blair’s “being there” (1999, 2001) Dickinson and Aiello argue that “being through there” centers a perspective of that person’s movement through space (p. 1295). Rather, “being through there” offers a rhetorical lens for performative, sensory, and embodied materiality that confirms, advances, and even contradicts one’s own assumptions of that set of media. The authors also advance critical materialities where sensory engagement is often, although not necessarily, political. This work and political sensibility of movement in space is relevant and particularly fitting for us because the embodied experiences of World Cup stadium spaces, tournament venue rules, and proximity to the US Women’s National Team (USWNT) as “a set of media” has a potential for challenging and shifting hegemonic narratives of women in sport.

Grabill, Leon, and Pigg use field methods to trace rhetoric as a “distributed, diffuse, and material labor” intimately tied to agency (2018, pp. 193–194). We found this fitting for the World Cup since there were so many inventional sources of rhetoric (players, coaches, commentators, fans, material environments) and such an overwhelming sense of change or momentum surrounding the USWNT. The authors’ emphasis on agencies as “collective units with the capacity to act” (p. 194) speaks powerfully to the constant, creative, counter-cultural impact of USWNT that summer. Within this broad orientation, Grabill, Leon, and Pigg provide three analytical tools: mediators (“materials raised to heightened collective attention” that transfer and transform meaning (p. 204); resonances (the wider field against which mediators emerge, made visible by fieldwork (p. 202); and termini (the end result of an invention process, temporarily stabilized by the critic as “boundary markers” to determine meaning (p. 199)). Together, the field method of mediators, resonances, and termini “enabled us to thoughtfully and rhetorically stabilize the potential complexity of a rhetorical situation to focus on issues of assembling agency” (p. 197).

FIELD NOTES: SITUATING THE CRITICS

Mary Anne Goes to France

As the whistle blew and time lapsed on the USWNT's 2015 FIFA World Cup win over Japan in Vancouver, Canada, it became clear that I wanted to travel and "witness" (Pezzulo, 2003) the 2019 tournament in France. During the 2015 event, my travel group ran into several obstacles: stadiums that were hard to fill in early group stages because of remote locations; cumbersome travel distances with limited flights and little to no train access; and a detached national soccer fan base. For example, when I entered customs in Toronto, the agent did not know of the tournament or that Canada even had a women's team—nevermind a top ten internationally ranked team. France, however, has a storied history in both women's and men's soccer. The fanbase is learned, enthusiastic, and have adopted some of our USWNT players that have played in their French professional league. Given the historical significance, rich legacy, and the best—arguably—European national team of the host country, France would have that "Je ne sais quoi" that Canada lacked.

My group of four traveled to France from Boston, Austin, and New York, arriving for the Round of 16 games and staying the three-week period until the finals. Loving this team, and making an investment through travel, merchandise, and being in the stands felt important to me, for three reasons: (1) The USWNT had filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court against the US Soccer Federation for decades of gender discrimination, long solidifying that this team was as much of a force off the field as on, in their fight for gender parity, closing pay gaps, and advocating for better playing and travel conditions for women and girls soccer; (2) they had become an anthem for a constituency of fans tired of being bullied by systemically oppressive institutions, in sport and beyond; and (3) given that the US soccer federation undercuts and underfunds this team when compared to the MNT, I wanted to be a part of the economic investment through time and money to support the feminist and queer ethos of the USWNT. Drawing from Dickinson's and Aiello's (2016) "being through there" as embodied materiality and "experiential movement through space," my perspective, from wearing the No. 15 Rapinoc National Jersey to chanting "equal pay!" as the USWNT collected their fourth cup, I will integrate memories as a fan, a critical rhetorical scholar, and as a witness-participant in sport as gender justice.

Meredith Watches Stateside

My 2019 World Cup experience was bound to be more domestic with a young son at home and a baby on the way. My relationship to elite women's soccer traces back to the legendary "99ers"—the US team of 1999—winning via penalty kicks in the Rose Bowl, which I was lucky to attend as a media intern. I've met and interviewed members of that team, studied their impact on women's sport media (see Shugart, 2003) and watched the sometimes-painful transition away from that roster of superstars. I haven't attended a World Cup game since 1999, yet the 2019 team held my attention and love at a higher level than any year since 1999. The talent, the camaraderie, and the outspoken queerness and activism of this team (amid rock-solid team solidarity) made it compelling on a personal level, as a queer athlete/mom/wife and as a critical scholar of sport discourse.

The spaces that I moved through to experience the meaning of this tournament were varied: sports bars near my home in Birmingham, Alabama, live coverage of the games via my smart devices, one glorious getaway to San Francisco, California for LGBTQ Pride (and the quarter-final match against France), then the final in my father-in-law's house near Houston, Texas. In each of these spaces, my queer body and my athletic and scholarly identities would be manifest to different degrees, and modulated by the differing environments. Thinking ahead to writing this analysis, I attuned myself to "rhetoric as emplaced...[especially] the enmeshments of rhetoric and materiality, words and things, subjects and objects" (Rai & Drushke, 2018, p. 8). At times I watched in sports bars to enjoy the air conditioning, or to revel in some kid-free time alone. I preferred to watch in small settings, declining group watch events or big screens—this was driven by the personal nature of my fandom, my love for informed, expert, slightly restrained and focused viewing of the action, strategy, and dynamics. I don't enjoy ignorant comments from soccer skeptics, nor did I want to hear disparaging remarks about women and queer women during the event. For me, FIFA World Cup 2019 was a glorious full body-and-mind indulgence: watching elite female athletes who could also articulate an argument about systematic patriarchal bias.

FIELD NOTES: ROUND OF 16

Meredith: France Versus Brazil, June 23, 2019: Disciplining the Masculine in Birmingham, Alabama

For a lunch-time game between the USWNT's potential quarterfinal opponents, I choose a quiet pizza place in a residential neighborhood near my home. Sure enough, I am the only customer as bar staff prep for evening service. NBA games play on most of the screens but don't seem to hold interest—I ask for the game on one of their half dozen screens and order my pizza and diet soda. Once again I need to tell the manager what channel to choose (I've learned to check ahead of time to have this info ready) and they set me up with a great screen at the front table. This modest setting would become a site of Grabill, Leon, and Pigg's "assembled agency" to facilitate a queer feminist fan space before long (2018, p. 194).

As the first half unfolds, the bar staff—a female bar manager in her 30s and a young male bartender in his early 20s—starts to pay attention as they work. They note key chances, famous players, general flow of the game. I cannot hold back "oohs" and "ughs" as play flies up and down the pitch and I cannot decide who I'd rather the US *not* play in the quarters—France is excellent top to bottom but Brazil looks angry, dangerous, and as skilled as ever.

Two regulars arrive as we get into the second half—it's closer to an early summer happy hour time by now—two white men, one large-bodied with a thin beard is the loud, chatty one, immediately hailing the bar staff by first name and straddling onto what seems to be his usual bar stool. It doesn't take long for him to notice that the game is now on the majority of screens. "Why are we watching soccer today?" he asks with tones of ownership in his voice. "Because she asked to," says the bar manager, nodding my way—I don't turn around but sense that the large, loud man hadn't even processed me (despite my bright yellow Brazil jersey) as he came into the space. "Oh." A beat of silence and then we are treated to ten or fifteen minutes in which loud guy traipses out every predictable cultural and gender stereotype of French and Brazilian women that you can imagine. If this were a BINGO game of stereotypes and frat boy humor, I could have won in a flash: the French women didn't shave, they stink, they should use perfume. The Brazilian women are known for far less clothing than a soccer uniform, though yellow and gold would look great on a

bikini. The French are so stuffy and bitchy, you can tell. The Brazilians have that spicy Latin flair, don't piss them off man. Ooh, that Marta...

No one engaged the man, not even his companion, as he rattled on, dominating the social space and matching the volume of game commentators on the screen. I note that initial tepid chuckles give way to awkward, even chilly, silence as he increasingly isolates himself in the small gathering. By the time his last cultural trope limps out, he shifts tone, dropping in volume, softening, and blending in more to the murmurs of appreciation from the rest of us as he starts to actually comment on the play, revealing a higher level of soccer IQ than I initially would have guessed. He knows France is a favored team this year due to excellent team attacking, that USA would play the winner of this match in the next elimination round, and that Marta has set records for World Cup games played. He has been disciplined by the collective, brought back from his outrageous performance of masculinity—the excess of this is only heightened by his own aesthetic shortcomings as he shows little to no outward signs of physical fitness or past athletic success—to become a quieter, embedded member of an appreciative fandom. Reflecting on this transformation later on, I recognize that FIFA World Cup enabled me, and then the bar manager and others, to assemble a queer feminist agency that effectively disciplined this masculine interloper (see Grabill et al., 2018). The level of play, knowledgeable fans, and dramatic stakes of the game created a material rhetoric that overpowered this lone voice of patriarchal scorn. Ephemeral, yes, but no less powerful in the moment; they (the players) allowed us (the fans) to quell his threat.

The inevitable offsides question comes up—watch soccer long enough with Americans and someone asks about offsides, the rule that prohibits attackers from advancing ahead of the ball until it is struck forward. It is not a complex rule but is the hardest for referees on the field to see and judge correctly; thus, it is the subject of the most debate and contention in any soccer match. Sure enough, a borderline call results in arm waving and angry yelling, and loud guy's friend asks about why the attack was called back. The female bar manager offers an explanation, but is interrupted by her younger male employee who “man-splains” the rule to not only the customer but to the female manager, as well. She lets him finish before stating, “I know the rules, I played soccer for 10 years. I was just explaining it simply for him.” The employee is visibly taken aback, by the information and the rebuke, stumbling to a half-apology in which he offers, “I didn't know that; how would I have known that?” Once again

his female superior responded calmly: “You’d know if you listened. I listen to you so I know that you also played a bit.” Silence in the bar. Would the female manager—the only other female in the space—have rebuked the young man at all, or so directly, had I not been present that day? If my body had not brought the WWC into the bar space that day? Returning to the field methodology of Grabill, Leon, and Pigg, the comment figures as a “termini” amid “resonances” of female excellence and power created by the World Cup game (2018, pp. 199, 202). For at least that moment the sport performance an ocean away created material force to alter a workplace relationship. I wondered how their next shift together would feel—will the resonance of this moment sustain or be subjected to new relations of influence?

As the game comes to its thrilling conclusion—a late France goal sends them through—all the screens are blaring women’s soccer. We all hear Marta speak right into the camera about the ways young women must fight for the health of this game. Her fiery eyes and passionate features assemble a feminist energy I suspect the bar rarely sees. I tip high.

*Mary Anne: USA Versus Spain, June 24, 2019: Tension
and Release in Reims, France*

As I arrived in Paris, we readied ourselves for the Round of 16 knockout game against Spain, in Reims, two hours northeast by rental car. The casual fan would not see Spain as a threat to knock out the United States in a Round of 16. After all, the USWNT was ranked number one in the world—Spain, 13. On paper, Spain was no match for the US, but for my money, this was not the draw I wanted in a Round of 16. In the four years since their early exit in Canada, Spain was on an impressive and laudable ascent in global soccer. After finishing last in their group in 2015, players began petitioning for gender parity, better pay, and more publicity from their federation, which houses two of the wealthiest global soccer brands: Real Madrid and FC Barcelona. Given their historical and gendered obstacles (Longman, 2019), and fueled by new investment and new coaching, the 2019 Spanish team had earned the media’s attention as underdog darlings of the tournament. And if that storyline was not enough, Spain, a team of finesse, precision, tactical, and possession play was a horrific matchup for the USWNT, who has historically struggled against such opponents (i.e. an early quarterfinal exit to Sweden in the 2016 Rio

Olympics). To say I was nervous was an understatement; I had purchased a ticket package that had me in France for the next three weeks.

With the exception of watching the USWNT, I don't typically love to watch sports in live venues. As a once season ticket holder of Alabama and Texas football games, I would often tailgate and then share my tickets with friends, preferring to watch the games at home or in small groups. I find stadiums uncomfortable for the fan experience, especially as someone who embodies and projects a queer presence. For me, the stadium experience is often hetero-masculine in its rituals—where friendly banter can quickly turn to aggression if the outcome of play is unexpected. Thinking about my body in the stadium space through a lens of what Sara Ahmed offers as queer phenomenology (2006), rather how queer bodies orient toward the “material” space they are taking up, the stadium experience of the USWNT embodies, and even celebrates, difference. Fans often travel in groups, like ours, and obtaining tickets requires such meticulous knowledge of the process, that once in the stadium, a fan is already feeling some instant solidarity. What's more, fans are almost overwhelmingly female, an aberration in sports, and with a large queer presence. So if space is defined by “materiality as mediation” (Dickinson & Aiello, 2016) and “bodily inhabitation” Ahmed (2006), I felt the shift and difference of how this USWNT occupies and projects an ethos that challenges normative expectations of a mega sports event.

Initially, as we lined up at the entry gates for the Stade Auguste-Delaune, this felt like an American home game—the red/white/blue national colors outnumbering Spain's. There was tailgating and a cheer parade led by the beating drums of the American Outlaws. Across the wave of USWNT jerseys, I saw that women and girls outnumbered men and boys by at least half. Additionally, among the American flags were a smattering of rainbow flags; this space felt not only welcoming, but affirming—punctuating the very essence of why I love this team. The gendered and queer dynamics of this exceptional sport space converged often, for instance in spaces or routines governed by binary gender conventions. For example, as we made our way to the gate, which felt longer than it should because of the record heat soaring above 95 degrees, we realized that it was also taking extended time because FIFA had not planned for this many women to attend the games. This created obnoxious (and preventable) delays in the security lines as we waited for gender-appropriate pat-downs (i.e. only female security guards could check female fans). This theme carried through into the stadium where restroom lines were

untenable for women. Because I “present” as gender-non-conforming, I started to use the men’s restroom. While there were confused looks and cutting eyes at first, this strategy became commonplace as the tournament progressed. Although the security line issue never resolved, even through the finals, fans began self-selecting to use the bathroom facilities as gender-neutral spaces, which felt like an incredible feat of antagonism toward FIFA event organizers. Given the queer and anti-patriarchal nature of this team and fanbase, it felt good to find spaces where we could thwart the rigidity of FIFA’s hetero-normative governance.

After finally entering the stadium, we had excellent seats, between mid-field and the corner, about ten rows up and with a full view of the field and all of the media monitors. As we looked across the sold out crowd, in the sea of American jerseys, there were signs that ranged from “Marry me Kelly O’Hara,” to “Equal Pay Now,” and “#PayThem”. As we watched warmups conclude, getting a look at the starting lineups, I felt a rush of anxiety; after three years of savings, one year of planning, and some hopeful assumptions about progressing through the tournament, I was finally here, and it could all be over in 90 minutes.

This was a game of surprises that had a flare for all sports fans, drama in the form of controversial VAR penalty kicks, defensive mistakes by a heretofore dominant US team, and instead of precision and tactics, violence. The Spain team was physically dominating the Americans—a shocking sight to be sure. Forward Alex Morgan was battered, a clear and effective game plan to disrupt the game flow and offensive advance of the USWNT. From the stands, there was a disjointed nature to the game, a consistent start/stop—which limited the US fans from asserting our numbers advantage. Although there was levitation from the crowd when Megan Rapinoe scored early from a penalty kick, the crowd was largely tense and silent until the second Rapinoe goal in the 70th minute.

During the controversial video assisted referee (VAR) break that led to a US goal, I had some time to text Meredith, indicating that things were “getting a little chippy in here.” While this particular penalty was in a long VAR review (see Bell in this volume for more on the VAR controversy), an interesting development was happening on the field. Alex Morgan initially lined up to take the kick, and waited in the penalty area as the referee reviewed the play. While Morgan stood on the penalty marker, she shared words and some contact with two players from Spain, including one player taking the ball out of her hands. In the stadium, it felt like a longer than necessary wait, which was nerve wracking because after a face slap and

yellow card from Rapinoe early in the game, and Spain's Losada eventually leaving the game with a lacerated eye, I felt we were about to watch a brawl between the players. The frustration from the Americans was palpable; everyone in that stadium could feel that the better team was being antagonized and outplayed by a scrappy Spain team. For more than five minutes, the crowd is nearly silent in anticipation, but also worry; finally, the review is in, the kick is on. From the sideline, Jill Ellis instructs Rapinoe to take the kick; she converts, and after a few more yellow cards from Spain in frustration, the US advances 2-1. I can't know what it felt like for viewers at home, but in the moment, after so many fouls, so many uncalled penalties, Alex Morgan seemingly on the ground more than on her feet, this winning PK felt a little—yes, lucky for the USWNT and unfortunate for Spain—but also justified.

After the match, there was a collective sigh of relief; many fans, including us, stayed for a bit in Reims. This area of France is home to the best champagne in the world, afterall. Motivated by that and a working air conditioner in this heat wave, we searched for a local pub to watch the Round of 16 game between Sweden and Canada that was just about to start back in Paris. Neither team was in our immediate future, but Canada's captain, Christine Sinclair, was in a position to pass the former USWNT captain, Abby Wambach, for the all-time goal-scoring record of any professional soccer player. From tension to release and ecstasy, what would happen next is perhaps best captured in what Grabill, Leon, and Pigg offer as resonance(s), meaning an "intersection of attention and environment, made meaningful when we create accounts for them" (2018, p. 197). After checking in with some of the members of the American Outlaws, we joined the club and more fans for an afterparty. To our surprise, this was also the destination for the families of the players, including friends, spouses, and former players of the USWNT, including Wambach and her wife, author Glennon Doyle. What's more, within the hour, the Outlaws start drumming as the players arrive, filing in one by one to join their families. Applause echoes through the room as we all leap to our feet, almost in disbelief by what is transpiring.

One of the many perks that France had as a host nation was proximity to the team. Only a few games are played in the major metropolitan areas, so when we traveled, it felt as if we were part of a caravan—almost like a small town lining up in their cars behind the team buses, following their teams to the Friday night lights. The experience is communal, a once in a lifetime shared event where fans have an orientation toward a team that

feels like you are part of the history they are creating. Although I captured a few pictures that I'll always treasure, for the most part, I felt in awe and wanted to be present in this place at this time, 15 feet from Rapinoe and Wambach, spotting the famous spouses like, Zach Ertz, a Super Bowl-winning tight end with the Philadelphia Eagles, or laughing with our server who was completely starstruck and disoriented after taking Alex Morgan a glass of water.

As one would imagine, we couldn't take our eyes off the players' room, as they too watched Canada and Sweden, fully knowing what record was at stake. Every time Sinclair touched the ball or took a shot, the whole restaurant would sigh in relief as she missed, cheering the Wambach record more than cheering Sinclair to fail. The room felt emblematic of the connection between fans and the team, almost parasocial; there was respect for teams that challenge the USWNT but deep national pride, as well. Christine Sinclair did surpass Wambach's international goal record later that summer, but on that night, Abby's supremacy held for another World Cup, and the cheers and jeers became a resonant materiality (Grabill et. al., 2018) for making sense of queer legacy and memory for and beyond the USWNT.

FIELD NOTES: QUARTERFINALS

Meredith: USA Versus France, June 28: Rapinoe Rapture at San Francisco Pride

A special weekend gets even better: amid our two-day getaway to San Francisco Pride to watch a documentary in which I appear, we get to watch the USA-France quarterfinal. The film screening means we'll have to leave early so we're hoping for another fast start by the USA so that I can sit in the VIP room and do post-film panel discussions without tears or drama.

Rhetoric's materiality is evident as we walk in San Francisco. As we wait for yet another cable car to trundle past and buy us time ("the game starts in four minutes!"), a lanky white woman gay as the day is long sprints past us in a Rapinoe jersey. We observe this, look at each other and smile, eyebrows cocked—"think it's that way?" The running lesbian leads us to a tidy, chic gay-themed sports bar that is wonderfully, joyfully, elbow-to-elbow packed on this sunny Saturday of Pride weekend. Have we arrived in heaven? Young queers, old white lesbians, tattoos and pink/purple hair,

cargo shorts and white tennis shoes, skinny jeans and wallet chains, mullets—it's all there. Really, are we in heaven? It is another moment in which the material rhetoric of the World Cup women has altered a space thousands of miles away: gone are feisty debates about sexuality and gender continuums, generational tension is erased. The resonance of this team and this event for gender and queer politics unites the packed bar in ways I rarely see. We squeeze our way through, smiling like idiots, to a standing spot by a wall of decorative gym lockers that has a great view of a screen (and the crowd). The starting lineups are on the field and the whistle blows moments after we get settled.

The sensory stimulation is nearly overwhelming: the brilliant red-white-blue of each teams' uniforms on the screens above us, the rainbow flags all over the bar, the beautiful bodies sweating on the screen, all shades of skin and hair, and the beautiful bodies sweating (a bit less) all around us—queers in both mediated and personal proximity. Smells of delicious bar food whisking past by short shorted male servers (who seems oblivious to Lesbian Heaven happening around them) and sips of summer lager beer (don't tell the obstetrician...). World Cup soccer could hardly be more immersive and energizing—except if you're in the stadium like Mary Anne. Amazingly, my texts are going through.

We've barely processed all this when Rapinoe lines up for the free kick just outside and to the left side of the French penalty area, and whips a low near post shot that sneaks through innumerable sleek calves and kneecaps to score! The bar erupts. I am jumping, over and over again, straight up since we are too packed to move much farther and screaming "YES" into a sea of faces: Alex, stranger on right, Alex, stranger on left, table of lesbians, back to Alex. When Rapinoe runs to the corner flag to take her triumphant pose our shrieks rise in frequency and volume. I text Mary Anne "YES—Have faith in the homos!!!" and then I ask again, have we gone to heaven? The gays are literally winning!

The energy ripples around the room as we try to settle down and watch the full half—nervous moments in defense, the unending runs up the wing and Crystal Dunn somehow shutting each one down. Mary Anne texts me that Rapinoe has been using that pose since the 2019 She Believes Cup but it doesn't diminish my joy in her refutation of our president's harassing comments. The nearby table of lesbians notices my pregnant belly and offers that "if you need it, we can give up a seat," which feels much more respectful of my strength and my choices than the typical insistence that I sit, immediately, then and there, and say thanks. We watch the

clock carefully, staying for as long as we can then finally, Rapinoe is set up for another gorgeous goal and we get to jump and yell and rejoice all over again. More importantly, I can leave with a 2-0 lead and shut off my anxiety that they will not allow three goals in 30 minutes. We head to the Castro Theater for what had been the main event of the weekend and now would be lucky to earn a draw.

The film comes through, just like the USWNT. Pairing the sports bar with the Castro Theater and seeing our small Alabama town featured as a site of ongoing queer resistance was nearly more than I could ask for in one day. Taken together the agencies assembled by this team and tournament made us feel like anything was possible, that we could truly achieve the revolution. We felt part of one large queer/inclusive team dedicated to justice, equity, redemption.

Mary Anne, USA Versus France, June 28: Viva Rapinoe! in Paris

From underdog, to elite host; back to Paris and the Parc de Princes, because our quarterfinal showdown was set. This is the game that everyone had circled on a calendar since the group stage matches and brackets were announced seven months prior—a finals like setting with the host nation against the tournament favorites, and reigning World Cup champions. The anticipation and excitement alone could have fueled our car back to Paris, where we would wait four days for match day. Paris is not a bad city for down time. We certainly took in the sights, including architecture and museums, and as a bonus, Paris Pride was while we were in town, which felt especially timely for our group and this team. We also spent a lot of down time finding sports venues and bars that would show the World Cup games, including an Australian expat bar that turned away rugby fans, and catered to their women's soccer base, which is no small feat.

Finally, it's game day. I have never experienced any type of energy as I did on this day. The noise and energy were incredible. The US fans marched into the stadium, thinking this game would again feel like a strong American presence. No, our fans were outnumbered three to one, the complete opposite of our experience in Reims. "La Marseillaise," with its tone-setting extended trumpet interlude, is one of the most beautiful anthems I've ever heard, and on this night, the entire stadium at full capacity joined in unison, shaking the rafters. I had chills because I had never experienced anything like this in sport. To hear national pride for a women's soccer team, where open disregard was common not long ago, was

incredible. In the stadium that evening I saw the women's names on French fans' shoulders: Renard, Henry, Diani, and le Sommer. As we were engulfed by the anthem, this moment continued to feel like a watershed event, bigger than soccer, and bigger than one team, but something on the rise for women's soccer internationally.

As it had throughout the tournament, the US scored early. It wasn't until the Rapinoe goal that I realized how many American fans were in the stadium, because the French fans were stunned into silence. In contrast to the Spain contest, the first 45 minutes of this match lived up to the hype. Although physical, there was much more sophistication from both sides. With each ball touch, you could hear the collective gasps from the crowd, on both sides, as if every dribble mattered. The US matched the French's precision and movement. After halftime, US fans grew louder and more confident after a Tobin Heath beauty (that was reversed on a close offside call); then, Rapinoe scored her second goal in the 64th minute. At that point, our fans were secure but anxious because we knew France would throw everything forward. And in the 81st minute, Renard scores off of a perfect header, which is exactly the moment I realized how outnumbered we were to the French fans. The stadium erupted as US fans hung their heads in their hands, nervous at how much time remained, and feeling the entire stadium shake under our feet as Renard demanded her fans stay in the game. As the referee announces five additional minutes of stoppage time, there is a collective groan from the American fans; momentum has grown for the French—in noise and play, and I'm thinking how did they get to an extra five of stoppage. After the longest six minutes in sports, in the 96th minute overall, the whistle blows and the USWNT has defeated the host nation. Watching the players intermingle on the field was a special moment, with clear respect and adoration between the teams, and frankly some heartbreak from the American fans for France. Because the World Cup is an Olympic qualifier for the European league, this loss in a quarter-final meant that France would not be playing in the 2020 Olympics, a sports injustice for sure.

Altogether, the end of this game had a different feeling than Spain. Where the previous match elicited a sense of relief from the fans in the stadium, this quarterfinal game felt like the achievement as it had been billed. French fans applauded both teams, and US fans began a trend we would see in the remaining games: echoes of "Equal Pay" chants grew through the stadium. Throughout the tournament, there were consistent signs of equal pay, and even jerseys where in the place of the last name, the

jersey read #PayThem or Equal Pay; my favorite was a jersey I captured by photo after meeting a fan where she had an equal sign and dollar sign as the numbers on the jersey. Although fans at home could not hear the cheers yet (as noted by text messages back and forth with Meredith), the cheers for equal pay trickled through the stadium fanbase, cementing the stakes of this tournament.

FIELD NOTES: SEMIFINALS

Mary Anne: USA Versus England, July 2: A Rising Power in Lyon, France

Given the enormity of the quarterfinal matchup against the host country, it was hard to believe anything else could compare, but we packed our bags, rented a car, and drove to Lyon, about two and half hours south, and for us wine drinkers, in the heart of the Rhone Valley. Although Paris was the bright lights, drama, and showcase of the World Cup, Lyon is where I wanted to be for a semis and potential finals matchup. The city itself is majestic, famous for many things, including its location at the intersection of the Saône and Rhône rivers, home of Roman era architecture, the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière towering over the city, the home of the bouchon culinary tradition, and yes, a storied and intelligent soccer community, especially for the women's game. The Stad de Lyon would also be the biggest stadium of the tournament, and our fan base was continuing to grow, not just from American fans flying in for the semis and final, but also the European converted fans. From media coverage, we read a ton about American arrogance and how Europe was done with the antics of the USWNT, but that is not what I felt on the ground, in Reims, Paris, or Lyon. At least from my experience, European fans—from my ride-share drivers to young fans on the winding streets of The Presqu'île (Peninsula) area—were eager to cheer on Rapinoe and Morgan, former Olympique Lyonnaise players. If not eager, fans would acknowledge what this USWNT was doing in arguably the greatest talent pool ever for a women's World Cup.

On the day of the game, I situated myself at the American Outlaw tailgating station, a bar near the rail line that would take us to the stadium. I also texted back and forth with Meredith in anticipation of the game. Meredith was concerned with an emotional letdown, and I that Morgan had not scored a goal since her four in the opener against Thailand. As

game time neared, my group grabbed some tailgating supplies (i.e. champagne) and headed for the train. Because Lyon anticipated the fanfare and attendance records, there were direct train routes to accommodate the massive numbers. The 40-minute ride was a packed train car with other tailgating US fans, sharing stories of the games so far, what we had done in France over the two-week stay, and of course, our predictions for the evening. As we sipped and shared champagne on the pavilion before entering the stadium, our group of four was approached by a British journalist. At first, he prodded for the arrogant “of course we are going to win” and looked for the soundbite. After he got what he needed, we chatted about the English team, recent and long overdue investments by the Premier League into the women’s game, and how the US had been so dominant for so long. We talked in depth about the differences of European club level investment versus the US college model with Title IX advancements in youth sports. It was a reminder of how far our federation still has to go in gender parity, but also another clear message about how sports has a platform to advance gender and social justice narratives.

The semifinal against England did not disappoint. Fans back in the States would most likely remember this game as the Alex Morgan “sips tea” game. We again had the same seats as in Reims, only about ten rows up, just off of the pitch. We had a bullseye image of the Christen Press header. Starting for Rapinoe and scoring the first goal, she threw her hands into the air to her mom, who had passed away only months before, a day after Press scored the winning goal against Spain in their brush-up friendly before the World Cup—a moving moment, to be sure. In that same location in the second half, Alyssa Naeher would make the save of her life stopping a penalty kick in the 86th minute that would have tied the game. I texted with Meredith because I knew she was feeling the stress as a former collegiate goalkeeper, especially with the way that VAR had basically rendered goalies completely ineffective at stopping PKs in this tournament. I was not feeling confident but Alyssa made a great stop, earning an instant buzz from Meredith: “Naeher!!!!!!”—while all I could muster was, “wow, omg, omg, omg.” After the final whistle blew, with a US 2-1 victory over England, the chants of Equal Pay were becoming more pronounced, and confirmed via text, that cameras and announcers were picking up on the trend.

FIELD NOTES: FINALS

*Meredith: USA Versus The Netherlands, July 7: Soccer Match
Becomes a Pride Parade in Houston, Texas*

Texas. Family trip. Father-in-law's den with a giant 74-inch screen. All day I'm eager, checking that our typical schedule will allow me to fully focus and revel in the game. The internal dialogue is all about patience and politeness: "Sure, we can all watch" and then inside my head "BUT DO NOT INTERRUPT ME WITH STUPID QUESTIONS." Where to sit? Clear sight line, able to jump up and stretch my arms out in stressful moments... "Sure, our son can watch" but inside my head "DON'T BLOCK MY VIEW." Phew. I'm exhausted as they take the field.

I like the Dutch team; if they weren't playing the USWNT, I'd root for them over the more established nations. I also love orange and their fans seemed fun and committed to the women's game. As an opponent, they seem skilled and dangerous but not as much of a threat based on experience and confidence. We have to keep it together and be patient, unrelenting. Sure enough, in the second half it breaks open: Rapinoe on a penalty, doing her undaunted thing—YES! How is the goalkeeper getting to all those shots? And the clincher, the amazing dribble, feint, and strike from the ghostly pale seemingly teenaged Rose LaVelle, holy cow. I felt myself rising up off the ottoman as she drove upfield, still processing the on-the-ball skill that we don't always see from the pass-happy Americans and then BAM! the shot was in the back of the net before I noticed her leg move. You could feel the team explode, rejoicing the goal and knowing it was going to win the title now.

The final minutes were full of amazing chances as Netherlands had to throw it all forward. It felt at times like the first part of their victory parade, which resembled the Pride parades of the month prior! I began watching the telecast for crowd shots of activism signs, recognizably queer fans, and queer romantic partners of the players (see Harman in this collection). We all knew that Rapinoe's partner Sue Bird had made the trip, but I was surprised to not see camera cuts her way as Megan scored or was substituted for to allow a massive ovation. Was FOX nervous to provide even more media platform to "the gay agenda? Did Sue, a basketball legend, ask to keep a low profile? Then a text from Mary Anne confirms it: she's

there! As the whistle blew and players gave into overwhelming joy and elation, I scanned obsessively for small moments of queerness and activism: did they acknowledge the American Outlaw fan group with a massive pride flag right behind the goal? Who kissed whom in the first row of seats? Knowing that mainstream media accounts cannot (or will not) report these details it was on me to sleuth out as much radical resistance as possible. Days after observing our annual Fourth of July explosion of nationalist excess, I felt proud of this American team and my nation that was slowing being transformed by their unrelenting (queer) excellence and vision of justice.

*Mary Anne, USA Versus The Netherlands, July 7: A Long,
Awaited Victory Lap in Lyon, France*

It wasn't that we weren't nervous for the finals, but the overall significance of the USWNT was so much broader than soccer by this point that our game-specific stress was modulated by this deeper level of impact. The match would be tough, but it was as if the effort for victory would be the punctuation of a narrative that had been building since the first group stage game six weeks prior. The first half was a battle that saw Morgan, again, on the turf multiple times, a bloodied Becky Sauerbrunn, and an injured Kelly O'hara, but in the stadium, fans were more eager than nervous for a first goal. Just as in the other games, with the exception of France, the US outnumbered the Netherlands' fans by my eye 5-1. With every close shot on goal, the crowd grew louder and louder, with longer pronounced cheers echoing through the stadium. Unlike all of the earlier games where the US had scored within the first ten minutes, the halftime line was 0-0 and the US could not score against the Golden Glove winner of the tournament—Sari van Veenendaal. Finally, we witness another Rapinoe PK, securing her golden boot and most valuable player trophies. After LaVelle provided the punctuation mark, the fans erupted in joy. More than the game, I remember what it felt like to be in the stadium as the team made its victory lap, cannons firing, players making confetti angels, and yes, how the stadium shook when the 40+ thousand fans chanted in unison, "Equal Pay," for more than 10 minutes as FIFA and US Soccer readied the podiums for the champions. With all due respect to the young Dutch side, there was more on the line for the US than cracking their youth and well-coached defensive structure. Although, one giant takeaway from the US's run against the gauntlet of Europe, besting Spain,

France, England, and the Netherlands: this European upswing is here to stay.

The culmination of the moment felt like activism. The first hurdle was hard enough, winning and showing the world what investment looks like on a global scale; but harder still, was winning and carrying the torch for so many teams who cannot protest their national federations, players who are not paid a high enough salary and must work part time, and finally, proudly having a queer presence and agenda when so many sports and some national teams still trade in upholding status-quo, hetero-masculine norms. The finale also punctuated a tournament that showcased a new generation of national team stars—from Crystal Dunn rising to the occasion and quelling worries about her backline defense against France’s speedster Kadidiatou Diani, Naeher stepping out of Hope Solo’s shadow earning her own spot at the world stage, and finally, a rising star in LaVelle. I remember feeling the sly gratification that, although yes, Europe was on the rise, the Matildas of Australia made a splash, and Nigeria, we see you—but also, the USWNT was still a frontrunner, and reloading for 2023. And for all global soccer fans, we were seeing a tipping point in women’s soccer. With hope, international and national federations saw it, too.

LESSONS LEARNED: CHAMPIONS OF SPORT JUSTICE

Meredith: Immersive Excellence Demands Emplaced, Embodied Analysis

For three weeks, the queer feminist activists of the USWNT were everywhere. Culminating in their championship on the pitch and a dizzying schedule of ticker tape parades (where the confetti was their shredded contract with US Soccer), stylists on cross country airplane rides (with champagne from the only female vintner in France), award shows, and interviews from Good Morning America to Rachel Maddow. I happened to be up late on July 9, walking through the kitchen area of my father-in-law’s house when I was arrested by the site of Rachel Maddow and Rapinoe face to face, in profile. My first instinct: take a photo for posterity. The gay agenda has prevailed—we are everywhere! Then I turn on the volume and actually listen to the interview, to Maddow nearly falling all over herself and asking only half-jokingly if Rapinoe will run for president. The most astute political reporter in our country, reduced to fan. Maddow, *not* the most powerful lesbian in the room for a minute. Holy moly.

To capture the rhetoric of this team, and the rhetorical impact of this tournament, demands a methodology that can tap into this immersive, embodied phenomenon. We urge sport scholars to expand our repertoires to understand the meanings of women's sport. If commercial sport media demonstrates little to no change to the percentage of mainstream hours of sport broadcast dedicated to women (Cooky et al., 2013)—with few exceptions (see Billings et al., 2014)—but American sport culture has made space for successful, if not thriving, elite women's sport leagues in basketball and soccer, and, to a lesser extent ice hockey and softball, there seems to be a disconnect. As other contributors in this volume attest, the FIFA 2019 World Cup was a convergence of sport and activism (see Everbach; Nisbett & Weiller-Abels; Haldane; and Yanity & Coombs). We argue that field rhetoric demonstrates the power of these emplaced experiences of sport discourse that cannot be captured in traditional sport comm research.

Mary Anne: World Champions of Gender Equity

Against the criticism that this team was too arrogant—which of course is gendered in the double binds of how women athletes are “supposed to act and speak”—players not only continued to perform at the highest level of their sport, but prevailed in highlighting gender inequities in US and global soccer. What we hope to have advanced in our field narratives from “being there” (Blair, 1999, 2001) and “being through there” (Dickinson & Aiello, 2016) is a lens for interrogating rigid and gendered conditions of understanding the rhetorical legacies of this team. As scholars, we need a more nuanced way of talking about advancements in women's sports that go beyond reporting how many fans attend events, or TV rights, or ratings; we need a methodological perspective that accounts for and pushes ideological limitations. We believe the experiential field perspectives offered here is one path toward such nuance, and a way toward showcasing gender justice outside of hetero-masculine restraint.

We encourage critical sport scholars to engage field methods as we continue to study “rhetorical objects than cannot be solely located in textual artifacts or symbols but that require being there” and as we attend to “persuasive forces that only a body among other bodies and things in a particular place and time has access to” (Rai & Drushke, 10). Sport is an area of our complex social-political communities that often evades straightforward symbolization. Further, we have a strong tradition in sport of

valuing place, presence, and witnessing (see Grano, 2017). Especially then, for momentous sport events like FIFA World Cup 2019, with all its components and complication, field methods “might be imagined as a puzzle-solving endeavor, an attempt to fit pieces of rhetorical acts together to offer a more complete and compelling account of its complex interacting parts” (Pezzullo & Hauser, 2018, p. 263).

Compelling indeed.

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A (Somewhat) Accidental Sports Tourist: Watching the Women's World Cup from the Ground

Fred Mason

This chapter offers an “on-the-ground” perspective on attendance and fandom around international-level women’s football events. Specifically, details are given on experiences and observations from women’s Olympic football in Glasgow, 2012, the FIFA U-20 Women’s World Cup in 2014 and the Women’s World Cup 2015, both in Moncton, Canada, and the Women’s World Cup in France in 2019. Based on causal and more focused field observations, shifts over time can be discerned in the prevalence of media coverage, the attention being paid to the tournament more broadly in the host country, attendance by spectators and the atmosphere within games themselves.

I frame myself as a “somewhat accidental” sports tourist. Going to Olympic football in 2012 and the opportunity to be in France during 2019 were coincidental to academic conferences in the host locations. In

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both cases, I admit a lack of awareness of the event while planning and booking travel, and in 2019, adjustments had to be made to allow attendance at the round of 16 in Paris (which itself speaks to lesser recognition and promotion of the women's game). Attending games in Moncton in 2014 and 2015 was enabled by Moncton, the east-coast site for the two tournaments, being only an hour's drive away. Nonetheless, critical observations made across time indicate growth and development in fan and media interest. While 1999 is rightly remembered as seminal for fan support and media coverage, from the ground in a country-side town to Paris, the 2019 Women's World Cup seems as important a moment.

Writers traveling to various places to live with and observe football fans and compare their cultures amounts to a journalistic tradition. Popular works include Simon Kruper's *Football Against the Enemy* (1994) and Franklin Foer's *How Soccer Explains the World* (2004).

Important sociological work on football hooligans was done from participant observation and ethnographic methods, where researchers immersed themselves in the groups under study and reported back (Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1995). There are also good precedents for doing field observation with everyday football fans, in the stands during regular professional seasons and at World Cups (Brown, 2004; Giulianotti, 1991, 1996), including research in pubs and cafes (Weed, 2006). Such work highlighted the passion that fans have for men's club and national teams, and varied traditions in singing, showing support and display through clothing. It has also raised critical questions around nationalism, issues with racism and sexism, and the relationship of fans to clubs and organizing bodies.

Little work has been done on fans of women's football in general; this is especially true of ethnographic work with the exception of Carrie Dunn, who researched female fans of the professional men's game in England (Dunn, 2014), and wrote about fans at the women's World Cup in Canada in 2015 (Dunn, 2015, 2018). Some key findings from 2015 include that fans had a significant amount of dissatisfaction around the planning and scheduling of matches, and that they felt that the women's World Cup was treated as less important and less interesting by the media and the public at large. Dunn's work will be discussed more when we deal with the 2015 Women's World Cup.

WATCHING, LEARNING, AND REFLECTING: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION METHODS AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC INPUTS

At the Olympic game in 2012, I intended to take lots of photographs with my 35-millimeter camera to have visuals for teaching my Olympic studies course in the coming year. Once at the stadium, I was taken aback by the security arrangements, which tend to be quite strong for European football anyway with the typical presence of many stewards empowered to control fan behavior with the threat of ejections or fines. This was accelerated by it being an Olympic event with additional layers of security. I later used this collection of images as visual data, approaching it methodologically and theoretically with a visual sociology perspective (Becker, 1998; Harper, 2012) to construct a visual essay about security and surveillance at the game (Mason, 2014). As part of the process of engaging with that game, I wrote a set of fieldnotes in order to document events and conversations and enable critical reflection.

Field notes constitute the main “data” that researchers produce in ethnographic and participant observation research. The creation of fieldnotes generally involves jotting down observations and ideas throughout the day while in the field, and then doing an extensive, descriptive write-up at the end of the day or as soon as possible thereafter (Fetterman, 1998). Field notes allow for writing down, in regular and systematic ways, what the researcher observes and learns in the field (Emerson et al., 2011), and many researchers include a diary of their own impressions and feelings (Fetterman, 1998; Weed, 2006). This researcher has experience with ethnographic and participant-observation methods, having conducted an ethnography of university homecoming weekends while a doctoral student, and a multi-year, multi-site ethnography of ultrarunning in Canada.

In 2014 and 2015, I attended the games as a spectator with my family. To reconstruct ideas and images from the event, I turned to autoethnography. Autoethnography is a method of narrative research where the researcher’s experiences are the focus as they write themselves into the frame and attempt to share an evocative story. The researcher reflexively considers their own experiences to illuminate cultures under study, through the practice of writing. As Carolyn Ellis proposes, it is “auto,” in terms of considering the author’s self, “ethno” in providing information about cultures and people, and “graphy” in its concern for “representation, description or showing” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 117). Autoethnography has been frequently used to explore traumatic events

such as illness and grief from the loss of significant others (Ellis, 1991; Tamas, 2009). Its use spread across a variety of disciplines and a number of autoethnographies related to sport have been published, including those focused on experiences as athletes, administrators and fans (Knijnik, 2015; Schaeperkoetter, 2017; Tsang, 2000).

Memory can, of course, be inaccurate and problematic. To help reconstruct events and experiences, I wrote narratives of spectating in 2014 and 2015 as a story to reflect upon. When I attend major or professional sports events, I make it a habit to walk about and explore the stadium, concessions and fan zones, partly for interest and partly to be able to discuss it later with students. I had done this at both games in Moncton, and the writing process allowed some recapturing. To help validate how I remembered things, I conducted informal debriefings with each of the three family members that attended with me, to tap into their memory of events and significant incidents. While each of them had different aspects significant in their memories, their version of events reinforced my recollections.

Autoethnography has been criticized for being too self-interested and too much toward narrative. This led to the development of a version known as “analytical autoethnography” (Anderson, 2006). While some of the original practitioners of autoethnography dislike the move away from evocative storytelling (Ellis & Bochner, 2006), Anderson’s version allows for more critical reflection and thought. Trying to follow with that, I will share parts of the story of the experience, but also dip back into the academic literature throughout to provide critical commentary and analysis.

Once aware of my access to the 2019 Women’s World Cup, I planned to devote as much time as possible outside the conference conducting observations, thinking that there might be differences with this World Cup and others, particularly the 2015 event. I spent most of my time in the countryside city of Limoges, and intentionally wandered in the evenings to find and observe people watching the World Cup in bars and cafes. I passed one afternoon in the pub with colleagues and friends watching Canada play their last round robin game, and several hours one evening watching, with a critical eye, French television’s extensive coverage of the France women’s team. I wrote ethnographic field notes on all of this on a daily basis. After the conference, I attended the round of 16th match between Canada and Sweden at Parc des Princes in Paris and wrote extensive field notes the next day. Rather than provide an exhaustive study of spectating at Women’s elite football tournaments, the goal of this paper is

to create a broad picture of observations and experiences that give some indication of change over time.

Practitioners of narrative research often advocate that reflexively situating one's subject position is important so that readers may see underlying perspectives and biases (Patnaik, 2013). I became a fan of international men's football in 1985, when Canada beat Honduras at King George V park in St. John's, Newfoundland, to qualify for the World Cup for the only time (CBC Archives, 2018). I was a local kid and knew ways to sneak into the stadium. Like many of the 8000 paying fans, I followed the 1986 World Cup and was disappointed with three losses and no goals.

From then, I only really followed major competitions. When the Women's World Cup happened in 1999, I was a master's student preparing for my own research on gender differences in media coverage of the Pan American Games scheduled some two weeks later (Mason & Rail, 2006). Brandi Chastain's post-goal celebration with her shirt in her hand is seared into both my own and public memory, as much by the repetition of the image and the controversy it generated (Woodward, 2019) as by seeing it happen in real-time. I have conducted research on gender, race, and disability in the sports media since 1999. In 2002, I began research on the media coverage of the men's World Cup in Canada, focusing on commercialization and the style of presentation (e.g., Mason, 2003). Some form of critical research on media on the men's World Cup has been part of my work since. All of this is to say that longstanding fandom of international football and a long-term critical perspective on gender, sport and sports media, influences my observations and interpretations.

GLASGOW 2012: TICKETING ISSUES AND GENDER BIASES

On 25 July, 2012, I attended an Olympic group stage match between the women's teams of France and the USA, with my family and another colleague. This was the game where I took photographs and used them for a visual sociology study of security and surveillance. The main conclusion from that work was that extra precautions for the Olympic Games were layered on top of the normal high security level for European football. The paper argued that the "ring of steel"—fences and access points—often described by surveillance studies scholars looking at major events (Coaffee & Murakami Wood, 2006), was augmented by a "ring of yellow," meaning a large number of security personnel and volunteers explicitly visible by their fluorescent yellow police-style coats, and other covert

personnel very much designed to not be seen (Mason, 2014). But other lasting impressions from that day include the easy availability of tickets, the more than half-empty stands, and the discussion of some fans around me comparing women's football negatively to the elite men's game.

Olympic football in 2012 was played in Glasgow and four other distributed locations throughout the UK, because of the need to get in both a men's and women's tournament in the relatively short span of 17 Olympic days. The Glasgow matches occurred in Hampden Park, the Scottish national stadium holding 51,866 fans (London Organizing Committee, 2012). We traveled to Glasgow for a pre-Olympic Scientific Congress, and hearing of the women's matches while we were there, tried to acquire tickets. This proved difficult through official channels because tickets were allocated and distributed through national associations. However, I learned that the Congress, with its affiliation to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), had tickets and was essentially giving out however many attendees needed. My colleague added four more to her total, and we were able to see two of the top teams in the world just that simply.

At the game itself, there were many empty seats in the stands, especially sections in front-center presumably more expensive or for official invitees. The announced attendance was only 18,090, for a match between teams that would win the tournament (USA) and place fourth after losing play-off games with one-goal differentials (France). The numbers would go down for the second match of the day between Columbia and North Korea after many fans, like us with our small children, left after the first game or got fed up by North Korea delaying the start for over an hour because the South Korean flag was shown on the stadium screens in error.

Part of the issue with ready-ticket availability and empty stands had to be with the ticket distribution problems that plagued the London 2012 Olympic Games. The London Organizing Committee set up its own ticketing partner called CoSport, in an effort to stop ticket reselling and price gouging. CoSport had many problems distributing tickets through national and committees, and within the UK to special groups and organizations (LaFountain, 2012). The tickets we received from the Congress were designated for schoolchildren in the UK, but likely had been re-assigned after distribution delays (or something more nefarious). Many events had higher than normal VIP tickets and few tickets in the cheaper price bands (Riach, 2012), and with some football matches, long queues for ticket pickup meant spectators spent hours trying to get in (Press Association, 2012). So ticketing issues may in part explain the lack of fans.

Another likely factor, however, was a lack of interest among spectators, and even a more active disregard of women's football in the UK at the time. There are many historical examples of the idea that football was not appropriate for women, and of women's football being actively suppressed in many countries up until the 1970s (Pfister et al., 1988; Williams, 2003). In the United Kingdom, football's associations with gritty, working-class masculinity for both players and supporters (Williams, 2003) made it seem doubly so, and women footballers were often stigmatized as lesbian to downplay their challenge to the gender order (Cauldwell, 1999). And this is not just a long-in-the past attitude—living and teaching in Bedford, England, from 2004 to 2006, I was surprised not only at the low support for women's football as compared to Canada (see Hall, 2003), but how many of my students actively disdained women in the sport, even when the Women's Euro 2005 tournament took place in the country.

Some of the discussion overheard in the stands among spectators suggest that some of those attending had biases against the women's game. Three young men seated behind us, who sounded very knowledgeable about football tactics and strategies, drew constant comparisons to the men's game, with women never quite measuring up. Studies of the styles of play in elite men's and women's football have found some differences, indicating that women tend to employ more long passes and that goals tend to be scored from closer (Althoff et al., 2010; Bradley et al., 2014). Meanwhile, other researchers suggest that the competitiveness of the women's game has become much greater over the years, with less gap between top teams and others (Barreira & Da Silva, 2016; de Araújo & Mießen, 2017). The game was relatively high scoring at 4-2, and defensive errors on long balls led to two of the goals. But the play was excellent overall and these were two of the world's top teams. That did not matter for the lads behind me, who consistently complained about the women's game, obviously not intent on giving it a chance.

Drawing negative comparisons between men's and women's sports is frequently seen in studies of the sports media (Domeneghetti, 2019; Fink, 2015). The 2011 Women's World Cup the summer before is seen as important in the growth and development in the women's game (Krasnoff, 2019; LeFeuvre et al., 2013) and professional opportunities for women footballers became more abundant after that (Dunn, 2014). However, marketing and media coverage for the tournament still tended to be very gendered, even with new media forms (Coche, 2016) with a focus on femininity and attractiveness, rather than athleticism (Pfister, 2015; Ravel

& Gareau, 2016). This goes back all the way to the 1999 Cup (Brown, 2006; Christopherson et al., 2002). In this case, the attitude of some fans and media discourses seemed to connect.

WOMEN'S U-20 WORLD CUP MONCTON: A LOCAL AFFAIR

On the 9th of August 2014, my family and I attended the women's U-20 World Cup game between South Korea and Mexico at the Moncton stadium. The 2014 women's U-20 World Cup was given to Canada after they were announced the Women's World Cup host for 2015, and the 2014 tournament served as a test event for many of the facilities. Moncton seemed very small for many who attended the Women's World Cup in 2015 (Dunn, 2018), and was the smallest of the stadiums used in recent history, with a standard capacity of 10,000, and up to 20,000 if reconfigured. This appeared to be an attempt to spread football across the country, with there being no other appropriate facility east of Montreal without major renovations. The Moncton Stadium had been built to host the 2010 World Junior Athletics Championships and would go on to host Canadian Football League exhibition games.

Because little parking existed at the stadium, the organizers ran buses from the downtown Moncton Coliseum, some 5 kilometers away. For this game we anticipated small crowds, and we managed to find parking in the neighborhood adjacent to the university and walked in with little difficulty. Parking and busses would cause much more trouble in 2015.

My recollection is that the stadium seemed about three quarters full, but official attendances put the crowd at 4634 spectators (all numbers on games come from FIFA match reports or technical reports). One thing that made assessing the crowd tricky was that many of the spectators congregated in small groups at the entrance end of the stadium, from where you could still see the game because stands were not installed there for this tournament. It very much had a feel like attending a Canadian university football game.

The fan zone inside the stadium consisted of a tent for the local radio station, a face painting table for children, and a sponsored setup where fans could shoot a ball with their speed measured. The volunteers at the one merchandise tent informed me that sales had been good, and that they were almost sold out of everything, even though at least a few remained of most items. There were two food concession stands, set up on opposite sides of the lengths of the field. One operated out of the kitchen

in the enclosed stands holding the VIP and media areas, and the other opposite under temporary shelters. The lines tended to be long throughout the evening as there was only one access point for each of four different types of food.

Nigeria led throughout the game, scoring in the first and 36th minute, with South Korea managing to get a goal back late. The crowd was quiet throughout the game, although this might have been as much due to its small size as its enthusiasm. At the time, I was the president of the Lincoln Recreation Council, which provided summer camps and served as the soccer club for our small town outside of Fredericton. As such, I had some connections to Soccer New Brunswick and to the Fredericton District Soccer Association, the bigger group in our area. I recall meeting many people I knew through that and through other sporting activities in the stadium that evening. It seemed much more of a local sporting event than any sort of international competition, with large numbers of the supporters being sports enthusiasts as participants or organizers at the local and regional level. At the time, my oldest daughter was only 10 years old, so we had not yet gotten to the level of travel competition. The sense that I recognized so many people, even with that, suggests how much of a local crowd the event brought in.

To be fair, the small, mostly local crowd can be linked to the fact it was a junior event with few recognizable stars. With football, if someone is a star in their late teens, they are probably already moved up the senior national team or playing professional by that point. One could also speculate that spectators less personally involved in sports might hold off attending, knowing that the Women's World Cup was coming the next year. Interest for the games held in Moncton in 2014 would be much more localized given how far away the city was from the other competition sites. Spectators from outside the region would probably need a personal affiliation with teams competing to want to travel that far. Meanwhile, Dunn's (2018) research with England fans on the ground in Moncton in 2015 found that Moncton was very hard for travel, and that people they encountered had less awareness and excitement than anticipated. Perhaps the lack of uptake for 2014 is just reflective of the local area. At the same time, I was left wondering if the crowd would be different for a men's event—would that draw more than a group that seemed very regionally based?

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2015: CHEERING IN THE RAIN

Since Canada hosted in 2015, the media provided much more extensive coverage than just showing Canadian team games, as in the past. CTV-Bell media won broadcast rights as part of a broad package with men's and women's football from 2015 to 2022 (Bell Media, 2011), and showed all games between TSN (The Sports Network) or the French language RDS (Réseau des Sports). They had dedicated in-studio teams of former elite women's players and recognizable female anchors from the daily *Sportsdesk*, as well as other regular broadcast commentators doing reporting.

The coverage was sport-focused, discussing strategies and tactics and the successes and failures of teams and individual players. Having regularly studied the coverage of the men's World Cup from 2002, I will argue that until 2014, the half-times and other surrounding material on the Canadian Broadcasting Association (CBC) included a lot of human interest stories, and "man-in-street" segments, often focused on multicultural fans coming together. My interpretation is that it took until the entrenchment of Major League Soccer as a regularly covered sport, before the coverage of the men's World Cup shifted to only straight reporting in 2014. The MLS needed to grow in popularity since its start in 1994, and there seemed to be assumptions around the knowledge and interest of fans. The coverage of the 2015 women's World Cup lined up with providing straight sports coverage and not trying to draw in non-soccer fans through providing other types of stories.

A major controversy surrounding the 2015 Women's World Cup was the use of artificial turf for all the fields. Many players and national football associations spoke out against this, with a lawsuit eventually being filed by a coalition of players with the Ontario Human Rights Commission against FIFA and the Canadian Soccer Association (CBC, 2014). Their main criticisms were increased possibility of injury, and that men's football would not be expected to do the same. The players eventually dropped the lawsuit, but only after threats of suspensions from FIFA (Shoalts, 2015). The Canadian press covered the controversy extensively, so while it indicated the inequities between the governance of men's and women's football, it also provided quite a talking point for the media to raise those concerns for many months in the lead-up to the tournament. One irony with the Moncton Stadium is that FIFA paid to convert its grass field to turf in early 2015, so it would match with the other five stadiums and not provide any competition advantages (CBC, 2014). The tournament was the

largest yet, expanded to 24 teams. As British journalist Anna Kessel (2015), put it, “The sport has never before had a platform of this scale and the high-profile row over artificial pitches is one of several signs that it is finding its voice.”

My family traveled to the round of 16th match between Australia and Brazil on June 21, 2015 in Moncton, the last match of the tournament there. We used it as an excuse to arrange a family camping trip, staying in the north end of the city. In the evening before the game, we noted that a number of other campers were World Cup fans. I was excited to have the opportunity to see Marta, so my children, naturally, decided to cheer for Australia. This delighted the family on the campsite next to us, the father of who was an Australian expatriate. They had driven from Ontario over two days to come to the game.

Given the much larger crowds this time, we elected to take the busses from the Moncton Coliseum. We had no trouble because we had heard about bussing problems in the local media for earlier matches (CBC, 2015) and arrived at the Coliseum over two hours before the game. The earlier problems had been played off as too many fans with a “laidback Maritime attitude” showing up just before the game, but participants in Dunn’s (2018) study, some of who knew people that got into that game quite late or missed the first of the two that day in entirety, characterized it as poor organization. Bussing on the way back was a much larger issue as the entire stadium emptied out at the same time, with a walk across campus to meet at the bus pickup. With only ten buses running at a capacity of 45 people (CBC, 2015), it took a good 45 minutes in the rain to get loaded on a bus.

Attendance was officially 12,043 in a stadium configured for 13,000, despite the pouring rain on the day. That still constituted a small crowd in a small stadium for a Women’s World Cup, and significantly smaller than the high-water mark of over 90,000 who attended the 1999 final (Brown, 2006). Putting the World Cup in such a small stadium needs to be contextualized within Canadian regionalism, and perceived needs to be inclusive of a vast country. However, the crowd would likely have been far bigger in a more populated city, that was not as hard to travel to as the regional center of Moncton. Despite the weather, with rain and temperatures more reminiscent of November than June, that crowd was raucous, and because the one goal came in the 80th minute, no one left until the game ended.

Multiple food concessions ran the length of the field behind the north stands. At least four of each type of food stall existed, so while the crowd

was three times the size as 2014, the lines were similar. Clearly, some lessons had been learned from the year before. The main merchandise store was almost completely sold out of items; this being the last game in this stadium. All that remained was small souvenir items, and one style of t-shirt, showing the consistency of the crowds and their spending.

The people I talked to in the stadium indicated that the crowd was far more diverse than the year before, with travelers from all over the country and many international visitors. As compared to the year before or in 2012 in Glasgow, these fans were far more into the game, and seemed to be much more knowledgeable about the women's game and the players. Despite making observations around the stadium and actively listening, I never encountered any negative discussions of the women's game. This might speak to cultural differences in Canada and the UK, or perhaps indicate change over time. Black and Fielding-Lloyd (2019) analyzed English press coverage of the 2015 Women's World Cup and found much support among the press for England's third place run in the tournament; even if the press characterized the women's team as "outsiders" and discursively positioned men's football as the superior standard, it does show increasing support for the women's game.

Offering a final addition to the 2015 data, I traveled to Tennessee for a conference during the last part of the Women's World Cup. American media was covering the tournament, with a natural focus on the US Women's team. Games could be found on television through ESPN, which also provided serious, sport-focused coverage. In Johnson City, the games were played in bars and restaurants, but even with the US team, if a bar had multiple televisions, it tended to be shown as part of a suite of sports on offer. Interested fans at the conference varied across the age spectrum, but the group of younger academics and graduate students seemed to have the most interest. When the US played in the semi-final against Germany, they all gathered at the house of a local colleague to watch, showing that the Women's World Cup had become part of a collective fan experience for some.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP 2019: MEDIA SATURATION AND FAN SUPPORT

The controversy most apparent in North American media in the run-up to the 2019 Women's World Cup revolved around the US Women's team and their lawsuit against the US Soccer Federation (USSF) for equal pay with the US men. The March 2019 filing included 28 players on the team seeking a class-action suit over "institutionalized gender discrimination" (ESPN, 2019). The suit made news in the sporting and mainstream media, and appeared frequently in Canadian sports media when discussing the US national women's team. In addition, star US player and co-captain Megan Rapinoe had come to prominence as an early supporter of Colin Kaepernick in taking a knee to draw attention to racial justice issues, which drew her both admiration and castigation across the media and political spectrum. The USSF instituted a ban on kneeling in 2017, then repealed it in June of 2020, leading to apologies from the federation (Peterson, 2020).

In this chapter, criticisms have been raised about the lack of awareness of women's soccer by some fans, but I confess my own ignorance coming into 2019. I was program chair for the Sport Literature Association conference in Limoges, France in June of 2019, but we did no advertising or promotion to our conference attendees, and I remained unaware of it until after I made my traveling plans a few months out. That someone who studies football did not know about the Women's World Cup much in advance, speaks to the general lack of media discussion and promotion outside of the host country (and admittedly reflects poorly on me).

To attend a game, I had to rework some of my travel. I was fortunate enough to get Round of 16 tickets for the game in Paris the day before I returned home. This necessitated a train trip and an overnight stay in Paris that was not initially planned, but which led to a great conversation with an older French man on the train. Among politics, international relations and other topics, he also wanted to talk about women's football. He insisted that in his area, basketball was a more popular sport for women, which speaks to some historical legacies discussed by Krasnoff (2019).

I stayed overnight in Manchester, England on the way to France, and was surprised that the pub across from my hotel had a large sign outside advertising when the games of the Women's World Cup would be shown on television. This pub was part of a national chain, so some of the marketing would come from corporate, but it showed they saw the Women's World Cup as part of their competition for patrons. This was a departure

from previous experiences of living in the UK. Fifteen years before, had I asked to watch the Women's Euro in one of the pubs I frequented, I would likely have been met with derision, even if there was no other sport on.

During the conference, I spent evenings walking the downtown of the city of Limoges, a traditional market-center town in the central-west of France with a population of over 130,000. It was easy to find games being shown on television in bars and cafes, with fans there intentionally to watch the game, rather than it just being something on. This was the same for larger, more expensive restaurants and small, local cafes that spilled people out into the street. FIFA had scheduled the Copa Américan (south American men's championship) and the CONCACAF Gold cup (men's north and central American and Caribbean championships) at the same time—it would be suggested in later marketing that the scheduling was intentional to promote all three, but earlier reports indicated a “clerical error” of just not checking the women's schedule (Blum, 2019). In Limoges, the bars demonstrated an equal or slightly larger preference to show the women's game as the Copa.

On a Thursday afternoon, I gathered with colleagues in an Irish bar in Limoges to watch Canada play its last group stage game. I shamelessly hoped they would lose, because that meant their playoff position would have them in the round of 16 game at Parc des Princes for which I had tickets. It was an international group of football fans, with myself, an Australian academic and journalist, an American from Kansas, a Dutch scholar working in Northern England, and a Scot also employed in Australia. We were the only patrons there specifically to watch the Women's World Cup, but there was no resistance to putting it on and other bargoers watched with us.

One rainy night, I stayed in and watched French television coverage on TF1. This consisted of several hours of coverage, initially doing recap and analysis of the French team's game against Nigeria from a few days before, and individual players' performances. This gave way to a panel discussion with a live studio audience on three sides. This coverage demonstrated the level of media interest in the national team, which was unparalleled even when compared to Canada in 2015. Then, the sports networks covered all the games and provided serious analysis, but outside of the games there had been little discussion and other professional sports superseded. In 2019, the coverage continued with things like speakers' panels featuring

audience reactions and questions, and much coverage even on days France was not playing.

In Paris, I stayed in the 15^{em} Arrondissement because it was close to the park. The afternoon before the game, I shopped in sports stores in the commercial-residential area just south. Most of the merchandise related to the Women's World Cup was sold out, both more general souvenirs of the Cup, and French national team gear. I took this as indicating the popularity of merchandise, which I did see some of in the streets, rather than a lack of supply.

Crowds of people converged from all directions as I crossed the Seine, blocks away from the stadium. The fan zone outside the park left much to be desired, amounting to a photo booth sponsored by Emirates Airlines, where one could take a picture with their companions and tag it with multiple sponsor hashtags on social media. This struck me as an after-thought, and some of the things at the U-20 game in Moncton in 2014 were frankly more exciting. The atmosphere was enlivened by a large group of Swedish fans arriving en masse. My count had them at 300, with flags, jerseys, whistles, whistles, face-paint, drums, trumpets and a tuba. They sat mostly together behind one of the goalposts, where through much of the game, they engaged in standing, chanting and general noise-making behaviors, which would likely get them kicked out of an all-seater stadium in the gentrified, professional men's market.

Inside the concourse, merchandise stalls sat about every 200 feet, at the mouth of every major access point into the stands, as is befitting of a major stadium and a major international tournament. These stands were fairly sold out, into the playoffs. No soccer balls remained, except expensive ones that had been game-played. Small souvenir-style merchandise was available, and a good selection of t-shirts, but almost no hats, scarves or other items. The merchandise was put into plastic bags that featured star players—mine had an action shot of Megan Rapinoe.

The stands seemed quite packed, and the seats were some of the tightest together I have ever experienced. The official attendance was at 39,078 in a stadium that could seat 45,600. Again, the only empty seats seemed to be front-center on each side, the more expensive or VIP-designated seats. Many of the spectators around me were American travelers who were enthusiastic but who, at the risk of being accused of stereotyping, seemed not all that knowledgeable. Interspersed with cheering were frequent discussions trying to figure out what was happening, and the group beside me politely asked questions of those around them.

They also decided to cheer out of what the man next to me called a sense of “North American pride,” cheering for their northern neighbors.

Canada lost that game, missing a penalty kick that would have tied it at one each. It seems a very Canadian experience to travel far to see your national football team play, only for them to have trouble scoring. After the game, the Swedish fans happily marched off together with drums and tubas. While I am sure the residents of the local area are used to crowds, I would wager they were happy when this one dispersed. I walked back with a colleague who had also gone to the game and drowned my sorrows in a nice glass of French wine. It had been a long day, and I had to get up at 4 a.m. to get a train back to Limoges, to route to Manchester and home.

LESSONS LEARNED

This chapter has offered one person’s story and understandings of a range of experiences at women’s football, across four events. Like any ethnography or form of narrative research, it comes from the perspective of the author who chooses what to observe, the types of questions to ask, and what material to bring to bear to make interpretations. Still, it provides some useful perspective from the stands (and pubs, street, and media consumption), of similarities and changes over time, and indications of growth and development in the women’s game. While the U-20 World Cup is a smaller event, and Olympic football is subsumed within a major games, the World Cup games in 2015 and 2019 showed larger crowds, improvements in the nebulous “atmosphere” at the games, and demonstrations of much more intensive media coverage, with a much more serious approach than seen previously.

The Women’s World Cup in 2019 indicates that the women’s game has reached a point of stability with a high number of supporters, strong public interest and media attention, and not just in the host country. The crowds for 2015 and 2019 did not reach the high numbers of 1999 or even 2007 in China with its large population, but live televised consumption was unprecedented; almost a billion viewers globally watched some of the tournament, and record-setting viewing occurred in many countries, with Italy as the top example, seeing viewers increase some 35 times to 7.3 million, over the previous 2011 high of 202,844 for an individual match (FIFA, 2019).

Much of this is due to the growth of interest and opportunity in the women’s game at the professional level, with European men’s clubs

investing more heavily in their women's teams, and the stability offered by the National Women's Soccer League in the US. If anything, the controversies at the 2015 and 2019 World Cup might suggest that growth in the women's game might be in spite of, instead of due to, FIFA and World Cup organizing committees. Williams (2019) makes persuasive arguments that crowds would be larger if the stadiums chosen for the games had been bigger. Most were in the range of seating numbers in the low to mid-20,000 range, and the Stade de France would seat almost twice as many people as the largest used for the women's tournament, Parc des Princes. Williams suggests that this showed a lack of belief in the women's game to pull crowds, which then set limits on crowd size. It is worth remembering the turf pitch controversy of 2015, and the use of Moncton Stadium with its 13,000 capacity (and which was forced to change from grass to turf). Such aspects are choices by FIFA and the organizing committees, and when things happen like scheduling two major men's tournaments at the same time as in 2019, it is not hard to conclude that the women's game is still devalued and disadvantaged, despite the fans and media coming to it as seen in France 2019.

While I write this, gender issues are still prevalent in women's football—the US national women's team had their pay lawsuit dismissed in court in May of 2020 and continues to appeal, but in the last few days, both the Brazil and England federations, two countries where the women's game was undeveloped or suppressed for a long time, voted to equalize pay, joining Australia, New Zealand and Norway (Reuters, 2020). The next Women's World Cup in Australia in 2023 should prove interesting. Australia has taken to soccer after a long history of disregard for the game in favor of other codes of football—rugby and Australian Rules (Harder, 2019)—and the Matildas are “high among the nation's most esteemed sport ‘brands’” (Rowe, 2020). The positive developments noted across time in this paper should only continue, with those factors added in, and hopefully, fewer obstacles in the way.

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Megan Rapinoe's Power Pose: Informing and Influencing Fan Performances

Molly Yanity and Danielle Sarver Coombs

One of the most iconic moments of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup came during a tense quarterfinal match between the US and France on June 28. The US Women's National Team (USWNT) had come into the international tournament as favorites and with a point to prove: After years of being paid less than the US Men's National Team, the players had sued their own federation for equal pay.

The team's first match—a 13-0 defeat of an overmatched Thailand side on June 11 in the group stage—made clear to all that this team was there to win... and to win as big as possible, no matter against whom they played. While their football was impeccable, their performance was widely criticized, particularly because they continued celebrating even after the game had turned into a rout. The day after the match, one of the

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perceived leaders on the pitch, American superstar Megan Rapinoe, refused to apologize, noting in a FOX TV interview, “If anyone wants to come at our team for not doing the right thing, not playing the right way, not being a good ambassador, they can come at us. It was an explosion of joy. If our crime is joy, then we will take that” (Fox Sports, 2019).

By this point, Rapinoe was no stranger to controversy. On September 4, 2016, in the wake of National Football League quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s silent protest against police violence perpetrated on black Americans, Rapinoe supported him by kneeling during the national anthem prior to a National Women’s Soccer League game. Over the next two years, Rapinoe either knelt during the anthem when she played in NWSL games, or—when she played for the USWNT—did not participate in the pregame anthem ritual. She is an outspoken LGBTQ activist and in a relationship with professional basketball star and Olympian Sue Bird. And, after the USWNT advanced out of the group stage at the World Cup in France, recorded comments from a month earlier went viral as Rapinoe declared that “I’m not going to the f—king White House. No, I’m not going to the White House. We’re not going to be invited. I doubt it” (Eight by Eight, 2019). Never one to let perceived insults slide, US President Donald Trump responded to Rapinoe’s comment on Twitter on June 26, declaring Rapinoe should win before speaking out. Rapinoe, who had publicly criticized Trump since his 2016 campaign, became a lightning rod for social media vitriol. Fans of the US team wondered if the team would be able to transcend the off-field tensions and dramatics, or if eventually another team would show them up to both steal the World Cup trophy and silence Rapinoe.

These concerns came to a fever pitch when the USWNT faced France in the quarterfinals—a match between the two teams widely considered to be best in the world. After scoring her second goal, which was the game-winner, Rapinoe struck what would become *the* iconic image of the tournament: Arms raised and outstretched, her purple hair shining, a slight smile on her skyward-tilting face, Rapinoe embraced the glory that comes with scoring for your country on the biggest stage in the game.

The US beat France, 2-1, en route to the championship. The final between the US and Netherlands—a 2-0 US win—was the most watched match in Women’s World Cup history with an average live audience of 82.8 million with an estimated 263.6 million people reached by live coverage around the world (FIFA, 2019). In the US, approximately 14.3 million viewers tuned in to the final match compared to 11.4 million for the

2018 Men's World Cup Final, a 22% boost, FOX Sports reported using Nielsen ratings data (Hess, 2019). Further, that report indicated that total viewership, which also included online streaming, reached roughly 20 million, "making it the most-watched soccer match on English-language television, men's or women's, in the U.S. since the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup final, which delivered 25.4 million viewers" (para. 3).

Rapinoe ended up scoring more goals than any other player in the tournament to win the Golden Boot honor. She also earned the Golden Ball trophy as the tournament's best player. The power pose emblazoned magazine covers, graced t-shirts, and was printed on posters. The interpretations and celebrations of Rapinoe's power pose struck a chord, in part because of the politics and drama around her war of words with the president and previously established activism, coupled with the USWNT's overwhelming confidence and raucous post-tournament festivities. It also resonated because of how it ran contrary to the ways women are taught to perform: be humble, be thankful for the opportunity, take up as little space as possible. Female fans embraced the pose as both a celebratory marker of fandom and a political one.

This chapter examines how women fans of the USWNT understood, interpreted, and assigned meaning to Rapinoe's power pose in light of their fandom. Further, it explores how women fans interpreted the pose—and Rapinoe *herself*—as a condensation symbol.

FANDOM, IDENTITY, AND POLITICS

This analysis is grounded in the theory of Performative Sport Fandom (Osborne & Coombs, 2013, 2015). PSF posits that fandom is relational, contextual, and negotiable. Understanding the subtle differences between identity theory (sociology) and social identity theory (social psychology) is critical to the conceptualization of PSF. Identity theory is formed through the roles an individual acts out, or identity is formed by "what one does" (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identity theory describes the formation of self through an individual's association with particular groups, or "who one is" in comparison to the group. Osborne and Coombs (2015) grappled with the subtle differences between identity theory and social identity theory. While through both lenses the conclusion is that identities are socially constructed, identity theory "stresses that this construction occurs through a process by which we take on roles that we then perform for an audience of others" (17). As in any performance,

the performer negotiates the next performance based on the positive or negative feedback of others; we learn what is socially acceptable through the feedback. Judith Butler's performative gender theory suggests gender is "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1999, p. 519). Osborne and Coombs use an example of a woman wearing a tennis skirt. By wearing it, they write, the woman is performing femininity. "A man may choose to wear that same skirt, perhaps because he prefers to wear women's clothes or perhaps because he is attending a costume party," but the act can only be understood within the broader context of the performance (Osborne & Coombs, 2015, p. 19). Performances of gender can also be resistant, but this point of Butler's is counter to the unconscious nature of understanding identity theory. Through performative gender theory, we come to see "what one does" as not simply a reflexive performance shaped by feedback, but a performance of individual agency and even resistance to the feedback.

Building upon identity theory and performative gender theory, PSF suggests that sports fans exist through their "performance of fandom. Those performances are socially constructed and vary based on context and audience" (Osborne & Coombs, 2015, p. 20). Further, in their extensive study of female fans of American football, Osborne and Coombs found that fans "construct fandom through complex interplay between how much you know about your team and how much you care about your success," measured on a matrix of "Knowing and Caring" (2015, p. 23). Precisely how fans negotiate the performances of knowing and caring varies depending on audiences, settings, and stereotypes of a fanbase.

Rapinoe's power pose is laden with meaning that likely transcends her impact on the pitch. Her performance prior to and during the World Cup was both explicitly and implicitly political. This chapter examines how women fans of the USWNT situate themselves on the fan performance matrix and how they interpret Rapinoe and the power pose. This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How do fans of Megan Rapinoe situate their fandom on the Knowing-Caring matrix? What do Megan Rapinoe and her power pose mean to self-identified USWNT fans?

THE DESCRIPTIVE POWER OF THE INTERVIEW

After outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the chapter, we turn to our methodological approach: The qualitative interview. Qualitative interviews based on non-uniform questions achieve a more fully developed

dataset, as well as a more coherent “depth and density” of material (Weiss, 1994). In qualitative interview studies, Weiss writes, “the demonstration of causation rests heavily on the description” of events, emotions, and so on (p. 179). If the descriptions across subjects bear similarities, the researcher can “feel justified in proposing a more general statement as a hypothesized minitheory [and] each new interview can then be a test...” (Weiss, p. 179).

To best understand the ways women describe and perform their fandom of Megan Rapinoe, we chose to perform qualitative interviews with women who are self-declared fans of football and the USWNT, 18 years of age or older, and residents of the US. We selected 17 subjects after they voluntarily responded to tweets that included the hashtag #USWNT, as well as a targeted Facebook post to the USWNT private group, which includes 57,200 members and for which an administrator approves membership. Both the tweets and post asked for self-identified female fans of the US Women's National Soccer team interested in doing a short interview. We selected the first 17 subjects who were 18 years of age or older, lived in the US and could do the interview on our time schedule.

The subjects each provided oral consent. They ranged in age from 18 to 67 years and lived in varying geographical regions of the continental US. Four of the subjects identified as non-white. We conducted 17, in-depth and semi-structured interviews by phone between December 27, 2019 and January 10, 2020. The average length of the interview was 30:17. All interviews were recorded via Otter.ai and transcribed.

We analyzed the transcripts to identify common themes using a planned out, constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002). The plan implied, Boeije writes, “that the researcher knows beforehand which comparative steps are needed in the analysis regarding the elements that are compared, the aims, the questions asked and the expected results of each step” (p. 406). For this dataset, we researchers knew there would be a need to compare answers to specific and open-ended questions in relation to the Knowing-Caring matrix. That was needed to establish how a subject internalized their USWNT fandom, their fandom of specific players and Rapinoe, as well as their assessment of and relationship to the context, for example, Rapinoe's activism, politics, and so on.

RAPINOE FANS' PERFORMANCES: HIGH KNOWING, HIGH CARING

As mentioned above, PSF is built through “the complex interplay” of an individual fan’s knowledge base and how much they care about the success of their team or of an individual athlete. Therefore, PSF is “relational, contextual, and negotiable” (Osborne & Coombs, 2015, p. 23). The Knowing-Caring matrix does not numerically, or literally, measure fandom. Rather, it shows how fan performances are, in fact, relational, contextual, and negotiable.

Fans Support Rapinoe Across Fronts

As a player, as a role model, and as a team leader, Megan Rapinoe enjoys support from the entirety of our sample of interviewees. She was occasionally listed as a “favorite,” but USWNT fans we interviewed support Rapinoe as evidenced by achieving high marks of knowing and caring on the matrix, even when their own political beliefs or other factors were involved.

“She’s not my favorite,” revealed a 27-year-old fan, “but I do appreciate her game and what she does off the field because I think that takes a lot.”

High Knowing, On Pitch and Off

Knowing is important and “being able to demonstrate high levels of Knowing... develops a deeper quality to one’s fandom” (Osborne & Coombs, 2015, p. 201). The women with whom we spoke have cultivated this knowledge over years of watching Rapinoe play with the USWNT since she earned her first cap in 2006—and even before.

A 67-year-old noted that her relationship to the University of Portland began to inform her fandom. She mentioned both Canadian captain Christine Sinclair, who played at Portland from 2001 to 2005, as well as Rapinoe, whose college playing days at Portland spanned from 2005 to 2008:

I moved to Portland in the early 90s and I started attending the University of Portland soccer games and they were very good. Yes, they were and their pitch is beautiful. I had never gone to a soccer specific stadium before so it was really fun. (I became a fan of the USWNT) mostly through the soccer

players that had come through the University of Portland. Then the USWNT came and played in Portland.

Rapinoe's lengthy USWNT and domestic careers have given women plenty of fodder from which to learn.

A 28-year-old from suburban Massachusetts noted that Rapinoe has only missed penalty kick:

She is, like, the clutch, ice-in-her-veins type of player who maybe has a bad game or doesn't do much, or plays last, so they bring her on late but then she always manages to find a goal when the team needs it the most—and she is like a killer when it comes to penalty kicks.¹

Subjects mentioned Rapinoe's efficiency on corner kicks, changes in her game tactics over the years, as well as a memorable assist to Abby Wambach from the 2011 World Cup quarterfinal; it was a cross in the 122nd minute to propel Team USA to a penalty-kick victory over Brazil. "She's a creative leftwinger, really good at crossing," one subject said. Another added, "On the field, I just love her vision... you're so excited about the possibility of what could happen when she is playing."

The USWNT fans we interviewed also know a lot about Rapinoe *off* the field, as well. In addition to Rapinoe's activism (which will be described in detail later in this chapter), her fans know she is dating basketball star Sue Bird, that her brother is in prison for crimes related to his drug addiction, that she has an identical twin sister, and that she loves fashion.

High Caring, for Rapinoe and Team

The performance of Caring depends on myriad factors, Osborne and Coombs (2015) found, and can change depending on how fans watch games (alone or in groups), where they watch games (attending games, public TV viewing, or private viewings), and other factors. Emotional outbursts before, during, and after games can be part of the performance, but can reveal an obvious investment of feelings. Nancy, a 53-year-old from Dallas, for example, said, "I was high-fiving, screaming, spilling my beer. I was doing my own celebrations with my friends... when you're a sports fan, you're in the moment with them."

A 27-year-old white woman from a rural area said she typically watched games alone because of her emotional swings. She described the

anxiousness she felt during the 2019 quarterfinal game against France: “The last 10 minutes of France... I was like, ‘Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god.’ I paced. I think we lost part of our carpet.” Another, who is a college student in Wisconsin, said she watched games alone, too: “I am like an anxious lunatic when I’m watching the games, especially in the later rounds.”

Owning and wearing clothing, or donning costumes representing one’s favorite team and/or player is considered critical “in communicating one’s loyalty and devotion” when it comes to caring (p. 26). All 17 interview subjects own some kind of USWNT gear—t-shirts, jerseys, scarves, caps, and sweatshirts. They wear the gear when watching and attending USWNT events, and casually for no reason. One subject, a 34-year-old from suburban North Carolina, nearly took the representation further. She said, “I like (Rapinoe’s) hair. The pink hair. I liked her hair in the last Olympics and I was like, ‘I should cut my hair like that...’ But, I wouldn’t look cute. She’s cute, she’s a cool soccer player. I’m not.”

Financial and time commitments are other indicators of caring. Three of the 17 interview subjects traveled to France for at least some of the 2019 World Cup. One of the subjects—the grandmother from Portland, Oregon—also attended all the games at the 2015 World Cup in Canada and has season tickets for the Portland Thorns of the National Women’s Soccer League. Two other subjects attended previous World Cup tournament games. All 17 have attended at least one USWNT game in the continental US for either qualifying games or friendlies, and all of them watched nearly every USWNT contest in the 2019 World Cup, even while they were at work or traveling. “Some people had their laptops out so as to pretend to be doing their work, but I wasn’t really paying attention to what I was supposed to be doing during that time,” a 28-year-old from suburban Massachusetts said.

These data show the women we interviewed to be in the High Knowing-High Caring quadrant of the PSF matrix.

Fan Performances Invoke Political Discourse

Fans of Megan Rapinoe can no more avoid her political activism than her opponents can avoid her craft corner kicks. Thus, political discourse is woven into the performance of their fandom. A 29-year-old from Pennsylvania said, “I wanted to wear (USWNT jerseys) because they are

cool, but there is a political agenda, too. I mean, I want the sales (of the jerseys) to do well, which they have been doing, to help make them make the case that there is a market for women's soccer."

RAPINOE'S POWER POSE: ICONIC, TRANSCENDENT, AND POLITICAL

In the 65th minute of the 2019 World Cup quarterfinal match against France, Tobin Heath of the USWNT darted toward the right of the goal with the ball. Heath crossed the ball through two defenders in front of France's net to a charging Rapinoe, who drilled it in to give the US a 2-0 lead. Without expression, Rapinoe ran an arc in front of the net toward the corner when she pumped both her fists downward while screaming. Her teammates jumped on her and celebrated. Some hugged her. Still, without breaking a smile, Rapinoe shook them off and walked to the corner and faced the jubilant crowd. She raised her arms outward and upward, chest proud, face smug, and stood still in the pose. Rapinoe's "power pose" became iconic in an instant. It transcended the moment of the triumphant soccer play. It transcended even sport to force the audience to reconceptualize what female athletes act and celebrate, and how they physically occupy space. It also came to embody Rapinoe's politics, evoking powerful meanings and opinions. By engaging in the political as well as the sport arenas, Rapinoe and her pose became rhetorical political constructions open to fans' interpretations. After determining that was a recurring theme through our interviews, we identified that Rapinoe and the power pose had become rhetorical *condensation symbols*, or according to Graber (1976), a "name, word, or phrase that arouses emotional, mental, or physical action involving the listener's most basic values." This finding is also explored.

ICONIC: "EVERYONE KNEW THAT POSE"

The photograph of the pose was reproduced on newspaper covers throughout the world, on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, on the back of Caitlin Murray's book "The National Team," on Rapinoe-branded t-shirts, and more.

CNN's Scottie Andrew and Nadeem Muaddi wrote:

Less than 24 hours have passed since Megan Rapinoe scored the only two goals against France in the Women's World Cup quarter-final match, but her glorious goal celebration has already been hailed as an "iconic" moment in soccer and all sports. (2019, para. 1)

Neither the USWNT's success nor the power pose came out of nowhere. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the US program has been the globe's most successful international side, winning four World Cup championships. Individual players from Mia Hamm to Hope Solo to Abby Wambach became household names as TV ratings continued to rise. With that, sponsorship and publicity opportunities for the team and individual players followed. The rise of Rapinoe as a leader on and off the pitch has been well documented to this point, as well. Thus, the moment Rapinoe faced the crowd and stretched out her arms, the USWNT's victory and her own triumph seemed to be certain.

The pose means different things to fans, but all 17 subjects we interviewed saw it as iconic and positive.

When asked what the pose meant to her, a Black woman from Kansas City answered:

My mother is a photographer, so my whole life, growing up, my house is full of photos and moments. And I think there's, like, there's something about that photo (of Rapinoe), that image that you can point to it and be like, this comes from this specific moment. You can see that this is from the Women's World Cup in 2019 and this is Megan Rapinoe, and this was a statement she was making in all sorts of ways.

Another subject saw it through a patriotic lens. "I always get happy when I see it. I have so much love for her, for that team. They make me feel proud to be an American woman."

The moment was iconic, but it was a moment built on top of other moments from both teams and players past.

The USWNT won its second World Cup championship when the US hosted the tournament in 1999. The tournament, which garnered 1.2 million attendees at eight venues, set a women's soccer attendance record that stood until 2015, when Canada hosted. The '99 World Cup crescendoed on July 10 in Pasadena, California as 90,185 spectators—a world record for a women's sporting event—packed into the Rose Bowl to see the hosts face China. The scoreless tie ended in penalty kicks when defender Brandi Chastain delivered the US's fifth and deciding goal.

The US had just won the 1999 Women's World Cup. Chastain ripped her shirt off without a moment's hesitation, waved it around her head, and then dropped to her knees. The image of her on her knees behind the penalty spot, both fists in the air—jersey clenched in her right fist—was captured by photographers. It instantly became one of the most iconic images in American sports (Murray, 2019, p. 45).

An interview subject from New Jersey said:

Everybody knows that (image); it's tied with the '99 championship. I was young, so I don't remember, but I have a feeling it wasn't all that loved that a girl was throwing her shirt off and screaming in a sports bra at that time... but, that was Brandi Chastain's most iconic moment. They remember her for that moment. Every little girl wanted to be Mia Hamm, but everyone knew that pose.

The moment is enshrined in a bronze statue outside the Rose Bowl.

In 2015, the USWNT clinched its third World Cup championship in Canada defeating Japan, 5-2. When the game ended, the program's all-time leading scorer Abby Wambach ran to the seats and kissed her then-wife on national TV—a unique and unexpected celebration just a week after the US Supreme Court had struck down all state bans on same-sex marriage and legalizing it all 50 states.

In group play of the 2019 World Cup, the US players cranked up the celebrations—namely during a 13-0 rout over Thailand when Rapinoe slid into the bench area while kicking her leg.

Rapinoe's power pose is a clear evolution of the celebrations that preceded, but stood on its own given Rapinoe's dominance on the pitch and her vocalness of it.

"I wouldn't be surprised if there was a statue of that some day," the New Jersey subject added.

TRANSCENDENT: REDEFINING EXPECTATIONS

As examined through the power pose, USWNT fans interviewed for this study feel the pose offers new representations of what it means to be a woman and an athlete—and that those representations are often in sharp contrast with expectations of feminized behavior in sport. Studies (Choi, 2000; Ezzell, 2009) have shown that female athletes often struggle to navigate their athleticism in terms of physical, emotional, and

psychological traits that resist hegemonic masculinity. Krane et al. (2004) go further and write: "It appears that, in negotiating and reconciling the social expectations of femininity with athleticism, sportswomen develop two identities—athlete and woman" (p. 326).

The women we interviewed contend the power pose puts the female athletic experience in a light that contradicts the findings of those studies. With Rapinoe, there is no struggle.

Displaying joy and confidence, taking up physical space, rebelling, and being proud of physical domination were common interpretations of Rapinoe's power pose by our interview subjects.

A 29-year-old fan from Pennsylvania said:

Just joy... Spontaneous joy. That's why I love watching sports because it is an occasion for such spontaneous, joyful intoxication... I was watching (Rapinoe) get hugged by her teammates and she mouthed to Kelley O'Hara, "I'm back!" There it is. That's Megan being Megan. She just doesn't care. She sees sports as entertainment and this is her performance. I just thought to myself, "Congratulations, Megan."

The 19-year-old from Massachusetts felt Rapinoe's confidence when she saw the soccer star make the pose after scoring:

She just knows that she's a powerful woman. And I think she knows that she's great at what she does and that, you know, that even though men might not think that she's in a powerful position, I think that she thinks she is. And I think that she's just trying to show that women can be powerful athletes and have an impact.

The idea of taking up space, in both a literal and figurative way, resonated with the subjects.

The subject from New York City said of the pose:

It's a woman taking up space. It's something I think about on the subway every day when, like, my pet peeve is manspreading and we don't allow women to take space up in that way. I think society is still pretty reluctant to let people who deviate from sort of what's considered standard identity, to take up space in that way. ... And I think also in an age where everything is so visual, and people are sending pictures left, right, and center on Instagram and Twitter and Facebook, like the impact of having something visual like that, I mean, you see that picture on newspaper stands and you want to

know more. It's a way of taking a space both on the field, in people's minds, in the media. It's just really, really powerful.

Fans also internalized a form of rebelliousness from the pose. A 50-year-old Asian American from Los Angeles saw the post-goal pose as showing off for the crowd: "Oh, she is showboating, but in the best way. 'Look at me. I'm amazing.' Like, 'Show me some respect. Look what I just did.'"

As noted in the previous section, the power pose is an evolution of USWNT celebrations. For example, in 1999, the USWNT faced North Korea in the final match of group play, after scoring her second goal of the game, Tisha Venturini did a backflip in the middle of the field (Murray, 2019). Chastain's iconic image pushed boundaries. Even for Rapinoe, the pose was not even her most boisterous celebration as one interview subject noted, recalling Rapinoe's celebration after scoring against Colombia in the group stage of a July 4 game in the 2011 Women's World Cup. Rapinoe had sprinted to the corner of the field where a live microphone was situated. She lifted the microphone and sang part of Bruce Springsteen's classic, "Born in the USA."

When discussing the pose, Rapinoe herself noted her role as an entertainer and reveled over the fact the photo of the pose became a viral meme. She said, "You're sort of on the stage, so I guess I'm looking at myself as a performer and trying to entertain. It's sort of a funny playful pose and we're always looking for good celebrations so this one stuck a little" (Kimble, 2019).

Not everyone was a fan of such celebrations. After the USWNT won its first two group play matches in 2019, *Washington Post* columnist Fred Bowen wrote:

Parents and coaches often talk to kids about being a good sport when you lose. But there is also the art of being a good winner. That includes toning down celebrations in runaway games. Maybe the U.S. women should save the celebrations for the close games and for July 7 when (hopefully) the team will celebrate winning its fourth World Cup. (2019)

Still, the women we interviewed felt the power pose Rapinoe struck after her goal against France redefined the way women celebrate in the sporting arena and pushed back against criticism.

One interview subject said of Rapinoe's pose:

It's her putting herself out there... It's taking a bow after a performance. But not everybody would do it. She's probably one of the few on that team, even, to do it. (Portuguese football star) Christiano Ronaldo strikes a pose after every finish that he makes. It's come to be expected and anticipated for great footballers across the globe, so good for her.

POLITICAL: RAPINOE AND THE POSE AS A CONDENSATION SYMBOL

Los Angeles Times' culture columnist and critic Mary McNamara wrote of the pose: In one gesture, the 34-year-old midfielder acknowledged her own greatness, embraced the audience, honored her team and celebrated the joy of being at the center of a women's sports team paving the way for gender parity in attention, respect, and maybe even pay (2019, para. 4).

Women's equality and the gender pay gap are inherently political issues that Rapinoe and her USWNT teammates embraced, going so far as to sue the US Soccer Federation over the pay disparity between what they make and what the USMNT makes. Rapinoe's LGBTQ activism, her allegiance to Colin Kaepernick, and her war of words with Donald Trump make the political unescapable. By engaging in the political as well as the sporting arenas, Rapinoe and her pose became rhetorical political constructions open to fans' interpretations. After determining that was a recurring theme throughout our interviews, we identified that Rapinoe and the power pose had become rhetorical *condensation symbols*, or according to Graber (1976), a "name, word, or phrase that arouses emotional, mental, or physical action involving the listener's most basic values." Graber built on Sapir's 1934 definition of a rhetorical symbol that "condenses" feelings or meanings into a specific connotation.

Rapinoe's pose and, ultimately, Rapinoe herself came to mean many different things to many different people. For example, the meme of the pose often had included politically charged discourse. Rapinoe herself crossed into the political rhetoric as a condensation symbol, as well. During the World Cup victory parade in New York City, she gave a brief in which she said, "We have to be better. We have to love more, hate less. Listen more, talk less. This is everyone's responsibility. It's our responsibility to make this world a better place."

The seemingly positive message sparked controversy. Among the 163 public comments on the YouTube video of the speech, these were included:

- “Is this her start for a political (sic) career??”
- “I didn’t know the team captains all won a seat in office as well! Interesting!”
- “Well, she covered just about everything political—gender, race, LGBT, hair styles, the election—am I missing anything? Did she mention soccer?”
- “The ones talking trash are the trump supporters they envy you. Trump fail and that bully won’t get away with everything”

Kaufer and Carley (1993) describe condensation symbols as different from ordinary words by “being well-connected to its context of meaning ... well-connectedness can be factored on the dimensions of situational conductivity, density, and consensus” (p. 205). The more impact a condensation symbol has depends on how high they are on each of those dimensions. The situational conductivity means that the word, or device—in this case, the pose—has many ties to “many other situation-specific concepts” (Kaufer & Carley, p. 203). The sporting concept of it was clear: Victory, dominance, confidence; Rapinoe celebrated her goal. But, with Rapinoe’s political activism, the pose took on a political concept.

A subject from New York City said:

I think it’s both politically and athletically powerful. It’s powerful from a soccer perspective of, “Are you not entertained?” which in its own way is maybe a political statement, because they’re like, all that online discourse about women’s soccer is less fun to watch. And also, (the pose says) “I’m not going to be cowed by fans, by people who say we celebrate too much, by Trump, by the administration...”

The condensation symbol also scores high on the situational density chart, which Kaufman and Carley describe as “denotes how often a word or expression is likely to recur as parts of larger sentences, paragraphs, genres in context” (p. 204). The pose does recur in discourse about the Women’s World Cup, women’s football, women’s sport, LGBTQ issues, sport, and more. Situational consensus “refers to the extent to which a concept is elaborated in similar ways across a given population in a given context” (Kaufman & Carley, p. 204).

The 22-year-old interview subject from New Jersey, put the pose and Rapinoe in larger contexts:

She works towards and stands for an intersectional typed of justice that the world is uncomfortable coming to terms with, and she isn't afraid to use her identity as a gay woman to advocated for other gay athletes, or children... she also took a knee with Colin Kaepernick and she's not a Black American, she is a white American who holds a certain type of privilege, but she is a self aware, intersectional activist pushing for a type of justice that we all need and are afraid to really to terms with.

Fans of the USWNT understand Rapinoe in similar manners as they understand the controversy Rapinoe creates, but respect it.

The 67-year-old Portlander said: "think that anytime you are different or forceful, you are polarizing. There's a lot of people who think women shouldn't participate in sports. There are lots of people who think that being out and being celebratory of being out is wrong. So, she's going to be polarizing."

Watching Rapinoe play and do the pose ignited a conversation about athletes kneeling during the national anthem between the college student from Massachusetts and her father, she said.

I kind of agree with everything she stands for and for how outspoken she is, but my dad was like, "I love the way the team is playing, but I don't know if I want her playing for the team." I was like, "Oh, why?" He said that she is representing the U.S, but kneels during the anthem. I hadn't really paid attention, but thought, Oh that's cool." But he was like, "No, she's representing America." I feel like being American is standing up against the things that are wrong in the country... But that was kind of like where our first big disagreement was, with the team. I thought she was doing something noble. ... I thought, you know, you have this big platform and she is using it in a way I liked, but obviously not everyone's going to agree with it.

Political argumentation actually depends on the use of condensation symbols, Zarefsky (2008) contends, writing "Rather than confronting potential critics directly, (using condensation symbol) seeks to disarm (political opponents) preemptively, converting them to supporters by bringing them within the ambit of one's own symbolic resources" (p. 324).

The pose and Rapinoe became symbolic of the pursuit of LGBTQ rights and racial equality, of feminist plights, such as equal pay for women not just in sports, but in all professions. With Rapinoe's verbal spar with the Republican president, she and the pose further became a condensation symbol representing liberal policies and anti-Trump sentiment, as well.

LESSONS LEARNED

By the end of 2019, Rapinoe had become a full-fledged celebrity. She graced the covers of fashion magazines *Marie Claire* and *Glamour*, *Sports Illustrated* three times, as well as mainstream periodicals *Esquire* and, with the rest of her World Cup teammates, *Time*. *Sports Illustrated* named her its Sportsperson of the Year and featured her on the cover in an ankle-length dress, Doc Marten shoes and holding a sledgehammer. The editors' letter explaining her as the choice was titled "A Large, Loud Voice" (Editors of *Sports Illustrated*, 2019). She found herself on EA Sports' FIFA 20 video game box cover, speaking on behalf of her teammates at the 2019 ESPY Awards, and imploring her male football counterparts Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Zlatan Ibrahimovic to use their platform to speak against racism and sexism—while accepting the Ballon d'Or.

Fans of the USWNT and of Rapinoe know and care about the team, about Rapinoe the player, about Rapinoe the activist. They understood and identified the iconicism and transcendences of Rapinoe's power pose, sensing the importance of what it meant in terms of how women act and celebrate on the pitch. Further, they understood the rhetorical function of the pose and of Rapinoe herself in political discourse.

NOTE

1. In her combined domestic and national team career, Rapinoe is, in fact, 9 for 10 in PKs.

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Kelley O'Hara and Lesbian Rule: “[H]umdrum, Everyday Postwin Kiss, and That's What Makes It Monumental”

Katherine Harman

In many respects, the four-week-long 2019 Women's World Cup celebrated queer excellence in ways previous tournaments had not. Prior to the international competition's start, media outlets reported on the number of openly LGBTQ+ participants, while stories of queer players often dominated the news, especially with the commanding performance of the United States Women's National Team (USWNT), who had five openly LGBTQ+ players and an out lesbian coach. This was in stark contrast to previous USWNT World Cup and Olympic rosters, which generally boasted only one or two openly queer individuals, with the sexuality of other players speculated about furiously by the fanbase.

However, one of the more surprising and significant moments of queer representation for the US came from a player that was not previously out, nor had she ever publicly discussed her sexuality.

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The kiss between defender, Kelley O'Hara, and her girlfriend, provided a different type of LGBTQ+ representation. The image—which was not televised during the broadcast but was caught on film by photographers—depicts O'Hara leaning against the stands embracing her girlfriend who is standing in the front row.

This essay aims to situate the O'Hara celebration kiss within Cassidy's (2019) "scandalous outing to casual acknowledgment" framework before engaging in a discussion of how the image derives meaning from Villarejo (2003)'s understanding of lesbian visibility, as the reaction to the image from queer media, community, and fans elevates the photograph—and subsequent coming out moment.

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT: QUEERNESS IN WOMEN'S SOCCER

Throughout history, many have associated being LGBTQ+ with women's sports (Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Bullingham & Postlethwaite, 2019; Cahn, 2015; Griffin, 1998; Kane, 2018; Waldron, 2016).

While many have equated being queer as inherent to women's sports, barriers still exist to women or gender nonconfirming individuals within athletics as it relates to "coming out" (Griffin, 1998; Iannotta & Kane, 2002; Stott, 2019; Waldron, 2016). This encompasses women's soccer, as there have been varying degrees of visibility and acceptance relating to both American professional leagues and the National Team (Linehan, 2020; McCauley, 2019; Molloy, 2019; Parkinson, 2019; Wetsman, 2020).

Women who have competed for the USWNT have come out previously, first with Natasha Kai in an interview prior to the 2008 Olympics (Zeigler, 2008). Lori Lindsey, Megan Rapinoe, and Abby Wambach followed with announcements of their own, while Briana Scurry, along with others, came out after their playing careers (Grant, 2013; Kroh, 2015; Lora, 2012; Portwood, 2012). But these admissions did not directly lead to an in-flux of openly gay or lesbian players, as only Rapinoe and Wambach were publicly out for the US squad at the 2015 World Cup. This is in stark contrast to the 2019 team, which had five openly LGBTQ+ players on the roster at the start of the tournament: Tierna Davidson, Adrianna Franch, Ashlyn Harris, Ali Krieger, and Rapinoe.

Additionally, the USWNT has erected a shared identity of queerness, where their games and fandom are a perceived safe place for LGBTQ+ individuals (Gutowitz, 2019b). At times, this has been in tension with the

number of publicly “out” players on the team, which mirrors literature about the WNBA (Women’s National Basketball Association) (Plymire & Forman, 2000) but also supports historical assertions of sport as a safe space for queer women in varying capacities (Anderson & Bullingham, 2015; Bullingham & Postlethwaite, 2019; Cahn, 2015; Griffin, 1998; Kane, 2018; Waldron, 2016).

This all puts O’Hara’s coming out in context, as it materialized 11 years after Kai and just seven after Rapinoe. Additionally, the moment occurred at the conclusion of a tournament with 40 openly LGBTQ+ players, coaches, and trainers—a distinction from the 18 that competed in 2015 and the zero who participated at the 2018 Men’s World Cup (Villarreal, 2019).

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

The sports fan is well acquainted with the celebration image, whether depicting a team, player, coach, or country. Therefore, seeing a Super Bowl MVP mark the victory with his family on the field or a tennis star scale the bleachers to embrace their spouse after a Grand Slam win has become almost ubiquitous. In American professional sports, similar jubilant scenes and corresponding images do not exist of same-sex couples. Therefore, the Getty Images photograph of Kelley O’Hara (Machado, 2019) celebrating the title by kissing her girlfriend in the stands connotes multiple meanings, some conventional, others unconventional, as it is depicting something completely ordinary—an individual sharing an important achievement with a loved one.

Comparable photos of the USWNT, the Women’s World Cup, and same-sex couples at the Women’s World Cup (WWC) do exist, as similar instances were caught on camera following the 2015 and 2019 tournaments. The novelty here is that O’Hara and her girlfriend were not previously in the public eye, which makes this standard display of affection garner more significance.

Thus, this chapter considers the image as O’Hara’s coming out moment, examining it through the lens of Cassidy’s “scandalous outing to casual acknowledgment” framework. Cassidy (2019) addresses the “state of coverage” of openly LGBTQ+ athletes, in addition to scrutinizing the changes and developments within the manner through which sports journalism reported on the coming out of three high-profile female athletes: Billie Jean King, Sheryl Swoopes, and Brittney Griner. He claims, “By directly analyzing and comparing coverage of these three athletes, this

research will provide an overview of how journalists have covered lesbian athletes in professional sports over the past 35+ years” adding that the work provides “additional insight into the depth and quality of coverage” (p. 2). Engaging with the O’Hara moment in this manner builds upon this analysis, as she plays a different sport, is most prominently known for her athletic role on a national scale as opposed to domestically, and also “came out” in a much different fashion than the three athletes Cassidy (2019) reviews.

The lack of mainstream media articles, including overall coverage, pertaining to both the moment and the photo indicate that a productive and insightful thematic analysis could not be performed. However, the dearth of content within mainstream sports media, specifically in contrast from self-identified queer media (Gutowitz, 2019a, 2019b; McCauley, 2019; Molloy, 2019; Parkinson, 2019), is significant and a main point of focus.

The discrepancy in coverage between mainstream outlets and queer or marginalized individuals is considered through Villarejo’s (2003) theorization of how viewers understand lesbian visibility, what constitutes visibility in lesbian images, and how this representation has limits.

Villarejo (2003) exclusively uses the term lesbian in her work, “lesbian as a modifier, not as a noun but as an adjective” explaining that its focus is on “lesbian people, lesbian places, and lesbian things” (p. 4, emphasis original). She acknowledges that the word is “sometimes subsumed by the term queer or coupled with the term gay” but that its power lies in a “niche market” within the history of the term and in understanding the limitations (pp. 7–8, emphasis original). While the argument is intriguing, this chapter incorporates language that is inclusive to lesbians, LGBTQ+ women, the broader LGBTQ+ community, and queer individuals. The chapter then, considers women, genderqueer, gender non-binary or gender non-conforming people who are attracted to or in romantic relationships with other women, genderqueer, or gender non-binary or gender non-conforming people, within Villarejo’s (2003) concept.

By probing these issues through this lens, this chapter seeks to contribute to feminist, gender, and sexuality scholarship, but acknowledges that this is just one interpretation of the image and the meaning that is derived from it. Viewers, fans, and those both within and outside of the soccer community are not a monolithic group, and therefore may have diverse readings of the photograph and its meaning. Additionally, not all queer individuals or soccer fans may find value in the text.

VISIBILITY AND "CULTURAL MEANING"

As Duncan (1990) states, "Photographic images tell stories, much as written narratives do, and thus may be read just as written texts are" (p. 22), while Jones (2006) claims, "Photographs tell stories. They are 'so much a part of our daily lives we rarely think about how they influence us and what that influence is'" (p. 108). As "sport shapes society, as much as society shapes sport" (Billings & Hundley, 2010, p. 2) it is critical to examine the impact sport photographs have on athletics and society, especially when the impact is on marginalized communities.

Research has demonstrated that images of female athletes are typically presented in a sexualized or feminine fashion, with women often depicted in passive poses, existing in a non-sport setting, wearing non-athletic clothing, or not appearing as an athlete entirely (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011; Duncan, 1990; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015; Hardin et al., 2002; Jones, 2006, 2013; Kane et al., 2013; Pegoraro et al., 2018). Print and digital images of athletes have been analyzed at the Olympics (Duncan, 1990; Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2015; Hardin et al., 2002; Jones, 2006, 2013), in sports blogs (Clavio & Eagleman, 2011), in sports magazines (Smallwood et al., 2014) as a form of "digital activism" (Chawansky, 2016, p. 772), as a way of performing fandom (Toffoletti et al., 2019), and in the context of framing a specific team (Pegoraro et al., 2018).

Morris III and Sloop (2006, 2017) examine same-sex public kissing, specifically between men, while McKinney (2010) analyzes how magazine photographs of two women kissing are understood by women who comprise the LGBTQ+ community. As Morris III and Sloop (2017) argue:

Kissing representations, especially those reflecting homonormative embodiment and living, continue to proliferate in US culture; those representations would seem still predominantly to be consonant with apolitical, assimilationist, and incrementalist logics of social change; even such "benign" depiction and enactment incite panic and disciplinary response, which is to say that nonheteronormative public kissing remains a cultural and political fault line; and we still can imagine a worldmaking project propelled in part by a "critical visual mass" of same-sex public kissing. (p. 183)

Further, Morris III and Sloop (2006) contend that same-sex public kissing goes beyond "an act rife with cultural meaning" and instead "constitutes a paramount political performance" (p. 3). While the authors are

explicitly arguing the significance regarding the visibility of men kissing other men in public, it should be considered that women kissing other women in such a manner may also constitute cultural meaning and political performance.

Historically, however, women kissing other women publically is often read as performative, with both self-identified queer and straight women pressured to perform their real or perceived sexuality for the male gaze. This is especially true for women who identify as bisexual or pansexual (Fahs, 2009; Johnson, 2016; Lieb, 2018). While O'Hara has never named or labeled her sexuality, it is crucial to note the possibilities the kiss suggests. Reading her as lesbian may be the most common or popular practice within queer fans or media; however, it is not the only probability the act implies.

Bullingham and Postlethwaite (2019) maintain that historical and contemporary representations of lesbian athletes have fallen into three categories: ambivalence, scrutiny, and invisibility. Ambivalence is understood as mixed messaging or narratives, scrutiny is described as looking at something critically, and invisibility is equated with silence, in a thematic way or through language (Bullingham & Postlethwaite, 2019). All three categories feature prominently in the coverage—or lack of coverage—of the soccer star.

Google searches for “Kelley O'Hara gay,” “Kelley O'Hara lesbian,” “Kelley O'Hara coming out,” and “Kelley O'Hara girlfriend” result in virtually nothing of substance. This is not unique or unexpected, “[W]hen a woman athlete comes out, even if she's a superstar in her sport, it's not considered nearly as newsworthy as when a male athlete—even one with a much lower profile does” (Cassidy, 2019, p. 89). This applies to O'Hara, who enjoys a relatively higher profile for an American female athlete, as she has played for the USWNT for a decade, appearing in two Olympic Games and three World Cups.

The lack of newsworthiness is likewise apparent on major sports sites like Sports Illustrated, ESPN, The Athletic, Bleacher Report, and The Ringer with zero stories appearing on those outlets that mention either her coming out or sexuality. The same is true for the highly regarded soccer outlets, The Equalizer, and SB Nation's All for XI, an outfit dedicated to women's soccer. Again, this is unremarkable, “Seldom, if ever, do the traditional forms of mainstream media facilitate such an open discussion of the sexual politics of women's sport. Rarely do lesbians have the chance to speak for themselves or to encourage openness in women's sport” (Plymire & Forman, 2000, p. 150). However, O'Hara did “get a chance” to speak

for herself, as the right back gave an interview for ESPN's Body Issue in September 2019 and penned a piece for *The Players' Tribune* in February 2020 (ESPN *The Magazine*, 2019; O'Hara, 2020). Neither article—in which she had conceivably more autonomy to “encourage openness” like Plymire and Forman (2000) suggest—mention her sexual identity.

O'Hara publicly acknowledged her sexuality months later, June 30, 2020, when she posted a photo to her Instagram feed with the caption:

Been wearing these tie dye United We Win socks all month, which are part of @underarmour's Pride collection. Although I don't post about my personal life, I choose to keep that private, that doesn't mean for one second I am not proud of who I am or who I love. My hope is everyone can feel this way and however they choose to express themselves will be met with compassion, understanding, kindness, and LOVE. [rainbow emoji] Happy Pride, y'all! (@kelleyohara, 2020, emphasis original)

The tone of the caption closely adheres to the “corporatized coming out narrative” Chawansky and Francombe (2011) examine in their discussion of coming out as related to an endorsement deal, which they argue “mark a decidedly different space for lesbians in sport” (p. 463). Just as an endorsement deal with Olivia Cruises allowed “previously silenced, ‘closeted’ athletes and ‘deviant’ bodies to be heard” so too does O'Hara's relationship with Under Armour (Chawansky & Francombe, 2011, p. 472). Additionally, the post appeared just weeks before O'Hara was set to launch a new podcast (Linehan, 2020), which furthers the understanding of O'Hara as a “lesbian sporting celebrity” (Chawansky & Francombe, 2011). Notably, this mirrors an interview she did on the *Finding Mastery* podcast released July 1, 2020, which ended with the athlete and the host both plugging her new venture.

Ambivalence, as well as scrutiny, appear in the podcast interview when the host, Michael Gervais, introduces O'Hara as a member of the National Team who played every minute of the 2012 Olympics, a player for the Utah Royals, a Stanford graduate, and a Hermann Trophy winner. However, this is at tension with how O'Hara describes herself—someone who “wears a lot of hats”—in which the second one she mentions is “partner” (Gervais, 2020). Later, she briefly talks about her approach to being a public figure, “I don't talk about my personal relationship—that much. And it is out of respect for my partner who isn't in the public eye. And I think that that actually is what's difficult, people think I'm not

comfortable or super in love or proud of who I am. Because I am” (Gervais, 2020).

Here, Gervais demonstrates these themes by defining and introducing O’Hara to listeners by listing her athlete achievements, while O’Hara brings up her role as a “partner.” O’Hara may not be an official member of queer media, but she is a part of the community and therefore functioning in a similar role. Interestingly, O’Hara furthers the ambivalence theme later in the conversation, as both she and Gervais refer to her racial and gender identities—White, woman—without noting her inclusion in the LGBTQ+ community (Gervais, 2020). Additionally, the words gay, lesbian, queer, or LGBTQ+ are never mentioned in the episode, instead coded language is used to refer to O’Hara’s “marginalization” (Gervais, 2020).

These examples help fans, viewers, and readers conclude that assorted messages abound in mainstream media portrayals of O’Hara, as her sexuality, nor the celebration at the 2019 World Cup were mentioned. Various—and unrelated—articles on O’Hara do mention other factors about the player, demonstrating the facts deemed considerable and worth relaying by media outlets. However, this theme was not present in queer media, including social, as O’Hara’s sexuality and kiss with her girlfriend were valued in these spaces (Gutowitz, 2019a; McCauley, 2019).

Through ambivalence and scrutiny, it is apparent the mainstream media frames O’Hara’s identity solely as an athlete, champion, and soccer player, while queer media members, as well as fan interaction on social media, frame her identity outside of sport through her sexuality. That may be explained through the queer community’s understanding of O’Hara as being one of their own, viewing her not exclusively as a celebrity but as an appealing lesbian athlete (Bullingham & Postlethwaite, 2019; Chawansky, 2016). Therefore, part of what makes O’Hara a “lesbian sporting celebrity”—or an appealing queer athlete—is how her identities are framed online, as digital media can be a powerful place for identities to be constructed, especially for female athletes (Chawansky, 2016; Stott, 2019). This framing, Stott (2019) contends, demonstrates the societal pull media has, as their framing can influence the manner in which an athlete comes out (p. 92).

Similar to the first two themes described by Bullingham and Postlethwaite (2019), there is a discrepancy between how mainstream sports media outlets covered O’Hara’s coming out moment compared to the reaction of LGBTQ+ media members and fans. While the mainstream

sports media silenced or made invisible O'Hara's sexuality and kiss with her girlfriend, the opposite is true of queer media—which appear to be the only outlets to discern the implication of the moment. That is not to take away O'Hara's agency, as she could have given voice to her identity or made her sexuality visible both before and after the event but chose not to, as her behavior, instead, supports Bullingham and Postlethwaite (2019)'s identification of silence as a “defensive strategy” (p. 66). Nevertheless, if the media framing of issues does directly impact how and when athletes come out as Stott (2019) argues, then one can understand O'Hara's circumvention of a “traditional” method for a more “contemporary” one.

Here, the “contemporary” method of using a celebratory kiss to make one's sexuality visible replaces a “traditional” approach. This is at tension with normative ideas about what being out means, as Iannotta and Kane (2002) argue “coming out and being out linguistically” has been “routinely privileged” as “the most (if not the only) effective way to create inclusive and tolerant climates, while simultaneously marginalizing other, more subtle forms of identity performance” (p. 349). The favoring of verbally coming out over other action delegitimizes alternative methods or approaches, even though the O'Hara moment, “[D]id indeed accrue powerful meanings, especially in the context of visible signs of an intimate connection between two women” (Iannotta & Kane, 2002, p. 362).

These “powerful meanings” are apparent in the coverage of the event in queer media, as well as the reactions of fans and non-fans of O'Hara and the USWNT.

COMING OUT NARRATIVES

Cassidy (2019) examines how sports journalism covered the coming out announcements of King, Swoopes, and Griner. King, a tennis star, trail-blazer, and icon was famously outed in the press in 1981, while Swoopes came out following her 2005 MVP season in the WNBA, and Griner revealed her sexual identity prior to competing in the WNBA but after her selection as the No. 1 pick in the 2013 draft (Cassidy, 2019). These stories span three decades, encompass two different sports, and feature the coming out of one White woman, as well as two Black women, as lesbians. While Cassidy (2019) may consider King's outing in the press “scandalous” he also details the overall positive reception and support she received. Questions of “newsworthiness” surrounded the coming out of Swoopes, even though she was the only out WNBA player at the time, as many in

the mainstream media spent considerable time discussing when a “man of her caliber” would follow suit, as opposed to the substantive nature of Swoopes doing so (pp. 20–22).

However, Griner’s announcement—which Cassidy (2019) denotes as a “casual acknowledgement”—received little fanfare, as the lack of reaction to the story ended up getting more coverage than the announcement itself. This “understated coming out” in which the athlete comported a “nonchalant, confident demeanor” was ruled as an improvement, especially in the three decades since King (p. 28).

O’Hara’s coming out moment cannot be viewed as “a scandalous outing” like King’s, nor as a part of a “larger conversation” regarding LGBTQ+ male athletes in sport like Swoopes, as her story more closely adheres to the narrative of a “casual acknowledgement” like Griner (Cassidy, 2019). The “tepid response” Griner received is analogous to the response the mainstream sports media gave to O’Hara (Cassidy, 2019, p. 28).

If Cassidy’s (2019) argument that Griner’s “casual” coming out signals an improvement for LGBTQ+ female athletes, then the reception of O’Hara furthers this, as the occasion was not met with ambivalence by queer people, “O’Hara’s sideline kiss wasn’t bold. It was your humdrum, everyday postwin kiss, and that’s what makes it monumental” (Gutowitz, 2019a). In contrast to mainstream media, those occupying marginalized spaces found the kiss to be immensely consequential, “I think about how O’Hara wasn’t outed. That she didn’t need to make a written statement. How she didn’t face backlash. Instead, she received voracious praise from the queer community and USWNT fans” (Gutowitz, 2019a).

McCauley (2019) remarks:

But what made this moment significant is that O’Hara had not previously made any kind of announcement about her partner or sexual orientation. She didn’t follow this moment up with an interview, a social media post, or a proclamation of any kind. She just had an affectionate moment with her partner, then continued her life as normal, because what she did is normal and should not require an explanation.

That reaction isn’t limited to queer media, either, as social media is rife with content related to the player, the moment, and her identity. Inputting “Kelley O’Hara girlfriend” into the search bar on Twitter results in positive memes, reproduction of the image, and various states of awe, jealousy,

and joy. The same is true for the #kelleyohara [sic] hashtag on Instagram and on Tumblr, both platforms known for high engagement rates for soccer fans but also members of the LGBTQ+ community (Wetsman, 2020). This is critical in gauging the significance of the image as, “online dialogue offers critical intersubjective opportunities for interpretations that exceed prescriptive normalizing narratives” (McKinney, 2010, p. 27).

On July 7, 2019, the day of the final, @lis_ashlee tweeted, “Kelley O’Hara jumping into the stands and frenching her surprise girlfriend was the 2nd best thing to happen today” while @sheindange_aaa tweeted “that picture of kelley o’hara [sic] and i guess her girlfriend literally changed my life...” (@lis_ashlee, 2019; @shesindange_aaa, 2019). Similar tweets were posted in the days following the win, with @stanleyk13 stating, “Kelley O’Hara kissing her girlfriend after winning the World Cup made me so much gayer if that was even possible” (@stanleyk13, 2019).

Although just a small sampling and different in tone, as well as tenor, that positive reaction mirrors the sentiment that Cassidy (2019) illustrates King received. Additionally, the lack of mainstream media coverage reflects the few articles discussing Griner’s coming out, especially when compared with Swoopes who received a reduced number of write ups as opposed to King. The reception also affirms the paradox of queer women participating in athletics, “While there is no shortage of lesbians in sport... there does seem to be a shortage of lesbian athletes who are out in professional sport” (Anderson et al., 2016, p. 94). As the O’Hara example demonstrates, when a professional female athlete does come out, the surrounding community is likely to support and welcome them—a pattern particularly apparent in digital spaces, which leads to opportunities for community and visibility for women in sport. Similar is true for LGBTQ+ women interested in athletics, especially fans, as they have traditionally been marginalized and on the periphery of these spaces (Chawansky, 2016; Plymire & Forman, 2000; Toffoletti et al., 2019; Wetsman, 2020).

Wetsman (2020) explores the impact fans and community have had on the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL), finding a standard of women’s soccer fans relying on social media to “create a culture that’s different and more inclusive than those in mainstream men’s sports.” Prevalent to this group is its existence as a safe space for those who don’t fit into hegemonic norms related to femininity, womanhood, and heterosexuality. While the NWSL is separate from the USWNT and the World Cup—although undoubtedly inextricably linked—the culture the league induces can also be found for American women’s soccer more broadly.

One could argue that the success of the USWNT and the queerness of its fanbase has led to the formation of the passionate and organized fans of the NWSL that Wetsman (2020) describes.

Additionally, Molloy (2019), Parkinson (2019), and Gutowitz (2019b) write about the gravity of the inclusion and visibility of the national team's queerness. While the pieces ran before the final, and thus before O'Hara came out, the authors argue that the acceptance of the openly LGBTQ+ members of the team and the fans who cheer for them demonstrates progress for out female athletes, as well as those who watch them succeed. It is not a coincidence that the perpetuation of this message and the empowerment the authors describe in relaying it largely come from self-identified women within the queer community and not mainstays in sports media.

O'HARA AND LESBIAN RULE

As a photograph, the picture of O'Hara kissing her girlfriend can be read as a normal player celebration but also as a highly visible coming out moment for an individual who had previously never publicly discussed her sexuality. Broadly, the scene also depicts what societal assumptions would designate as lesbian, considering two women sharing romantic affection with one another is predominantly denoted in this manner. That classification exposes a lack of awareness or engagement with other queer subjectivities and identities while simultaneously establishes the relevance of the term lesbian, which Villarejo (2003) examines at length. The appearance of the O'Hara image as lesbian—even though it has potential to be understood as queer, bisexual, and/or pansexual, among others, is of consequence. “Far from functioning simply as a liberating symbol, a positive image, or an object of desire” Villarejo (2003) argues, “lesbian appearance simultaneously conceals the very relationship between sexual difference and social relations that would allow us to generate a politics of that difference” (Villarejo, 2003, pp. 6–7).

Unlike other sports images, this one was not broadcast on television as a part of the coverage following the match or post-match analysis and subsequently was not seen by that audience. Rather, it garnered traction and a major reaction online after it was posted. Therefore, the only place one could find the image was digitally. The virtual nature of the photo conveys that an individual must be familiar with or a member of specific communities in order to have better access to the image. It can be assumed,

then, that the communities who had a high prospect of seeing and interacting with the photograph are soccer fans, fans of the National Team, fans of O'Hara, and women who consist of the LGBTQ+ community. As such, a person who encompasses more than one of these identities, and is on social media, would presumably be considered more likely to see and engage with it.

Without considering its queerness, there isn't anything unquestionably revelatory about the picture. While an image of Alex Morgan with her husband is expected and the norm, the photo of O'Hara and her girlfriend is somehow also expected and the norm, in addition to not inhabiting either. Expected because it is an athlete celebrating a momentous victory with a loved one and unexpected because of the lack of LGBTQ+ representation in similar photographs. In other words, as Morris III and Sloop (2006) contend, "The sight of a similarly aged heterosexual couple kissing publicly might not be noticed at all or, if registered, would merely signify a largely sanctioned expression of mutual pleasure, affection, love" as the gesture "at once banal and iconic, the public kiss by members of the opposite sex represents metonymically the shared cultural embrace of heteronormative values and behavior" (p. 2). The queer kiss, on the other hand, can spark, "a conflagration sufficient to scorch the heteronormative order in US public culture" (Morris III & Sloop, 2006, p. 2). However, as King (2017) suggests, the kiss "is not enough but the critical mass summoned... suggests the potency of visual symbolism in both spectacular and more banal forms" (p. 390).

As such, the queer symbolism of the O'Hara image and its cultural meaning is of substance. In the case of the soccer player and her girlfriend, Gutowitz (2019a) notes that the kiss goes against societal norms regarding "romance," which she posits has been defined by "heterosexual love and gender roles." Further, Gutowitz (2019a) situates the kiss within the connection to what society is accustomed to seeing:

O'Hara had just won her second consecutive World Cup title—and just as we've seen male sports players do countless times, she ran to the sideline and kissed her girlfriend. The way her girlfriend held O'Hara's face just about melted me into a pile of molten lesbian lava. What a uniquely 2019 way to come out as queer: to win your second consecutive World Cup title and kiss your girlfriend in front of all the cameras and screaming fans as though it was as matter-of-fact as any male athlete kissing his partner after a win.

Here, Gutowitz (2019a) is grounding her interpretation of the image in the substantialness of this type of visibility and lesbian representation. Even so, the photo concurrently adheres to hegemonic norms regarding women, femininity, and images of them. While she is in uniform and the viewer can only see the back of her head, O'Hara still presents as feminine, due in large part to a longer ponytail, as hair frequently serves as visual cue for who may or may not be LGBTQ+ (Esterberg, 1996). Her girlfriend also presents as feminine, with signifiers such as having her hair down, wearing jewelry, as well as possessing longer and painted nails. Both women are also White and thin, which traditionally is how beauty and femininity have been framed. Moreover, the scene the photograph details is sexualized simply because it features two women kissing one another, as this has become societally understood as something women perform for men, regardless of their sexual identity (Fahs, 2009; Johnson, 2016; Lieb, 2018). While sport can be a place where these norms are challenged and contested, this has not often been the case, with public displays of romantic affection and desire between same-sex partners not widely exhibited within American professional athletics.

The nexus between the meaning of the image as conventionally celebratory, unconventional, and representative of progress, or a continuation of normative notions of femininity, sexuality, and sport—although these are not all mutually exclusive—lies in who is viewing or absorbing the photo, their identities, and how they derive meaning from it.

McKinney (2010) explains the relationship between visibility, queer representation, and the consumption of images:

The things we feel when we consume media images with which we have an affective relationship—images with which we might have a subjective stake—are messily bound up in the social contexts in which those images are produced, consumed and circulated. What we might call a psychic reaction to the photographs—of viewing pleasure and identification—is held in tension with what we might call the social—a collective critique of lesbian media representation situated in a specific political moment. (p. 7)

Of course, not all representation is good representation and not all visibility leads to positive outcomes in the public or private sphere. Because of this, Villarejo (2003) is critical as to the significance of the visibility of lesbians and lesbian images without acknowledging the context and intricacies involved even though, “To promote portraits of lesbian lives is to

promote representational presence in public culture and therefore heightened public authority" (p. 14).

By focusing on visibility, Villarejo (2003) asserts one misses, "mobility: not mechanistic assimilation to the status quo but complex systems of judgement, intervention, the exchange of services of bodies, uncritical as well as critical adherence to tradition, stylizations of self and surroundings and the like that constitute being lesbian and appearing as lesbian" (p. 14). In this case, the mainstream media did not grant visibility to the kiss, O'Hara's sexual identity, or the context of what either mean to the LGBTQ+ soccer or broader queer sporting community. However, the McCauley (2019) and Gutowitz (2019a) pieces, as well as many social media posts referring to the moment, do all of those things.

The pieces written by queer journalists and the posts from LGBTQ+ individuals situate the "lesbian"—here understood as two queer women kissing—within a social and political context, not rendering it static. While the photo may be capturing, "a particular object at a specific moment in time" it obviously means more than that to those who comprehend the complex history of queer women in sport (McKinney, 2010, p. 35). McKinney (2010) notes that Villarejo is not "dismissing the political power of images as cultural texts" and instead argues that society must pay attention to the ways in which "individual queer women articulate their viewing of images as an experience that is personal and individuated but also related to the social positions they take up in a politically intelligible group of lesbian media consumers" (pp. 36–37).

In exploring pieces written by members of the queer community, as well as through the responses of LGBTQ+ fans, the magnitude of the representation in the image gathers meaning and power culturally, socially, and politically. By comparison, mainstream sports media outlets rendered O'Hara and her celebration invisible, eliminating the possibility of meaning. The invisibility in and of itself is a message, one that does not allow "us to generate a politics of that difference" nor does it grant the picture the mobility to function as "liberating symbol, positive image, or an object of desire" (Villarejo, 2003, pp. 6–7).

Visibility and lesbian—or LGBTQ+, queer, bisexual, pansexual, and so on—representation in sport, then, allows for possibility. If queer women, and subsequently their desires or romantic lives, received more visibility and coverage in sports media, then LGBTQ+ outlets and journalists wouldn't be the only ones discussing the importance of said representation.

Crucial to the reception of this increased visibility is who is doing the looking.

Villarejo (2003) sees similarities between documentary film work and “the gazes one permits or denies oneself in daily encounters with people and their bodies” (pp. 13–14). This “looking” or “gesture” depends on “the authorization to look and to narrate, to assume something about the other based upon what one knows of oneself” (p. 14, emphasis original). Within sport, LGBTQ+ individuals have historically had to “look and narrate” as is the case with McCauley (2019) and Gutowitz (2019a). Thus, looking at a different image of O’Hara, one can assume or guess her sexuality based on visual signifiers, as these coded cues become additionally apparent for those who identify as being a part of the community (Esterberg, 1996). But, the image of O’Hara and her girlfriend requires no cues or signifiers—no further looking and narrating—because the assumption has been eliminated. Instead of assuming her sexual difference, the image confirms it.

In her analysis, Villarejo (2003) considers various films and examines them through each of their specific contexts. Here, she foregrounds her discussion by exploring how each film was produced, distributed, and circulated. We can recognize the O’Hara image in a similar manner. In particular, the distribution and circulation of the image by and through queer media as well as queer fans, demonstrates the importance within the community.

In McKinney’s (2010) analysis of how an online lesbian community consumed and critiqued photos of two actors in a woman’s magazine she found that the readers, “often position their own viewing practices at the intersection between pleasure at seeing sexual minority presence in a mainstream women’s magazine and displeasure at the images related to their status as staged promotional photographs meant to sell a film” (p. 25). This concept does not apply to queer writers or fans who remarked upon O’Hara, as the photo was candid, not staged, and was not produced to sell anything.

However, one may conclude that the existence of the photograph—especially in the collective consciousness of LGBTQ+ soccer fans—did aid O’Hara when promoting her podcast and in assisting Under Armour sell the Pride socks the player advertised on Instagram. The kiss, and the photograph that captured it, then, advances O’Hara’s visibility, as well as her position within the queer community. Villarejo (2003) concludes her analysis with a discussion of “at home” viewing—a focus that shifts to

include technology that is, "All of the obsolete and emergent forms at once" (pp. 191–192). The O'Hara image as a photograph is obsolete, as photos are not considered an emerging technology or text. However, the digital nature of the image, in that online is where it first appeared, what constituted its spread, and perpetuated its visibility/popularity, allows it to also exist as an "emergent" form. That changes "the dynamics of spectatorship" but not in the way Villarejo (2003) describes (p. 193). While viewing a film at home results in a "distracted gaze" contrary to the "rapt gaze" a viewer manages in the theatre, this concept may not translate to texts that only exist in the digital realm (p. 193).

For individuals who sought out the O'Hara image or those whose social media feeds allowed them access, the only option was to view at "home." Here, home can mean an assortment of places, on disparate platforms or devices, but is used because it is so distinct from the experience of watching a film in a theater-like Villarejo (2003) outlines.

Being able to consume texts at home leads to more accessibility, with the opportunity for "replaying," "savoring," "reassembling," "collecting," and "speaking back" (Villarejo, 2003, 196). As a text, the image was replayed, savored, reassembled, collected, and spoken back through Tweets, Instagram posts, on Tumblr, and in news articles. That self-identified queer women were most often the ones doing the replaying, savoring, assembling, collecting, and speaking is monumental and helps inform why we can understand the image as beyond "lesbian" symbolism.

LESSONS LEARNED

Containing varying degrees of consequences, outcomes, and limitations, an array of options exist for LGBTQ+ individuals who wish to "come out" as much as we can understand the concept of coming out as a singular process and not a lifelong procedure. Villarejo (2003) grasps the notion of coming out as being "saturated with the idea of debut" with the "debut" distinguishing "a trajectory, a movement of innovation and authentication, the (re)coding of value and the necessity of its transformation" (p. 200). As a beginning or first, coming out through an display of romantic or sexual desire at the World Cup is major, due to the prominence of and widespread interest in the international tournament. Coming out in a similar manner after a friendly, exhibition, or league match may have had a similar effect but would lack the gravitas of occurring at the most esteemed soccer competition in the world. If this marks O'Hara's "debut"

as an out LGBTQ+ individual, the moment does evoke movement, display authenticity, and holds value. Simultaneously, it also reveals the privilege O'Hara maintains as a White, American, cisgender, traditionally feminine, and conventionally attractive woman. It is worth asking how the image would be received had it been performed by an athlete who does not possess those attributes.

We must also inquire whether it was majority White, American, cisgender, traditionally feminine, and conventionally attractive women who garnered empowerment from the image, the role those identities maintain within the broader LGBTQ+ and soccer communities, and what that means for the existence of other marginalized groups in these spaces. As such, the argument central to Villarejo's (2003) book is, "that when lesbian appears, her appearance functions as a substitute or as a cover for the very distinction I think we need collectively to make between who or what we are (into what we are inserted) and what we want to become (how we may change that which we confront)" (p. 6).

In the context of the O'Hara image, the "who or what we are" can be accepted as the LGBTQ+ and soccer communities who found meaning in the text, as well as the sports media who did not.

As for the "what we want to become," O'Hara's appearance must function beyond "casual acknowledgement," as that renders invisible those who acquire meaning from the moment and subsequent image. By not mentioning the moment at all, mainstream sports journalists also rendered those same individuals invisible, even if the representation depicted in the photograph operates in a largely symbolic fashion. More queer representation in sport—in both queer and traditional media, by both queer and not queer authors—is a reasonable appeal for what these spaces have the capacity to develop into.

However, there are obvious restrictions to visibility, as LGBTQ+ representation in sport and sports media cannot fall victim to "the slippages those visualizations struggle to contain, the limits at which representation functions" (Villarejo, 2003, p. 191). "Slippages" and "limits" abound within the coverage as well as constructions of the O'Hara image.

But, to borrow a word from Gutowitz (2019a), that doesn't make it any less monumental.

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PART III

What We Still Need to Learn



Beyond the World Cup: Women's Football in Central-Eastern Europe

Dunja Antunovic

October 17, 2020 “*Jó napot kívánok.*” I used the formal “I am wishing you a good day” greeting politely as I walked up to the newsstand. I glanced at the display to see whether it showcased the publication I was looking for. “Érdeklődnék, hogy női foci világbajnokság matricás album van-e?” The kiosk sold sticker albums, so I thought I would ask if they had the one for the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup. I loved those sticker albums as a kid and, admittedly, as an adult, too. My inquiry was partially for “research” (I am a feminist sports media scholar, after all), but I also just really wanted that album. This kiosk sold other Panini albums for men’s tournaments, but not for the Women’s World Cup. I tried at a few other kiosks, bookstores, and grocery stores. A few days later, I crossed the border from Hungary to Serbia, went to another set of kiosks, with the same question. “Dobar dan. Da li *možda* imate album za sličice za svetsko prvenstvo u ženskom fudbalu?” This time I added “*perhaps*” to the sentence. No luck. I was not surprised. After all, not all albums are

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sold across the continent and neither national team in the countries where I looked for the sticker album participated in the tournament. But Budapest had just hosted the 2019 UEFA Women's Champions League Final, so I thought I'd try. My quest for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup sticker album, while seemingly banal, reflects broader patterns around the systemic marginalization of women's sport. Clearly, the invisibility of women's football in newsstands is not specific to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Forty years of scholarship has consistently found evidence of "marginalization, trivialization, ambivalence and sexualization" of women's sport, with some differences but also remarkable consistencies across geographic contexts (Bruce, 2016, p. 367). In the CEE region, coverage of women's sport varies depending on the national, socio-political, and economic contexts, but generally, men's sports—especially men's football—dominate coverage (Horky & Nieland, 2013). Across the region, sports media ignore and/or sexualize sportswomen particularly those who are not from the "home" nation (Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019; Ličen & Billings, 2013; Vujović et al., 2017). In some cases, the media construct women as athletically competent "queens" who advance national pride, especially in sports that have longstanding associations with national success (Antunovic, 2019, p. 64; see also Bartoluci & Draženović, 2017; Ličen & Bejek, 2019; Vaczi, 2019). Calling for further research in CEE, Organista et al. (2020, p. 11) argued that "given the different socio-political and historical background, it is important to study media coverage outside the English-speaking countries or those with long-term political stability." Women's football is a particularly important site for analysis as the sport remains virtually invisible in the media and in scholarship on the region (Jakubowska, 2015).

This chapter positions the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup as an entry point to examine the social-historical and media landscapes that structure gender norms around women's football in (some) CEE countries. This analysis of the FIFA 2019 World Cup is shaped by my lived experience in multiple cultural contexts, a comparative socio-historical understanding of sport systems, and a transnational analytical lens on the media coverage of women's sport. As a feminist sport sociologist and media scholar based in the United States, I closely follow women's football (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). As this edited collection illustrates, 2019 FIFA World Cup had wide-reaching implications on women's sport and brought unprecedented visibility to issues and stories surrounding the teams in the tournament. In

order to fully understand “what we learned,” it is important to also examine the World Cup in contexts where national teams play, but did not qualify for the tournament. One such context is Central and Eastern Europe.

Primarily focusing on the broadcasts of the World Cup, the chapter intertwines several epistemologies. I draw on scholarly literature written by scholars from the region (including research written in languages spoken in the region) to provide a historical overview of women's football and synthesize patterns in media coverage of women's sport in the CEE context. Informed by this literature, I analyze the media coverage of the World Cup with a focus on European public service media. Finally, I situate the analysis within the multidisciplinary study of sport media to illustrate the ways in which perspectives from the CEE region advance scholarship on women's sport.

CONTEXT OF THE ANALYSIS: CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The term “Central and Eastern Europe” encompasses a wide array of countries, including the former Eastern Bloc, the Balkans, and the Baltic states. Central and Eastern European countries share some commonalities as post-socialist and post-communist societies, albeit with significant differences in the transition process and in the structure of the media systems (Połonska & Beckett, 2019). For the purposes of this study, I will make some imperfect linguistic choices. When referring to findings and observations that transcend multiple national contexts, I will use two terms: “Central and Eastern Europe” and “region.” I limit my analysis to particular sub-contexts within Central and Eastern Europe based on a variety of factors, including the availability of scholarship in the languages I speak and my familiarity with the spaces within which I am situated. This chapter will reference scholarship on the “region” that includes Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland as well as former Yugoslav republics Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia. As of 2020, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia and Croatia are members of the European Union, while Serbia is a “candidate country” (“Countries,” n.d.). The literature I review is from this “region.” The World Cup-related analysis will focus primarily on Serbia and Hungary. Certainly, a significant variance in the histories, political structures, and accession status in relation to the European Union exists within the transition processes, which then

shape sport structures, media discourses, and gender relations. Thus, any claim about the “region” should be considered with that caveat in mind.

This chapter makes several epistemological interventions. Studies on media coverage during mega-events typically focus on countries that actually participate in the event, which is understandably so the case in this edited collection, as well.

However, I would argue that in order to fully comprehend the implications of mega-events broadly and FIFA 2019 specifically, we must consider the spaces that are excluded from these events. No team from the “region” qualified for the 2019 World Cup. The European participants were all “Western” countries, namely, France, Spain, Italy, England, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. The UEFA qualifying group stage in 2017 included numerous teams from the region, including Serbia, Romania, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, and others. Shifting attention to the marginalized reveals structural forces in the relationship between elite-level sport and media.

More specifically, knowledge-production *about* Central and Eastern Europe and *from* CEE locations expands research on women’s sport beyond “Western” and English-speaking contexts (Organista et al., 2020) and disrupts the hegemonies of feminist sport media studies (Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018). Throughout the chapter, I negotiate various knowledges by building the analysis upon sources from the region and in the languages of the region and English-language sport studies scholarship by scholars mainly from the region, even if some of them—like me—are based in the “West.” As a scholar living in the United States, and educated in the US context, I am implicated in the reproduction of dominant scholarly narratives about women’s sport. Yet, I was born and grew up in the region and watched the World Cup there, so I do have an “insider” perspective within the local context that I analyze. Although I do not explicitly identify these connections in the narrative, my multiethnic, multilingual, and transnational identity allows me to consider sources that otherwise might not become a part of the storytelling about women’s football. The focus on the CEE context reveals a complex relationship between social location and epistemic position in the production of knowledges. At the very least, this chapter complicates what Bruce (2016, p. 362) called “the theoretical and empirical preoccupations of U.S. researchers” that dominate the published corpus on women’s sport and the media.

The section specific to the 2019 World Cup offers insight into European public service sports broadcasting. The analysis is based on my informal,

yet theoretically informed, observations about the match broadcasts to provide insight into cultural particularities. The chapter pieces together various sources of knowledge on this region to make sense of the relationship between sport, media, and gender in the context of the FIFA 2019 Women's World Cup. The story this chapter tells is inherently partial.

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN THE REGION

Women have played football in the region since the beginning of the twentieth century. This overview has some gaps as academic research on women's football in the region is scarce. Of the 117 articles on women's football published between 1998 and 2017, none focused on the CEE context or countries within the region (Valenti et al., 2018). Although data from the region was included in some comparative analysis that identifies factors that determine national teams' success (Valenti et al., 2020), few countries were even mentioned and none were discussed in detail. Historiographies of sport in the former Yugoslavia and the former Czechoslovakia identify the political, social, and cultural contexts of sport in the region (Rohdewald, 2011; Zwicker, 2011), but do not address women's football specifically. In fact, Rohdewald (2011, p. 392) observed that "almost without exception, gender is a lacuna in all epochs" and "sports journalism is another topic that has been rarely analyzed for its social importance." The studies that address gender in sports journalism, and in some cases women's football specifically, are situated in sociology of sport. Sociology of sport in the region has faced some structural challenges that have limited the scope of theoretical approaches and topics of foci (e.g., Földesi, 2015; Slepíčková, 2015), but scholarship over the last decade has provided valuable insight into representations of women's sports in the media. The literature review draws on secondary research, FIFA/UEFA data, journalists' accounts, and information from the club's websites.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

In 1912, Boriska Brauswetter dreamt of creating a women's football team in her hometown Szeged, Hungary. According to András Dénes, a sport journalist who published a book about the history of women's football in Hungary, Brauswetter was "unquestionably a pioneer in the history of the sport" ("Hogyan próbálta meg," 2019). This and other "toddling" first

steps proceeded what would in the 1960s eventually become the “era of heroes,” the organized emergence of women’s football (“Hogyan próbálta meg,” 2019).

Elsewhere in the region, the 1930s brought about significant developments in women’s football as clubs formed and subsequently organized competitions locally and across borders. In 1937, in an attempt to popularize the sport, two teams from Austria played matches in Zagreb, which further sparked an interest to create organized opportunities (Grgić, 2018; “Ženski nogomet,” n.d.). Early attempts to form women’s football teams were rejected by the federations that governed men’s football (Grgić, 2018). Despite the football federation’s resistance, women’s football emerged as an organized sport quickly from the ground up. The Czech shoemaking factory Bata with locations in Yugoslavia organized matches between the team in Borovo and factory teams from Prague and Zlín (Grgić, 2018). Young women interested in football organized in Zagreb and formed a team comprised students and women in manufacturing, trade/craft, service work, indicating that women of different strata expressed interest in the sport (Grgić, 2018). By 1938, additional teams formed in larger cities, which served as a catalyst for matches with teams across Yugoslavia and from the region, including from Brno and several teams from Austria (“Ženski nogomet,” n.d.).

The successful tournaments and audience interest (an estimated 12,000 people showed up to one of the international matches and 4000 to a domestic match) prompted another attempt to formalize women’s football (Grgić, 2018; “Ženski nogomet,” n.d.). The founding assembly established the Yugoslavian Women’s Football Federation, formed a board of directors, outlined a set of rules, and began the process of seeking approval. However, the Ministry for Physical Education of the People rejected the request based on medical stereotypes about women’s bodies and essentially banned the spread of women’s football (Grgić, 2018; “Ženski nogomet,” n.d.). By 1939, the women’s football teams folded. Even though the teams were short-lived, Grgić (2018, p. 558) posited that the attempts to establish a women’s football federation in 1938/1939 could be considered early indicators of what would become “sports feminism,” based on Hargreaves’ (1994, p. 26) definition as the “desire for equality of opportunity for women in comparison with men.”

The 1970s are considered a turning point for women’s football in the region. On the territory of what is now Serbia and Croatia, many teams that currently compete began to form after 1969 (“Desetogodišnjica

ŽFK,” 2009; “Najstariji ženski klub,” 2019; “Pola veka,” 2020; “Ženski nogomet,” n.d.). The football federation of Yugoslavia started organizing tournaments in 1974 and formed the “First League” in 1980, which lasted until the 1990/1991 season (“Ženski nogomet,” n.d.). In Hungary, April 30, 1970, is a notable date in women’s football history when women finally received permission from the Hungarian Football Association (MLSZ) to organize an event at the stadium in Budapest (Dénes, 2020). Over 100 women showed up and the Budapest Football Association allowed the women to meet weekly at the headquarter offices to organize matches. By 1971, ten teams formed and the championship started on April 17 (Dénes, 2020). The formalization of women’s football in Hungary and Yugoslavia in the early 1970s corresponded with the time when FIFA and UEFA started paying attention to women’s football.

WOMEN’S FOOTBALL IN UEFA AND FIFA

When the Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA) formed in 1954, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia were among the 30 members present with men’s teams. Evidence about women’s football suggests that Czech teams played in tournaments in the 1960s. FIFA and UEFA took control of women’s football between 1969 and 1971 due to the “twin forces” of increasing number of players and commercial interest based on attendance (Williams, 2011, p. 15). In the 1980s, UEFA’s conferences of women’s football included delegates from 18 member associations out of the 34 (including Czechoslovakia). Competition would include 16 national football association teams, though UEFA continued to constrain the allowed number of participants (Williams, 2011). The 1982 competition included only teams from the West and no teams from the “region,” but the 1984 tournament included Hungary. The 1985 UEFA survey indicated the following numbers of players and clubs, respectively: Hungary 280 and 6, Czechoslovakia 800 and 22, Yugoslavia 3000 and 20. The UEFA surveys beginning in the 1980s illustrate the attempts of “institutionalized surveillance and development” of women’s organized football (Williams, 2011, p. 64). Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union and the separation of Czechoslovakia, nation-states gradually became independent members of FIFA and UEFA.

To turn to more recent data, no teams from the region competed at the UEFA 2017, the most significant tournament leading up to the 2019

FIFA World Cup. The 2016/2017 UEFA survey indicates a growth in the number of registered women's football players across the region, but still few professional players (or even semi-professional players). In the region, the Czech Republic reported the highest number of registered female players at 15,473. Hungary had the second highest number of registered female players at 11,430, including 24 pro players who played for 4 clubs. Croatia had 12 pro players at 2 clubs, while Serbia had 12 professional players who all played for 1 club ("Women's football," 2017). Leading up to the World Cup in March 2019, the highest ranked team from the region on the FIFA rankings was Poland (28), followed by Czech Republic (29), Romania (41), Serbia (43), Hungary (45) and Slovakia (46) in the top 50 ("Women's Ranking," 2019).

The UEFA and FIFA data, while informative, do not sufficiently explain the state of women's football in Central and Eastern Europe. Socio-cultural factors, political context, the organization and funding of sport, and the function of the media shape women's football. This chapter provides insight into the role of the media in relation to women's football in the region.

SPORTS MEDIA IN THE REGION

National Identity, Sport, and Media

Sports media contribute to the construction of national identity. In the CEE context, the process of post-socialist and post-communist transformation shifted political and economic structures, including the role of media and the organization of sport. As such, examining media discourses in the CEE context provides "a new national perspective of issues of identity" in the coverage of international sport mega-events (Ličen & Billings, 2013, p. 380) and illustrates the ways in which sports media play a role in the (re)imagining and (re)inventing the nation (Antunovic, 2019; Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019; Molnar & Whigham, 2019).

The ways in which sports media articulate national identity vary considerably by country, but men's football is a hegemonic force in this process throughout the region. Men's football carries a troubling relationship with the state as the sport has been mobilized for war and violence (see Mills, 2018) and remains governments' dominant tool for invoking

nationalism (Molnar & Whigham, 2019). The extensive media visibility of the sport has further exacerbated the relationship between men's football, hooliganism, and nationalism (Hughson & Skillen, 2014). Men's football retains a central position in sports media coverage regardless of the level of performance (Organista et al., 2020), thereby reinforcing the masculinist constructions of the sport.

National identity finds various articulations through several other sports. For example, in Hungary, the "most important symbolic team sport" is men's water polo, but the country has achieved significant success in handball, kayak-canoe, swimming, fencing, and wrestling (Dóczi, 2011, p. 170). Croatia has achieved success in men's basketball (e.g., silver medal at the Olympic Games in 1991) and water polo, as well as in tennis (Bartoluci & Doupona, 2020). Slovenia has achieved international success in individual sports and, notably, skiing broadcasts became an avenue to "establish and reproduce an idealized vision of nationhood and national identity" (Kotnik, 2008). Evident from this summary is that women's football occupies a marginal status in media and in scholarship. As such, it is not clear whether and how national identity is mobilized through women's football coverage.

The media tend to construct a division of "us" versus "them" in coverage of international sport regardless of context (Bruce, 2016), and including in CEE. This pattern manifests in several ways. First, media outlets tend to dedicate coverage to "home" athletes who represent the nation and construct differences between the participants (Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019; Organista et al., 2020). Further, media tend to use the term "our" to identify athletes from the home nation (Ličen & Billings, 2013). National identity is complicated in the case of athletes whose "flag" changes because of the transformation in political structures/borders, switch of citizenship, and/or migration. Thus, the media's construction of the "ethnic other" and an "insider" is unstable and shifting based on the athlete's position in relation to the nation (Bartoluci & Draženović, 2017; Bartoluci & Doupona, 2020), as well as based on how governments conceptualize the nation and see the position of ethnic minorities within and outside of the nation's borders (Dóczi, 2011; Molnar & Whigham, 2019). National identity and the question of who is considered "ours" were, as I illustrate, relevant in the media's decision-making about the FIFA 2019 World Cup.

Women's Sports and the Media

In the Central and Eastern European context, women are underrepresented in routine media coverage, with some exceptions in during the Olympic Games and/or in special issues. The data varies depending on the context, but studies on print media found that women's sports coverage is around 10.4–12.5% in Slovenia (Ličen & Bejek, 2019), 15.8% in Hungary (Antunovic, 2019), 17–26% in Serbia (Stojiljković et al., 2019), and up to 37.13% in Poland (Organista et al., 2020). In broadcast media, women's sporting events tend to be relegated to less prominent channels and are more likely to be described in terms of personality and physical descriptions (Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019; Ličen & Billings, 2013). Sexualization of women, attribution of women's success to men, and the emphasis on the athletes who win gold medals and further national pride are prevalent in representation strategies (Antunovic, 2019; Gál, 2016; Jakubowska, 2015; Ličen & Billings, 2013; Organista et al., 2020).

Gender intersects with national identity in ways that influence both the types of sports that receive coverage and how gender is constructed in relation to sporting success. For example, in the Hungarian context, Gál (2016) found that during the 2016 Rio Olympics the daily sports newspaper *Nemzeti Sport* focused less on heterosexuality and more on the sportswomen's records and achievement. The emphasis in Hungarian media is on athletes who compete in Olympic sports with notable success. Thus, sportswomen in kayak-canoe and swimming are presented as “queens,” with respect to not only their athletic accomplishments but also their education and preparation for life after sport (Antunovic, 2019; Gál, 2016). In Poland and Slovenia, studies have likewise found that the success of individual sportswomen at Olympic Games had a significant impact on the amount and quality of coverage (Ličen & Bejek, 2019; Organista et al., 2020). The challenge is that sportswomen must accomplish exceptional achievements on the international level and adhere to gender norms in order to “earn” media attention and promote the nation.

Despite the fact that women's football is an Olympic sport, it does not carry the connotations for international success in the region and receives minimal coverage. In a study on Polish media, Jakubowska (2015) found that media covered sports such as basketball (Poland hosted the 2011 women's EuroBasket championship) and tennis, but out of the 71 articles, 0 were about women's football even though the data analysis coincided with the 2011 Women's World Cup in Germany. As Jakubowska (2015,

p. 5) argued, “The marginalization of women’s football is not characteristic of the period analysed and the print media alone,” as interviewed coaches also attested that women’s football receives minimal media coverage. In a study on Slovenian newspaper coverage during the summer of 2015, Ličen and Bejek (2019) identified only 6 articles about women’s football out of 3155 analyzed. In many studies, women’s football coverage is not even mentioned (e.g., Antunovic, 2019).

The analysis of this chapter is unique in relation to national identity because none of the teams in the region competed in the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup. Thus, sport media in this context lacked the national interest incentive to cover the tournament, which could have resulted in no coverage whatsoever.

MEDIA AND THE FIFA 2019 WORLD CUP

European Public Service and Sport Mega-Events

The 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup received “unprecedented” media coverage in European public service media (“Eurovision Sport delivers record,” 2019). The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) Member broadcasters had access to 1000 hours of live programming, a 5-time increase of the 2015 Women’s World Cup. The agreement included 38 EBU member countries, while public media broadcasters in 9 countries held individual agreements for the tournament. In addition, Eurovision Sport made the live match coverage available to fans through their online service. Executive Director of Eurovision Sport Stefan Kürten positioned the World Cup as consistent with the “values” of Europe’s public service media and stated: “We are committed to sport and to all the wider benefits it brings to individuals, communities and society and one important aspect of this is that we promoted a gender balanced rights portfolio” (“Eurovision Sport delivers record,” 2019).

The context of public service media in Europe is significant for understanding the implications of the FIFA 2019 broadcast in Central-Eastern Europe. The European Broadcasting Union is non-profit association of radio and television associations established in 1950. The member broadcasters serve a public mission and are typically located within the EBU area, though some are outside of the area and operate as associate members. The Eurovision system “constitutes the main framework for the joint acquisition and cost sharing and the exchange of programs among active

members” (Meltz, 1999, p. 109). Perhaps the best known such program is the Eurovision Song Contest, but Eurovision News and Eurovision Sport play an integral role in distributing content to primarily public service media.

Public service media (PSM), formerly public service broadcasting (PSB), serves a central role in communication about and to the nation. The functions for public service broadcasting (PSB) received much debate among European policy-makers and the Member States. In general, the role of the PSB is to foster a public sphere and informed citizenship, as well as serve educational, social, and cultural functions. The Member States retain the right to organize PSB and determine aid within the parameters of European guidelines (Harrison & Woods, 2001). However, normative approaches to PSM, namely Western models and principles, often fall short in transitioning societies. The democratization process and operation of media systems vary depending on the context, but “the illiberal turn in the regions media industries” transcends national boundaries as public service media in Central and Eastern Europe face serious obstacles, including inadequate policies, financial concerns, limitations of media pluralism, and political influence (Połonska & Beckett, 2019, p. 14).

The role of sport for public service media is implicated in these tensions. Public service media has struggled to compete with private broadcasters for exclusive broadcasting rights (Meltz, 1999). Further, the digitalization process and the proliferation of streaming services diminished the significance of linear programming (Lünich et al., 2019). Public service media and sport organizations historically maintained a symbiotic relationship, but the skyrocketing rights fees raise significant questions about whether PSM should still bid for those events. For instance, the IOC discontinued licensing and distribution via the European Broadcasting Union in 2015 and awarded the exclusive rights to the 2018–2024 Olympic Games to Discovery Communication, the parent company of Eurosport for across all platforms, including free-to-air television, subscription/pay-TV television in 50 countries and territories (IOC, 2015). Satellite and cable sports channels, thus, create competition for sports content.

In a market-driven economy, the role of public service media in sport broadcasting is complex. Unlike the solely entertainment-driven programming—the mission of PSM stipulates that journalists address controversial issues related to sport. In coverage of mega-events, public service broadcasters provided contextual reporting on socio-political issues and offered

more critical perspective than commercial channels (Hayashi et al., 2016; Lünich et al., 2019). At the same time, public service broadcasting of sports coverage might embrace national interests in which “sports announcers behave as (although mild) patriotic supporters, rather than reporters” (Ličen & Billings, 2013: 393) and even assert political ideologies (Hayashi et al., 2016). Further, live sport events might receive varying exposure even within the public service broadcasting structure. In some cases, women’s events are relegated to the sports channel, while men’s events are moved to the “main” public service channel (Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019). Thus, the intersecting forces of national interest and gender shape programming decisions regarding sport on public service television.

Broadcast Availability and Quality

In a typical study on coverage of women’s sport, I would have systematically collected data and analyzed the broadcast (Ličen & Billings, 2013). As I was not able to do so for a variety of reasons, what follows is a theoretically informed, albeit disjointed, analysis of the matches and media coverage. Searching for the broadcasts proved to be quite a quest. Sports programming is usually on channel 2 of public service television, which is dedicated to sport, educational programming, and cultural events. The public service television in Serbia, Radio Televizija Srbija (RTS), features sports on RTS2. RTS1 carries sporting events only occasionally, for example when multiple matches with Serbian players in competition are happening at the same time. Hungarian public service television is structured differently as M1 focuses on news, other channels feature a variety of historical, cultural, and entertainment contents. In 2015, M4 launched to solely focus on sports with a primary intent to promote Hungarian sport (Molnar & Whigham, 2019).

In the early stages of the tournament, it was a struggle to find the broadcasts PSM did not air all matches due to other competition happening at the same time. Further, I was not able to watch the matches live on the Eurovision site, presumably because the broadcasters in the region had the rights even when the matches did not air. The matches were available in full later and are still available under “FIFA Events” on Eurovision Sport’s website. That said, public service media in Serbia and Hungary did feature many of the matches, especially in the later stages of the tournament.

Public service media presented a generally well-informed commentary on women’s football. I will highlight two matches as examples. On June

29, I turned on RTS 2 (Radio Televizija Srbije; the Serbian public television channel) to watch the Sweden versus Germany quarterfinal match. The match was already in the 58th minute and Sweden scored the second goal a few minutes prior to taking a 2-1 lead. The Serbian commentator was highly critical of Germany team's performance. His tone oscillated between frustration and annoyance with observations such as, "Popp [the captain] is finally where she is supposed to be." The commentary activated my feminist sensibilities. If I had conducted a content analysis, then I would have coded the comments in those first few minutes as "negative" commentary on "athletic skill" (Ličen & Billings, 2013, p. 390). The "disrespect" for the team was particularly surprising considering Germany's past success and undefeated record in the group stages of the tournament. As I kept watching, I realized that the commentary was merely analytical: the play-by-play announcer was simply shocked by Germany's performance in comparison to previous rounds—in fact his criticism was informed by knowledge of how the team is capable of playing based on "past achievements" and "experience" (Ličen & Billings, 2013, p. 390). At the same time, he praised Sweden's strategic decisions and defense, which would have been coded as "positive" commentary on "athletic skill" (Ličen & Billings, 2013, p. 390). Indeed, Germany were the favorites in this match. Reuters and the BBC called the outcome a "surprise" (Hafez, 2019; "Sweden upset Germany," 2019) and even DW (a German news site) observed that "Germany looked rattled and despite cooling breaks and halftime, they couldn't settle" (Thorogod & Harding, 2019). Sweden's 2-1 win disrupted the predictions that Germany would advance to the finals. As the match continued, the commentator also provided context about women's football, such as information about a former player's contributions to the German team and the structure of professional leagues in Sweden.

The second example reveals the programming decisions in relation to other sporting events. When the matches occurred at the same time as sporting events with national interest, women's football did not air or aired with a delay. For example, the later stages of the tournament occurred at the same time as Wimbledon. In general, tennis receives a great amount of coverage in Serbian media due to the success of several players, men and women, but most notably Novak Djokovic. The matches of two Serbian players went longer than expected, which resulted in a delay of airing the World Cup semifinals. This example illustrates that, as expected, national

interest held priority in programming. (Although, stopping the broadcast in the middle of the match would have been a strange programming decision.)

When the World Cup match broadcast began, the commentary was enthusiastic. During the semifinals between England and the United States, the commentator remarked on Alex Morgan's goal as "That's how the best in the world does it—and one of the best of all time." Later in the match, he observed that "We are watching beautiful football here in Lyon" and described the overall level of play as "exceptional" and the players as "outstanding." In a clear display of knowledge, the commentator introduced the audiences to each team's past World Cup and Olympic Games records. In addition, the commentator remarked on the strength of youth football for girls and the structure of intercollegiate athletics in the United States to explain the success of the national team. Thus, commentary of both matches I watched included educational information about growth of women's football in each national context.

In Hungarian public service media, the matches seemed to have aired regularly on M4, the public service sports channel, even if not on the televised channel at least on M4's online streaming platform (this information is based on television guides and news releases). FIFA matches were on the schedule even amid a packed weekend program of live sporting events, which included the FINA Water Polo Men's Super Final, a sport with significant national interest. M4 also posted news stories about the match outcomes on the online platform (e.g., "Franciaország és Anglia," 2019).

A notable storyline in Hungarian public media and sports media outlets focused on Dzsénifer Marozsán, a Hungarian-born player on the German national team. Marozsán embraces her Hungarian identity and Hungarian media, likewise, embrace her. She received significant media attention leading up to and during the World Cup. In May 2019, Budapest hosted the UEFA Finals, which featured Marozsán and her team the Olympique Lyonnais. M4 and other media sources, such as *Nemzeti Sport* (a daily sports newspaper), elevated Marozsán's success and emphasized her Hungarian identity, which Marozsán also makes visible with a Hungarian flag on her sneakers and by talking about her family in Hungary. The media conducted interviews with her in Hungarian (she is fluent), asked her about her feelings on playing and winning at home amid audience chants of "Ria, Ria, Hungaria," and emphasized the presence of her family and friends in Hungary ("Könnyekig hatódott," 2019). During the World

Cup, M4 (and other media outlets) reported on Marozsan's injury, which prevented her from playing and later celebrated her return to the pitch ("Bombagóllal jelentkezett," 2019; "Marozsán Dzsenifer," 2019). Thus, a player's Hungarian identity, albeit competing for another national team, became an entry point for connecting women's football with national identity in news about the World Cup.

BEYOND THE WORLD CUP

When the World Cup concluded, the European Broadcasting Union stated that member broadcasters "reported record audience figures and coverage" of the tournament, "signaling a landmark moment for women's sport" ("EBU members deliver," 2019). Based on data reported from 17 EBU territories, the number of hours viewed increased from 1 million in 2015 to 15.1 million in 2019. Viewership increased even in countries with no national team in the tournament, including the Czech Republic and Slovenia. In addition to national broadcasters, the live matches were available on the Eurovision website. The audience demographic on the platform was mostly (55%) under 34 years old and mostly (68%) men. The viewership numbers indicated widespread support for women's football in EBU member countries and territories and affirmed the importance of Europe's Public Service Media in creating an audience for women's sport. Further, as Executive Director of Eurovision Sport Stefan Kürten said, "It is also very positive trend to see a significant increase the level of coverage and engagement in territories without national team involvement," where Eurovision Sport has "worked hard to develop the interest" ("EBU members deliver," 2019).

In addition to high viewership numbers, the EBU's commitment to *develop interest* is significant for numerous reasons. First, this approach counters the attitudes of sports journalists who claim that women's sports are not interesting and that audiences are not interested in women's sport (Organista et al., 2019). Second, the contracts support the importance of European public service media, one where the broadcast is produced centrally and distributed for free to members. Women's sport, and women's football specifically, thus, is positioned as content of public interest. Third, the inclusion and emphasis on territories without a national team in the tournament indicates a vision to build audiences for women's sport. In December 2019, EBU secured the rights for the Women's European Championships 2021 (Dixon, 2019). The tournament has been postponed to 2022 due to the

coronavirus pandemic. The European Broadcasting Union's efforts to build interest for women's football through sport public broadcasting and the implications for the CEE context merit further attention.

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE BETTER

The FIFA 2019 Women's World Cup generated significant media attention, including in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite the fact that the national teams from CEE did not qualify for the World Cup, public service media in CEE and the countries analyzed here (Hungary and Serbia) carried the matches on public service broadcasting. In this way, Eurovision's broadcast provided an international connection toward the visibility of women's football, which was then negotiated and taken-up by public service broadcasters in the Member States. However, even when Eurovision secures the rights to the tournament, rights-holding broadcasters serve as gatekeepers for the availability and the subsequent coverage of the tournament. As Jakubowska and Ličen (2019, p. 320) cautioned, mandates that intend to preserve the tradition of sport broadcasts on public access programming are "laudable," but might perpetuate "the marginality of women's sport which typically lacks such tradition." The question, then, becomes whether Eurovision's intent to "develop interest" in women's sport aligns with the mission of member broadcasters. Considering the challenges of sport mega-events broadcasting in relation to public service media in Europe (Lünich et al., 2019), the potential implications of women's sports broadcasts are complicated and should be carefully examined beyond the precursory analysis in this chapter through nation-specific and/or comparative analyses (Ličen & Billings, 2013; Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019).

Further, media prominence is situated within broader economic and political structures implicated in the "production of gendered national identity" (Jakubowska & Ličen, 2019, p. 318; see also Antunovic, 2019). The commentary focused primarily on the football-related elements and on context about the players and teams. The national interest function still factored into decision-making about which events to broadcast and which identities are positioned as "ours," but might have been subdued because of the absence of a "home" team. As women's football is generally marginalized in coverage and in scholarship, a more comprehensive methodological approach that explicitly *seeks out* routine media coverage of women's football across channels and platforms would reveal much about

the articulations of gender and national identity. A systems-level question could ask: Which *functions* of the media (e.g., entertainment, public service, national interest) gain prominence via the coverage of women's football? How are representations of women's footballers constructed in relation to gender norms? An analysis of journalistic values in relation to women's sport and specifically women's football within local, regional, national, and European media structures provides an intriguing area for feminist sport media studies.

More specifically, feminist sports media scholarship needs to remain attentive to geopolitical locatedness of knowledges in order to see new dimensions of existing phenomena (Antunovic & Whiteside, 2018)—in this case, the Women's World Cup. The research reviewed here illustrates representation patterns of women's sport and media practices in the region that transcends boundaries of the nation-state (Gál, 2016; Ličen & Bejek, 2019; Organista et al., 2020). However, there are both substantial structural differences in the political, media, and sport systems and particularities in gender constructions. A transnational, multilingual perspective is essential in order to establish connections in gender discourses within and across locations. As we continue to build knowledge on women's sport, we ought to keep in mind the epistemic significance of theorizing from marginalized geopolitical locations *vis-à-vis* deductive analyses based on hegemonic feminist frameworks. To that end, I consider “being better”—the theme of this edited collection—as invitation to a dialogue that creates spaces for heterogeneity and convergences in theorizing about women's sport.

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Nigerian Female Football: Ambivalence and Struggle in the Shadows

Chuka Onwumechili and Kapriatta Jenkins

The 2019 Women's World Cup in France presented a mega tournament in transition and contrast. It marked the transition from a relatively low fan interest tournament to one watched by 1 billion people worldwide. This figure surpasses viewership for men's World Rugby (789 million in 2019) and the Winter Olympics (478 million in 2018). The Women's World Cup also set new mileposts for excellent athletic performance and celebration of social/gender liberalization.

But while these mileposts are eagerly celebrated, it can be easily forgotten that these developments tend to erase spaces of ambivalence and cast shadows on continued stigmatization and marginalization that exist within pockets of the game. There may be no better example than experiences of African teams at the WWC. The 2019 World Cup saw multiple African teams—Cameroon and Nigeria—go beyond the group stages for the first time. Although both Cameroon and Nigeria were subsequently eliminated in Round of 16, they were competitive. But beyond their efforts on the field, there were shadows behind the scenes that diverged sharply from

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the tournament's dominant narratives of gender liberalization and increased popularization of the women's game. Nigeria, particularly, remains a place where homosexuality is outlawed, women footballers are scrutinized over issues of sexuality, a significant number of the country's women are prevented from participating in football because of socio-religious issues, and the women's game is largely marginalized. Yet, Nigerian women footballers have gained notoriety for their global performance with the likes of Asisat Oshoala, Francesca Ordega, and Desire Oparanozie playing for some of the strongest European clubs.

While Nigerian athletes join their counterparts in achieving global notoriety and an increasing audience watched the Nigerian team for the Women's World Cup, an ambivalence exists behind those narratives and scenes. Focusing on celebrations of the 2019 WWC risks possibility that alternative narratives that problematize several issues in certain locations, like Africa, are erased.

Therefore, this chapter analyzes Nigerian women's football, with a particular focus on the national team, to better understand its status in the rapidly changing world of women's football. It accomplishes this task by examining news and social media text about the Nigerian women's team at the 2019 World Cup and how those texts intersect with Nigeria's social environment to produce and reproduce a different narrative for women's football in the country. Our discourse begins by examining the socio-historical context for women's football in the country underpinned by traditional historical theorization about gender and social practices in Nigeria. From that viewpoint, we interpret the struggles of women footballers in the country to understand the challenges they face and the methods they use to confront them. The work also examines tweets that surround the struggle of these women during the 2019 World Cup in France to understand public conceptions of Nigerian women's football, its existence, triumphs, and challenges.

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL AND THE NIGERIAN SOCIAL CONTEXT

It is easy to watch the large crowds at the Women's World Cup and the increasing media attention to women's football and then conclude that acceptance of women's participation in the sport is globalized. After all, women's soccer leagues are emerging across the globe, and in some countries like the United States, participation in the sport by young girls surpasses participation by young boys. But using those as examples for the

sport worldwide is a major mistake. In places like Nigeria, as well as other places, women's acceptance in the sport has not yet arrived. Nigeria particularly presents an example. Though the Nigerian national women's football team is one of the most successful in the African continent, the history of the sport shows that it is not widely accepted as a proper sport for women. In his analysis of Nigerian newspapers, Onwumechili (2011) found that the early representation of women's football included rules that served to legitimize myths of men's superiority over women. Football was and is, by some, thought of as a man's sport, and women should instead spend their time being wives and mothers. This narrative still takes place today.

Ironically, women's football in Nigeria has a long history that is almost 100 years. But that history denotes the ambivalence about its existence first by Nigerian colonial rulers and then discriminatory practices by indigenous football administrators that persist today. This long history of struggle is captured in Onwumechili and Goodman's (2020) recent work on Nigeria's female national team. Beyond this history is the embeddedness of two major barriers—culture and religion—that differentially affect women participation. We address each of those below.

CULTURE

The impact of culture in restricting women's participation in sport in Nigeria is well documented by scholars. Adedeji (1978), Akindutire (1992), Elendu and Okanezi (2013), and Anaza and McDowell (2017) each stress the impact of culture on restricting women's participation in sport. Elendu and Okanezi (2013), for instance, cite stereotypes that perceive sport as male-dominated and lacking femininity and concluded that such perceptions create the belief that "women who participate in sports are seen as violating the cultural expectations of womanhood" (p. 140). Ogunleye and Adebayo (2010) identify this as benevolent sexism, which is a form of prejudice in which gender inequality is promoted through the appreciation of women as valuable resources' in the areas of childbearing, nurturance, and sexual and intimacy needs primary. This effect by culture is relatively new and is more likely a derivative of colonial cultural impact. Scholars such as Oyewumi (1997) have long argued that pre-colonial culture in the territory that became Nigeria, especially in the Southern parts, did not strictly and always demarcate activities that were either masculine or feminine. In fact, as Oyewumi (1997) claims, gender was a creation of

colonialists. The pre-colony recognized biological differences, but those differences did not restrict what one sex could do and what the other could not do. This non-differentiation is also confirmed by Amadiume (1997). In fact, as Amadiume correctly points out, women in certain cases undertook the role of “husband” in order to maintain family property rights and sometimes to seek rights of reproduction in certain situations. In essence, roles were not strictly based on biological sex. Biological sex and gender became important at the advent of colonialism which also included the introduction of modern sporting activities. Since then, expectations for women became separated from expectations of men, and these expectations were often expressly coded in sporting activities. For instance, under the British in the territory that became Nigeria, football was explicitly a male sport. Women were not expected to participate in football. Instead, female sports became some designated track events, netball, among others. Where men and women participated in the same sports, they were separated into different competitions based on sex. Because of this culture, rumors are escalated as excuses for why women should not participate in sports, including the idea that sports hinders childbirth, causes more injury in women, and negatively affects a woman’s menstruation. All of which have been proven to be untrue by various studies (Vipene, 2009). This culture became embedded in Nigeria and expressed in media discourses at the onset of women’s football in the country.

Due to the hardships some female footballers endure in Nigeria, some have made it a goal to play nationally for other countries. Agergaard and Botelho (2014) found that some of the significant reasons Nigerian footballers who migrated to Scandinavia did so for economic and social reasons. Because of the effect of sexism and culture in Nigeria pertaining to women playing soccer, the pay and treatment are not as good as playing on other national teams. Migrated players found they were able to gain higher visibility, which leads to more sponsorships and money when playing for a Scandinavian team. Players interviewed also mentioned the inadequate facilities that are given to women footballers in Nigeria which can hinder their play. Playing for organizations outside of Nigeria allowed them to have better opportunities.

RELIGION

The effect of religion is equally important. Jeroh (2012) quoting Neikin defines religion as a belief system that had a God or powerful idea that is the “key to all knowledge, the explanation of history, and the guide to the conduct of everyday behavior.” Using religion to guide the everyday behavior of citizens can significantly affect the lives of its followers. Nigeria, with 60% of its over 200 million population Muslim and about 49% females, effectively loses half of the population that should be at their prime in sport participation (World Bank, n.d.). Jeroh (2012) states that for some followers of Islam and the Muslim religion, sports can stir sexual urge or encourage moral perversion and also discourages sports matches or games that involve both sexes. Walseth (2006) notes that Muslim girls and women’s identity work was critical in participation in sport, yet the religion abhors women exposing parts of their bodies, including their legs. Women who position themselves within the framework of their religio-ethnic identity reject sport participation, which is seen as lacking femininity. Walseth’s findings are quite revealing. First, girls restricted themselves from involvement in sport as part of their identity as respectably feminine. Second, the few girls that step out of those restrictive boundaries experience sanction and/or harassment. The effect has been dramatic. Jeroh (2012) inserts that religion may explain the absence of Muslim girls in the National Female Football Teams in Nigeria. With most Northern Nigerian girls unavailable to participate because of religious beliefs, the pool from which female footballers can be selected is limited by religion.

Nevertheless, Bichi (2018) has argued that the lack of Northern Nigerian girls participating in sport is due to religious misunderstanding. He cites the Islamic religious book to argue that sport is actually encouraged by Islamic religion because it promotes good health and fitness. Bichi argues that it is the embedded cultural beliefs and expectations of women, as well as misunderstanding of Islamic religion that has made it difficult for Muslim girls to participate in sports in Nigeria. Bichi however acknowledges that the Islamic religion prohibits women from being involved in mixed sporting engagement with men. However, women’s football involves competition involving only women and thus is not prohibited. But another obstacle is that Islam requires a dress code even in sports participation. However, those requirements do not mean that women cannot participate in sports, including football.

Nevertheless, while correct, Bichi's (2018) points still have not encouraged Nigerian Muslim women, particularly those in Northern Nigeria, to participate in football. Note, for instance, that most of the Nigerian girls who first participate in football, even the Christians, are introduced to the sport by playing with boys. Although increasingly there are a large number of girls playing the sport in the country, which means an all-girls play around is possible, it is still not a common sight except in a school environment. Second, the traditional culture in most of Northern Nigeria frowns on women participating in sports, and in many cases, these girls are encouraged to marry early. Third, the clothing requirement for Muslim girls makes it difficult to participate fully and in a competitive environment.

HOW WE INVESTIGATED

Given the themes of gender equality and progress through football, particularly by the World Cup events, the question is whether these extend to Nigerian women's football. We examine this possibility in two ways: (1) identifying and thematically analyzing pertinent news stories preceding, during, and immediately after the World Cup and (2) reviewing and identifying themes for various tweets on Nigerian women's participation at the 2019 World Cup.

Analyzing News

There are several media reports pertaining to Nigerian women's soccer just before the 2019 Women's World Cup. Although the team played in a small number of internationals in the few years prior to the World Cup, these stories on the team provide us with insight into the perception of Nigerian women's soccer. Importantly, it allows us to investigate the media's perception of these women to assess the claims of gender liberalization. We examined several reports from 2015, four years before the 2019 World Cup tournament, and shortly after the 2019 World Cup tournament. We found four key themes that define the reports that we identified: *unequal pay, homophobia, lack of family support, and flailing media attention*.

The first theme concerns *unequal pay*. A 2019 CNN news report called out the continuation of the unfair treatment of African women footballers in their interview with former Nigerian national team player, Ayisat Yusuf-Aromire. Yusuf-Aromire recalled the discrimination she witnessed after winning the 2004 African Women's Championship. When the Football

Federation refused to pay the team's bonuses and pending allowances, the team staged a sit-in, which eventually led to getting their bills settled after persistent pressure from the players. The national team was also paid ten times less than the men's side. A report in *Puse.ng* documented that the Super Falcons were not paid bonuses for two years before they participated in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. This incident also happened in the 2004 and 2016 Africa Women's Cup. A sit-in for up to five days took place to fight for the players' bonuses.

The second theme concerns sexuality and *homophobia*. Engh (2011) states that the heteronormative discourse nurtures homophobic attitudes. Gendered ideologies and cultural norms around womanhood have shaped what female footballers' sexual relationships, behaviors, and appearances should look like. South African defender, Nothando Vilakazi, was harassed about her gender when a picture circulated, showing her hands over her groin area during a match. A 2016 *Newsweek* report examined comments made by the Nigerian Football Federation's vice president, Seyi Akinwunmi. He stated that "lesbianism kills teams" when addressing the problems affecting women's football in Africa. Even with the continued success of Nigeria's national women's football team, the standards of what African women footballers should look and act like continue to oppress them.

A third theme involves a lack of *family support*. In a survey sent to national teams participating in the 2019 World Cup, *The New York Times* asked, "What does your family think of your job as a professional soccer player?" Nigerian forward, Francisca Ordega, responded that her mom hated her job and that she should be in an office working or married. In Nigerian footballer Yusuf-Aromire's interview with CNN, she explained how she had to sneak out of the house to play, and eventually stood up for herself in deciding to play professionally. In an interview with [DW.com](#), Nigerian footballer, Monday Gift, stated that even after playing for the national team, her parents are still not entirely convinced that she should be a footballer and always remind her that getting married should be her goal.

The last theme that emerges is *failing media coverage* for women's football team in Africa. A member of the women's committee for the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) told CNN that marketing and promotion for the women's football teams had not been enough and that the lack of consistency in promoting leads to little attention for their tournaments and games. Sponsors pay attention to teams with large viewership,

and the women's team in Africa struggle to attract those sponsors due to lack of coverage. News site, DW.com, examined issues Nigerian women footballers face, and lack of attention was included. One owner of a football club admitted to having his girls train twice as hard to shine to hopefully get noticed by a foreign team. Though some of his players made the national Nigeria team, less media attention causes less sponsor, investor, and even spectator viewership. Lack of sponsorship opportunities for the players means they have to obtain other work commitments outside of football or attempt to play for other countries.

Tweeting Football

Besides examining the stories written about the team before, during, and shortly after the 2019 Women's World Cup in France, we examined tweets during the event in France. The goal was to also discover key themes that guided the tweets about the Nigerian women's team. We used various hashtags to identify relevant tweets. The hashtags included #Superfalcons, #WWCNigeria, #SoarSuperFalcons, #NGAGER, #NGAKOR, #NGATHA, and #NGAFRA. The last four were tweets around the four games that the team played at the 2019 Women's World Cup and the previous three reflect more general tweets about the team at the World Cup.

We found four themes—*pride in team overachieving*, *perceived racism, sexism and homophobia*, and *ethnocentric rivalry*. There are sub-themes within each theme. The fourth theme is decidedly different because while comments under the first two themes reflected a somewhat united and shared view of the largely Nigerian posters, the third theme exposed ethnic cleavages among the commenters and possibly point to team development difficulties that perhaps affect team performance and acceptance within the country itself.

The theme *Pride in Overachieving* exemplified a national pride. There are sub-themes here including those that express low expectations from the team including those that criticized published ages of the girls, fear of big losses, expression of disgrace embarrassment, and pride. These expressions mostly came after Nigeria beat South Korea 2-0 following a huge 0-3 opening loss to Norway. The final score in the Norway game was a relief after the team was down at half time by three goals. Several Nigerians apparently expressed very little from the team in the next game but the team recovered to beat South Korea 2-0. The win was the first-ever win by an African team at the Women's World Cup and the tweets that followed

the result expressed relief. For instance, @BBC Pidgin stated “Nigeria don comot shame for Africa eye for dis World Cup.” @BBC Pidgin tweets using the BBC News logo but is an unverified Twitter account. The reference to Africa in that tweet is important. For posters, the win was not just a Nigerian win but an African one considering that no African team had won a game at that point. Another poster used a smiling face and exclaimed “Super Falcons made us proud.” But fear of defeat was always around the corner. For instance, as the team prepared to face Germany in the next game, @The General asked: “How ego be? (What would be the result?) Mega thrashing or not?”

Many of the tweeters *perceive racism* in their tweets surrounding Nigeria’s games. For African teams, this feeling often exploded into emotional outbursts, as was widely expressed by the Cameroonian team in one of their games at the tournament. These feelings and expressions of frustration focused on officiating that they felt were decidedly against the African girls. In Cameroon’s case, it led to a public walkout from a game. In Nigeria’s case, the frustrations were widely expressed on Twitter. Several posters put up photos they described as an unjustly re-taken penalty by France after the French girls hit the upright on the previous attempt. The tweets expressed frustration with officiating, and one tweet cited the fact that no African was on the team in the VAR Reviewing room, noting that the absence of an African in the room was a justification that the decision-makers were anti-African teams. Another tweeter referred to the VAR as an acronym for video assistant racist. Most of the discontent was expressed toward the officiating of the close game against France, where another tweeter expressed: “This is pure racism, FIFA should just hand the Cup to France already. As for the racist VAR team, I have nothing to say to you.” The frustration may have been a result of how surprisingly well the Nigerian girls had played against a team that had trounced it 8-1 barely two years previously or the fact that defeat meant Nigeria had to wait for results of games in other groups to determine if the team had indeed done enough to progress to the Round of 16.

The third theme includes that of sexism and homophobia. One tweet concerning the Super Falcons stated:

I don’t understand why these women are all running around in men’s football kits. If they were to let down their hair, apply a bit of lipstick, and put on a nice frock, then they might make a nice wife for somebody.

This statement goes to the culture found in Nigeria of not wanting women to play “masculine” sports. Another tweet stated, “Nigerian falcons have horrible hairstyles. Naturally beautiful Odega and Oshoala now look very funny.” In response to the tweet about the Super Falcons’ sexuality, a Twitter user stated, “I hate to tell you this sir, but a few of them bat for the other side, and I don’t mean Australia.” The user was sarcastically stating that the players are lesbian in response to why the super falcons did not look “feminine” enough.

The fourth theme is decidedly different from the previous two themes. While the first two themes focused on the perception of the women’s team as representing Nigeria and backed by the country against outside opponents, the third team looked inward. It examined the team and its ethnic components. We describe this theme as ethnocentric rivalry. Tweets surrounding this theme were highly emotional with ethnic accusations, abuses, and stereotypes emerging in heated conversations as the team encountered elimination games during the tournament. A key protagonist in the debate was a poster who self-identified as a Northerner. This poster instigated a lively debate with the following:

If the Nigerian girls team loses today it will be due to lack of federal character in the team. Look how the provocative Biafran sisters are dominating this team!!! How come our superior Northern girls are never considered?

The statement above is overly provocative. It was essentially a retort to a longstanding complaint of most Southern Nigerians who usually accuse Northerners, often in leadership positions in the country of neglecting Southerners in appointments to coveted government positions. However, members of the Nigerian women’s soccer team “The Falcons” mostly come from the South because Northern girls do not often play football because of Islamic region and early marriage. By claiming that the Nigerian team was full of Southerners and lacking equal representation of the country’s ethnic group, the poster, @PrimeBuharist, was provocative to tweeters perceived to be Southerners. As expected, numerous and swift responses came and some were abusive. Several derided the questioner and one, @Agajivic, retorted as follows:

Your Northern girls marry at the age of 11 and become mothers 2 years later, when will they have time to train and do like others? Besides, begging remains your favorite sport. Aboki.

WHAT WE FOUND

Our analysis of news texts, as well as tweets surrounding Nigeria's participation at the 2009 Women's World Cup, provides insight into what that participation means. While the participation of Nigerian women in football is no longer a novelty as previously reported (Onwumechili & Goodman, 2020; Okonkwor & Egaga, 2018), participation is still not considered to be competitive at the highest level by Nigerians as evidenced in tweets. Invariably, the fans perceive ethnic resentment and racist attitudes toward the team at the local and global levels, respectively. In addition, the media report persistent pay discrimination, homophobia, and poor media coverage related to the female national team.

Analyses: Challenging the Dominant Narrative with the Not Yet Uhuru Frame

The term *Not Yet Uhuru* has inspired several movements, protests, and literature on the question of rights and freedom across the African continent. It was a term first used by Oginga Odinga, a key fighter for Kenya's political independence from British rule when he lamented that in spite of political independence achieved by Kenya, that political freedom was still not achieved. Uhuru is a Swahili word denoting freedom. Odinga lamented that in spite of Kenya's stringent fight for independence from British colonizers that freedom continued to elude Kenyans post-independence. The phrase, since then, has been used by others to describe the mirage sense of freedom experienced in various spheres of life all over the continent. Women's football, in spite of its introduction in the late 1930s and in spite of the rise and acceptance of women's football globally, remains under strictures in Nigeria, hence the use of the term *Not Yet Uhuru* in referring to the state of women's football in Nigeria.

There is little doubt that the women's game has experienced acceptance all over the world, including in Africa. It is a world of difference comparing its stature today to the novelty attitude toward football in Africa, including Nigeria, during the early periods in the mid-twentieth century. That novelty nature was widely recorded, including periods in which women were banned from participating in the game. Even at the restart of the game in Nigeria right after the country's civil war ended in 1970 to the establishment of nationwide competitions in the late 1980s, the game was largely considered a novelty. That view of the game has largely dissipated.

The game is now widely seen as competitive, with some of Nigeria's best players competing at the professional levels in both the United States and Europe. Yet, the game still is not fully accepted in Nigeria on the same level as its men version.

The result of our analysis of both the extant media reports and tweets by football fans demonstrates that there remains some ambivalence toward the women's game. It is that ambivalence that fully captures the epithet *Not Yet Uhuru*. In essence, while there is little doubt that the women's game in Nigeria has come a long way in improvement and acceptance, there remains quite some distance to go before it is fully accepted by its public and football fans. This is amply demonstrated by the results of the data obtained for the research published here.

We note some results that arguably mirror the men's game in Nigeria. All three tweet themes, particularly, fall into this category. Such mirroring basically indicates that the women's game may well be on its way to assuming the same passion accorded to its men counterpart in the country. The first *Pride in Overachieving* is reminiscent of similar pride reserved for the men team at the World Cups of 1994 in the United States and 1998 in France when the team overcame, unexpectedly, strong opponents such as Bulgaria and Spain, respectively. While the women's team may not have as many Nigerian fans following the results of their games, those fans who follow the women's game did not show any less enthusiasm. Just as Nigerians were proud of the 3-2 upset over Spain in 1998, they were proud in the close defeat to the French at the 2019 Women's World Cup. Though the 1998 men's game could be described as pride associated with a win, the 2009 loss to France was a Pyrrhic victory. Both teams met barely two years before in an international friendly just a year before. It ended 8-0 in France's favor but the French had to sweat for a late win at the World Cup in the next year. For Nigeria, it was a shock result that needed to be celebrated, defeated or not. The margin mattered.

The growing public interest in the women game in Nigeria, as we mentioned earlier, is a significant difference in how the game was viewed in its early years and as late as the early 1990s. The tweets, particularly during the Pyrrhic victory in the French game, are also instructive on how far the women's game has come in Nigeria. In the early years, watching the women play was good enough because it was considered a novelty and provided fun moments for spectators.

But clearly, the game has grown to become a serious endeavor and competitive. The fans of the game no longer attend simply for funny and

light moments but to watch serious football and gifted athletes. The tweets claiming racist decisions were made in favor of France and eliminating Nigeria from the World Cup amply demonstrates that the Nigerian women's game was no longer simply for entertainment purposes but meant much for national pride. It has taken center stage that was formerly reserved only for the men's game. That several tweeters were demonstratively angry at the result and that several made charges of racism indicate how far the women's game has come in Nigeria. It was no longer a novelty. There is now seriousness and national pride attached to it and results from such games.

The ethnocentric tweets surrounding Nigerian women's participation at the 2019 World Cup are yet another marker for how serious the women's game has become in the country. Ethnocentric discourse is a central discussion point in Nigeria's social life. It pervades social and political discussions in in-person conversations, social media, and life in Nigeria. The fact that it has emerged in tweets about female footballers in Nigeria means that the game has become important in the life of Nigerians. The men's game has always had ethnocentrism as a critical part of its national existence, with players selected for the national team viewed, regularly, from the lens of their ethnic origin, especially when a Nigerian is at the helm of making selection decisions. The tweets at the 2019 Women's World Cup on the ethnic composition of the Nigerian team demonstrate that the women game has become a serious aspect of sporting life among Nigerians. Although the 2019 women's team was coached by a European, the discourse on ethnic composition was still important. Its seriousness was amply conveyed by the harsh and sometimes abusive words used by those who tweeted on the ethnic composition topic.

For the women's team, the ethnic issue may be exacerbated by religion and culture, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter. The tweets severely allude to the Islamic religion creating an obstacle for women who wish to play football and the culture of early girl marriages exacerbating the situation. While those causes may be true, what is largely silent but important is that the seriousness of such conversation about women's football demonstrates how important it has become for the general and sporting public.

However, while the tweets give the impression that women's football has arrived in the public's consciousness, we are reminded that ambivalence still exists. This ambivalence emerges in the themes that we find in news stories that surround the 2019 Women's World Cup. The themes focus on unequal pay, homosexuality, poor media coverage, and lack of

parental support. Those four themes remind us that while women's football may have become accepted as a serious sport in places such as Nigeria, there are still obstacles to overcome.

Unequal pay in soccer, when women are compared to men, clearly is not restricted to Nigeria. This has been a worldwide issue with the issue going before the law court in the United States. In Nigeria, there has not been a court case just yet, and there may not be one in the foreseeable future. However, this is not because the issue is absent, nor is it because the issue is an acceptable one. Instead, it is because it is an issue that competes with others in the women's struggle for equality and respect. The gripe is not restricted to the amount of compensation compared to what their male counterparts receive, but it is also about when the agreed compensation is paid at all. While payment to male players may be delayed, a rarer occurrence, they eventually are paid. For whom, they often must take to the streets to demand owed sums of money and on two previous occasions (at the 2004 African Women's Championship in South Africa and at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France), they seized the championship trophy in 2004 and refused to travel home with it to Nigeria until they had received promised compensation. While such protests were often deemed as an embarrassment to the country, they ultimately proved effective. In 2004, for instance, the girls were protesting nonpayment of promised bonuses for winning the trophy. The players' refusal to fly home as scheduled was based on previous experiences where payment never materialized after the team arrived home with a championship. Therefore, they stood their ground, and it became a global story forcing the country's president to order that the players are paid immediately and a plane to be sent to South Africa to bring them home in a triumphant return. They were feted by the president, and the president purposely left the team officials out of the celebration, believing that it was the latter that had shamed the country. It was an embarrassing situation and one that has rarely occurred with the men's national team but appears to be frequent with the female national team.

Because of unequal pay, many women footballers are encouraged to play outside of their country. Football club coaches acknowledge the success of the national Nigerian women's football teams, but also acknowledge that their players could find more success and exposure playing elsewhere. Due in part to the perceptions of female footballers, Nigerian male teams gain more benefits of being national players leaving the women with lesser pay and inadequate facilities. Knowing this, women players seek

better conditions elsewhere instead of their own country to be able to afford better opportunities.

The issue of homosexuality is yet another point of difference when attitude to the women's national team is examined in comparison to the male teams. It is remarkable that sexuality is a media issue in relation to a football team in Nigeria. It is an issue that is silent in media discourses on male teams in the country. Although several pages and time are dedicated to top reporting male football teams in Nigeria, the issue of sexuality is silent. Yet, the opposite is the case with female teams in the country. Sexuality takes a huge size of reports on Nigerian women's football. In the early days of soccer revival among women's teams in Nigeria, during the 1990s, the issue of sexuality focused on the suitability of the game in women's reproductivity and ability to attract male partners in marriage. However, as women's football became more normalized in the Nigerian public psyche, the focus has dramatically shifted to questioning the sexual orientation of female footballers. This shift may be an implicit recognition of the improved quality of women's football skills and the fact that the ability of these athletes compares favorably to their male counterparts. But rather than merely accept this development as positive, questions have begun to arise about whether these athletes are truly women.

Two explosive media reports about this issue forced the International Federation for Football Federations (FIFA) to publicly caution the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) about public comments made by respectable Nigerian football officials. The most recent is included as part of the data for this chapter, and it occurred in 2016 when a top-ranking Nigerian federation official accused Nigerian women's footballers of homosexuality citing homosexuality as the reason that the women's game in the country has failed to attract marketing interest. However, no one asked whether homosexuality was only restricted to female footballers in Nigeria. Are men exempt from homosexuality, and why is homosexuality considered abhorable? Although Nigeria outlaws homosexuality, the fact remains that globally it is not outlawed, and the federation publicly backed down from the position of its officials when pressed by FIFA. But the attitude and opinion expressed in 2016 by a top Nigerian official were not aberrant. A few years before, the national women's coach, Eucharia Uche, made a similar statement about footballers but had to back away from the statement after a similar caution by FIFA.

Ultimately, it shows that women footballers are treated differently in the country, and the claim that they may have reached equal status with

their male counterparts following the 2019 World Cup may be a bridge yet far to cross.

Parental influence is another attributing factor to women participation in sport in Nigeria. Ogu (1994) states that the role of the family can contribute to the development of children, and the social environment can affect how a family sees sport participation. Ogu acknowledges that the traditional image of gender may be a factor in children's sport participation. Worries such as fear of accidents and effects of academic performance may hinder a parent's will to allow their children to participate. Still, studies show that parents instill those fears into their daughters more than sons (Ogu, 1994). When studying secondary schools in Imo State of Nigeria, Ogu (1994) found that there is a gender difference in the approval of parents in their children's sports oscillation. Findings in a study by Aminat (2016) found that socio-cultural factors, including parental attitude, are potent factors determining female participation in sports. Parents have been seen as more influential in socializing their children in sports than other factors. Dixon et al. (2008) state that parental influence can impact sport involvement by normalizing the sport experience, particularly in terms of gender.

The poor media coverage of women's football is, perhaps, one of the last bastions in the unequal treatment of women's football. It has existed since the introduction of women's football in the country in the late 1930s and remains even today despite notable gains. In the earlier period, the media barely recognized its existence. In fact, the lack of media interest is responsible for the lack of a definitive date for the start of women's football in Nigeria. Beyond the fact that we know that it existed by 1939, we have nothing to indicate whether it existed even before then. Beyond a letter to the editor that recognized its existence then, it rarely occupied any media space for years afterward until the 1980s. Although media attention has increased since then, its coverage compared to its male counterpart is minuscule. Today, it is covered as an important sport, but reports on it are fewer and far between in the national media. Even with the Nigerian female team being the most successful, they still receive less media attention than the men's team. This also contributes to the lack of support for the women's team and lessens their measure of significance in Nigerian football. Notably, the space dedicated to the coverage of women's football is notably smaller except for a few occasions when a large number of pages may be dedicated to the coverage of the women's national team in the newspapers. On television, only competitive games are assured

of televised coverage. For the men counterparts, most games, whether competitive or not, are often covered live on television, and print media interest is usually at a much higher level. Media coverage is an important factor for national sports players as it helps them get viewership for sponsors and supporters. Sponsors help in getting higher pay for players, and support can help give encouragement.

Ultimately, it is clear that women's football in Nigeria has come a long way. From a novelty to being truly recognized as a competitive sport, women's football has experienced tremendous progress in Nigeria. It is no doubt considered a serious sport by Nigerian football fans. That seriousness is underlined in the tweets about the team at the World Cup, which indicated fan appreciation of the efforts of the players and fanned emotional reactions to perceived racism against the team as well as an ethno-centric rivalry that exploded in discourses surrounding the team's composition. They are indications that the fans consider women's football to be important and support the Nigerian team. However, as Odinga noted in Kenyan politics, it is *Not Yet Uhuru*. That statement is apt, given that the women's game still has obstacles to overcome. Those obstacles include restricted media attention, equal compensation of its labor, and focus on homosexuality instead of the performance of the players and teams.

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE BETTER

In conclusion, there is little doubt that the 2019 Women's World Cup in France was a landmark for the women's game at the global level. Not only did it set record attendance at games, but also the television audience was at a high level. There is little doubt that the women's game has arrived at the global level. However, these remarkable accomplishments at the global level do not mean that such progress is even across all countries. In our discourse of the Nigerian situation, it is clear that women's football in Nigeria has come a long way. Nigeria had been to every Women's World Cup from the first one in 1991 to the last one in 1999. Nigeria has dominated the African competition, winning all but two of the bi-annual championships. Yet, despite these measurable steps of progress, the game is not fully accepted or at par with its men counterpart. As the above analysis demonstrates, the game has rapidly developed from a novelty status, which was the case at the inception in the late 1930s until it was re-constituted as a competitive sport in the late 1980s (Onwumechili & Jenkins, [in press](#)).

The attitude of fans toward the game has changed as well following that trajectory. Today, it is considered competitive by Nigerians. This entails not just watching the game with pleasure but to develop an emotional attachment to it as was amply demonstrated in the tweets about the team's performance at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France. Yet, we conclude that it is Not Yet Uhuru. By this, we recognize that despite this evident progress made by women's football in Nigeria, there are still obstacles that it has to overcome. Those obstacles include adequate and ample media coverage, pay discrimination, and homophobia.

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Rebel, Rebel! How Megan Rapinoe's Celebrity Activism Forges New Paths for Athletes

*Tracy Everbach, Gwendelyn S. Nisbett,
and Karen Weiller-Abels*

*I'm privileged to be a famous person and to be on this team and to be
who I am, and if I just stay silent, it seems awfully selfish.*
—Megan Rapinoe on MSNBC, July 9, 2019

After the USA won the 2019 Women's FIFA World Cup, one woman emerged as an epochal symbol of female power. With her lavender hair, athletic build, quick moves on the field, eye for style, and outspoken

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advocacy for equality, Megan Rapinoe captured the world's attention. The image of her triumphant victory pose, arms outstretched, went viral as a symbol of women's empowerment, but also as a sign of her political views and activism supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, opposing President Trump, fighting for equal pay for her team, and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights (Marchese, 2019).

During the same year, Rapinoe also posed for other iconic photos that seemed to shatter the traditional image of women athletes posing for the male gaze. She appeared in the *Sports Illustrated* (SI) Swimsuit Edition, showing off her muscled body. However, Rapinoe did not resemble the physique of the small-waisted, curvy-hipped, large-breasted Victoria's Secret-type models usually appearing in SI. As an out lesbian with a high-profile athlete girlfriend (Sue Bird of the WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association)), Rapinoe has opted to use her muscled body as an expression of what women can become as opposed to the curvaceous body many models display. Later in 2019, chosen by SI as Sportsperson of the Year, she posed on the magazine cover in a couture Valentino gown with black Brogue shoes, carrying a sledgehammer signifying the ultimate power and strength of women, women athletes, and the right to speak out for equal rights for all.

This chapter examines the evolution of Megan Rapinoe as an influential celebrity activist, employing social media, mass media images, and sports journalism. Meanings both visually and textually will be examined, identifying implications for women, women athletes, out athletes, the sports world, and society as a whole. Identification and discussion of power and hegemonic masculinity in sports will be presented, as well as cultural studies and queer theories. Rarely has an out lesbian achieved such fame and admiration while expressing clear feminist and social justice views. Previous studies on women athletes have shown that they are often feminized and sexualized (Bishop, 2003; Daniels, 2009; Davis, 1997; Everbach & Mumah, 2014; Frisby, 2017; Hardin et al., 2005; Salwen & Wood, 1994; Villalon & Weiller-Abels, 2018). Rapinoe defies these norms and takes women athletes, and all athletes, in new directions.

In an intersectional, third-wave, feminist theory, and queer theory-based analysis, we argue that the global fame and popularity of Rapinoe are important not only as media phenomena, but in the very real impact athletes and their activism can and do have on culture and changes in gender roles, in normative behavior, and on the individuals who follow them. Research on celebrity influence suggests that people are often influenced by famous

people's image, actions, and attitudes (Brown, 2015). Through Rapinoe's rebellious style, we will explore how this new form of athlete celebrity is shaking up how we view the intersection of feminism, sports, and culture.

RAPINOE EMERGES AS A CELEBRITY INFLUENCER

One outcome from the 2019 FIFA World Cup proved that Megan Rapinoe is a charismatic force of nature. From what many have regarded as the obscurity of women's sports, Rapinoe launched onto the scene with tremendous swagger and celebrity appeal. Given the historic and even current marginalization of women's sports, young women athletes do not have many sports mega-stars to look up to as heroines and role models. Rapinoe is one of a handful of talented women athletes to get the credit she deserves and to become a celebrity influencer.

Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018a) argue that "the athletic labor of femininity" of women sports celebrities dictates that champion athletes such as Serena Williams will temper their strength with performative displays of femininity (p. 299). They argue that women athletes interacting with fans on social media are compelled to uphold to the standards of heteronormative attractiveness. Rapinoe on the cover of *SI* in a couture gown flirts at this trend, but then layers in black Brogues and a sledgehammer to drive home that her celebrity is different. This defies the women athlete celebrity model that centers on capitalizing on tropes of female power (i.e., neoliberal feminism) as argued in Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018b). Unlike other women athlete celebrities, Rapinoe is unabashedly herself and has refused to adapt to the normative expectation of what a female celebrity looks like (e.g., a feminine object for the male gaze).

From celebrity research, we understand that Rapinoe has the potential to shape both the sports narrative and the political narrative surrounding women's sports. Celebrities are adept at drawing attention to political and social issues even if they do not have the gravitas to speak on those issues (Nisbett & DeWalt, 2016). Celebrities who can craft a political narrative can more effectively influence audiences (above and beyond relying upon charisma and appeal) (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2019). Moreover, celebrities can make social and political issues more appealing to younger people and those less engaged in civic activities (Austin et al., 2008; Nownes, 2012).

Shortly after the World Cup victory in 2019, Rapinoe was interviewed on MSNBC's *Rachel Maddow Show*. When asked about the power of her

platform and celebrity, Rapinoe commented that she “take[s] very seriously the platform that we have.” She added, “Where my voice goes when I say things and trying to use those things for good and trying to challenge people” in terms of social issues (MSNBC, July 9, 2019).

Rapinoe’s appeal is unique, and she has become a celebrity influencer in both product promotion and social activism. Celebrities regarded positively can increase brand awareness and consumer intention to purchase (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). As a spokesperson, Rapinoe is appealing to advertisers interested in performative pro-social branding. An example of this was a Nike advertisement during the World Cup featuring Rapinoe and the rest of Team USA. The message focused on equality for women in sports and in society in general. The ad begins with a rousing “I believe that we” followed by a celebratory manifesto stating that the team is the best in the world, that children will want to grow up to be like Rapinoe, that women athletes will get their fair due, and that women will change the world.

Subsequent celebrity influencer activism by Rapinoe challenges stereotypes of beauty, strength, sexuality, and political power. Indeed, she is a celebrity for the moment, appealing to the pro-social zeitgeist of the age. This chapter examines significant examples of how Rapinoe used her influencer power to drive a conversation about body image, fight for LGBTQ+ and women’s equal rights, and speak out for the Black Lives Matter movement.

BREAKING THE MOLD OF WOMEN ATHLETES

Women athletes have long been marginalized in sports media, as well as televised, online, and print media (Bishop, 2003; Daniels, 2009; Davis, 1997; Frisby, 2017; Hardin et al., 2005; Salwen & Wood, 1994). Sports are one of the main societal sites of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), a construct that places men as dominant and powerful, with women presented and viewed as subordinate. Boys and men in Western society grow up learning that sports are key to their development and are masculine spaces, separate from the world of women (MacDonald, 2014). When women try to enter this societal, often restricted realm, they have historically been viewed as unwelcome invaders in this masculine domain.

Kane and Greendorfer (1994) note that sports are an area in which men are predominant, a concept that has been and continues to be upheld by sports media. Women athletes are more likely to be portrayed in sports media in individual sports such as tennis or ice skating rather than in team

sports like soccer or basketball (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). The physical attractiveness of women often is highlighted over their strength and power, and women's sporting events have been historically trivialized and marginalized as related to the amount and type of media coverage (Cooky et al., 2021; Higgs & Weiller, 1994; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Tuggle, 1997). Therefore, sports media serve as a conduit to maintain the notion that men are at the top of the sports hierarchy and women are limited to attention in certain sports perceived as feminine.

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, which gave women and girls the right to equal access in education, including sports, women have increased their sports participation by nearly 40% (Women's Sports Foundation, 2016). Recently women have received more actual airtime than men in Olympic Games coverage (Billings et al., 2018). However, it is important to point out this coverage of women athletes largely has focused on sports considered to be socially acceptable, which are those emphasizing grace and beauty, rather than team sports that involve power and aggression (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). Competitions in which women wear minimal, tight-fitting clothing (e.g., gymnastics and beach volleyball) have received undue attention by a variety of media outlets (Coche & Tuggle, 2017; Hardin & Greer, 2009), therefore maintaining the hierarchical status quo by reinforcing what is "acceptable" or "expected" in women's sports (Stewart, 2018). Outside the Olympic Games, most media coverage focuses on the "big four" men's professional sports: football, baseball, basketball, and hockey, as well as on men's college football and basketball.

The sports industry and sports media continue to be mainly a domain for men and male power. In the sixth edition of the *Associated Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card*, Lapchick (2018) and his research team gave gender hiring a grade of F. They noted that 90% of sports editors and 88.5% of sports reporters are men. While men are able to cover women's sports and vice versa, the culture of sports and the lack of women's voices in newsrooms leads to an ambivalence about women's sports (Antunovic & Hardin, 2013). Women journalists also internalize the male-dominated values and norms of newsrooms to devalue women's sports.

Musto et al. (2017) traced more than two decades of women's sports coverage on television and found that demeaning coverage from the 1980s has shifted to more blasé forms of coverage that they call "gender-bland sexism" (p. 573). This type of coverage, while making it appear that women have equal opportunity in sports, continues the perception that

women's sports are less interesting and less accomplished than men's. It also, the authors argue, serves to hide the "unequal status quo" and make it more difficult to change (p. 592).

Gender-bland sexism is thus a form of stealth sexism. It operates under the radar to reify gender boundaries and render invisible the very real and continued need to address persisting inequalities, thus presenting a fictitious view of gender that is both subtle and difficult to contest. (p. 592)

As a lead plaintiff in a sex discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation, Rapinoe consistently has faced this type of stereotyping. For instance, in March 2020, the Federation filed court documents claiming that its women players had "lesser responsibilities and physical abilities" than its male players, despite the fact the women's team has won more world championships and Olympic medals (Associated Press, 2020). The Federation's president, Carlos Cordeiro, then issued a statement apologizing to the women. In turn, Rapinoe called him out, noting his assertion was nothing new: "Every negotiation we've had, those undertones are there that we are lesser. So for him to put that out saying sorry, presuming it's for us, we don't buy it. That wasn't for us at all, it was for everybody else," she said (Associated Press, 2020, para. 5).

Bowell (2011) notes that feminist standpoint theories reflect marginalized lived and shared experiences of individuals who identify as female, lesbian, and/or Black from a political and societal perspective, as related to both power and marginalization. Including the work of O'Brien Hallstein (1999), Bowell further pointed out these identities are fixed and enabled by both one's identity and social position in society. Social positions, according to these authors, relate to hierarchical power, with some groups having greater power and social position than others. Applying standpoint theories, Harstock (1983) indicates the lived experiences of individuals who are marginalized are different from those of individuals whose power is considered more valid in society. An additional component of feminist standpoint theories is the experiences of those who operate from an outsider status, an extension of those who are part of marginalized groups. For example, those who identify as both female and lesbian would experience aspects of society differently than would a heterosexual, white woman. Women who identify as Black and lesbian may also report differing lived experiences than white, heterosexual women.

Although multiple perspectives of feminist standpoint theories exist, this chapter concentrates on feminist cultural studies, which assume cultural and social interactions at the basis of the conversation (Hargreaves & MacDonald, 2000; Krane et al., 2001; Ryba & Wright, 2005) and queer theory, which serves to examine the common heterosexual belief as related to sex, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 2006). Queer theory examines and attempts to alter the heteronormative man-masculine and feminine-heterosexual view of a binary world. In a binary world, men are lauded for muscular physiques, promoting the notion that this is natural and expected for men. Women, on the other hand, are praised for their soft curves and slim bodies.

A queer theory lens, by perceiving identity to be fluid/changing, allows for an examination of what might or might not align with normative views. For example, King (2008) suggests that an antinormative view presents sexual identities that may drastically alter what has been perceived as normal (e.g., marriage equality). Queer theorists may not adhere to normative institutions such as marriage. As related to sports, queer theory seeks to examine heteronormativity to sports, hoping to look beyond the binary organization of sports as we know it. Finally, in taking the feminist standpoint queer theory and relating this to the sports world, Welland (2007) prompts individuals to thoroughly and consistently examine and question the confines of white, masculine, and heteronormative sports that marginalize LGBTQ+ individuals.

Examining sports from this perspective encourages moving beyond the traditional means of viewing sports. What is influential in both of these standpoint theories is the way individuals think about and experience their social world with respect to how specifically feminine and masculine identities are promoted. Further, a thorough and robust examination and contesting of heteronormative structures are paramount in a discussion applying queer theory. Any conversation must also address options to alter the binary approach to sport, including cultural aspects such as clothing and gender-appropriate actions as well as sexed and gendered structures. Rapinoe faced this binary approach head on, by choosing the poses, clothing, and style that suited her and provided fuel for the non-binary outlook she took. As noted by Travers (2006), fostering queering theory, this perspective encourages all voices and all identities to be heard and featured.

RAPINOE'S SWIMSUIT EDITION

The notion of a feminine pose in the past could be associated with the hyper-feminine *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition, originally designed as eye candy for the male gaze (Davis, 1997; Frisby, 2017). While most of the women featured have been professional models, the magazine in the 2010s also began featuring professional athletes in swimsuits. Still, the magazine continued to display traditional, socially constructed images of feminine beauty: slim, tall, young, light-skinned women with large breasts wearing tiny swimsuits or painted nude bodies. However, *SI* more recently began pushing more boundaries of socially constructed femininity by hiring models with different body types, such as larger-sized model Ashley Graham, women with disabilities, women of color, older women, women of different religions (including a hijab swimsuit model), and, in 2020, the first transgender *SI* swimsuit model, Valentina Sampaio.

In the 2019 Swimsuit Edition, members of the women's national soccer team posed for a photo shoot in St. Lucia. Their swimsuit photos appeared in a 13-page spread. Rapinoe appeared in five photos. The largest photos showed her sculpted, muscular body in a two-page spread wearing a white strappy suit, a photo of her flexing, showing her bicep tattoo that reads, "nature ran her course," and holding a golden soccer ball while wearing a golden bikini. Three smaller photos feature her muscled abs in a skimpy black bikini on the beach, a shot from the rear of her paddling on a board in a high-cut suit, and a playful photo of her without a top, jumping in the air while holding her breasts.

The photos portray Rapinoe and the other athletes as beautiful, but also strong and at the top of their game. These are not photos designed for a male gaze; Rapinoe stares defiantly at the camera in the two largest photos, as if to say, "try to objectify me." The three smaller photos show her as free-spirited. The photos demonstrate that women athletes can be considered beautiful, strong, assertive, powerful, and talented athletes all at the same time, embracing qualities considered socially masculine and feminine. Rapinoe's ability to combine her athleticism along with choosing how she presents herself in mass media images aligns with a social and activist approach promoted by Baumgardner and Richards (2000).

PUTTING COVERAGE IN CONTEXT: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM

One primary aspect of standpoint theory is the “recognition of privilege and marginalization due to identities; and hegemonic practices” (Waldron, 2019, p. 17). In discussing hegemonic masculinity, Hargreaves and MacDonald (2000) suggest that hegemony encompasses the experiences and difficulties of marginalized individuals due to the power held by the dominant group. As the dominant group puts into the world notions that marginalization is the proper and commonplace thing to do, it becomes accepted practice. As that seeps into society, marginalized groups, though perhaps not intending to give consent, do so without any protest toward these societal norms and practices.

Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) is derived from Gramsci's (1971) work on hegemony. Ideas regarding the use of gender in academic research to explain men's power and domination over women, how attitudes and often daily practices have and continue to foster gender inequities, have been present for many years (Hearn, 2012). As noted by Jewkes and Morrell (2012), hegemonic masculinity is described as follows:

A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features, a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (p. 40)

Hegemonic masculinity applied to the sports world affords men privileges and lessens those of women, particularly women with multiple identities. Sports has remained a masculine domain, and sports privileges often are promoted to and by males who are exhibiting typically masculine qualities of aggression, physicality, and toughness (Connell, 1987; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; MacDonald, 2014).

Connecting this to the idea of cultural studies standpoint theory and to what has become known as third-wave feminism, Lovell (2000) noted that traditional feminine ideals of beauty and gracefulness have continued to permeate societal values and norms. The work of Bourdieu (1985, 1986) provides a background when discussing hegemonic masculinity and feminism. Capital was one of the primary key concepts upon which Bourdieu focused. This referred to the differing aspects of power held by social agents and was a focus of social space. Capital referred to power, wealth,

and social consciousness. Bourdieu noted women were not capital-accumulating subjects; rather, their importance lay in their relation to other social agents, such as their family or husband, thus a connection to power over women as lesser.

Feminist scholars (Adkins, 2000; Lawler, 2000; Skeggs, 1997) note that some women do embody capital-accumulating actions through a commitment to physical prowess and risk-taking. As discussed in a review of women snowboarders, Thorpe (2009) suggested that the snowboarders acquired both symbolic and cultural capital from the strength of their commitment to this physical sport, as well as their powerful abilities. The physicality of snowboarding may be part of the conversation as related to acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital with the intensity of the terrain and difficulty of the maneuvers. In 2001, Bourdieu pointed out that women experienced a “double bind” as they [women] attempted to access power. Further, he noted behavior “came into question. If women were to behave like men, they would risk losing their femininity as they attempted to move into the power structure of the male world” (p. 67). It is this femininity issue that is further explored through societal expectations and third-wave feminism propositions and applied to Rapinoe.

Harris (2004) and Adkins (2000) suggest feminism has a popular and current presence in society, including media and current popular culture. Harris commented on the notion of an essential issue for women with regard to femininity: being the “perfect woman.” What are the consequences of this perfection for girls and women? The popularity of social media enforces a new type of visibility previously not present. Girls and women can be subjected to public scrutiny on all forms of social media. How does this, if at all, influence or affect girls’ and women’s view of their bodies? Are they compelled to become the societal ideal of the perfectly formed women? How is the feminine ideal as well as the third-wave of feminism part of how Megan Rapinoe identifies herself, how she wishes to be featured, and how she is featured in mass media?

The notion of third-wave feminism (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003) was presented as both social and activist. Growing out of second-wave feminism, a third-wave lens challenges the second-wave interpretations and representations of either being pretty or powerful. Heywood and Drake (1997) note the ideal image might include male femininity as well as female masculinity, moving away from the typical, traditional heterosexual objectification and

presentation of women. This third-wave view proposes women are no longer tied to the binary societal view of either being the athlete or the female.

Women athletes can tell their own story and write their own endings. Garrison (2010) suggests two rules apply to this way of thinking. The first rule suggests women will now present their own sporting truth and be able to communicate this as a result of changes in the way societies communicate. This shift includes social media, which has altered the ways sports media are both presented and consumed. The second rule promotes the value of a girl's or woman's body in her sporting experiences at the forefront, rather than her appearance only. Physical competence and femininity can thus be combined into a complete whole (Mumford, 2004).

Where and how does Megan Rapinoe fit into these notions? Are we in the twenty-first century, still promoting the beauty over power myth? Certainly, Rapinoe speaks her own truth and adheres to her own voice in how she has chosen to present herself in the media. She clearly has embodied a third-wave approach.

RAPINOE: PURPLE-HAIRED LESBIAN GODDESS

Lesbians and gay men long have participated in sports; however, recognition of their sexuality only has occurred in recent decades. That recognition has often led to negative consequences and marginalization. Some recent challenges to these societal responses have occurred; Mann and Krane (2019) note that in 2013, WNBA player Brittney Griner signed an endorsement deal with Nike, becoming the first openly gay or lesbian player to do so. Despite Griner's athletic success, women in sports who are perceived to be masculine are quite often still stereotyped and disenfranchised. Griner has never received the type of admiring media coverage that her male counterparts in the NBA received.

Women in sports, like many women in society, are expected to uphold socially constructed feminine appearances and behaviors. Women athletes who display strength, competitiveness, and assertiveness in their sport are assumed to be masculine, thereby causing the assumption that these high-performing women athletes must be anything but heterosexual (Cunningham et al., 2008; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). This often leads

to these women athletes feeling the need to promote their traditional femininity, by dressing in a feminine manner and wearing makeup in order to demonstrate they can be both pretty and powerful. A commercial by CoverGirl in 2018, featured athlete Massy Arias asking, “What—you don’t wear makeup to work?” The message being sent was yes, women athletes can wear makeup, and in order to present themselves as feminine and strong, wearing makeup was as much an expectation as a choice. Heterosexuality is associated with so-called feminine sports. Interestingly, commentators often provide narratives that emphasize this aspect for women, while stressing the power of that sport for men (Bissell & Parrott, 2013; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994).

Meanwhile, women athletes in team sports featuring a greater degree of physicality, like basketball, softball, and soccer, are under scrutiny for their sexuality if they do not conform to Western feminine beauty standards (which include being slim, having long hair, and wearing makeup). The hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity of sports assumes heteronormativity—that men athletes could not possibly be gay, since homosexuality is assumed to be contradictory to power, strength, teamwork, and aggression in athleticism. Also, women athletes who do not present themselves in feminine ways may face presumptions they are lesbians (Mann & Krane, 2019). While facts and logic demonstrate these stereotypes are untrue, media presentations and coverage continue to perpetuate these ideas even while society is becoming more aware and more accepting of sexual differences and sexuality differences. Mann and Krane argue that these assumptions should be challenged if diversity in sports is ever to be accepted.

These authors examine the social and cultural climate surrounding hegemonic masculinity and its positioning of lesbians in sports under a queer feminist frame. The very traits that make a successful athlete—strength, perseverance, aggression, and dominance—are highly valued in sports. However, when a women athlete exhibits these characteristics, she is assumed to be gay, a phenomenon the authors call “the myth of the lesbian athlete” (p. 71). This myth serves to negatively affect all female athletes because it marginalizes those who are gender non-conforming and forces others to eschew any appearance of queerness.

Some women athletes have portrayed themselves in hyper-feminine ways in order to avoid being stereotyped as masculine, including posing for sexy magazine spreads and by emphasizing their heterosexual relationships (Klasovec, 1995; Mann & Krane, 2019; Villalon & Weiller-Abels,

2018). Women athletes who present themselves as attractive to men with feminine hairstyles, makeup, and skimpy clothing often have gained more attention and approval than athletes who perform well on the field and court (Cunningham et al., 2008; Dutot, 2000). An example is tennis star Anna Kournikova, who received a plethora of media coverage in the late 1990s and early 2000s and became a celebrity, although she never won a solo major tournament. Media coverage focused on her femininity and beauty rather than her skills.

Women who have come out of the closet, voluntarily or involuntarily, have suffered from discrimination. For instance, when tennis great Billie Jean King was publicly outed in 1981 by a former assistant with whom she had an affair, she lost all her commercial endorsements, which she depended upon for income (Mann & Krane, 2019). Tennis champion Martina Navratilova also came out in 1981 and recalled that the more feminine-looking player Chris Evert received dozens of endorsements over her. "It was the kiss of death. Advertisers wouldn't touch me with a 10-foot pole," she said (Gessen, 2019, para. 8).

Mann and Krane (2019) argue that hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity in sports currently are being challenged. Some teams, coaches, and athletes have become more accepting of athletes' diversity of sexualities than in the past, although the acceptance mostly is focused on white, middle-class, Western women rather than women athletes of color or those from less dominant nations. The authors note that lesbian athletes have been more willing to come out when previous members' teams were also out and accepted, indicating that they will be supported and welcome. "When queer athletes feel safe and comfortable in their team environments, they may be more likely to be themselves revealing subtle indications of their sexual orientation" (Mann & Krane, 2019, p. 79). The more athletes who come out, who are visible to the public, and who are accepted for who they are, the more queerness in sports becomes normalized.

In Rapinoe's case, U.S. Soccer teammates previous to her had come out as lesbian with acceptance, including Olympic gold medalist Abby Wambach. In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right for same-sex people to marry, leading to more tolerance and less stigma for LGBTQ+ people. Women's soccer has been particularly hospitable to those who are queer and gender non-conforming; the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup featured 40 out athletes, including 38 players, a coach, and a trainer (Villarreal, 2019). Two U.S. players, Ashlyn Harris and Ali Krieger, were

engaged to each other during the championship (and married in December 2019). All these events contributed to the acknowledgment and approval of LGBTQ+ women, although a majority of the athletes were white and from the USA, Canada, European countries, Australia, and New Zealand. However, some progress can be noted. Eight of the forty were women of color, five of the eight from South American nations.

As an out lesbian, Rapinoe also continued to get endorsements and make appearances, contravening the lesbian myth that has marginalized prior women athletes, particularly. She embraced her sexuality, her beauty, her athleticism, her outspokenness, and her politics, and remained iconic. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for men athletes, who largely remain in the closet. Rapinoe opined why no major male stars have come out while playing and how being LGBTQ+ is still a stigma for men.

I think homophobia in sports accounts for that, but it's also more than homophobic culture. Life-changing, generational wealth is at stake for these guys. I think they are scared to death to lose that ... But obviously there must be so many gay male athletes, and it's probably an open secret with them. (Marchese, p. 13)

In fact, Rapinoe was heralded on social media and in several sports media under the hashtag “PurpleHairedLesbianGoddess,” a phrase that upholds the promise of third-wave feminism: a woman who can embody beauty, queerness, athletic prowess, and championship.

TAKING A KNEE FOR BLACK LIVES MATTER

Sports fans often insist that politics have no place in sports, but the truth is that sports have always been political. As sports journalist Dave Zirin points out in the film *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics, & American Sports*, both professional and amateur athletes and teams have confronted issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia (Jhally, 2010). Teams also have glorified the military and war, adopted debatable mascots, and blatantly embraced capitalism and commercialization of politics in attempts to market themselves (Jhally, 2010; Newman & Giardina, 2010). Athletes such as Jack Johnson, Muhammed Ali, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, and Billie Jean King have spoken out about some of the most controversial political issues facing the nation.

Activists in sports have faced resistance and criticism when trying to draw attention to injustices. One of the most famous in recent years is Colin Kaepernick, the NFL quarterback who began kneeling during the playing of the national anthem before games to protest the unjustified killing of Black people in the USA. He ended up being forced out of the league and labeled “too controversial.” Others who joined him in protest also faced criticism, harassment, and fines. In 2016, three WNBA teams were fined \$5000 each and their players were fined \$500 for wearing warm-up shirts that protested the killing of Black people. The fines later were rescinded amid public outcry (Eilerson, 2016). Rapinoe also began kneeling during the anthem in 2016 in support of Kaepernick and the movement he embraced.

Global events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games have long attracted political activism. When Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists while receiving the 1968 Mexico City Olympic gold and bronze medals in the 200-meter track event, they were protesting racial inequality. But such protests were not well-received by the public. Smith and Carlos were stripped of their medals and ostracized by the sports community. Kaepernick ended up being shunned by NFL teams. Grix (2013) argues that global events such as the Olympic Games are inherently political, designed to promote the image of and showcase nations where they are centered. Grix notes that the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin served as propaganda for the Nazi regime, and China used its hosting of the 2008 Beijing Games to improve its image. Commercialization through corporate endorsements and sponsorships also adds a political aspect to these large sporting events, including the FIFA World Cup.

Placed on this world stage, Rapinoe's political activism, unlike Kaepernick's, earned her celebrity status. As *Sports Illustrated* pointed out in its issue naming her “Sportsperson of the Year,”

for Kaepernick, kneeling during the national anthem meant, seemingly, the end of his career. For Rapinoe, it was a rebirth of hers, eventually. And she wrestles with those outcomes. Not that she ever could have guessed how things would play out. (Vrentas, 2019, p. 48)

Rapinoe's team and fans embraced her activism during a time when the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements, as well as gender discrimination in sports were highlighted in news and sports media. Rapinoe's

message of social change and her strong voice withstood the criticism she received, including hate mail (Vrentas, 2019).

Rapinoe, as a lead plaintiff, in 2019 joined a class-action lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation, claiming unequal pay and working conditions. She also speaks up about LGBTQ+ rights and the desire to be oneself. Rapinoe is not afraid to be political. In an interview with *The New York Times Magazine*, she said she disagrees with people who think sports and politics should not mix.

I don't understand that argument at all. You want us to be role models for your kids. You want us to endorse your products. You parade us around. It's like, we're not just here to sit in the glass case for you to look at. That's not how this is going to go. (Marchese, 2019, p. 12)

One obvious reason for the different public reactions to Kaepernick and Rapinoe is their race; a white woman in U.S. society has more structural power than a Black man. Rapinoe has “acknowledged the role white privilege played in her being feted as an outspoken World Cup champion while he [Kaepernick] remains unemployed” (Vrentas, 2019, p. 50).

Women's sports also have been more accepting of political activism than men's; in fact, women in sports inherently are political, given the barriers they had to break and those they continue to face. One hundred years ago, women were thought to be too dainty and delicate to play sports and largely were excluded from them. In the 1940s and 1950s, women did play professional baseball in the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL); however, they were forced to adhere to the ladylike expectations of the time with the uniform of a skirt and an expectation of wearing makeup and being perceived as feminine both on and off the field (Weiller & Higgs, 1994). It took Title IX in 1972 to give women at least an equal opportunity to play.

Even though women have the law behind them, women's sports are still struggling to achieve the status of men's sports, on many levels. Rapinoe has taken a lead in fighting for equality for a women's national soccer team that is exponentially more successful and winning than the men's, yet the players receive lower pay and winnings than the men. In an interview about the class-action lawsuit in which she is a lead plaintiff, Rapinoe noted, “The national team is wildly popular, making tons of money, growing exponentially, so do you have an idea other than sexism

as to why people aren't investing in women's sports in a huge way right now?" (Marchese, 2019, p. 13).

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE BETTER

In this analysis of Megan Rapinoe's celebrity activism, we have applied the feminist standpoint theory of cultural studies as well as queer theory. These theories highlight hegemonic practices that have and continue to exist in the sport world, particularly in soccer. Rapinoe has consistently fought for her beliefs in equality for all, including her legal battle for equal pay for her team, her support for Black Lives Matter, and her openness about her sexuality, all while displaying her extraordinary athletic ability. Rapinoe's activism contests privileged, heteronormative structures of society and sports in her attainment and maintenance of her celebrity status. As an athlete and activist, she is in a league of her own. She has defied stereotypes, rebuffed the status quo, and excelled both in her sports career and as an influencer activist. She exemplifies the tenets of cultural feminist theory and queer theory. She navigates these intersectional identities with a no-nonsense approach.

Consistent with third-wave feminism, Rapinoe has walked the line between presenting herself as both feminine and masculine—something few other athletes have been able to accomplish. Many women athletes feel pressure to present themselves as hyper-feminine to be accepted by the public (Davis, 1997; Frisby, 2017; Lovell, 2000), yet Rapinoe has been embraced as both a model for the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition and as a "purple-haired lesbian goddess." She has been accepted by fans as a strong, talented, beautiful, assertive woman who does not hide who she is. No athlete before her has been able to display such strong activism combined with subversion of cultural norms.

Celebrity status is not limited to only adults. It should not be underestimated the influence Rapinoe has on young fans, as well. Boon and Lomore (2001) argue that young people's identity formation can be strongly influenced by celebrity idols. They explain that a strong respect for a celebrity idol can shape life choices and even influence a sense of "self-worth" (Boon & Lomore, 2001, p. 457). Rapinoe has and continues to use her platform to highlight issues beyond the soccer field; she is emerging as a refreshing and important voice on LGBTQ+, racial equality, and women's rights issues and how they affect future generations of young leaders.

Why has Rapinoe been able to break these barriers? We speculate one reason is that the absurdity of a winning team (women's) being paid less than a losing team (men's) is easy for sports fans to comprehend and embrace. When Rapinoe points out these inequities and receives responses like the one from the U.S. Soccer Federation president, who said that women have "lesser responsibilities and physical abilities" than male players (Associated Press, 2020), fans can easily spot the hypocrisy. In addition, unlike men's sports, women's soccer embraced her sexuality and LGBTQ+ players. In men's sports, athletes still are encouraged to stay in the closet, at least until they are no longer playing on a team.

Also, unlike Colin Kaepernick, whom she supported in kneeling for Black Lives Matter, her outspokenness drew admiration, not disdain. Part of this is attributable to her white privilege, which she has acknowledged (Vrentas, 2019). However, more than this, she spoke up to support relevant social movements at a time when they were part of the national discourse, thus elevating her profile beyond her exceptional athletic abilities. Throughout, Rapinoe ignored her critics, sticking to her positions on issues that disrupted the traditional marginalization of women athletes, thereby gaining public admiration and support beyond sports fans.

Future research should continue to explore the path set out by Rapinoe, including athlete celebrity activism in other sports. Though this chapter takes a feminist approach, further research can examine athlete celebrity influence in terms of audience appraisal, fandom studies, and marketing persuasion. Future research also should examine the role of athletes taking political stances on social justice and other issues.

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FIFA's Feminist Foot Soldiers: Looking for Equality in the Women's Game Approaching the 2023 World Cup in Australia and Aotearoa

Hillary J. Haldane

There is a scene in Abderrahman Sissako's gorgeously haunting 2014 film "Timbuktu" in which the village children are on a dusty field, wanting to play football. The extremists who have taken over the Malian village have imposed their interpretation of Sharia, which includes the removal of all activities and entertainment, including sports equipment. Undeterred, boys and young men take to the field and play a beautifully orchestrated match, with corner kicks, goals, celebrations, and fouls, without any ball in sight. The sheer power of the simulacrum of football is evident in the joy and elation on the faces of the players. Yet it is more than the ball that is missing from the scene described above. There are no girls or women in the game.

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“EQUALITY OF WHAT?”

The Nobel Prize-winning economist, Amartya Sen, famously asked the question: “equality of what?” (Sen, 1980). His basic point is you cannot make everything equal, though we profess aspirations for some nominal degree of such in everything from pay, to access, to health, and for this particular chapter, gender and to a related degree, race. It is a seemingly obvious point that relatively few people agitate for inequality (certain noxious political trends in the US and elsewhere notwithstanding). But, as Sen demonstrates, any form of “equality” is generative of, or at least accommodates, other forms of “inequality” (Crawford, 2003; Gudeman, 2016; Mullings, 2005; Tilly, 2007). The most egalitarian societies have some elements of inequality, even if they have managed to eliminate forms of inequality that plague others: class, gender, opportunity. If the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (hereafter FIFA) is pursuing “equality” for the women’s game, and the women themselves are pushing for this, what equalities are they hoping to achieve, and what inequalities may this produce as a byproduct?

Fans, players, and shareholders alike accept many inequalities in sports. Various inequalities are tolerated in the world of football itself. La Liga accepts the fact that the entire budget of the Eiche CF squad is roughly equivalent to Lionel Messi’s salary. We accept inequality of resources between clubs, and even between countries. No one is demanding FIFA institute an “everyone wins, no one loses” result in the game. We expect inequality in outcome. At the same time, we do expect equality within a match. We expect fouls to be called fairly, that both teams play by the same rules, and that the match officials treat the players the same. In order to “be better” in the game, then, what inputs of equality are we asking for, and what outputs of inequality will be acceptable? In this chapter, I explore this notion of equality as it relates to the women’s game by first examining the structure and practice of FIFA, the problems and improvements from the 2015 to the 2019 tournament, and using the host countries of Australia and Aotearoa as context for asking what FIFA will deliver to “be better” for the women’s game. The generic cry for equality, while morally desirable, is often ill-defined and impossible to implement. As we head toward the 2023 tournament and beyond, it is critical to identify what forms of equality are possible, and which forms of inequality we are willing to live with.

EQUALITY FOR WHOM?

FIFA has the mission “develop the game, touch the world, build a better future.” FIFA manages to promote this mission, ironically, as they accept sponsors from some of the most rapacious corporations in the world: Coca-Cola, Visa, Qatar Airways. These are companies that contribute to and compound numerous health inequities, generate debt, and fly the bourgeoisie to far-flung places for further exploitation and expropriation. Therefore, they are certainly “touching” the world in ways that benefit some and harm others, and it is clear the vision for a “better future” requires significant work. FIFA inaugurated a World Cup for women’s teams in 1991, though there had been tournaments held for women’s football prior, starting in 1970 in Italy, with games in Central America, Asia, and Europe before the 1991 official FIFA event in China. Since that event, the countries of the USA (four wins), Germany (two wins), Norway (one win), and Japan (one win) have been champions over the eight tournaments. The first official FIFA tournament for men was held in 1930, so it only took sixty-one years for them to develop one for women.

There are a number of other glaring inequities, many of which have been described in detail in this book, but one notable difference is the number of teams involved in the men’s and women’s tournaments. The first women’s tournament had twelve teams, one fewer than the number of teams at the first men’s tournament in 1930. By 2019, the field had doubled to twenty-four teams for women, whereas the men’s last tournament in 2018 had thirty-two. FIFA is planning a thirty-two team tournament for women with the 2023 World Cup in Australia and Aotearoa, but the 2026 World Cup to be held across North America is planned with forty-eight. It seems women can never fully catch up.

FIFA supports over 200 associations and six confederations, organized around continental locations. The confederations differ in the number of member associations, and therefore how many slots they receive at each FIFA sponsored event. The upcoming WWC in 2023 is unique in that it is the first senior tournament shared by two different confederations, Oceania Football Confederation (Aotearoa) and Asian Football Confederation (Australia). The senior and junior tournaments for both men and women have a few things in common. They all are nation-state tournaments instead of city tournaments, therefore matches are played at more than one venue in the host country. FIFA also sponsors the same awards for all the tournaments: Golden Ball, Golden Boot, Golden Glove, and Fair Play Award.

In addition to the tournaments held for the youth and senior teams for both boys/men and girls/women, FIFA has maintained their award for the Best FIFA Women's Player since 2001, and while not currently a FIFA award, the French Football Federation has established a women's Ballon d'Or for the best women's players in the world. The first two awardees for the Ballon d'Or are Ada Hegerberg in 2018 and Megan Rapinoe in 2019. Many will never forget the way Ada was treated when she received her award. French DJ Martin Solveig, participating in the event, asked Hegerberg if she could twerk when she arrived on the stage to accept her award. She stated afterwards that she didn't consider the question to be harassment, but the reaction by many journalists was that this was yet another example of a double and sexist standard in sports, and marred what should have been the celebration of the first Ballon d'Or for women players. This award was given to Hegerberg after she had already quit participation with the Norwegian national team, claiming it was an unhealthy environment and she would refrain from participating with the association until improvements were implemented. Thus, the world's best women's football player at the time missed the 2019 tournament due to subpar support, sexist standards, and an unequal playing environment FIFA had no interest in asking the association to clean up. It is hard to imagine if a winner of either the best FIFA player or Ballon d'Or for men had made a decision to quit their national team due to the unequal standards and general lack of care for the players, there wouldn't be an outcry and a corrective.

FIFA, like all revenue-generating entities in our contemporary system, has various inequalities baked in. It is hardly the only sporting body that supports competition that maintains rules where every player carries the same passport (country) and others where it is a global mix (club). But the point is, it is seeking to "nestle" everywhere—FIFA has to expand the countries where the game is played, it has to secure an endless pipeline of players for these countries teams, and it has to ensure that each country has a viable club system that maintains a local productive chain for a global product. It has to find the raw materials to manufacture the product, and it must ensure a consumer base for the consumption of the product. There is a (men's) club system on every continent on the planet, with the exception of Antarctica. The game is an elite club of truly "global" products, which include MacDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Cristiano Ronaldo, a star of the Portuguese national team and current Juventus player, and the most followed individual on Instagram. Football is the global product, and its players are the global commodity. But not all players are as famous or as

well compensated as Ronaldo. Not many men footballers come close to Ronaldo's financial fortunes, and women players are nowhere close to this level of remuneration nor global fame, though one form of equality across all players is that they are fair game as a revenue-generating machine for FIFA.

Companies, and their advertisers, pay for the privilege of using relatively young bodies as billboards. This is most obviously the case with club teams, where "sponsors" are prominently displayed on the front of a team's jersey, but the secondary and tertiary sponsors are also given space throughout the kit—included on the sleeves, the yoke, on the socks, and even across the buttocks. The player's choice of boot is also a 90-minute free commercial. While most of the men's top-tier, second-tier, and third-tier players are given their boots, only a handful of women's teams and individual players have that level of sponsorship. Therefore, women are paying a company to provide them with free advertising. Even country kits, which do not have an evident "sponsor" emblazoned across the bosom or buttocks, have their sportswear maker prominently displayed, some of the most popular being Nike, Adidas, Puma, and Umbro. In many cases, these sponsorship dollars and brand-related giveaways are money in the pocket of the association. The association is not the same as money directly given to the women's program, or to the women's senior team. If anything has been made clear through the US Women's National Team's (USWNT) lawsuit against their own federation, as well as the discovery of the egregious discrepancy in pay between Jill Ellis, the two-time World Cup-winning coach of the women's side, and her male counterparts (including the coach who managed to not get the team into the men's 2018 World Cup), is that there is money. The money doesn't go to the winners or the women (and with USWNT, this is one and the same).

In striving for some semblance of broader representation, leading up to final qualifiers for the 2019 cup FIFA highlighted a number of "feel good" stories that exposed perverse inequities: stories about entire teams benefiting from schoolgirls' donated cleats (seriously, a national women's team having to outfit themselves from US preteen girls' leftover boots); teams that made it into the tournament were raising funds by selling chickens and T-shirts, and waiting for individual rich women to step in and support them (Cedella Marley in the case of Jamaica, Nualphan Lamsam in the case of Thailand). And while the situation for the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) seems to be much better than most other senior national teams, the fact that they are in a protracted legal battle against

US Soccer Federation for equitable pay demonstrates how even those with all the trophies and stars are still prevented from eating from FIFA's trough. It is stated on various pages related to FIFA associated teams, how the women's game suffers from the lack of financial support. And yet, these financially strapped countries manage a senior men's team in every single case. While all of these are examples of the lack of financial support for women's teams and sports more generally, FIFA did strive to correct some of the mistakes from the 2015 tournament and demonstrate improvement with the 2019 event in France.

After the fallout over the discrepancies in support for the women's tournament in 2015, and in the lead-up to the 2019 tournament in France, a couple of associations had stepped up their support for their women's program. Finland had announced in 2019 it will pay its men's and women's teams equally; Aotearoa, one of the 2023 hosts, announced in 2018 that men's and women's senior national team players will earn the same pay, along with equal standards of travel, room and board, and training support. In September, Brazil announced that its senior women's team would receive the equal daily rate to the senior men, though this is hardly the same thing as overall equal pay. Also in September, Sierra Leone became the first national association in the Confederation of African Football (CAF) to promise equal pay for its senior men and women's team. While Australia has made a deal with the Matildas to give them an increased share of the FIFA tournament prize money, provide better support for training and resources, as well as parental leave, the overall gap in rewards remains because FIFA does not support the senior men's and women's tournaments equally. This gap at the top maintains, and in many cases exacerbates, the inequality found at the pitch level.

The 2019 tournament operated under the ideal of equal opportunity: grass pitches replaced the artificial turf from the 2015 tournament; professionally dressed Emirates flight attendants were substituted for the model-thin and mostly white women in little black dresses normally deployed by FIFA to carry out the hardware at the awards ceremony; and the inclusion of video-assisted referee, or VAR, which had already been adopted into the men's game: signs that all things are equal. The 2019 WWC was an opportunity for women's football to be accepted as *football* on the world's stage. The players themselves, across the 24 teams that participated in the tournament, argued for opportunity, for better conditions, and to be accepted for who they are (as women, as lesbians, as Black and Brown, as mothers, as athletes). The women players are a key node for this growth, and they

circulate feminist arguments as part of the logic—"women deserve" "women work just as hard" "we play the same game, we deserve equal pay"—that are critical for individual rights and certainly for deserved benefits, but ultimately sustain a system that ensures there will always be winners and losers.

What should FIFA do differently as we shift our focus to the upcoming tournament in 2023? More critically, what are our expectations for this tournament and thereafter? There is a lot of promise and potential with the next women's World Cup. As aforementioned, it will be the first one to be shared by two confederations (Asia and Oceania). If successful, then this could be a blueprint for other collaborative efforts (e.g., Spain and Morocco, members of Union of European Football Associations, or UEFA, and CAF, respectively) and help to bring more attention to the women's game in Asia and throughout the Pacific. As aforementioned, some of the things that FIFA did in 2019 to recover from the mess they made in Canada in 2015 was the use of real grass, the same referee standards for the men's and women's tournaments (you may hate VAR, but you should have the opportunity to hate it equally), and maintained the same prize categories for individual awardees.

These examples of FIFA doing a few things right are not to absolve FIFA of all the things it does wrong: its excesses, abuse, or outright criminality. They are an entity deserving of our opprobrium and disgust. White-collar criminals like FIFA pay fines, not spend time behind bars. They flout the rules that they themselves make, and then when caught breaking their own rules, they pay for the privilege of maintaining the façade of operating a clean, just, and fair organization. As Jon Greenaway, writing for JSTOR Daily in 2015, stated:

It is not an easy time to be a football ("football") fan and it hasn't been for quite a while. The world governing body, the ostentatiously named Fédération Internationale de Football Association, (FIFA) has proven itself almost comically corrupt with a startlingly serious predilection for major bribery only usually found within high-level organised crime gangs.

FIFA is a deeply unlikeable, contemptible, and infuriating non-profit organization, but profits must be made in order to be sustainable and to invest money in the development and reach of the game. The vast majority of their revenues come from licensing, television contracts, and marketing. FIFA has to simultaneously respond to consumer demands (which matches

are the most lucrative to broadcast) while also hoping to generate consumer interest (will broadcasting particular women's matches bring new customers in?). This is a situation every confederation, association, and local team is faced with, and while it is easy, and often desirable, to blame FIFA for the glaring inequalities in the game, the broader political economy is one where all these forms of equality and inequality play out, even in the two 2023 host countries that are often regarded as some of the more gender "equal" societies in the world.

EQUALITY OF WHERE?

Australia and Aotearoa, with their AsOne2023 bid, landed the hosting rights for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup on 25 June 2020, in the middle of the deadliest pandemic the world had experienced in one hundred years. The awarding of the tournament has forms of inequality attached—FIFA must be presented with bids from each nation, their infrastructure of facilities, transportation, lodging, and site desirability are all factors the bid nations must compete over—resources of the nation-state are factored in, another unequal playing field many football fans and players themselves accept. Colombia was the nation that had the best chance to compete against AsOne2023 and is a "better" football nation in many respects. Football IS the national sport in the country, with baseball being a distant second. If the goal is growing the game, then South America is a natural Petri dish. It is the largest and most followed sport on the continent, but the discrepancies between the women's and men's game across all countries in South America is glaring. Arguably, Colombia may have been a better site to achieve some of the goals FIFA claims it wants to achieve: Australia and Aotearoa already have some of the best conditions for women's footballers in the world. And it is unlikely that football will ever take over the top sport slot of either nation. Women already have considerable rights in the '23 host countries, whereas Colombian women, and South American women's teams generally, could greatly benefit from the boost a FIFA senior tournament can provide.

It is understandable that FIFA would want the AsOne2023 bid to win: Australia and Aotearoa are models of the new, more "equitable" investment strategies made in women's football. These are also countries where there are longstanding cultural and legal traditions of white women's equality as far as education, political engagement, and business opportunities. They are also countries that have remarkable success in the world of

sport. Both countries, with their relatively small populations (Australia is 25 million, Aotearoa is 5 million), have significant hardware per capita, with Australia ranking 5th and Aotearoa at 39th on the Global Sporting Index. This is particularly impressive for Aotearoa given that many times the country doesn't even appear on a world map. Australia has held a surprising number of world cups and events, including the Olympics in 1956 and 2000. It appears the country is in a constant state of bidding for, and hosting, various international sporting events, at a rate astonishing for a country with such a small population. And this isn't even factoring in the numerous surfing, sailing, swimming, tennis, and myriad other sports that have tournaments and competitions held in Australia on an annual basis. While Aotearoa has not attained the same overall level of success as Australia, or the experience hosting as many international events, they are widely recognized as a sporting nation with an international reach. Their athletes do exceptionally well in water events, and are often viewed as "punching above their weight" when it comes to their sporting achievements given the small population of the country. The sports where Aotearoa has consistent success on the world stage in addition to sailing-related sports like the America's Cup are cricket, netball, and rugby. The 2021 women's rugby World Cup will be held in Aotearoa, and the third major international rugby tournament held in the country. The only other significant international tournament Aotearoa has hosted is the cricket World Cup, held four times between the men and women's tournaments. While the country has never hosted an Olympics, they have hosted two prior youth FIFA tournaments, in 2015 and 2019.

Sporting culture in Aotearoa and Australia has been friendly to white women, more than many countries around the world, and fairly early on in the modern era. In Australia, women's sporting activity was built into school curricula in the late nineteenth century, and quickly expanded beyond sports like tennis, bicycling, and lawn bowling to athletics, rowing, and cricket. Arguably, Australia was one of the best places for white women's sports by the middle of the twentieth century. Like Australia, Aotearoa has an active sporting culture and women have been participating in sporting events and competition for nearly a century. While not as progressive as Australia, by the 1950s, Aotearoa had increased the number of organizations that allowed for women's participation in sporting events. The first woman from Aotearoa to participate in the Olympics was in the 1920 games in Antwerp, Belgium, and since that time have been a part of the country's delegation to every Olympics where Aotearoa has competed.

Women's football in Aotearoa, similar to the sports trajectory in Australia, was a relatively late sport for women in the country to play. The first organized teams were started after the First World War, but declined by 1921. Started in the early 1970s, after a nearly fifty year gap in organized play for women in the sport, there was a renewed interest in the sport, and teams formed in Wellington and Auckland, with an annual tournament played since 1976. The national team was officially formed in 1975. It is in the sporting world where you now see significant efforts toward gender parity and greater access to opportunity in both countries, though this is where Aotearoa eclipses its co-host. The most recent step in this direction was in December 2020 when Sport NZ, the official body for all sporting activities in the country, announced a set of public-private partnerships to ensure fairness and inclusivity in sport for all members of society.

While neither nation is seen as a football powerhouse, both Australia and Aotearoa's senior women's teams are well regarded by their competition. Australia's national women's team is the Westfield Matildas, named after a shopping mall and either an object you swing onto your back as you go on a walkabout, a battle-hardened maiden, or a sleeping partner. Take your pick. While the men's team, the Socceroos, has only qualified for five World Cups, The Matildas, formed in 1978, have played in the last seven FIFA Women's World Cups, and have steadily risen in rankings, sitting in the FIFA table at number seven, wedged between England and Brazil. They have ranked as high as number four, prior to the last WWC in 2019. Aotearoa's national women's team, the Football Ferns, also does better than its men's senior team in international football competition. The Ferns qualified for the first women's World Cup in China in 1991, but then didn't make it again until 2007, when they have made an appearance at every one since. The men's team, the All Whites, has only qualified for two. The Ferns are currently ranked 22nd in the world, and have automatically qualified for the 2023 tournament since they are a host nation.

As aforementioned, Aotearoa made the pledge for pay equity between their senior men's and women's teams in 2018, Australia has not made this commitment. There have been some efforts toward the goal of pay parity in Australian football by 2030, with a push by FIFA. In the spring of 2020, the Football Federation Australia (FFA) announced that its men's and women's club leagues would have the same starting date, and that the minimum pay for each league would be identical. This doesn't translate into equal overall pay for men and women as the men's league has more matches played in the schedule, but FFA committed to spend equivalent

amounts on the marketing for each match. In reality, the women's league is still semi-professional: women players still maintain second jobs or other professions to make a living. Sam Kerr, the current star of the Matildas, is the highest-paid Australian woman in the world, and she makes roughly \$600,000 US a year. Playing in England. The vast majority of the women's players on the national team will earn around \$57,000 US in 2020 as part of the new contract with FFA, which is slightly higher than the minimum living wage in the country.

Pay equity between men and women is the primary form of equality that players, fans, and some federations are privileging at the moment, and an area where the host countries are performing better than many societies around the world, other inequalities mar the host countries' histories as well as are manifest in their contemporary societies. Like Canada and the United States, Aotearoa and Australia operate within a similar framework of having built a societal structure with white men as the citizens who have agency, and over the last forty years increased the opportunities first for white women, then for the Indigenous and other minoritized members of the population. Australia and Aotearoa each had one Indigenous player on their squad for the 2019 tournament, the US and Canada had none.

EQUALITY FOR SOME

White women generally have had significant rights in both Australia and Aotearoa. In Australia, white women's suffrage was complete by 1908, married women could own property as early as 1882, and white women could gain entry into universities in Australia by the 1880s. At the federal level, white women could both vote and run for office in 1902, so the country has generally had some recognition of gender equity for over a hundred years. This has not been the case for non-white women, and most certainly not for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women or people generally in the country. Aboriginal Australians did not gain full legal status until the passage of the 1967 referendum, and the various state and territory governments were still removing children from Aboriginal homes until 1975, in a practice that is known as "The Stolen Generation." Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not receive land recognition until 1992, with what is known as the Mabo decision, which overturned the foundational myth of *terra nullius*, or empty and uninhabited land, that was used by the British Crown to justify the colonization and resulting genocide of Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous

peoples of Australia received an apology for this policy and for the practices that led to The Stolen Generation in 2008, 220 years after the arrival of The First Fleet in 1788, the year that is marked as the formal colonization of the continent.

Aotearoa has long regarded itself as a progressive country when it comes to women's rights and equality. It was the first country with the franchise for women in 1893, and the current 2020 elections brought the total number of women in the parliament up to 48% of the membership. They have also had three women prime ministers: Jenny Shipley of the National Party, and Helen Clark and the current prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, from Labour. The diversity of women and other members of parliament in the current government is unparalleled in other settler societies: ten percent of the members identify as LGBTQ+, seven Pasifika members, the largest number ever, and sixteen MPs are Māori. Politics experts claim this is the most representative parliament in the world (at the time of writing, in late 2020) with more Asian members than ever before and the first MP of African origin including in the next legislative session.

While Australia didn't recognize Indigenous peoples in their federal census until 1967, The British Crown and over 500 Māori signatories established a Treaty in 1840. The original document was signed on February 6, at what is now known as the treaty grounds in Waitangi, located over 200 kilometers north of Auckland, and near Kororareka which was an important whaling station in the Bay of Islands. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi as it is known in Māori and English is treated as the foundational document for the country. While interpretations of the treaty have varied as far as what is meant by sovereignty, and the role of the Crown in overseeing the lands and peoples, arguably Aotearoa has done a better job of ensuring Māori their rightful place in government, though this has not resulted in social benefits for Indigenous peoples throughout the country. Māori have the highest rates of incarceration, food insecurity, family and domestic violence, suicide rates, and lower mortality overall. It is one thing for the country to acknowledge the Māori language, but quite another for them to have a voice.

When it comes to sport, and football specifically, both countries have a long way to go to achieve equality of access for Indigenous players in the game. Participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia, and for Māori and Pasifika women in Aotearoa has not been as supported as it has been for white women. Before the 1972 Olympics, not a single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander athlete had represented

Australia at the games. In the game of football, Aboriginal women have only recently made inroads for full participation and representation. Kyah Smith became the first aboriginal player, man or woman, to score a goal for an Australian side in a FIFA World Cup—in 2011. While the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women has increased across the sports landscape, football, due to its reputation as a white sport and the numerous barriers still in place for access to opportunity, still sees relatively few Indigenous women participating in the game in Australia. Things seem slightly better in Aotearoa. Amber Hearn, a retired Fern of Ngāpuhi descent, holds the goal scoring record of any NZ international footballer, man or woman, and Abby Erceg, captain of the Ferns and a defender in the National Women's Soccer League in the US, is the most well-known current Māori player. NZ Football has done a better job of bringing some Māori players into the game, and they have not been as successful as their counterparts in rugby. Aotearoa has started to address the lack of Māori access to and representation in football, and in 2008, the Māori Football Aotearoa association was formed. Australia and Aotearoa each had one Indigenous player on their squad for the 2019 tournament, and both countries wish to improve these numbers for the 2023 teams.

The lack of inclusion of Indigenous players in the game does not mean there isn't Indigenous symbolism attached to the game. While land acknowledgments were conspicuously absent at the 2015 WWC held in Canada, the 2023 tournament will be replete with Indigenous cultures and commercial inclusion, from each match beginning with a welcome to country or a haka, to the use of Indigenous languages and availability of cultural experiences. Desmond Campbell has warned against the "tourism model" of Indigeneity, the uses, abuse and commodification of Indigenous peoples, artwork, languages as a way of selling the country as Indigenous friendly and exotic all in one go. In Australia what this means is you can feast on "bushmeat," have your face painted with the iconic dot style associated with Aboriginal art, and listen to a didgeridoo. While these are all valuable aspects of Indigenous (First Peoples) cultures and societies, they get presented to tourists and white Australians as commodified aspects of culture, divorced from their history and contemporary context, and tend to reinforce the idea that Indigenous peoples are of the past, and of the bush, and not of the urban and contemporary now of the country. It will be unsurprising if we are once again faced with a host team with at most one Aboriginal player on the team, a perfunctory welcome to country at

the start of each match, and white settler fans from Canada, USA, South Africa and elsewhere will enjoy the spectacle without being forced to consider the legacies of colonization and genocide of either the country they are visiting, or the places they are visiting from.

Likewise in Aotearoa, there will be elements of Māori cultures sprinkled throughout the tournament. It is likely that a pōwhiri (an official greeting) will be given at an opening ceremony with officials and players, the anthem will be sung in Māori, and cultural expeditions will be available for visitors to learn more about the Indigenous peoples of the country. Visitors may be unfamiliar with many aspects of Māori history and contemporary issues, one Māori cultural practice has global appeal: the haka. The All Blacks are the most famous team associated with the practice, though most of the national men's and women's teams start their matches, games, and all other forms of contest with the haka. Lots has been written about the relationship between the haka, sports, Māori rights, and politics, so I won't repeat that all here, but it is the most visible and well-known expression of Indigeneity from the country, and it inspires awe in respect in the players and fans alike (Hapeta et al, 2018; Jackson & Hokowitu, 2002; Palmer, 2016; Tengan & Markham, 2009). The issue both countries need to address is how these symbols translate into equality of access for Indigenous and other non-white players in the country. The critique from many Indigenous scholars is that both countries like to commoditize culture without pursuing equality (Amoamo & Thompson, 2011; Pihema, 2002; Tahana & Opperman, 1998; Wikitera, 2006).

EQUALITY OF HOW

How does one access the game as a supporter or fan? Five cities and six stadiums will serve as host and venue for the WWC events in Australia. Aotearoa has four cities serving as host. The opening match will be played in Auckland's Eden Park, with a 50,000-seat capacity, and the final is expected to be played in Sydney's Stadium Australia which can host 83,500. The estimated number of tickets to be sold will be 1.5 million, with a revenue of \$40 million US in direct and related sales with the tickets.

Depending on the game schedule, the 2023 tournament is expected to be incredibly costly for a fan to attend, even though tickets for the game will probably be the cheapest part of the trip. For the 2019 tournament,

the cheapest ticket for a match was \$10.50, and the most expensive was \$99 US. What will put the tournament out of reach for most fans of the game will be the costs of travel and lodging.

It costs on average 200–300 US dollars to fly roundtrip from Perth to Melbourne. Given the size of the country, this is not a place where it will be easy to hire a car as a means for transportation between the host cities, and public transportation is a work in progress for the nation. The average cost for a hotel in every host city in Australia is over 100 US a night. Thus, the distance and cost for fans just attending games in Australia is exorbitant, let alone the costs associated with travel to Australia's co-host and neighbor to the east.

The average cost of a flight from London to Auckland ranges from \$1100 to \$2000 US; Paris to Sydney is \$1200 to \$1900. To travel within New Zealand costs at the low end \$60 from Auckland to Wellington and \$80 for Wellington to Dunedin. A Brisbane to Perth flight will set you back at least \$350. And this is a steal. To travel between the two countries can be anywhere from \$300 to \$700 depending on where your trans-Tasman departure and arrival hubs are located.

And let's be honest—football fans drink. A lot. And while both Australia and Aotearoa are known as producers of terrific beers and wine, these don't come cheap. An average beer will set you back 6–7 dollars US, and a glass of wine on average will be 8–9 dollars US in a restaurant. When France was preparing for the 2019 games, increased alcohol consumption was listed as one of their main areas of security concerns alongside civil unrest and terrorism. Alcohol in both Australia and Aotearoa is expensive due to the taxes levied on wine, beer, and spirits, and the related security costs for additional policing are factored into the overall cost of hosting the games, whether you are a fan who imbibes or not.

And a final question: Can the residents of the countries playing in the tournament travel to the games? The number of teams has increased but has the diversity of passport holders increased alongside? As fans of the game, are we willing to accept the shrinking pool of wage laborers who can afford to attend a World Cup tournament due to costs associated with travel (not to mention who can afford to get time off of work to attend a match), because the revenues associated with the game are hopefully being used to provide more equitable remuneration to the women players. Is this an inequality we are willing to accept so the women are paid what they rightly deserve?

OPPORTUNITIES TO BE BETTER

Focusing on what we, as writers and fans, players and supporters, FIFA and member federations, desire in and for the women's game, we need to ask ourselves which equalities we want, and which inequalities we can live with that will be generated alongside. As this chapter has demonstrated, there are various types and forms of equality we may desire, and competing interests that may serve as barriers for equality to be achieved. If the goal is equality of representation, as many chapters in this volume discuss, then what will be our measure of success? How will we "know" equality when we see it? Is the goal equality of pay? Of access? Of race?

Is there a way to reconcile what appear as contradictory forces: FIFA's monopoly of the game and a grassroots desire, around the world, for girls to have the same opportunities as boys, and for players from another nation to have a truly even playing field? If the equality desired is of pay, then other costs will come associated with that push forward. Equality of pay is a morally sound aspiration, but difficult budget proposition. And in many cases, our commercial and theoretical interests are not aligned. Ending racist barriers and aiming for great racial equality are also critical moral imperatives, though it isn't clear which goal (equality of gender or equality of race) is achievable in the short term.

Jessica Luther and Kavitha Davidson explore a conundrum that resonates with this chapter in their masterful new book, *Loving Sports When They Don't Love You Back: Dilemmas of the Modern Fan* (2020): they ask where the space is for loving sports, for all people, and all sports, when there is evident inequity in the access to, delivery of, and consumption available across social location and geographical terrain. Likewise, we are stuck with the tension of hating FIFA while loving the game they deliver; of adoring the players while bothered by the way they have to capitulate to indignities, like wearing used boots, or raising funds at a bake sale, to make a living.

Despite the critique presented herein, I am positive that progress will be made in the women's game. I believe it is possible to achieve racial, pay, and access equality. Equality is not a finite resource across all domains: while there will always be some form of inequality in the game—only eleven players per team are allowed on the pitch at once; thus, not all team members can play at once—this does not mean there isn't the potential for equality in others. If FIFA is serious about its commitment to the women's game, then the level of competition (the outcome inequality sports

fans support) will improve. There won't be a lopsided 13-0 score at the end of 90 minutes. It is doubtful those things will be achieved by 2023, and even unlikely for 2027. But I'm tempted to believe that by 2031 the game will look differently.

It will be better.

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