

Male-Bias Within Adult U.S. Sports

By Brooklyn Nelson

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Women's involvement in sports has increased dramatically since 1972 and the creation of Title IX which "requires that women and men be provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports. . . an equal opportunity to play" (Jackson). What once was every 1 in 27 girls who played sports has progressed significantly to every 2 out of 5 girls playing sports, (*Title IX and the Rise of Female Athletes in America*) with over 40% of athletes being women (Box). With this dramatic increase, some say that there exists little to no deterrents to women's involvement in sports. Yet a 2018 report showed contradicting opinions on the true progress of equality made in sports: "Research from Women in Sport has found 40% of women in the sports industry say they face discrimination because of their sex but 72% of their male colleagues say they see no inequality" (Kessel). Moreover, additional questions arise with a recent *TIME* interview of professional soccer player Alex Morgan, revealing that she too has "experienced sexist attitudes in her career many times" (Gregory). Because there continues to show an increase of young female athletes that eventually filter into adult sports, in addition to vast differences in opinion about the degree of equality that remains for them, a new question emerges: does there exist male-bias within adult U.S. sports? There does exist male-bias in adult U.S. sports, particularly through underrepresentation, as well as sexist stereotypes and hypersexualization of women.

American journalist and sports author Allen Barra claims in a 2015 article: "2014 the average had risen to 8.8 sports teams per NCAA school. . . 200,000 female participants. There is hardly a

college in the country now that doesn't have established teams for women. . .” (Barra). Despite evidence, such as this, that points to adequate participation of women in sports and the growing number of spots open for female athletes since Title IX, there still exists a lack of representation of women in some sports, specifically esports. In the stimulus material *Taking College Esports Seriously*, authors Nyle Sky Kauweloa and Jenifer Sunrise Winter--both professors in Communication and Information Science at the University of Hawaii at Manoa--address this issue when interviewing Player 8, an athlete apart of their study on college esports athletes and their seriousness about the sport. The authors explain, “she is the first (of two women) to have joined a college esports program in the United States. . . college esports suffers from a lack of girls and women participating in the space, programs need to provide a wider range of activities for marginalized (women, POC, and LGBTQ)” (Kauweloa). Because of the abnormality of Player 8 being a female in esports, the sport is male-dominated, thus male-biased. Sportswriter Benjamin Mock reiterates the lesser participation of women in esports and explains its cause when saying, “women are still the clear minority within esports. . . 14 interviews for this piece. . . women I spoke with asked to remain anonymous over fears of retaliation and harassment from the esports community. Misogyny. . . deeply embedded in esports” (Mock). Though Mock’s credibility as a sportswriter is unclear, he touches upon the issue that prejudice against women occurs often in esports; reversely, because misogyny is prevalent in esports, they are also biased towards men. On a larger scale, a 2017-2018 report found that not only did 87% of NAAC schools offer a greater amount of opportunities to male athletes than female athletes, but in NAAC sports, women had 62,236 fewer available sports opportunities/spots (Gibson). In essence, male athletes are given a greater advantage when wanting to play collegiate sports

because of the greater opportunities they have than female athletes. Meaning that women are underrepresented due to the lesser positions, consequently making U.S. adult sport male-biased.

The underrepresentation of women contributing to male-bias in sports can be seen further than in the sport itself. Professor James R. Angelini, who studies media and peoples' relationship with it, writes on this issue when stating, "Men athletes will receive more mentions than women athletes in NBC's prime time telecast of the 2010 Vancouver Games. . . The majority of the 20 most-mentioned athletes" (Angelini). Sociology academic and professor at the University of Auckland, Bruce Toni, goes beyond the lesser mentions of female athletes compared to male athletes and explains, "researchers identify globally persistent patterns and strikingly disproportionate levels of traditional media coverage between male and female athletes. . . women's sport averages approximately 10 % of print media and 5 % of television" (Toni). Angelini and Toni show the priority of the media to focus on male athletes over female athletes by a great margin, illustrating extreme male-bias. However, some may explain, like St. Paul Pioneer Press Sports Reporter Bob Sansevere, that coverage comes with public interest, somewhat like tv, when stating, "same thing with tv. . .they're not going to watch a tv show they're not interested in" (*Media Coverage and Female Athletes*). Claims like these do not recognize that public interest is derived from coverage, and without any exposure of female athletes, public interest lessons for women's sports. Verifying this, 20 year sports journalist Shira Springer writes, "don't commit to consistent women's sports coverage. . . perpetuate the biased, inaccurate belief that fans don't care about women's sports. . . can't build a following for women's sports when fans don't know when or where they'll find games or features or in-depth analysis" (Springer). Underrepresentation --or lack of publicity-- of female athletes in the media is a key component of male-bias in sports.

Apart from the sole component of underrepresentation, male-bias is shown in adult U.S. sports by sexist stereotypes of female athletes. Traditional sexist views of women and their involvement in sports have existed for decades, as shown in the stimulus material *Sporting Spirit*, where author George Orwell argues that women do not have a place at sporting events in 1945: “a boxing audience is always disgusting, and the behavior of the women, in particular, is such that the army, I believe, does not allow them to attend its contests” (Orwell). Although women are currently allowed to view and play sports in America, many gender roles stem from sexist stereotypes such as Orwells and tend to see women as needing to be “sheltered” (Wood). Authors Zacharias C. Wood and Alex C. Garn from Louisiana State University, continue by clarifying that these stereotypes, though often seen as positively protecting women, are indeed forms of benevolent sexism. Somewhat like this, NYU Applied Psychology student Andrea Paloian leads by interpreting a study on attitudes towards female athletes and their feminine qualities providing obstacles for them, “‘Sportswomen read a fine line of acceptable femininity. . .an acceptable feminine demeanor is disempowering’ (116). . . traditional expectations focusing on appearance and exhibiting femininity are maintained by society’s attitudes towards athletic women” (Paloian). By fitting this “feminine demeanor” Becky Grey, *BBC* sports journalist, describes how female athletes are usually depicted as mothers first, athletes second, while men receive recognition of their strength as athletes first and foremost (Grey). When sports women are judged first of their feminine gender roles and demeanor, such as motherhood, their athletic abilities are not the focus. Opposingly, the athletic ability of male athletes is highlighted without the same deterrents as women, making sport male-biased.

Furthermore, when women are represented within media, hypersexualization often occurs, and physical feminine characteristics are overemphasized compared to skill. This idea is expressed by marketing writer Ann Snook when she reveals, “Toxic gender stereotypes also lead female athletes to be objectified and sexualized, their looks garnering more press than their skills” (Snook). Professor David Rowe at the University of Western Sydney, Australia restates this claim: “the commercial media are likely to sexualize them anyway, as well as to disparage the appearance of sports women whose bodies they regard as unattractive and/or overly masculine” (Rowe). Both authors give insight on women athletes being objectified in the media. The ways in which women are oversexualized, and how this greatly differs from how men are represented, can be exemplified by authors Travis Sheadler and Audrey Wagstaff when they state, “Television networks even choose different shots and angles for at least female beach volleyball players (4) and track and field athletes (26), exploiting their bodies” (Sheadler). A common argument against this issue is that Title IX led to more coverage of women as athletes and the “movement in the right direction for women’s equality” (Oganeku). Yet this argument falls short of noticing that greater coverage of women's sports does not mean proper coverage, such as that given to men. Author Alisia Carol gives a clear example of this by presenting an image of U.S. Olympic beach volleyball player, Kerri Walsh Jennings, in a bent-over position while playing; this photo is specifically used for unsolicited sexualization in the media from Olympic photographers. Carol goes on to compare this image to one published of two male beach volleyball players with a non-sexual pose from the side (Carol). Author Alisia Carol’s credibility on the subject is unknown; however, she does contribute to the assertion that when women are shown in media they are conveyed, and therefore defined, by their sexual nature and not their athletic skills unlike their male counterparts.

It is evident that male-bias persists within adult U.S. sports and negatively affects female athletes. The components of this issue occur most proficiently through the underrepresentation of women in sports, such as esports, and in media, as supported by Forbes' authors, Carrie N. Baker, Emma Seymour and Andrew Zimbalist, when affirming, "This undervaluing is nowhere more evident than in the media coverage of women's sport" (Baker). Likewise, sexist stereotypes and portrayals of female athletes contribute to male-bias within sports. Nevertheless, some may argue that sufficient headway has been made to reach equality in sports both in representation in sports and in the media since the introduction of Title IX, but fail to acknowledge the current issues that still occur. Because not all U.S. adult sports were researched, it cannot be determined the extent of these issues within them, nor does the research apply to high school level and below sports. It should also be noted that underrepresentation and sexist stereotypes and portrayals of women are not the only factors involved in male-bias through sports, for there are a multitude of them. Even so, to combat male-bias within sports, the media needs to advertise and cover more female sports, with that being proper coverage. Beyond this, change needs to occur at an individual level by recognizing male-bias in sports and pushing for equality on all levels of sports and sexist societal views.

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