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# Play Like a Girl: An Analysis of Media Representation of Female Athletes

Katherine A. Mannion

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## ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the relationship between media representation of female athletes and the public opinion of female athletes. Research has shown that female athletes are more likely to be sexualized than male athletes and are therefore delegitimized in their skill. Through analysis of sports websites and a survey distributed online through a midsized, public, liberal arts college in the Northeast, data was gathered to establish the public opinion of female athletes. Research presented shows that female athletes are delegitimized and sexualized as a result of a lack of proficient coverage of their athletic skills and pursuits.

Both the general public and the producers of sports media view women's sports in America as less important, less relevant, and less worthwhile than men's sports. This has led to problems, including a lack of representation in the media, a lack of places for young women to play sports professionally, a lack of female role models for female athletes, and dangerous playing conditions for female athletes. Investigating this problem will get to the root of the reasoning for and uncover the extent of this issue.

Previous research in the field has shown that women are not fairly represented in the media or on the playing field. Harris polls from the last three years have shown a lack of interest from the public in women's sports (Corso, 2014; Braverman, 2011), while data from 2009 shows that major networks like ESPN only gave 1.6% of their coverage to women's sports (Messner & Cooky, 2009). Other research has found that when young women do not see female athletes, they feel discouraged from participating and stop playing (Schmalz, 2006). It has also been shown that women are represented best in sports where their bodies can be sexualized and they can be shown off as being attractive (Hilliard, 1984). This study will investigate these claims, namely the extent of the lacking representation of female athletes and the effect it has on public perception of these athletes. This study hypothesizes that women's sports media representation is minimal, and that the public perception of female athletes is sexual and delegitimizes

their ability to perform. The research will include a comprehensive look at modern sports reporting and the opinions of young people on women's sports in order to find out if there is a relationship between the two. The study will discuss how sports media affects the way female athletes are perceived by the public.

This study will have practical implications in that it will uncover the issues in representation for women's sports in the media and in the eyes of the public. It will provide a springboard for the continuance of changes in the way women's sports are represented and how female athletes are perceived. It may provide a positive effect on young sports-playing women to encourage them to stay in the game.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Sports in America

In the United States, sports are a large part of the identity of the nation. According to a Harris poll, most Americans watch football (Braverman, 2011). Three quarters of men and over half of women watch somewhere between 1 and 16 hours of football per week, whether it is watching multiple games or participating in fantasy leagues (Braverman, 2011). A different Harris poll also found that a majority of Americans say professional football is their favorite sport in general, with 35% reporting as such (Corso, 2014). Professional baseball garnered 14% in a field of 21 options.



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**Sports as a cultural identity.** The large role that sports play in the American culture shows how they construct the social identity of America. The creation of a cultural phenomenon has several aspects. Culture, first and foremost, is the way that humans organize themselves and create relatable ideas that have common ground across differences. Generally, film, music, and celebrities create culture. According to Lull (2000), culture is not just the existence of these things, but the way that the ideas, values, and things are reacted to, interpreted, and spread through communication. Therein, culture is both a source and a resource. It is a source in that it generates what is being reacted to and it is a resource in that it creates something for humans to react to and build an identity around. Culture is always changing, and the public opinion of certain aspects of culture can shift rapidly from positive to negative depending on how it is being presented.

Sports are a cultural phenomenon in that they are an obsession of the American people that occupies much of the nation's time and energy. They are also used as vehicles to promote teamwork, physical fitness, and hard work, as demonstrated by the different campaigns athletes participate in. For example, the "I Will What I Want" campaign from Under Armour® promotes enthusiasm for fitness and achieving goals, and features athletes including Kelley O'Hara, Misty Copeland, and Briana Cope. Michael Jordan was featured in the "Be Like Mike" campaign where he encouraged young people to become like him by drinking Gatorade. These athletes are figureheads and role models for values, and Americans adjust their views to match those of their favorite athletes.

This idea that athletes are role models and promote teamwork and other values is in part due to the cultivation theory, which posits that people will believe television reflects reality and adjust their views accordingly (Gerbner, 1976). Cultivation theory has been used as a cornerstone for the effects of media on consumers. Researchers have found that those who watch more television are more likely to be discontented because their lives do not resemble the world on television. Many studies have reflected that constant media consumption leads to poor psychological health and warped perceptions of reality (Dittmar, 1994; McCreary & Sadaca, 1999). The hypermasculine idea presented through sports media contrib-

utes to the hegemonic masculinity that promotes strength, power, and aggression as traits specifically for men.

**Fanaticism associated with sports.** The influence of sports culture on America is directly related to increased fanaticism, or relation and passion for a certain thing (Wang, 2006). Sports fanaticism has led to increased camaraderie amongst Americans. In *Signs of Life in the USA*, it is suggested that this camaraderie is due to a certain amount of escapism from everyday life that sports provide. According to Maasik and Solomon (1994), sports create a way for American men to remove themselves from the home, their jobs, and other benign activities and vigorously engage in watching or playing extreme physical sports. Wang (2006) posits that Americans use sports teams to identify themselves, similar to the way they identify with a race or geographical location. Americans use their favorite sports teams to create a community of people who are interested in the same things as themselves.

Fanaticism also has a darker side, creating more ways for hardcore fans to be aggressive, mean, and almost dangerous. Fanatics have a conviction that their understanding is absolutely right, which reflects in sports fans when they aggressively defend their favorite teams and athletes (Marimaa, 2011). Marimaa (2011) also states that fanatics try to push their allegiances onto others. This correlates with Wang's (2006) study, which states that fans of winning teams encourage others to also root for their team and will be crude, crass, and downright violent to those who disagree with them. Therefore, although the fanaticism brings Americans together in united excitement, it also creates tension when there are differing opinions. The fanaticism is primarily related to male sports, however, as male sports are seen as more aggressive and deserving of crazed obsession than women's. This obsession fuels the occupation Americans have with men's sports that involves aggression and forms the public's opinion.

## Gender in Sports

The Harris poll asking for the favorite sports of the participants has been taken annually since 1985 (Corso, 2014). Sports played by women were not included in the poll questions until 2000. However,

when they were included in the survey they consistently ranked low, earning less than 0.5% of the votes every year, with the exception of women's tennis and women's college basketball, which pulled 1% of the votes in a few different years (Corso, 2014). Traditional gender roles and heteronormativity may play a role in the distaste the American public has for women's sports (Schmalz, 2006; Greendorfer, 1987).

Sports are often seen as hypermasculine physical events. By merely participating in certain sports that are seen as not "appropriate," people send messages to the people around them about certain characteristics (Messner, 2002). When asked to distinguish girls' sports from boys' sports, young girls had more difficulty explaining why certain sports, like baseball, did not include women, while boys were content explaining that girls should not become dirty so they cannot play football and boys should not wave their hands in a certain way so they cannot cheerlead (Schmalz, 2006). According to Schmalz's (2006) study, data collected from interviewing young people showed that women are more likely to play more masculine sports at a young age than men are likely to play feminine sports. Additionally, a Women's Sports Foundation Study states that girls who participate in sports and receive positive reinforcement in their youth are more likely to continue to play into adulthood, casually or professionally (Greendorfer, 1987). However, young girls are highly likely to face strict scrutiny as they grow up and continue playing their sport.

While Title IX requires that girls in school be offered the same opportunities to participate in sports as boys, according to Yu (1993), literature presented to children appears to do the opposite, showing young girls playing sports in picture books only about 25% of the time (Yu, 1993). This underlying sexism creates an environment that enforces gender roles, establishing men as more likely to continue playing sports and excel than women. So although women are more likely to play masculine sports as young people, they are likely to stop as adults as they are told to grow out of it.

Trujillo (1991) argues that sports culture is a result of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is created as a result of physical force and dominance. Therefore, when men play sports and place themselves above women as dominant, powerful forces,

they reinforce traditional roles and the patriarchy. According to Trujillo's (1991) study, masculinity is enforced by the dominant group's claims that sports create a hypermasculine society. Football especially emphasizes sanctioned aggression and violence. The banning of women from this sport reinforces patriarchal values that women are weak and unable to be as strong as men.

## Women's Sports

**Evolution of women's sports in America.** Sports are considered a largely male-dominated space. The "big four" major league sports—baseball, football, basketball, and hockey—expressly prohibit women from playing, but did not always. According to several *New York Times* reports, a female pitcher contracted with an AA team by the name of Jackie Mitchell struck out both Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth during an exhibition game (Brandt, W. E., 1931). A fear that the mound would become feminine led to her contract being voided. Women were formally banned from baseball in 1952 because it was considered by Commissioner Kenesaw Landis to be "too strenuous" for women (as cited in Pietrusza, 1998, p. 374). While there is no explicit rule in either rulebook, neither the NHL nor the NFL have ever accepted female players onto teams. Due to this, women have been forced to create their own leagues.

Historically, while there have been several attempts to form and operate women's professional sports leagues, they do not succeed when compared to men's professional leagues. Softball, considered a safe alternative to baseball, existed as the International Women's Professional Softball Association, or IWPSA, until 1980. The league folded due to a fiscal difficulty and in 1982 the NCAA began to sponsor college softball. This allowed the U.S. Women's National Softball team to form, and after several victories on the international stage, enough professional sponsors finally came together to create the WPSL, or Women's Professional Softball League. They have since changed their name to National Fastpitch Softball, according to their website. Women's hockey formed a professional league in 1999 that lasted only eight years (NWHL, n.d.). There is currently no single professional women's hockey league in America even though the U.S. Women's National Hockey team holds medals from the last five Winter Olympic

Games (USA Hockey, n.d.). Female sports leagues seem unable to thrive, as seen here, possibly because women's ability to play their sports is considered to be less valuable than a man's.

**Why women's sports are not valued.** According to Messner (1988), increasing athleticism in women does not signal increased freedom for women within sports. The attempts of women throughout history to overcome the bounds of hegemonic masculinity have been aggressively shut down by those in power. Female athletes have historically had to define their beauty by the standards put forth by men. The only movement to contest this was the women's bodybuilding movement, which allowed women to define what was strongest and "best" (Messner, 1988). Men respond to women who excel in athletics by stating that they would not do well if they were in a man's version of the sport. Hegemonic masculinity is so ingrained in culture that the media uses its coverage to align American values with male sports, and with other females playing sports that are considered to be more masculine.

**Media coverage of women's sports.** As media has become the primary way to watch, judge, and analyze sports, coverage of sports news has become almost entirely male-focused. In an observation of the 1992 Olympics done by Higgs and Weiller (2003), they found that when reporters covered women's sports, they covered them by using degrading comments about the female athletes' bodies and physiques instead of judging their ability to participate in their respective sports. Words including "strong" and "aggressive" were used to describe male athletes nearly 3 times as often as they were for women (Higgs & Weiller, 2003). It was also found in the next three sets of Olympic Games that sports media conglomerates claimed to promote equal opportunities for female and male coverage, but overhyped male sports and barely promoted female sports (Higgs & Weiller, 2003). The female sports that were promoted were ones men found aesthetically pleasing, such as gymnastics and swimming (Riebock, 2012).

In addition to Olympic coverage, bias exists during the regular season as well. In 2011, the Badminton World Federation demanded that all female players wear short skirts in order to make play more appealing to viewers. The rule was considered not only to

be sexist, but disrespectful to players whose religious ideologies prevented them from being able to wear short skirts. It was publicly decried as sexist and was eventually overturned, but remained in place long enough to anger professional female athletes both inside and outside of the sport (Longman, 2011).

A prime example of poorly covered female athletes is the United States Women's National Soccer Team. This team is one of the premier women's teams in the world. It has won five Olympic gold medals and has medaled at every Olympic Games it has attended since 1996. It has also won the Gold Cup at the Confederation of North, Central American, and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) tournament six times. The Women's National team has also placed at the World Cup every time they have competed since 1991, winning twice. They brought America's attention back to the sport in 2012 after winning a gold medal at the Olympics and were able to create an American league for the regular season. However, they are subjected to sexism in the media and within their own sport. They are rarely presented in athletic poses in magazines, a common trend amongst female athletes, and they have made the cover of *Sports Illustrated* a total of three times (Wahl, 2014), once for sportswoman of the year.

Underlying sexism can be found even within the organizations that fund women's sports. After examining the FIFA website, it has been found that the group values men's soccer over women's (Meân, 2010). The FIFA website's top stories were 97.3% on men's soccer and the stories were severely lacking in terms of results for World Cup Qualifiers, which occurred at the time of the story (Meân, 2010). Additionally, photographs of athletes on the site were mostly of men, but the few photographs of women showed the women from the waist up, celebrating their success or hugging their teammates instead of actually participating in the sport (Meân, 2010). Lack of representation within the organization that runs the event shows the underlying sexism within the sport. Not identifying, glorifying, or heralding female athletes for doing the same work that the male athletes do classifies them as "others" and diminishes their worth as athletes.

Female soccer players' ability to play their sport is inhibited by sexist rules put in place by their federa-

tions. FIFA has announced a bid to play the Women's World Cup on turf instead of grass. This is considered dangerous, and has been called "padded concrete" by Women's National Team player Megan Rapinoe (Peterson, 2014). It is more likely to cause injury and prevents playing the game to the fullest for fear of injury, according to a recent study (Sousa, Rebelo, & Brito, 2013). More than half of the participants in this study were injured on turf during their season as a direct result of the turf field (Sousa et al., 2013). Abby Wambach and 40 other international players have filed a lawsuit against FIFA for discriminating against them according to Canadian and international statutes, alleging that playing on turf creates danger and is a violation of human rights laws in that it denies female players the right to play on the same level as male players (Dellinger, 2014). Women are expected to have the same opportunities that men have on the field and playing on turf prevents that.

## METHODS

The research gained from this study will principally be used to examine the phenomenon of misrepresentation or lack of representation of female athletes in sports and sports media. Using data from the study, conclusions will be drawn regarding the public perception of female athletes. Principally, the study will focus on how people who either follow or do not follow sports see women's sports compared to the amount of representation within the media. The study will also look at the sexualization of female athletes by major sports outlets both on and off their respective fields, with a focus on women's soccer. By looking at this information specifically, it is hoped that a root for the cause of the discrimination, as well as the public perception of the discrimination's extent, can be found.

### Website Analysis

In conducting this study, sports media conglomerates and their coverage's breadth will be analyzed first. ESPN, Fox Sports, and BleacherReport will be the focus of the study. These conglomerates are the best-known sports programs on the national level and set the bar for local sports reports (Tuggle, 2009). The study was done by viewing the websites for each sports conglomerate and comparing the amount of time given to women's sports and to men's sports. In

a 2009 study looking at similar factors, it was found that women's sports received 1.6% of the coverage in major sports shows, while men's sports received 96.3% of the coverage (Messner & Cooky, 2009).

### Survey

A final method of this research study was an analysis of public opinion on the coverage of women's sports in the media. This was done using a survey distributed through Google Forms. The survey had about 20 questions and took somewhere between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. The population to be evaluated was that of a liberal arts college in the northeastern region of the United States. The college has approximately 5,000 students and is located in a rural area with approximately 30,000 people in it from backgrounds varying from metropolitan to rural to international, allowing for a broad range of responses. Additionally, the college has a history of fairly successful athletic programs. Respondents were asked about their interest level in sports as well as their ability to name female athletes and sports leagues.

A similar study to this one was conducted with middle school boys as subjects by showing the subjects athletes and models in several positions and evaluating their reactions. The students were presented with 15 pictures of white women and asked for their opinions (Daniels & Wartena, 2011). The study found that sexualized athletes were written about more for their appearance, alignment with the female ideal, and sexuality than performance athletes were (Daniels & Wartena, 2011). This study will perform a similar experiment. The researcher will show members of the focus group photographs of athletes in two different positions, sexualized and in action. The subjects will then be asked for three adjectives to describe both images of athletes. From there, data will be put together about how athletes are viewed in different scenarios. The athletes were chosen based on whether or not they had photographs in the ESPN Body Issue.

## ANALYSIS

### Website Results

On the ESPN website's home page there were 43 stories featured across a broad range of sports, including college and major league athletics. Because of the time

of year, most of the stories were about college and national football, as well as college basketball. Of these 43 stories, one was about a female athlete. Statistically speaking, this is approximately 2% of stories. This story linked to the website ESPNW, the ESPN site dedicated to women, and was about Heather Hardy, a female boxer. However, the article did not focus on her wins or athletic prowess but rather on the hardships she has faced as a female boxer. It discussed her selling tickets to her own fights and being sexually assaulted by a coach (Larriva, 2014). It repeatedly emphasized her flaws, and even went as far as to say “she isn’t the best or smartest fighter out there” in an article meant to herald her strengths (Larriva, 2014). In fact, the article repeatedly emphasized the fact that boxing is not ready for an all-female card.

Bleacher Report, another sports conglomerate, had no female athletes or women’s sports on their main web page. In their top 10 stories, two were about football, two were about basketball, two were about hockey, and the other four were public interest stories, including an athlete’s new line of sneakers and a “kiss cam” mishap. None of the stories were about women’s sports. At the bottom of the home page for the site, a list of 10 “featured authors” in varying sports was listed. One of these authors was female. Additionally, the website provided tabs that users could hover over to select teams. Even though these sports included college basketball, mixed martial arts fighting, and hockey, no women’s leagues or teams were available to select. There was also no link for a separate website dedicated to women’s sports.

A final website, Fox Sports, also had no female sports stories on their front page. There was one story about Danica Patrick, but not in the context of her sport. It highlighted her attending a country music awards show. The story did not contain any reporting but was a slideshow of her posing with different country musicians on the red carpet for the event. While Danica Patrick is a high-profile auto racer within the sport of NASCAR, the article was about her in terms of fashion at an award show unrelated to NASCAR. Within the story, Danica Patrick was introduced as a GoDaddy.com representative before a NASCAR racer. GoDaddy is a company that uses sexualized images of women to sell website domains. Finally, a sidebar containing most recent sports scores, titled

“All Sports,” did not contain any female sports scores, despite covering college soccer and hockey.

## Image Analysis

In a survey distributed through Google Forms, there were 193 respondents. The survey was open to people with email addresses for the college surveyed. Survey respondents were predominantly female, with 75% of the respondents reporting as such. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they had considered themselves athletes at some point in their lives, and 69% said they follow sports. Football is the most followed sport, followed closely by baseball and hockey. Research participants were presented with images of three female athletes and three male athletes in two different poses. One set of images was from the Body Issue of *ESPN Magazine* and the other set were the athletes playing their respective sports. Participants were asked to give three adjectives to describe their opinion of the athletes based solely on the images. The six athletes all received distinct opinions from each other.

**Male images.** The male images were of Marshawn Lynch, a professional football player; Michael Phelps, a swimmer; and Prince Fielder, a professional baseball player. These three men were shown mostly naked in one image and seen playing their respective sports in the second image. Marshawn Lynch was shown in a lunging position, naked, holding a football in his Body Issue picture. Michael Phelps was shown lunging from a diving block presumably towards the water. Prince Fielder is shown holding a baseball bat behind his head and turned to the side. Their action shots are Marshawn Lynch in full gear setting up a play, Michael Phelps swimming freestyle, and Prince Fielder swinging at a pitch.

For Lynch, the most common word given as a response (62.9% of the time) was “strong.” Second to this was the word “muscular,” given as a response 58% of the time. Many participants stated that Lynch’s pictures made him look tough and threatening, as well as “committed,” “proud,” and “ambitious.” Often, participants would use the word “threatening” in addition to a positive adjective. The most-used adjective for Phelps was “muscular,” appearing 27% of the time. “Strong” appeared in 17% of responses. Respondents were also apt to mention his drug use,

which could not be gathered from the images and might have tainted results. Prince Fielder, who is notably heavier and less defined than either of these athletes, received responses with different connotations. While the predominant adjective given was “strong” (28%), 25% of respondents used some variation of the words “fat,” “heavy,” or “overweight” when describing him.

**Female images.** The female images were of Alex Morgan, a professional soccer player; Miesha Tate, a professional mixed martial arts fighter; and Hilary Knight, a professional hockey player. As with the men, in one image the women were shown mostly naked in various positions and in the other they were in action. Alex Morgan’s first image is her lying on a beach in a prone position, wet presumably from the water. Miesha Tate’s is her wearing only pink hand wraps and covering her breasts. Hilary Knight is wearing nothing but hockey skates and surrounded by hockey equipment, bending over as to hide her breasts. In Morgan’s second picture she is receiving a pass, in Tate’s she is kicking an opponent, and in Knight’s she is executing a shot.

The most prevalent word for Alex Morgan was “athletic,” with 33% of respondents using it. However, 36% of respondents used words to objectify and sexualize. These words include “hot,” “sexy,” “beautiful,” and “attractive.” Additionally, the word “strong” was used just as often as the word “sexy” by 16.2% of respondents. Miesha Tate’s adjectives most closely resembled those commonly used for the male athletes. Forty-seven percent of respondents used the word “strong” to describe her; 21% of respondents used sexual language to describe her, including words like “sexy,” “hot,” and “beautiful;” 33% of respondents called Hilary Knight “strong,” and 17% called her “athletic;” and finally, 52% of respondents used sexual language to describe her, including “sexy,” “attractive,” “pretty,” “hot,” and “gorgeous.”

**Websites lacked coverage.** The websites rarely, if ever, had stories about female athletes. This result is not surprising and is supported by the study by Higgs and Weiller (2003) that found sports networks often failed to give equal media time to women’s sports. Additionally, the few sports stories that did cover women’s sports appeared to objectify the women. Heather Hardy’s story discussed her in terms of

her lack of skill instead of the skill she definitely has (Larriva, 2014). The women’s sports covered were also usually aesthetically pleasing sports or related to events outside of the sport that were focused on aesthetics. An example of this is the coverage of Danica Patrick. While she manages to hold a high position in a male-dominated sport, she is sexualized and fetishized as a result of hegemonic masculinity. As shown in the only women’s sports story on the Fox Sports site, Patrick is delegitimized by being sexualized in order to keep her from overshadowing men she surpasses in skill.

**Expected results.** Examining the words used by participants to describe the athletes led to expected results. While both men and women were described as “strong” across the board, certain athletes were more likely to receive that descriptor than others. Marshawn Lynch was overwhelmingly called “strong,” and Hilary Knight was also often described as “strong.” The key similarity between the two of them is the muscle definition in their naked pictures. However, Lynch received few descriptors sexualizing him. Knight’s strength was often coupled with her sexual appeal or beauty. While the descriptors used for all of the athletes were fairly similar, and almost entirely complimentary, female athletes were sexualized when the male athletes were not. Female-typed words such as “fierce” or “fit” were used more often than words like “tough.” These differing explanations for athletes of similar fitness levels in similar positions strengthens the idea that hegemonic masculinity adds more value to males than females in terms of their athleticism.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study highlights and examines the media coverage of female athletes as well as the public’s opinion of the presentation of female athletes. The study identifies the difference in narrative between male athletes and female athletes both in the media and in the public eye. The presentation of female athletes on sports websites compared to the words used to describe female athletes shows a clear “othering” within the genre. While men are constantly called “strong,” women are often called “fit” or identified using sexual or female-typed words. Men do not receive any praise in terms of their physical appearance outside of outright athleticism.



This study supports and adds to the work of Higgs and Weiller (2003), who noted that reporters were more likely to discuss the physical appearance of female athletes in terms of attractiveness than their athletic abilities. The statistics gained from the research participants in this study support Higgs and Weiller's (2003) work closely, showing that a male-typed word ("strong") was used 4 times more often for male athletes than for female athletes (62.9% to 16%), whereas female-typed words like "fit" and "fierce" were exclusively used for female athletes. Additionally, Daniels and Wartena's (2011) study found that high school boys were more likely to discuss the body types and appearance of female athletes when the athletes were shown in passive poses rather than in their in-action poses. The present study suggests that people, in this case people between the ages of 18 and 25, will sexualize female athletes if presented with a provocative image, even if the image is side by side with an action shot.

Along with female-typed words, female images are often passively posed. Goffman's (1979) concept of the feminine touch states that women are more likely to pose cradling things instead of carrying them in order to seem more passive. For example, in the image presented to the focus group of Hilary Knight, she is surrounded by hockey gear but not holding or wearing any of it, and bent over as if reaching for her skates. In the action image, she is tightly gripping her hockey stick and intensely focused. Goffman (1979) also posits that women are often photographed as distant and drifting from the scene. Photographs of Alex Morgan and Meisha Tate show them staring into the distance and not focused on the camera, dehumanizing them and allowing them to be sexualized further.

The lack of coverage of female athletes in action solidifies the hypermasculinity of the sports world and the ease through which they are sexualized. News outlets not covering female athletes for their achievements establish men as the superior athletes and delegitimize women's participation in sports in general. As mentioned earlier, young women who do not see athletes in action are less likely to continue playing sports (Yu, 1993). Additionally, when women are shown in sports media, they are shown out of the context of their performance, as evidenced by ESPN's story about Heather Hardy and her struggles

to become a boxer rather than her achievements as a boxer. When athletes are not shown participating in their sports, it makes it difficult for the general public to see them as athletes and not just sexual beings.

When asked to name female athletes, participants mentioned the same four athletes repeatedly, all of whom broke into a traditionally male sport or had some sort of scandal surrounding them. Serena Williams and Venus Williams have dominated the game of tennis and won repeatedly but have also been surrounded by scandals, including being accused of being too masculine by the head of the Russian Tennis Federation ("Russian Official Not Sorry," 2014). Hope Solo has been successful as a soccer goalie but also has been surrounded by domestic abuse scandals (Sullivan, 2014). As the analysis of websites showed, female athletes are often not written about for their skills in games but for outside events such as attending festivals or struggling in their home lives. This study reinforces the claim that a lack of serious coverage of sports delegitimizes the women who play them and creates images of sexuality and weakness.

This study's examination of media coverage and public opinion sheds a bit of light on the general trends of misogyny within the sports world. Further research could continue to create a link between the coverage, or lack thereof, of female sports and the way athletes are viewed in the public sphere. Although female athletes are continuing to achieve and becoming more recognizable in the public eye, there is more to be done to ensure female athletes are recognized for athletic prowess and that young girls are encouraged to play sports by seeing people like themselves succeeding. Researching this topic further could help change trends of misogyny and "othering" within the sports world and create a more equal environment.

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