

One and Done: The Long Eclipse of Women's Televised Sports, 1989–2019

Communication & Sport
1-25

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/21674795211003524

journals.sagepub.com/home/com



Cheryl Cooky¹ , **LaToya D. Council²**,
Maria A. Mears¹, and **Michael A. Messner²**

Abstract

For 3 decades we have tracked and analyzed the quantity and quality of coverage of women's and men's sports in televised news and highlights shows. In this paper, we report on our most recent iteration of the longitudinal study, which now includes an examination of online sports newsletters and social media. The study reveals little change in the quantitative apportionment of coverage of women's and men's sports over the past 30 years. Men's sports—especially the “Big Three” of basketball, football and baseball—still receive the lion's share of the coverage, whether in-season or out of season. When a women's sports story does appear, it is usually a case of “one and done,” a single women's sports story obscured by a cluster of men's stories that precede it, follow it, and are longer in length. Social media posts and online sports newsletters' coverage, though a bit more diverse in some ways, mostly reflected these same patterned gender asymmetries. Gender-bland sexism continued as the dominant pattern in 2019 TV news and highlights' stories on women's sports. Three themes of this “gender-bland” coverage include: 1) nationalism, 2) asymmetrical gender marking coupled with local parochialism, and 3) community service/ charitable contributions.

¹ School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Purdue University, IN, USA

² University of Southern California, CA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Cheryl Cooky, School of Interdisciplinary Studies, Purdue University, 500 Oval Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47906, USA.

Email: ccooky@purdue.edu

Keywords

gender, media, sport, SportsCenter, gender-bland sexism

On July 14, 2019, the sports segment of the 6 p.m. KNBC news in Los Angeles included a story on that day's WNBA game between the L.A. Sparks and the Atlanta Dream. As viewers watched game footage, sports anchor Mario Solis described the action:

We go to Atlanta. Sparks visiting the Dream. Tie game, closing seconds. Chelsea Grey breaks the tie with a tough turn-around. But Atlanta answers. Tiffany Hayes, can't be stopped. Right down the middle to tie the game and force overtime. End of OT, Gray does it again. *Cold-blooded*, that is the dagger! Sparks win 76 to 71. Derek Fisher's crew has won 5 of their last 6.

In two ways, this sports news report was unusual: first, it actually included a women's sports story; 80% of the televised sports news and highlights shows we watched for this study included zero stories on women's sports. What's more, this women's sports story was delivered with uncharacteristic enthusiasm by the reporter. In other ways however, it was typical of how women's sports are presented: This 23-s long WNBA story was embedded in a nearly 6-min long sports segment that otherwise covered all men's sports stories. This evening sports report led with a 51-s long story about the day's Major League Baseball games. Next, Solis devoted 1 min and 4-s to the L.A. Lakers' signing of star Anthony Davis. The 23-s story on the WNBA game came next, followed by a 57-s piece on what Solis described as the "epic final" men's singles match between Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, that day at Wimbledon. Solis next devoted 1 min and 4-s covering a celebrity golf tournament, highlighting footage of singer Justin Timberlake and NBA star Stephan Curry shooting hoops near the golf course, and then closed the sports report with a 38-s humorous gag story about a competitive hot-dog eating contest.

In short, the WNBA story—the shortest in duration of the six in the broadcast—was eclipsed by five longer reports on men's sports, stories ranging from in-season sports (MLB, pro tennis), an out-of-season sport (NBA), to human interest and comedic entertainment only tangentially connected to what most people think of as sports news. KNBC put an exclamation point on the "one and done" nature of that lone 6 p.m. WNBA story in its 11 p.m. report later that night. In a 6-min long sports news show, Mario Solis repeated his 6 p.m. stories on the Lakers' signing of Anthony Davis, and the Federer-Djokovic Wimbledon match. But to make room for expanded (2 min, 20-s) coverage of the day's Major League Baseball games, KNBC eliminated the stories on the WNBA game and the celebrity golf tournament. They did leave 33-s at the tail-end of the report, however, for Solis to repeat the hot-dog eating contest story.

For 3 decades, starting in 1989, we have tracked and analyzed the quantity and quality of coverage of women's and men's sports in televised news and highlights shows. In this paper, we report on our most recent iteration of the longitudinal study, focusing as in the past on (1) continuities and changes over time in the quantity of coverage of women's and men's sports in TV news and highlights shows; and (2) continuities and changes over time in the quality of coverage of women's and men's sports in TV news and highlights shows. In this new iteration of the study, we added an examination of two new sources of sports information that parallel the televised networks¹: daily online sports newsletters and social media content posted by the official twitter accounts of the television networks. We first outline the methods for conducting this now 30-year study of gender in televised sports. We then report on the quantitative findings for 2019, comparing with data from past studies. Next, we analyze the qualitative continuities and changes in how women's sports are covered, when they do appear. We revisit recommendations offered in the previous study (see Cooky et al., 2015) throughout the paper. We conclude with a discussion regarding change and continuity in media coverage of sports on television and highlight shows over the past 30 years.

The Gender in Televised Sports Study

The longitudinal data for this study was first gathered in 1989, with follow-up data collection conducted in 1993, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019. Each report from these studies published in the year following the data gathering. The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, now called the LA84 Foundation, published the first four studies in 1990, 1994, 2000 and 2005. The University of Southern California's Center for Feminist Research published the fifth study in 2010, and the last study appeared in print as two journal articles (one published in 2015, the other in 2017). The research reports, intended as public advocacy social science research, have been widely distributed, reported in the mass media, featured in documentary films, used by organizations like the Women's Sports Foundation, and in schools of journalism.

The research from past iterations of this study was also disseminated in various scholarly publications (Cooky et al., 2013, 2015; Messner et al., 1993, 1996, 2003, 2006; Musto et al., 2017). The ongoing study contributes to an extensive body of scholarly literature that explores the patterns and implications of gender in/equality and sexism in sports media (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bell & Coche, 2018; Bernstein, 2002; Billings & Angelini, 2019; Billings & Young, 2015; Bruce, 2016; Daniels, 2009; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Fink, 2015; Hull, 2017; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Kane et al., 2013; Koivula, 1999; Romney & Johnson, 2020; Wolter, 2020).

In order to examine change and continuity over time, in 2019 we replicated previous iterations of the study. The design and methods of data collection and analysis (both quantitative and qualitative) were identical to those of the 1989, 1993, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 studies. In Stage 1 of the research, we recorded

all of the 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. sports news and highlights segments on the local Los Angeles network affiliates (KCBS, KNBC and KABC), and the 11 p.m. broadcast of ESPN's *SportsCenter*. In Stage 2, a research assistant (second author) received instruction on coding data, so as to ensure continuity in the analysis with past iterations of the study, then viewed all recordings and coded the data. In Stage 3, the first author independently viewed all recordings, ran descriptive statistics on the coded data, and, sensitized to themes from the quantitative findings, qualitatively analyzed the commentary. In Stage 4, the first and fourth authors analyzed and interpreted the quantitative and qualitative data and wrote up the results.

As in 2004, 2009, and 2014, most of the programs in our 2019 sample included a continuous running "ticker" at the bottom of the television screen. The ticker's written text reports game scores, headlines, and breaking sports news that may or may not be reported through the main conventional verbal reporting and visual images. Based on our count of the amount of time segments scrolled across the screen, we analyzed the quantity of ticker coverage devoted to women's and to men's sports.

The study's codebook drew upon previous iterations of the study and included gender of sport (men's, women's, neutral), type of sport (basketball, football, golf, tennis, etc.), competitive level of the sport (professional, college, high school, youth, recreation, etc.), and time of the segment (measured from the beginning of an individual segment of coverage, reported in total minutes/seconds). Codes were also included to quantify production values (coded as yes/no), including the use of music, the use of graphics, and the inclusion of interviews and/ or game highlights. In addition to the above quantitative measures, we analyzed the quality of coverage in terms of visuals and verbal commentary.

In order to ensure the sample included various sports seasons, we analyzed three 2-week blocs of televised news: March 10–23; July 7–20; and November 10–23. In addition to the local affiliates, we analyzed 3 weeks of the 1-hr 11 p.m. ESPN *SportsCenter* broadcasts. These 3 weeks corresponded with the first week of each of the three network news segments: March 10–16, July 7–13, and November 10–16. The same procedures used for the analysis of the local affiliates were followed for *SportsCenter*.

In response to our most recent iterations of the study, some sport media producers and others questioned the continuing relevance of televised news and highlights shows as sources of sports information. Relatedly, some suggested that we might observe more coverage of women's sports on other media platforms. In response, we added online and social media sources of sports information to our 2019 study. During the same time frames during which we collected televised news and highlights data (see above), and sensitized to the same questions about quantity and quality of coverage, we analyzed content from the following online daily newsletters (sent via email to a subscriber's inbox): cbssports.com, nbcsports.com, ESPN.com, espnW.com. We also examined the following social media (Twitter) accounts: @cbssports, @nbcsports, @ESPN, @espnW. Both a new email account and new

twitter account were created to receive the online newsletters and to “follow” the social media accounts. The data was the only content received or followed. Although the online and social media data lacks the longitudinal depth of our TV data, we include it in this article where relevant as a point of comparison with the 2019 TV news and highlights data.

We note that, as in past iterations of this study, the data we gathered allows us only to analyze the gendered patterns of mediated content. In other words, our study offers little insight into the specific workplace decisions, dynamics and processes that go into the production of sports media texts (see Harrison, 2018; Hull & Romney, 2020a; Hull & Romney, 2020b; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Xu & Billings, 2021). Nor does our study offer a window in the various ways that audiences access, read, interpret or use media texts (Gantz & Lewis, 2014; Smith et al., 2019). However, our textual and content analysis of the persistent inequities in the quantity and quality of stories on men’s and women’s sports, we argue, is a key element of a feminist critique of the ways that mainstream sports media actively builds audiences for certain men’s sports in ways it does not do so for women’s sports.

A Continuing Dearth of Women’s Sports

In our last iteration of this study, we concluded with three modest policy recommendations that, had they materialized 5 years later, would have served as indicators of televised sports news and highlights shows producers’ and commentators’ commitment to move toward equity and fairness in coverage of women’s sports (see Cooky et al., 2015). Our first recommendation was to increase the proportion of airtime devoted to women’s sports from 3.2% (TV News) and 2% (SportsCenter) in 2014, to 12% and 18% respectively, by 2019. Even though this increase would have left 80% or more of the airtime for men’s sports, as Figure 1 shows, it would have constituted a dramatic expansion of coverage of women’s sports from their 2009 and 2014 nadir. This recommended increase would also have roughly doubled the peaks of TV news coverage of women’s sports in our study in 1999 and 2004 when women’s sports received 8.7% and 6.3% of the airtime, respectively.

In 2019, the coverage of women’s sports on TV news and on *SportsCenter* did climb from their 2014 levels, to 5.1% and 5.7% respectively. This slight increase from 2014 however, fell far short of our recommendation. In fact, this proportion of coverage is nearly identical to what we found in our first two iterations of the study in 1989 and 1993. What’s more, the lion’s share of the 2019 women’s sports coverage occurred during the July period of our sample, when 13.5% of airtime was devoted to women’s sports. In our March sample, only 1.7% of airtime was devoted to women’s sports, and in November it was a scant 0.7%. On *SportsCenter* there was no coverage of women’s sports in our November sample period. The clustering of women’s sports coverage in the July period echoes patterns in past years, but the

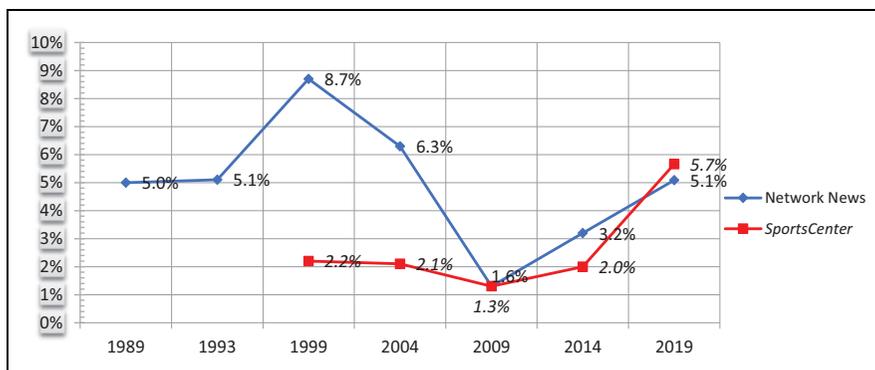


Figure 1. Proportion of airtime devoted to women's sports on three network affiliates' sport news, and on ESPN's SportsCenter, 1989–2019.

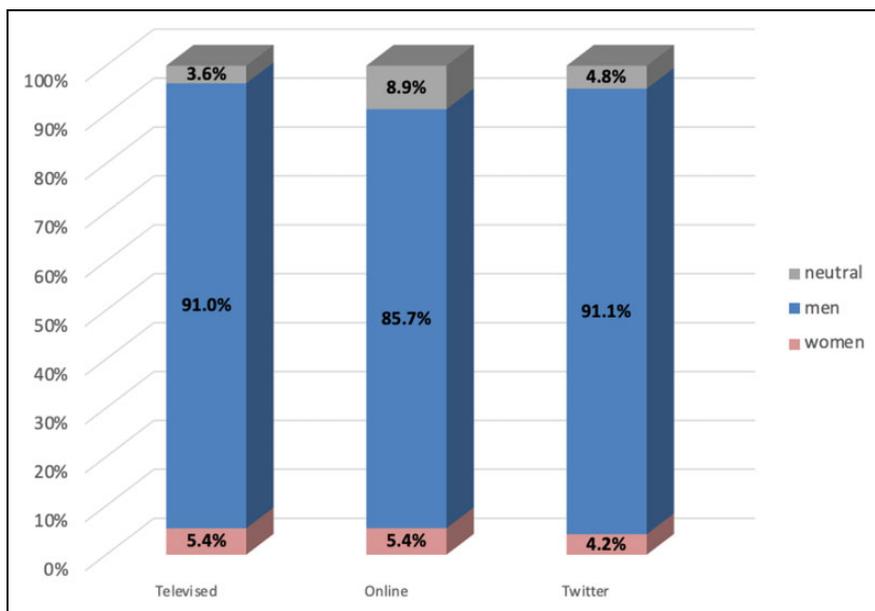


Figure 2. Televised news and highlights, online newsletters, and social media coverage, by gender (excludes espnWV), 2019.

especially high July proportion in 2019 was due in large part to short coverage bursts of the U.S. soccer team's victory in the Women's World Cup (WWC), and to a lesser extent of the U.S. women tennis competitors at Wimbledon. If we subtract out the coverage of the Women's World Cup alone, the local affiliates' coverage of

women's sports drops from 5.1% to 4.0% and ESPNs *SportsCenter* coverage drops from 5.7% to 3.1%. Absent the WWC stories, in other words, the overall 2019 women's sports TV airtime drops from 5.4% to 3.5%, a proportion similar to past years of the study. We discuss the significance of the coverage of the 2019 WWC in our qualitative analysis, below.

The proportion of coverage devoted to women's sports in our sample of daily online newsletters (8.7%) and Twitter (10.2%) was higher than in TV news and *SportsCenter*. Much of this however, was driven by the inclusion of espnW, which devoted 96% of its newsletter (published weekly, not daily as with the other newsletters) and 92% of its Twitter content to women's sports. Notably, espnW stopped producing its weekly newsletter following our July, 2019 data collection period. As Figure 2 shows, if we remove the espnW data from our sample, the online and social media proportion of coverage devoted to women's sports mirrors that of the TV news and highlights shows.

Lead Stories and Tickers

Television broadcasters decide to feature a lead story in a sports news or highlights show because the piece is deemed the most important sports story of the day, and/or because it is believed to be the most engaging "hook" with which to entertain and capture viewers. Usually this lead story is longer in duration and of higher production quality than most other stories in the report. As such, the lead story sets a tone for what is considered important and worthy of the producers' and commentators' technical investment, time, and enthusiasm. In previous iterations of our study, including in 2014, there were zero lead stories that focused on women's sports. Of the 251 broadcasts we analyzed in 2019, five (2% of the total) opened with a story on women's sports: all five were in the month of July, and all focused on the U.S. Women's National Team (USWNT) winning the World Cup. Of the 93 online newsletters in our sample, eight (8.6%) led with a story about women's sports. Four of these lead articles appeared on espnW.com, three were on ESPN.com, and one was on cbssports.

In past iterations of the study, we have also examined the content of the "ticker" that sports news and highlights programs scroll at the bottom of the screen. The scrolling ticker displays scores and breaking sports news that may or may not be reported in the main coverage. In the past, we found that the proportion of ticker time that *SportsCenter* devoted to covering women's sports was about the same—2% in 2014—to the proportion of airtime the show devoted to women's sports. In 2019, *SportsCenter*'s ticker time on women's sports increased to 7%, a proportion slightly higher than the show's main coverage devoted to women. In 2014, KCBS and KNBC, the two network affiliates that deployed tickers, devoted 6.1% of their ticker time to women's sports, greater than the proportion of main coverage they allotted to women's sports. In 2019, KCBS and KNBC devoted only 3.6% of its

ticker time to women's sports, a slightly lower proportion than in their main coverage.

Men's "Big Three": Still Eating Up Airtime

In our analysis of 2009 sports coverage, we noted that the types of sports covered in TV news and highlights programs was becoming less diverse. That year, 68% of all of the airtime (main coverage plus scrolling ticker) in our sample was devoted to what we called the "Big Three": men's college and professional basketball, men's college and professional baseball, and men's college and professional football. Five years later, in 2014 the time devoted to the Big Three rose to 74.5%, and as Figure 3 shows, that number inched up to 75.2% in 2019. The remaining one-fourth of the airtime was splintered into sparse coverage of all women's sports, all other men's sports, and gender-neutral topics.

The men's "Big Three" also garnered large proportions of coverage in the 2019 online newsletters and social media posts in our sample; however, we found somewhat more diversity in sports content. Men's football, basketball, and baseball comprised 57% of the content shared in online newsletters, and 64.3% of the Twitter content. Although women's sports received slightly more coverage in online and social media platforms than on the TV news and highlights shows, the space opened by the Big Three's relatively smaller share of coverage in social media mostly benefitted other men's sports, especially auto racing, soccer, and ice hockey.

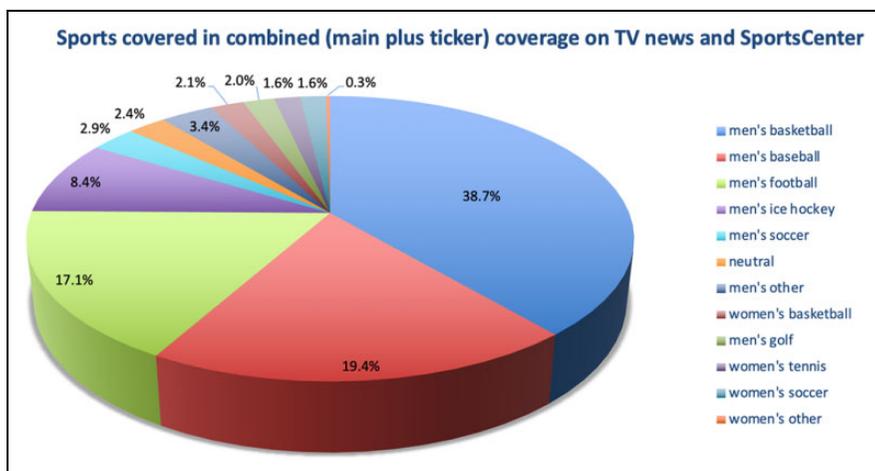


Figure 3. Total sports coverage (main plus ticker) on local network affiliates and SportsCenter, 2019.

Table 1. NBA and WNBA Stories (Main Coverage), In-Season and Out-of-Season, 2019.

	March	July	November
WNBA on KABC, KNBC & KCBS	(out of season) 0 stories; 0:00	(in season) 8 stories; 3:35	(out of season) 0 stories; 0:00
WNBA on ESPN SportsCenter	(out of season) 0 stories; 0:00	(in season) 1 story; 0:51	(out of season) 0 stories; 0:00
NBA on KABC, KNBC, & KCBS	(in season) 70 stories; 01:09:43	(out of season) 54 stories; 44:54	(in season) 62 stories; 01:08:24
NBA on ESPN SportsCenter	(in season) 24 stories; 1:04:33	(out of season) 18 stories; 57:11	(in season) 19 stories; 01:04:15

Never too early, and Never too Much: Coverage of Men's "Big Three"

"Opening Day is only 18 days away! Yes, I have a countdown goin'," KABC reporter Ashley Brewer enthusiastically reported on March 10, 2019. During this same time period, preceding the start of the Major League Baseball (MLB) season, several of the anchors on the local network affiliates repeated a tantalizing question for local baseball fans: Will Clayton Kershaw be the opening-day starting pitcher for the L.A. Dodgers? *SportsCenter* was equally enthusiastic in anticipating the start of MLB play, featuring on its March 15 broadcast a full-screen graphic "countdown to opening day." And, it wasn't just pre-season baseball stories that these shows were pitching. On March 13, KCBS devoted 1 min, 30-s to promoting a docuseries about the National Football League's (NFL) Los Angeles Rams. After showing the trailer for the show, anchor Jim Hill gushed, "It's *never too early* for pro football," and predicted that the Rams "will come back with a vengeance this year!" The next day, Hill ran a 33-s story reporting that the L.A. Rams' season tickets were now on sale; the report included an interview with the Rams' Vice President of Business Strategy, who spoke about the perks of having season tickets.

As the above examples illustrate, the dominance of men's Big Three sports on TV news and highlights programs is amplified by a practice we have noted in past studies: while a women's sports story rarely if ever appears when the sport is out of season, stories on the men's Big Three appear regularly, both when the sport is in-season and when it is out of season. Sometimes, in-season women's sports are fully eclipsed by stories devoted to out-of-season men's sports. For instance, on July 10, 2019, KABC's Curt Sandoval devoted a long segment to covering the National Basketball Association's (NBA) Los Angeles Lakers' summer league, even noting at the end of the story that the game didn't matter: "It's just summer league." Meanwhile, KABC did not cover any of the four regular-season Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) games that were played that day. Instead, the final scores of these games were noted in the scrolling ticker.

Sports news and highlights programs' tendency to promote men's Big Three sports during their off-seasons is not anecdotal; it is systematic. As in past studies, we compared in-season and out-of-season coverage of the NBA and the WNBA. As Table 1 shows, in 2019 we found WNBA stories on TV news or SportsCenter only during its season, while the NBA received nearly as much coverage during its off-season than when games were being played.

A similar pattern was evident in our analysis of the content of the scrolling ticker. During its off-season there was not one mention of the WNBA, either on *SportsCenter* or the network affiliates' tickers. By contrast, of *SportsCenter's* 191 NBA stories that scrolled across its ticker during our study, 94 of them occurred in the July sample, during NBA's off-season. Similarly, 50 of the network affiliates' 330 total NBA ticker stories appeared on the screen during the July NBA off-season period. The same pattern held in the online and social media data we collected. Online newsletters frequently included out-of-season NBA stories, but never once mentioned the WNBA during its off-season. The social media posts we examined included a sea of tweets about the NBA, both in-season and out-of-season, and only three out-of-season tweets about the WNBA, all from espnW.

As much as anything in our study, this tendency to promote men's Big Three sports during their off-seasons while rarely if ever mentioning women's sports during their off-seasons reveals how mainstream sports media works to actively build and maintain audience knowledge, interest, and excitement for these men's sports. The programs' several and oft-repeated July stories about the Lakers' off-season signing of Anthony Davis reveal not only that it's "never too early" to present an enthusiastic story about an out of season men's Big Three sport: The length of these stories—including a 3 min long *SportsCenter* piece on Davis' signing—show that it is also "never too much."

When Women's Sports Are Covered . . .

In our earlier iterations of this study, tennis was usually the most commonly featured women's sport. As recently as 2004, 43% of all women's sports stories in our sample were tennis stories. Over the next decade, the vast majority of women's sports airtime shifted to women's professional and college basketball, reaching 81% in 2014. That year tennis was a distant second with 6.4% over the women's sports airtime, and golf (5.9%) was third. As Figure 4 shows, the favored women's sports shifted again in 2019. Basketball, with 37.5% of women's sports coverage, was still number one. But soccer and tennis, each with 28.9% of the airtime, were not far behind. As we noted above, the July bursts of coverage of USWNT's World Cup victory, and of U.S. women competitors at Wimbledon accounted for much of this increase in coverage of soccer and tennis.

The social media content on women's sports was similar to that of the televised news and highlights shows: A tidal wave of tweets about basketball (39.8%), soccer

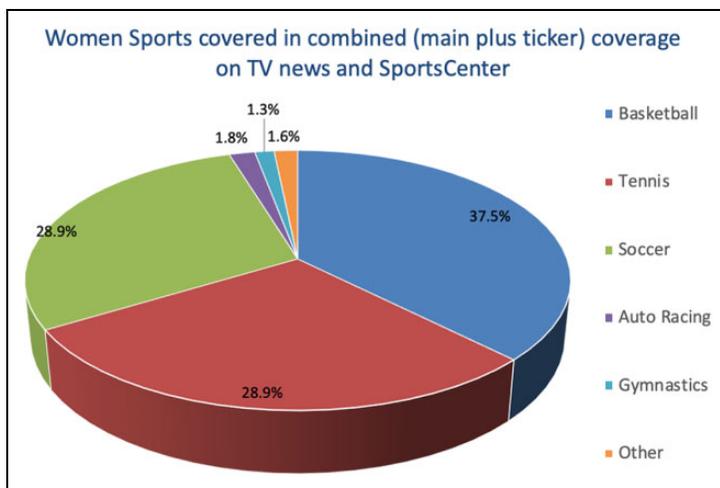


Figure 4. Women’s sports coverage (main plus ticker) on local network affiliates and SportsCenter, 2019.

(28.9%) and tennis (10.7%) submerged the number of tweets about other women’s sports. We found a wider range of women’s sports covered in online newsletters: soccer (21.7%), tennis (15%) and basketball (15%) still led, but this left ample room for gymnastics (10%), ice hockey (5%), skiing (5%), and a wide array of other women’s sports (20% of the total content).

March Madness: Still Mostly for Men

As in in the past, we found it useful to compare news and highlights coverage of the women’s and men’s NCAA basketball tournament. Unlike many sports, where there are major structural asymmetries that at least partly explain differences in reportage—for example, the existence of no women’s equivalent to men’s college football, the NFL, Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Hockey League (NHL), or the fact that the WNBA has a far shorter season than the NBA, and is scheduled during a different time of the year (summer)—the women’s and men’s NCAA tournaments are equivalent events, played during roughly the same several weeks. As such, they provide a source ripe for comparison.

In past studies, we concluded that these programs promote “March Madness” as “mostly for men.” As Table 2 shows, in 2019, this was still the case. The local affiliates devoted nearly 1 h and 14 min (56 stories) to the men’s tournament while spending only 3 min and 16 s (comprising 8 stories) on the women’s tournament. Similarly, ESPN’s *SportsCenter* devoted just over 2 h and 13 min to the men’s tournament (27 stories) and only 3 min and 43-s (a paltry two stories) on the women’s tournament.

Table 2. Men's and Women's NCAA Basketball Stories, March 2019.

	Men's NCAA basketball	Women's NCAA basketball
KABC, KNBC & KCBS, main coverage	56 stories; 01:13:29	8 stories; 03:16
KABC, KNBC & KCBS, ticker coverage	76 stories; 52:10	0 stories; 00:00
ESPN <i>SportsCenter</i> , main coverage	27 stories; 02:13:10	2 stories; 03:43
ESPN <i>SportsCenter</i> , ticker coverage	258 stories; 3:16:47	17 stories; 13:38

The online newsletters in our sample echoed this asymmetrical coverage, presenting 48 articles on the men's NCAA tournament, and only 6 (4 of them on espnW.com) on the women's tournament. Social media content also skewed strongly toward the men's tournament, with 730 tweets (89.7%) on the men's tournament, while the women's tournament garnered only 84 tweets (10.3%), 73 of which were posted by @espnW. In a clear example of cross-platform marketing, the largest number of newsletter stories and tweets about the men's NCAA tournament emanated from cbssports.com, the network that was live broadcasting many of the men's games. By contrast, ESPN was live broadcasting many of the women's NCAA tournament games, but did not seek to build audience interest with its online or social content, contributing only two newsletter articles and ten tweets about the women's tournament. Instead, coverage of the women's tournament was relegated to ESPN's niche platform, espnW.

How Women's Sports Are Covered: Shifting Patterns

The quantity of coverage of women's sports on TV news and highlights programs has changed little over the past 30 years, however our research has revealed dramatic shifts in how women's sports are covered. The first three iterations of the study, based on data from 1989, 1993, and 1999 revealed that women's sports, women athletes, and even women spectators were habitually insulted as objects of derision, trivialization, infantilization and humorous sexualization (Messner et al., 1993, 2003). Tennis, the most frequently covered women's sport during those years, was routinely presented in an overtly sexualized frame, for instance with cameras lingering on the body of Anna Kournikova (a top doubles player, but never a singles champion), as male sports anchors led the ogling, snickering with pleasure over their desire for her. This 1990s frame foregrounded conventionally sexy, model-beautiful (and mostly white and blonde) women athletes like Kournikova, while rendering invisible other women athletes—even those of greater talent and accomplishment—who did not conform to that narrow image of culturally-valued white femininity (Bruce, 2013; Cooky, 2018).

In 2004 and 2009, we observed a decline (but not a disappearance) of humorous sexualization and overtly insulting stories about women's sports. Instead, the

emergent frame foregrounded women athletes' roles as mothers, or as wives or girlfriends (of men). Echoing Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) we viewed this re-framing of women athletes as "ambivalent" (Cooky et al., 2013; Messner et al., 2006). On the one hand, foregrounding women athletes' children or husbands was purportedly more "respectful" than the insulting and sexualized 1990s frame. But on the other hand, it symbolically locked women athletes in an ideological frame of compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood, thus rendering less visible women who identified as lesbian, queer or child-free (Bruce, 2013; Lenskyj, 2013). While the sexualized media frame of the 1990s may have been deployed to entice men sports fans to pay attention to some women's sports (Kane et al., 2013), the 2000s wife-girlfriend-mother frame rendered women athletes familiar to male viewers, during a historical moment when same-sex relationships and families were still neither legally sanctioned nor widely culturally supported, and when women's sport leagues attempted to navigate the heterosexism and homophobia embedded in sports cultures (McDonald, 2012).

In 2014, we observed a further evaporation of insulting trivialization and sexualization of women athletes. And while there were a few reports that echoed the wife-girlfriend-mother portrayal of the previous decade, this frame had receded. Instead, in 2014 we observed what appeared to be an effort to present women's sports stories respectfully, without resorting to insults or overt gender stereotypes. We noted that most of the women's stories were presented by commentators with far less verbal pop and excitement than had typically characterized their men's sports stories. Routinely delivered in a dull monotone, women's sports stories, we observed, were usually presented as just boring. We labelled this frame "gender-bland sexism" (Musto et al., 2017).

Our identification of the emergent "gender bland" frame for women's sports stories influenced our policy recommendations following that study (Cooky et al., 2015). In addition to increasing the quantity of coverage of women's sports (our first recommendation, discussed above), we recommended that women's sports stories should be presented in roughly the same ways as men's stories, with high technical quality (ample game footage, graphics, music, and interviews), and couched in enthusiastic, colorful and exciting verbal description from the commentators. In 2019, with rare exceptions (e.g., a handful of high-quality stories enthusiastically presented by KNBC's Mario Solis), women's sports stories were still normally presented in bland and boring ways. In contrast, viewers of stories about men's sports were constantly immersed in a sea of colorful and dominant verbal descriptors, delivered in excited and widely-modulated voice intonations, such as, "emphatic dunk!", "lethal," "on fire!", "in command!", "exclamation point!", "Boom!", "a force," "crushing!", "Unstoppable!", "throwin' heat," "monster jam!", "took control!", "ripped up!", "ferocious dunk!", "high octane!". Commentators were adept at amping up the enthusiasm in their men's sports stories with statements such as the one *SportsCenter*'s John Buccigross deployed in describing then-college basketball phenom Zion Williamson: "He's such an unpredictable bundle of energy

that it reminds one of watching a swelling storm on Doppler radar.” Women athletes were rarely, if ever, described in this way.

Gender-bland sexism continued as the dominant pattern in 2019 TV news and highlights’ stories on women’s sports, but we also observed three distinct folds in this pattern, which we discuss below. First, we show how, when a U.S. women’s team or athlete is successful in a high-profile international field of competition, nationalism can escalate a women’s sports story temporarily into the foreground of sports news. Second, we discuss how asymmetrical gender marking couples with local parochialism in ways that mask how the TV news spotlight shines brightly on the successes of a local men’s team while rendering a local women’s team to relative darkness. Third, we point to the ways that men athletes and teams are frequently elevated in news and highlights shows due to their community and charitable contributions. Women athletes’ community contributions, including their social justice activism, almost never make it into the frame of women’s sports stories.

“World Domination Night from Team USA!”

We noted above that coverage of the USWNT’s 2019 World Cup championship accounted for a large proportion of the July, 2019 coverage of women’s sports on TV news and on *SportsCenter*. The quality of how these WWC stories were presented was also uncharacteristic of most women’s sports coverage, often with high technical production values and enthusiastic description that echoed the ways that the commentators normally celebrate men’s sports. The U.S. team’s WWC victory and follow-up celebrations even broke through a previously impenetrable glass ceiling in the history of our study, being selected five times as the lead sports stories on two of the network affiliate news shows, and on *SportsCenter*. What is it about the Women’s World Cup that explains this surge in quantity, placement, and quality of coverage of a women’s sport? A look at some of the commentary sheds light on this question.

On July 7, 2019, *SportsCenter* opened with an exciting, well-produced 6-min 51-s long story of that day’s most important sporting event, the U.S. women’s national soccer team’s World Cup championship. The report featured vivid game footage, video of the team celebrating, post-match interviews, and an on-screen graphic of the American flag. Tag-teaming the commentary, ESPN’s Michael Eaves and Kevin Connors opened the story with these words:

Red, white and wow! The US does it again. Back to back World Cup finals in dominant fashion... We begin with world domination night from team USA. Yeah, for the second straight world cup title as the goal. The US women’s national team clearly wasn’t satisfied with just taking part, they went to France to take over!

KCBS also opened its 6 p.m. sports news segment with a celebratory 68-s long story on that day's WWC championship match. Sports commentator Jaime Maggio reported the story with breathless excitement, as an off-camera male news anchor chimed in:

All right! Right on the heels of 4th of July, we have another thing to be proud about here in this country" [male anchor interjects, "Big day!"] Maggio continues, "With the patriotism, it just keeps on rolling." [male anchor chimes in, "It sure does!"] Maggio resumes: I'm sure the Women's World Cup had us cheering for them today. It was a record-setting day at the Women's World Cup.

After showing footage of the team with hands on hearts during the pre-game national anthem, Maggio aptly described the action as game footage ran of two U.S. goals and subsequent celebrations. The report ended with an emotional interview with U.S. team captain Megan Rapinoe and with Maggio's exclamation, "It's amazing!" That same day, KABC also ran a 55 min story on the U.S. team's WWC victory, with commentator Ashley Brewer delivering colorful description of Megan Rapinoe's goal—"Boom! Right there! Her sixth goal of the tournament!"—however the lead story on that broadcast was a report on that day's L.A. Dodgers' regular season game. KNBC did run the WWC story as a 1 min, 36-s lead sports story on their 6 p.m. broadcast, with Mario Solis providing colorful commentary that began with, "To say they dominated is an understatement."

How might we explain why this single women's sports story was elevated and spotlighted so dramatically, when nearly all other women's sports stories struggle to be covered at all, much less with the same quality, duration, and excitement of men's sports stories? A large part of the answer lies in understanding how nationalism infuses sport and sports media (Montez de Oca, 2013). A periodic international mega-sports event like the World Cup or the Olympic Games pits national teams against each other on an international field. On a world stage, these events create a context in which nationalistic pride can be promoted and amplified (Billings, Brown & Delvin, 2017), as the WWC coverage above illustrates, complete with American flags, clips of the national anthem being played, and commentary that celebrates "patriotism," "red-white-and wow," and "world domination night" by "our" team. For a moment, nationalistic pride trumps the sexist tendency in mainstream media to ignore women's sports (Bruce, 2016). And we emphasize that phrase, *for a moment*: The same day that KNBC ran the WWC championship match as its lead 6 p.m. news story, by 11:00 p.m. that night KNBC had bumped the WWC piece to second in its lineup, instead leading with a 53-s story on the U.S. men's soccer team's *loss* to Mexico in the Gold Cup Final. Five hr after it had shined so brightly, the eclipse of the biggest women's sports story in our 2019 sample had commenced.

While not as dramatic as the coverage of the Women's World Cup, several July, 2019 TV news and *SportsCenter* stories highlighted U.S. women tennis

players during Wimbledon, providing another example of the nationalistic elevation of a women's sport. The Wimbledon stories intertwined intriguing questions about two U.S. African American women competitors: Would ageing superstar Serena Williams reprise her career of dominant play, and capture her 24th major title?—and how far will 15-year-old phenom Coco Gauff advance in the tournament? Leading up to the title match, coverage of Williams' matches was routine, celebratory and generally of high quality. But when Williams lost in the finals to Romanian Simona Halep, committing 26 unforced errors along the way, the match was covered only briefly or not at all on the TV news and highlights shows.

On their 6 p.m. July 13 news show, following a 1 min, 36 s lead story on the L.A. Lakers' signing of Anthony Davis, KNBC did include a matter-of-fact 26-s report on Williams's loss in the Wimbledon finals. Commentator Mario Solis wrapped up the Wimbledon story by reminding viewers that "Surely the biggest surprise at the tournament was 15-year-old Coco Gauff, who opened her Wimbledon run with a win over Venus Williams, then advancing all the way to the round of 16. Keeping an eye on Coco as a local teenage player who some feel can also go far in the tennis world." In refocusing the story on Gauff, who had fallen out of the tournament five days earlier, Solis implied that although Serena Williams may no longer be able to win championships, here is a young U.S. player to whom Williams may pass the torch. Indeed, KNBC's other anchor, Fred Roggin described Gauff as "the future of American tennis." Punctuating that message, Solis followed up on a story KNBC had run back in 2008 on two young girls, local African American sisters who were emergent tennis stars. Now 11 years older, Solis reported, Maya and Regina Pitts were in their late teens, and "on track" to turn pro.

This celebratory and generally high-quality mini-spike of coverage of African American women tennis players in July, 2019 echoed the tone of that month's coverage of the Women's World Cup. So long as there were U.S. athletes competing for a championship on a world stage, the enthusiastic coverage surged; when Williams fell short, the story sputtered out, but for optimistic projections of future U.S. stars on the horizon. The nationalist spotlight glows brightly when "our" women athletes win, but quickly shifts to illuminate another subject—often an everyday men's sports story—when they lose. Considered critically in the context of systemic gendered racism, this brief elevation of African American women athletes echoes a history of Black women and men athletes—for example, Olympic Gold medalists Jesse Owens, Rafer Johnson and Wilma Rudolph—becoming objects of patriotic celebration for their accomplishments on a world stage (Bryant, 2018).

Following a major media event like the 2019 U.S. team's WWC victory, it is common to hear people speak of the event as a watershed moment, a turning point, predicting that now things can never be the same again, that never again will women's sports be ignored by the mass media. A sobering benefit of having done

this research for 30 years is that we know that there have been several such “watershed moments” in the past: following the U.S. team’s previous WWC victories in 1991, 1999 and 2015, for instance, or following U.S. women’s celebrated triumphs in the Olympic Games in recent decades (Messner et al., 2006). The reality is, following bursts of nationalistic media coverage and flurries of public celebration following these high-profile U.S. women’s international championships, there has been little to no subsequent spillover into increased quantity or quality of mainstream media coverage of everyday women’s sports. Nationalism can sometimes trump sexism, or even gendered racism in media coverage of women’s sports, but it does so only for a moment, its impact transitory and short-lived (Bell & Coche, 2018).

“We Just Can’t Stop Talking About UC Irvine!”

We noted above that during “March Madness,” news and highlights shows devoted far more airtime to the NCAA men’s basketball tournament than to the women’s tournament. Our analysis illustrates how the language routinely used in sports media coverage of a national sports story relegates women’s sports to the periphery. On March 16, KABC’s Ashley Brewer set the template for how the “local angle” on “March Madness” would play out over the next several days: “Well, after equally disappointing college basketball seasons, UCLA and USC won’t be a part of the NCAA tournament. But still, one SoCal team will be headed to the Big Dance. The Big West championship game in Anaheim. Cal State Fullerton versus UC Irvine. . . .”

Two very common conventions are visible in Brewer’s statement. The first is local parochialism (Hull, 2017; Hull & Romney, 2020b): the tendency to devote disproportionate technical investment, talk, and airtime into covering local men’s teams’ ups and downs in a national event like the NCAA tournament. The second convention is asymmetrical gender marking in the language commentators deploy to describe sports. On the one hand, there are *women* athletes, *women’s* teams, the *WNBA*, and the *women’s* NCAA tournament. On the other hand, men’s sports are routinely described in generic, non-gender-marked ways: there are athletes, *the* NCAA Tournament, the *NBA*, etc. This asymmetrical gender marking verbally inscribes women athletes and women’s sports as other, as secondary to men’s sports, which are positioned as the universal standard norm (Eitzen & Baca Zinn, 1989; Messner et al., 1993). Notably, KABC’s Brewer did not gender mark “the NCAA tournament” as the *Men’s* NCAA tournament. So, despite the fact that the UCLA women’s team qualified for the tournament, local stories for the next several days focused heavily on the U.C. Irvine men’s “Cinderella” run in “The Big [Men’s] Dance.”

On March 17, KNBC’s Mario Solis echoed this, reporting “There’s only one local team in the Big Dance.” The following day, KABC’s Brewer did present a gender-bland 15-s report with minimal production values on the women’s NCAA Tournament bracket, noting that the UCLA team was a six-seed, adding, “We wish

them luck.” Neither KCBS nor KNBC that evening mentioned the UCLA women’s team making the tournament, and KNBC’s Fred Roggin did exclaim, while showing footage of UC Irvine players celebrating, “There’s only one team from Southern California in the Big Dance. That is the UC Irvine Anteaters!” Over the next few days, there was little or no coverage of the women’s tournament, but ample coverage of men’s games, including frequent reminders like that delivered by KABC’s Curt Sandoval that UC Irvine is the “only team in town” to be at the tournament.

When the 13th seed UC Irvine men won their first-round game on March 23, the local excitement escalated, as KABC’s Curt Sandoval gushed, “We can’t stop talking about UC Irvine!” and KNBC’s Solis reminded viewers about UC Irvine that “. . . they’re the only, *only* California team still alive . . .”. However, that very day, the “other” California team, the UCLA women, had won its opening round game against the University of Tennessee. Curt Sandoval’s 35-s story on that game was respectfully presented with some game footage. Compared with the exciting hype for the UC Irvine men’s team however, the commentary on this women’s game was blandly-presented, including no post-game interviews, exciting verbal commentary, or technical bells or whistles. On March 24, when the UC Irvine men lost to Oregon, KNBC’s Mario Solis closed out the story that had so captivated the local news shows, with a 1 min 44-s long tribute that included game footage and post-game interviews with the UC Irvine head coach and a player. The UCLA women’s team, which eventually made an impressive run to the “Sweet Sixteen” round, was not mentioned in this report.

Men Athletes as Community Heroes

In 2019, we again observed a liberal sprinkling of stories that did not focus narrowly on recognizable sporting events—even, frequently, on broadcasts where there was no coverage of women’s sports. Instead, viewers were presented with entertaining humorous gag-stories (e.g., on March 20, KNBC’s Fred Roggin ended his sports broadcast with a 28-second humorous “March Madness of a different kind story” on the Russian “male slapping championships. The competition is brutal. You stand in front of a man and let him slap you as hard as you can”), or human-interest features that deepen viewers’ emotional connection with men’s sports (e.g., a 1 min, 35-s November 20 KNBC story that featured “One family, two generations of outstanding quarterbacks at Venice High”). A subset of these feel-good, human-interest stories highlighted the good that men athletes and their teams do for their communities through charity and other forms of generosity. We illustrate this pattern with four examples:

- On March 14, KCBS devoted 47 s on its sports news show for a segment on the L.A. Rams’ presentation of a \$1500 Deacon Jones Scholarship to a standout high school athlete in the San Fernando Valley.

- On its March 20 show, KABC ran a 20 s segment on USC football long snapper Jake Olsen, who is blind, bench-pressing 225 pounds, 17 times. Noting that Olsen was “raising money for retinoblastoma research,” commentator Ashley Brewer concluded, “He is so brave, so courageous.”
- Also on March 20, in a 49 s KCBS segment, as viewers saw footage of Magic Johnson in a classroom, alongside students working at computers, Jim Hill noted that “Crenshaw High School has a new STEM lab, thanks in part to Magic Johnson of the Lakers, who funded the project through a partnership with the school.”
- KABC ran a 2 min 30 s story on July 9, celebrating retired Lakers star Shaquille O’Neil’s partnering with EPSON and donating printers to schools. Ashley Brewer began the report, explaining, “When Shaquille O’Neil was winning four championships and an Olympic gold medal, he was always giving back to the community.”

Men athletes, especially highly-paid professionals, often do “give back” to their communities, and it is newsworthy when they do so. We note two critical points about this pattern. First, professional sports teams, and sometimes even big-time college teams, routinely contribute to community projects as a key element in their public relations and marketing plans. The marketing promotion arms of teams and leagues then actively pitch stories that are generated from these community projects, to local and national media outlets. As a result, media outlets receive a pre-packaged story for their news shows, and in return, their feature stories promote and enhance the public images of men athletes and their teams, actively building audiences for these sports (Montez de Oca et al., 2016). The entwined set of interests revealed in this symbiotic relationship between sport organizations and mass media is at the heart of what scholar Sut Jhally (1984) called the “Sport/Media Complex.”

Women’s teams and leagues—both college and professional—also engage in a substantial amount of public service, but women’s sport interests are not so organically tied into the Sport/Media Complex, and, as such, they are rarely mentioned in mainstream media. As Allison (2018) has shown, women’s professional soccer players, teams, and leagues regularly commit themselves to community causes, often those related to girls and women’s health. The WNBA too has a history of deep involvement in community service, exemplified in its “WNBA Cares” initiative for example, which according to its website supports programs focused on education, youth and family development, and health and wellness. In our 2019 study however, women athletes’ community or charitable work was never mentioned in a TV sports news or highlights show.

Women athletes and teams also have a deep history of engaging in social justice advocacy work, a public activity that recently has gained increased media visibility (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). Most evident during our study was the U.S. National Team’s advocacy for pay equity for women athletes, and for women in general. Following their WWC championship victory parade, star player Megan Rapinoe

addressed gender equity issues in her speech, and then she and members of the team joined the crowd in chanting “Equal Pay! Equal Pay!” Neither *SportsCenter* nor any of the three network affiliate news shows in our study mentioned this dramatic moment of social justice advocacy in their reports on the championship match or on the subsequent ticker-tape victory parade in New York City. A week later, in *SportsCenter’s* coverage of ESPN’s “ESPY Awards” show, Jeremy Schaap conducted an in-depth interview with star players Megan Rapinoe and Alex Morgan. To his credit, Schaap asked Rapinoe to address ongoing public disagreements between her and then-President Donald Trump, and the team’s efforts to raise awareness about equal pay for women. Given a rare public platform on which to comment on this issue during a mainstream sports program, Rapinoe did not pass on the opportunity:

We’re so much more than what we are on the field. And I think this team really understands and is so prideful, we really do carry with us other people when we step out on the pitch . . . But I think that the message that we have is really for everyone. It’s about equality. It’s about supporting each other. We really do take pride in, and take a lot into consideration in the stances that we take, and I feel like we fight for everybody. We’re trying to raise more opportunities for girls and women around the world to be included and be respected in the sport . . . and I think people respect that side of us, and I think we’re doing a pretty good job at it.

Conclusion

Spanning the 3 decades of this study, the quantity of coverage of women’s sports on TV news and highlights shows has consistently remained dismally low. Viewers of these shows are fed a steady diet of men’s sports, especially the Big Three of football, basketball and baseball. Even during their off-seasons, the Big Three men’s sports receive continuing coverage that helps to build and sustain audience interest, knowledge, and emotional connection to these sports. This pattern of coverage serves to reinforce the “center of sport,” (Messner, 2002). Most sports news or highlights shows are made up entirely of men’s sports stories, with most women’s sports events of the day fully eclipsed in darkness. On the rare broadcast when a women’s sports story does appear, it is usually a case of “one and done,” a single women’s sports story partially-eclipsed by a cluster of men’s stories that precede it, follow it, and are longer in length. Social media posts and online sports newsletters’ coverage, though a bit more diverse in some ways, mostly reflected these same patterned gender asymmetries. Previous research also found a lack of coverage of women’s sports on the twitter accounts of local sportscasters where seemingly time constraints would not factor into the content itself (see Hull, 2017). Our results indicate similar trends regarding the coverage of men’s and women’s sports on the national network twitter accounts. This latter finding surprised us, as we expected

that without the time and space constraints faced by mainstream media outlets like television news and highlights shows, social media would be a space in which information about women's sports would be more expansive.

Although the quantity of women's sports coverage has remained the same over the 30-year period covered by our study, we do note some dramatic shifts in the ways that women's sports are covered over time. In the 1990s, we noted that these shows routinely trivialized, insulted and humorously sexualized women athletes. By the 2000s' we noted that news frames had shifted toward viewing women athletes in less overtly insulting ways, instead highlighting their roles as wives, girlfriends of men/ male athletes, or as mothers. In 2014, we noted a continued decline of insulting sexualization of women athletes, and a receding wife-girlfriend-mother news frame, and the emergence of a presumably "respectful" framing of women's sports that was delivered in a boring, inflection-free manner we called, "gender-bland sexism" (Musto et al., 2017).

In the 2019 study, we identified three themes within this continuing gender-bland pattern: First, nationalism sometimes temporarily escalates a story of a successful women's sports team or athlete into the foreground of sports news, but there is little or no subsequent spillover into increased coverage of other women's sports. Second, asymmetrical gender marking couples with local parochialism in ways that mask how the TV News spotlight shines brightly on the successes of a local men's team while rendering a local women's team to relative darkness. Third, the community and charitable contributions of men athletes and teams are frequently elevated in news and highlights shows, while women athletes' community contributions, including their social justice activism, almost never make it into the frame of women's sports stories.

Following our most recent iteration of this study 5 years earlier, our third policy recommendation was for news and highlights shows to diversify their anchors and ancillary reporters by race and by gender. As in previous iterations of the study, in 2014 we found most of the content on the local news affiliates and ESPN was delivered by men, and in particular white men. Similarly, in our 2019 study the majority of anchors, co-anchors, and ancillary announcers/ analysts featured were white men. While there was some racial diversity among the male anchors/ announcers, there were no women of color who delivered sports content in our sample. In other words, the only female sports anchors/ commentators featured were white, with KABC having the most appearances of a female anchor in its broadcasts. For the local Los Angeles affiliates, there has been little turnover in the anchor position, with KCBS and KNBC employing the same main anchor over the 3 decades of this study. In our analysis of online content,² similar patterns emerged, with the vast majority of content produced by white men. These trends in gender and racial diversity have been observed in other sport media. For example, the most recent *Sports Media Gender and Racial Report Card* (Lapchick, 2018) found 85 percent of sports editors, 76.4% of assistant sports editors, 80.3% of columnists, 82.1% of reporters, and 77.7% of copy editors/ designers were white, with 91.5%, 90.2%,

83.5%, 85%, and 83.3% male, respectively. While the report notes an increase in the percent of women working as sports editors, assistant sports editors and so on, as an occupation, sports media remains overwhelmingly white and male.

Over the past 30 years, we have witnessed impressive growth in the quantity and quality of live televised coverage of some women's sports. When we first began this study in 1989, the women's NCAA basketball tournament games were not broadcast live; the championship game could be viewed on late-night tape-delay, and featured very low production values. Over the years we have conducted this study, live women's basketball broadcasts have increased in number and vastly improved in their production values, though often still falling short in quality when compared with the broadcasts of men's games. Even mainstream print sports media has made some strides toward better coverage of women's sports; for instance the *Los Angeles Times*' has invested in covering USC and UCLA women's basketball for the past two seasons. Our study has shown however, that the growing attention to women's sports in some media platforms has not migrated to the nightly TV news, to highlights shows like ESPN's *SportsCenter*, nor does it appear in the online newsletters or Twitter feeds affiliated with these networks (with exception of espnW, which can arguably be seen as ESPN's reason to remain, implicitly, "ESPNM"). We have analyzed this contradictory moment in history, characterized by improving coverage of women's sports in some media platforms, and continuing stagnation in others as an example of the "unevenness of social change" (Cooky & Messner, 2018). In the larger picture of girls' and women's continuing efforts to achieve equal opportunities, resources, pay, and respect in sports, TV news and highlight shows and their affiliated online and social media platforms matter, as they are key parts of the promotional and audience-building apparatus of the Sports/Media complex. Daily sports news and highlights shows' continuing failure to equitably cover women's sports mutes women's historic movement into sport and the impressive accomplishments of women athletes, as it continues to legitimize greater material rewards for men athletes, while shoring up stubbornly persistent ideologies of male superiority.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Margaret Carlisle Duncan, Wayne Wilson, Michela Musto and Orasio Becerra for their contributions to this and to previous iterations of this study. Special thanks to Marj Snyder, Karen Issokson-Silver, Don Sabo, Ange-Marie Hancock-Alfaro, Lawrence Wenner and Martha Avtandilian for their support of the project.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Primary funding for this study was provided through a grant

from the Women's Sports Foundation. The Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, and the Office of the Provost at Purdue University provided supplemental support that made the research possible.

ORCID iD

Cheryl Cooky  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8511-6616>

Notes

1. There is no daily newsletter or social media account connected to ABC. This may be explained by Disney owning both the ESPN and ABC networks.
2. We were not able to ascertain the race and gender of those who posted on the sports networks' twitter accounts.

References

- Adams, T., & Tuggle, C. A. (2004). ESPN's *SportsCenter* and coverage of women's athletics: It's a boys' club. *Mass Communication and Society*, 7, 237–248.
- Allison, R. (2018). *Kicking center: Gender and the selling of women's professional soccer*. Rutgers University Press.
- Bell, T. R., & Coche, R. (2018). High power kick: Content analysis of the USWNT 2015 world cup victory on American front pages. *Communication & Sport*, 6(6), 745–761.
- Bernstein, A. (2002). Is it time for a victory lap? Changes in the media coverage of women in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37, 415–428.
- Billings, A. C., Brown, K. A., & Devlin, N. B. (2017). Raising the American Flag Via Olympic Media Consumption: Quantitatively Exploring the Ethics of U.S. Nationalism and Sport Spectatorship. *Diagoras: International Academic Journal on Olympic Studies*, 1, 11–34.
- Billings, A. C., & Angelini, J. (2019). Equity achieved? A longitudinal examination of biological sex representation in the NBC Olympic telecast (2000-2018). *Communication & Sport*, 7(5), 551–564.
- Billings, A. C., & Young, B. D. (2015). Comparing flagship news programs women's sport coverage in ESPN's SportsCenter and FOX Sports 1's FOX Sports Live. *Electronic News*, 9(1), 3–16.
- Bruce, T. (2013). Reflections on communication and sport: On women and femininities. *Communication & Sport*, 1(1–2), 125–137.
- Bruce, T. (2016). New rules for new times: Sportswomen and media representation in the third wave. *Sex Roles*, 74, 361–376.
- Bryant, H. (2018). *The heritage: Black athletes, a divided America, and the politics of patriotism*. Beacon Press.
- Cooky, C. (2018). What's new about sporting femininities? Female athletes and the sport-media industrial complex. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe, & J. Francombe-Webb (Eds.), *New sporting femininities: Embodied politics in postfeminist times* (pp. 23–41). Palgrave Publishers.

- Cooky, C., & Antunovic, D. (2020). "This isn't just about us": Articulations of feminism in media narratives of athlete activism. *Communication & Sport*, 8(4-5), 692-711.
- Cooky, C., & Messner, M. A. (2018). *No slam dunk: Gender, sport, and the unevenness of social change*. Rutgers University Press.
- Cooky, C., Messner, M. A., & Hextrum, R. (2013). Women play sports, but not on TV: A longitudinal study of televised news media. *Communication & Sport*, 1, 203-230.
- Cooky, C., Messner, M. A., & Musto, M. (2015). "It's dude time!": A quarter century of excluding women's sports in televised news and highlights shows. *Communication & Sport*, 3, 261-287.
- Daniels, E. A. (2009). Sex objects, athletes and sexy athletes: How media representations of women athletes can impact adolescent girls and college women. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24, 399-423.
- Daniels, E. A., & Wartena, H. (2011). Athlete or sex symbol: What adolescent boys think of media representations of female athletes. *Sex Roles*, 65, 566-579.
- Duncan, M. C., & Hasbrook, C. A. (1988). Denial of power in televised women's sports. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 1-21.
- Eitzen, D. S., & Zinn, M. B. (1989). The de-athleticization of women: The naming and gender-marking of collegiate sports teams. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 6, 362-370.
- Fink, J. (2015). Female athletes, women's sports, and the sport-media commercial complex: Have we really, "come a long way, baby"? *Sport Management Review*, 18(1), 331-342.
- Gantz, W., & Lewis, N. (2014). Sports on traditional and newer digital media: Is there really a fight for fans? *Television & New Media* 15(8), 760-768.
- Harrison, G. (2018). "You have to have thick skin": Embracing the affective turn as an approach to investigating the treatment of women working in sport media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(5), 952-955.
- Hull, K. (2017). An examination of women's sports coverage on the twitter accounts of local television sports broadcasters. *Communication & Sport*, 5(4), 471-491.
- Hull, K., & Romney, M. (2020a). "It has changed completely": How local sports broadcasters adapted to no sports. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 13, 494-504.
- Hull, K., & Romney, M. (2020b). Welcome to the Big Leagues: Exploring rookie broadcasters' adjustment to new careers. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695820933888>
- Hutchins, B., & Rowe, D. (2012). *Sport beyond television: The internet, digital media, and the rise of networked media sport*. Routledge.
- Jhally, S. (1984). The spectacle of accumulation: Material and cultural factors in the evolution of the sport/media complex. *The insurgent sociologist*, 12, 41-57.
- Kane, M. J., LaVoi, N., & Fink, J. S. (2013). Exploring elite female athletes' interpretations of sport media images: A window into the construction of social identity and "selling sex" in women's sports. *Communication & Sport*, 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479512473585>
- Kane, M. J., & Maxwell, H. (2011). Expanding the boundaries of sport media research: Using critical theory to explore consumer responses to representations of women's sports. *Journal of Sport Management*, 25, 202-216.

- Koivula, N. (1999). Gender stereotyping in televised media sports coverage. *Sex Roles, 41*, 589–604.
- Lapchick, R. (2018). *The 2018 associated press sports editors racial and gender report card. The institute for diversity and ethics in sports*. University of Central Florida.
- Lenskyj, H. J. (2013). Reflections on communication and sport: On heteronormativity and gender identities. *Communication & Sport, 1*(1–2), 138–150.
- McDonald, M. G. (2012). Out-of-bounds plays: The women’s national basketball association and the neoliberal imaginings of sexuality. In D. L. Andrews & M. L. Silk (Eds.), *Sport and neoliberalism: Politics, consumption, and culture* (pp. 211–224). Temple University Press.
- Messner, M. A. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men and sports*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Messner, M. A., Duncan, M. C., & Willms, N. (2006). This revolution is not being televised. *Contexts: Understanding People in Their Social Worlds, 5*, 34–38.
- Messner, M. A., Duncan, M. C., & Jensen, K. (1993). Separating the men from the girls: The gendered language of televised sports. *Gender & Society, 7*, 121–137.
- Messner, M. A., Duncan, M. C., & Wachs, F. L. (1996). The gender of audience-building: Televised coverage of men’s and women’s NCAA basketball. *Sociological Inquiry, 66*, 422–439.
- Messner, M. A., Duncan, M. C., & Cooky, C. (2003). Silence, sports bras, and wrestling porn: The treatment of women in televised sports news and highlights. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 27*, 38–51.
- Montez de Oca, J. (2013). *Discipline and indulgence: College football, media, and the American way of life during the cold war*. Rutgers University Press.
- Montez de Oca, J., Scholes, J., & Meyer, B. (2016). The children are our future: The NFL, corporate responsibility, and the production of “avid fans.” In M. A. Messner & M. Musto (Eds.), *Child’s play: Sport in kids’ worlds* (pp. 102–122). Rutgers University Press.
- Musto, M., Cooky, C., & Messner, M. A. (2017). “From fizzle to sizzle!”: Televised sports news and the production of gender-bland sexism. *Gender & Society, 31*, 573–596.
- Reichart Smith, L., Gall Myrick, J., & Gantz, W. (2019). A test of the relationship between sexist television commentary and enjoyment of women’s sports: Impacts on emotions, attitudes, and viewing intentions. *Communication Research Reports, 36*(5), 449–460.
- Romney, M., & Johnson, R. G. (2020). The ball game is for the boys: The visual framing of female athletes on national sports networks’ Instagram accounts. *Communication & Sport, 8*(6), 738–756.
- Wolter, S. (2020). A longitudinal analysis of ESPNW: Almost 10 years of challenging hegemonic masculinity. *Communication & Sport, 1*–24.
- Xu, Q., & Billings, A. C. (2021). Voices of the gatekeepers: Examining the Olympic channel production through a gendered lens. *Mass Communication and Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2020.1864650>