



Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society

ATHLETE ACTIVISM

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
Rory Magrath



Athlete Activism

This book examines the phenomenon of athlete activism across all levels of sport, from elite and international sport, to collegiate and semi-pro, and asks what this tells us about the relationship between sport and wider society.

With contributions from scholars around the world, the book presents a series of fascinating case studies, including the activism of world-famous athletes such as Serena Williams, Megan Rapinoe and Raheem Sterling. Covering a broad range of sports, from the National Football League (NFL) and Australian Rules, to fencing and the Olympic Games, the book sheds important light on some of the most important themes in the study of sport, including gender, power, racism, intersectionality and the rise of digital media. It also considers the financial impact on athletes when they take a stand and the psychological impact of activism and how that might relate to sports performance.

It has never been the case that “sport and politics don’t mix,” and now, more than ever, the opposite is true. This is essential reading for anybody with an interest in the politics or sociology of sport, the politics of protest, social movements or media studies.

Rory Magrath is Associate Professor of Sociology at Solent University, Southampton, U.K. His research focuses on equality, diversity and inclusion in sport, with a specific focus on declining homophobia and the subsequent impact on men’s gender.

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Introduction

Rory Magrath

Athlete activism: Contemporary perspectives

Sport has a long history of athletes campaigning for issues of social justice. Examples of elite-level “activist” athletes, for instance, are evident as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. We might also examine Jesse Owens’ successes at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, or John Carlos and Tommie Smith’s “Black Power” salute at the 1968 Olympic Games (Boykoff, 2014, 2017), as examples of pioneering activist athletes. More recently, we could also look at Colin Kaepernick’s kneeling to protest the treatment of color in the United States; we might also consider U.S. soccer player Megan Rapinoe’s high-profile altercation with the then-U.S. President, Donald J. Trump; or we might consider how British soccer player Marcus Rashford campaigned for underprivileged school children to be provided with free school meals during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There has also, recently, been a significant growth of scholarly research focused on athlete activism. This has been typically true of elite-level athletes (e.g., Agyemang, 2012; Agyemang, Singer & DeLorme, 2010; Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; see also Chapter 12 of this collection), although an increased body of research has also considered the role of non-elite athletes across the world (e.g., Choi, Haslett & Smith, 2019; Kluch, 2020; MacIntosh, Martin & Kluch, 2020; see also Chapter 3 of this collection). Research has also examined the economic and financial impact of athletes’ role in “taking a stand” (Watanabe, Yan & Soebbing, 2019; see also Chapter 4 of this collection), fan perceptions of these actions (Mudrick, Sauder & Davies, 2019; see also Chapter 13 of this collection), and media (and social media) responses to, and coverage of, these actions (Boykoff & Carrington, 2020; Frederick, Sanderson & Schlereth, 2017; Sanderson, Frederick & Stocz, 2016).

The impact of athlete activists is also so great that numerous scholars have provided frameworks to chronologize and/or conceptualize their achievements. Included in this is Dr. Harry Edwards’ (2017) seminal work on Black athlete activism, covering the periods from the first half of the twentieth century; the postwar period, focused on tackling barriers imposed by race and class (1946

through 1960s); the mid-1960s through 1970s focused on athletes' demand for dignity and respect; and the most recent wave, best characterized by "unprecedented independence and influence as mini-corporate entities and social media maestros, high-profile athletes espoused ideologies of Black Lives Matter and related causes" (Isenberg, 2017). Other research, such as Cooper, Macauley and Rodriguez's (2019) typology of African American athletes attempts to delineate different forms of sports activism. These include (1) symbolic activism; (2) scholarly activism; (3) grassroots activism; (4) sport-based activism; and (5) economic activism.

More recently, Tredway's (2019) research on social activism in women's tennis has provided a fascinating examination of the most significant "issues, expressions, risks, and effects" of women tennis players (p. 1). Tredway thus outlines five significant cohorts, including the *trailblazers* who, in 1968, set the scene for social activism; the *founders*, including the "original 9," who took a stand against unequal prize money (1968 through 1975); the *joiners*, largely identified as the Evert–Navratilova era, during which individual endorsements and mass marketing became increasingly commonplace (1974 through 1990); the *sustainers*, which was greatly influenced by a further corporatization of women's tennis (1987 onward); and the *throwbacks*, notable for an increased focus and commitment to social justice (1999 onward).

Athlete activism, then, as evidenced by the sheer volume of research dedicated to this area of study – in addition to considerable media attention – is a worthwhile and important topic. The fact that I also received in excess of 30 submissions for potential inclusion in this book is also testament to the evolution of the field. To that end, I am so very excited to have brought together this collection of chapters, which I hope will further advance current understandings of how athletes currently engage in activist behaviors in a range of contexts.

Outline of the book

One of the great benefits of editing this text has been the ability to provide readers with a (deliberately) broad focus. Indeed, as evidenced by the chapter outline below, case studies include a series of issues, including, but not restricted to race, gender, sexuality, disability, finance, health, mental health, religion, media, and social media. While each of these chapters offer a fascinating and important contribution to existing work, we merely scratch the surface of a complex field of study. It is also important, at this point, to note that this book is restricted to *athlete* activism, and does not, therefore, include the activist behaviors of fans, coaches, and other key stakeholders in sport. Moreover, this collection is also geographically restricted to case studies based in the U.K., U.S., Australia, and Western Europe more broadly. This is not to deny the significance of activism in the Global South and beyond; we know, of course, from numerous examples of the effect of athlete activism in these parts of the world. Telling these stories,

however, is beyond the scope of this analysis and constitutes a broader research project.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 1, Jules Boykoff outlines how, despite the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) discouragement, and the existence of the Olympic Charter's Rule 50, athletes have used the mega-event to engage in a range of activist behaviors. Drawing on a range of historical and contemporary examples, Boykoff shows how athlete activism in the Olympic Games has typically taken two main forms: (1) direct engagement with political protest, and (2) symbolic actions rooted in representation that ripple with political import, albeit are not deliberate political undertakings. Boykoff also examines how the IOC has responded to these actions, and examines the dialectic of resistance and restriction as it plays out in the context of the Olympics.

Next, in Chapter 2, Cole G. Armstrong and Ted Butryn discuss the previously under-researched area of U.S. high school athletes and activism. Presenting their results of four focus groups on high school athletes' perceptions of athlete activism, they document three significant findings: (1) youth sporting identities; (2) activism and education; and (3) the next generation's attitudes toward social agency and social change. These findings are discussed and related to discourses around youth culture, public education, and coaching practices.

In Chapter 3, Yannick Kluch provides a fascinating examination of U.S. college student-athletes' motivations for engaging in activist behaviors. Drawing on 30 semi-structured interviews, Kluch documents four significant themes: (1) the promotion of social justice; (2) student-athletes desiring to act as role models for other members of their communities; (3) student-athletes had a strong desire to eliminate discrimination through their activist behaviors; and (4) the ability to strengthen communities of which they were a part. In doing so, Kluch's analysis provides a range of practical implications for college student-athletes to become what he refers to as "agents of change."

Samuel Schmidt then provides an important examination of the financial implications of athletes engaging in activist behaviors, in Chapter 4. There is, indeed, evidence that suggests athletes engaging in activism can negatively impact their commercial – and financial – relationship with certain organizations. In the chapter, Schmidt draws on two specific examples – Colin Kaepernick (NFL) and Gwen Berry (athletics) – before examining the financial impact of activism on organizations such as Nike. Accordingly, the chapter is a detailed insight into the cost of taking a stance.

Next, in Chapter 5, Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown and DeShon Foxx provide a fascinating – and timely – analysis of the changing face of Black activist athletes. To do so, Brown and Foxx first provide a general overview of the relationship between race and resistance in sport, before then examining Black athlete activism during the Civil Rights and Black Power era. Following a discussion

of the 1968 Olympic Games, the authors outline Black athlete activism more recently, starting with the 1980s and 1990s, and then highlight the contributions (and struggles) of Black athletes, such as Maya Moore and Colin Kaepernick, and the importance of #BlackLivesMatter. Finally, they conclude by outlining how Black athlete activism may look in the future.

In Chapter 6, Damian Haslett and Brett Smith provide a discussion of disability sport activism. Specifically, they provide an overview of the latest developments in para-athlete activism research. This begins with important historical context with respect to Paralympic sport and disability activism, before then focusing on how athletes' activist behaviors have positively impacted parasport. Next, Haslett and Smith outline how para-athlete activism has effected broader social good, and they then critique the International Paralympic Committee's recent plans to promote para-athletes as "activists." Directions for future research are then provided to close the chapter.

Following the theme of disability sport activism, Chapter 7 – authored by Stuart Braye and Tom Gibbons – uses an emancipatory theological approach to promote the use of disabled athletes in disability activism in the U.K. In doing so, the authors provide a novel and unique approach, applying Paulo Freire (1993) and Gustavo Gutiérrez's (2001) work to the topic of disabled athlete activism. The chapter also suggests that it would be in the best interests of key movements – such as the Paralympic Movement the Disabled People's Movement – to enhance equality for disabled people, and encourage disabled athletes' involvement in disability activism.

In Chapter 8, Valerie Moyer provides an important and timely analysis of trans-exclusionary narratives in sports activism. To do so, Moyer analyzes the current rhetoric surrounding gender nonconforming "threats" to women's sport, and examines the history of track and field in the twentieth century to critique the exclusionary activist rhetoric.

Chapter 9, authored by Leslie Crang, then provides a fascinating overview of former Scottish rugby union player "Doddie" Weir's activism. Crang's chapter examines how Weir, who was diagnosed with Motor Neuron Disease (MND) in 2016, has used his position as a former elite athlete to raise awareness of the disease, and to raise funds for charity in a number of ways. The chapter also outlines how MND has affected Weir's *physical* strength, but not his *mental* strength – through his ability to fight the disease through his campaigning. This, according to Crang, is evidence of Chouliaraki's (2012) notion of the "theater of pity" in action.

Celia Valiente then provides a fascinating account of how Spanish female soccer players engaged in a range of activist behaviors to demand improved sporting conditions and better pay. According to Valiente, these athletes used a combination of non-confrontational tactics (including a recognition of the fact that they sought *improved* conditions, not an equal status to male players) and confrontational tactics (including a strike, in November 2019). These tactics have been partially successful, and a collective agreement was struck meeting

their demands. Thus, Valiente concludes the chapter by outlining how these soccer players' approach has contributed to the improvement of women's sporting equality.

In Chapter 11, Linda K. Fuller provides a fascinating analysis of the first hijab-clad, Muslim American woman to win an Olympic medal – Ibtihaj Muhammad. To do so, Fuller provides an historical account of the relationship between female athletes and religion (particularly in the context of Islam), before then documenting the relationship between athlete activism and clothing – using Ibtihaj Muhammad's story as a specific case study.

Next, in Chapter 12, and also providing an analysis of athlete activism through clothing (and fashion), Shaonta' E. Allen examines how the most decorated female tennis player of all time – Serena Williams – has used her physical appearance to challenge the traditionally oppressive structures evident in elite tennis. Allen focuses on Williams' early career (and, in particular, how her hairstyles stood in opposition to the traditional tennis establishment), before then outlining more recent examples of how Williams' attire reinforces her femininity, which has frequently been denigrated because of her Black body and athleticism.

In Chapter 13, Hayley F. Gallagher, Caroline Wright, and Jeffrey W. Kassing appraise fan framing of Megan Rapinoe during the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. In response to Rapinoe's high-profile fallout with the then-President, Gallagher, Wright, and Kassing analyze over 500 comments posted on a Reddit thread. They document four significant themes: (1) discrediting comments (attempted to insult Rapinoe or the U.S. Women's National Team), or athlete activism in general; (2) resistance comments (indicating ongoing resistance to the U.S. political administration at the time of the tournament; (3) patriotism comments (which largely focused on how Rapinoe's actions were representative or antithetical to notions of patriotism and nationalism; and (4) general support comments (which reinforced support for Rapinoe and her activism). Their analysis permits the authors to conclude that fandom and athlete activism is complex, particularly given that fans remain polarized as to whether sport should be politicized or remain apolitical.

Next, in Chapter 14, Sam Schulz, Faye Rosas Blanch, and Sam Elliott evaluate the activism of former Australian rules football player, Adam Goodes, and the role of Australian teachers in tackling racism. To do this, the authors outline their results of a study focused on 450 pre-teachers' interpretations of a documentary highlighting the final years of First Nations Australian Adam Goodes' playing career. The documentary, *The Final Quarter*, follows Goodes as he campaigns for racial equality on and off the sports field. Schulz, Elliott, and Blanch examine the complexity of teaching racism, and argue that activist educators and sportspeople should collaborate and work together strategically to create anti-racism alliances.

In Chapter 15, Jonathan Cable then evaluates the use of social media in analyzing the activism of English soccer player, Raheem Sterling. Sterling, who has

been disproportionally criticized by sections of English tabloid media in recent years, frequently uses his social media accounts to speak out against racism in sport. Cable's chapter utilizes some of these postings, as well as select media interviews, to explore how Sterling navigates issues such as racism. Cable also argues that the power of alternative platforms allows athletes – like Sterling – to confront racism and discriminative media stereotypes.

In the penultimate chapter of the book, Chapter 16, Niamh Kitching, Ali Bowes, and Meghan MacLaren stick with the theme of elite athletes' narratives of activism. With a focus on elite women's golf, the chapter considers the potential for athlete activism to stimulate discussion and change in elite sport. The chapter excites, however, because, using a collaborative approach – with elite golfer Meghan MacLaren as a co-author – we hear directly about female athlete advocacy and activism. Responding to a series of questions, the subsequent discussion focuses on social and economic implications for elite athlete activists, and the role of digital media.

In the final chapter of the book, Chapter 17, Travis Scheadler evaluates the psychological impact of athlete activism. Scheadler argues that activism may provide a unique opportunity for athletes to bolster sporting performance, through the development of mental toughness, stress control mindset, goal-setting, and fearlessness. The chapter then concludes with a call for researchers to design and evaluate interventions that train and engage athletes in activist behaviors.

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Athlete activism and the Olympic Games

A dialectic of resistance and restriction

Jules Boykoff

Introduction

In the summer of 2019, at the Pan American Games in Lima, Peru, U.S. hammer thrower Gwen Berry punched her fist into the sky as she stood on the medal stand send a political message: to “stand for all of the injustices that are going on in America and a president who’s making it worse.” The previous day, U.S. fencer Race Imboden, animated by “racism, gun control, the mistreatment of immigrants,” took a knee during the official medal ceremony. The response from the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) was swift and harsh. Both athletes were placed on probation for a year. A letter from the USOPC stated they “could face more serious sanctions for any additional breach of our code of conduct” (Griffith, 2019). Both athletes competed in the 2016 Rio Olympics and were vying for spots at the Tokyo Olympics 2020.

A few months later, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) made it clear that it was in sync with the USOPC. The IOC issued a set of guidelines that forbade activism by athletes at the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, explicitly prohibiting “gestures of a political nature, like a hand gesture or kneeling” – precisely the actions taken by Berry and Imboden. The guidelines also barred “displaying any political messaging, including signs or armbands” (IOC, 2020a, p. 3). The policy added precision to Rule 50 in the current *Olympic Charter*: “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas” (IOC, 2020b, p. 90).

Because the Olympics have become a massive media and marketing event, the impact of athlete activism has the potential to reverberate globally. The episode involving Berry, Imboden, the IOC, and the USOPC is a modern-day microcosm of the long-standing dialectic of resistance and restriction within Olympic circles. While Olympians from around the globe have used their platform to express political dissent and to stand up for what they believe in, the powerbrokers who organize and manage the Olympic Games have consistently squelched athlete activism, doggedly imposing neutrality by fiat.

The core idea animating the IOC’s guidelines (2020a, p. 2) is that “sport is neutral and must be separate from political, religious or any other type of interference.”

While political neutrality may be laudable on its surface, critics argue that it ripples with hypocrisy when it is mandated by the IOC. “The Olympics are political, if nothing else,” writes Harry Edwards (2017 [1969], p. 85). “The fact that all participating nations do not compete under a single flag, the Olympic flag, but under their respective national flags, heightens their political flavor.” In short, the IOC’s brand of apoliticism – replete with the trappings of nationalism – is, in fact, deeply political.

This chapter analyzes cases of athlete activism at the Olympics in order to illuminate how the dialectic of resistance and restriction functions under the glow of the five rings. The *Olympic Charter*’s Rule 50 suspends athlete activists between the past and the future while denying their right to exist in the present. This reinforces the politics of the status quo, which benefits those in power. And yet from the early days of the modern Olympics, athletes have stood up and, undaunted by pressure from the top of the Olympic pyramid, taken political action.

IOC and political dissent

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the plucky French aristocrat whose dogged determination helped the modern Olympics reemerge on the world stage in Athens in 1896, often argued that the Olympics must transcend politics. In his writings and speeches, he made it clear he believed politics threatened to mar his vision of “Olympism.” He wrote (2000, p. 584): “Today, politics is making its way into the heart of every issue. How can we expect athletics, the culture of the muscles, and Olympism itself to be immune?” He then asserted, with more than a dash of wishful thinking, “the ravages that this phenomenon can cause” did not stain “Olympism,” which “remains as steadfast as the principles on which the institution is based” and safely sequestered from politics.

The Baron set the tone and subsequent powerbrokers at the IOC carried out his wish that politics be forbidden at the Olympics. For example, the U.S. business tycoon Avery Brundage, who headed the IOC from 1952 to 1972, stated at the opening session of the 1968 Mexico City Games, “We must never permit the Olympic Movement to be used as a tool or weapon for any ulterior cause nor the Olympic Games to be a forum for demonstrations of any kind.” Brundage added, “Let us all continue to work together with concord and strive to keep the Games clean, pure and honest, and free from politics and dollar signs.”¹

Even before Brundage became president of the IOC, Olympic plenipoten-tiaries were writing rules to nix politics. For instance, the 1933 *Olympic Charter* demanded that National Olympic Committees (NOCs) avoid political nationalism. “To fulfill their duty,” NOCs “must avoid any political or other influence and when called upon to take a decision be actuated only by general interest without taking into consideration local questions or the desire to favour national competitors” (IOC, 1933, p. 12). The 1946 Olympic Rules featured a passage on the “Examination of the question of the nationalisation of sports for political aims.” After commending governments for cultivating sports programs that fed

the Olympic movement, it warned against “certain tendencies which envisage above all a national exultation of success achieved rather than the realization of the common and harmonious objective which is the essential Olympic law” (IOC, 1946, p. 27). Politics in the form of nationalism was to be scrupulously avoided. The 1950 *Olympic Charter* clearly affirmed an anti-politics stance:

National Olympic Committees must be independent and autonomous. They must avoid any political, commercial or religious interference, and, consider when decisions have to be taken only the general interest of the Olympic movement and without being swayed by local questions or by the desire to favour their athletes.

(IOC, 1950, p. 8)

In 1955, the IOC’s preoccupation with politics pivoted from straight nationalism toward political activism; the group introduced language similar to what eventually ended up as today’s Rule 50. In a section called “Information for Cities which desire to stage the Olympic Games,” the IOC (1955, p. 31) asserted:

Invitations must state that no political demonstrations will be held in the stadium or other sport grounds, or in the Olympic Village, during the Games, and that it is not the intention to use the Games for any other purpose than for the advancement of the Olympic Movement.

By 1974, the *Olympic Charter* read:

No political meetings or demonstrations will be held in the stadium or other sports grounds, nor in the Olympic Villages, during the Games, nor in the preceding or the following week. The candidate city will officially confirm that it is not its intention to use the Games for any purpose other than the interest of the Olympic movement.

(IOC, 1974a, p. 51)

In a section called “Questionnaire for Candidate Cities Staging the Games,” the IOC (1974a, p. 54) asked, “Can you guarantee that no political meeting or demonstration will take place in the stadium, or any other sports ground or in the Olympic Village during the Games?” The minutes from an IOC Executive Board meeting in October 1974 show that one amendment suggested adding this line to the *Charter*: “Every kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether political, religious or racial, in the Olympic areas is forbidden and shall be firmly suppressed by the Organising Committee” (IOC, 1974b, p. 31). In the end, the Executive Board adopted the amendment but deleted the phrase “and shall be firmly suppressed by the Organising Committee” because IOC president Lord Killanin believed “that it was not fair to ask the Organising Committee to be responsible for suppressing propaganda” (IOC 1974b, p. 11). The following year,

the IOC *Charter* directly stated, “Every kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether political, religious or racial, in the Olympic areas is forbidden” (1975, p. 35). The spirit of this rule sits at the heart of today’s Rule 50 banning political dissent at the Games.

Olympian dissent

Despite the IOC’s wishes and strictures, athlete dissent appeared at the Games from nearly the beginning. At the 1906 “intercalary” Olympics in Athens, Irish track athlete Peter O’Connor punctuated a memorable performance on the track with an unforgettable act of political dissent at the medal ceremony.² O’Connor, the son of a shipbuilder, was a working-class clerk for a solicitor. Not only was he a star track athlete, but he was also a fiery Irish nationalist who loathed the notion of having to compete as a British athlete. But Ireland was ruled by Westminster at the time, and the English Amateur Athletics Association (AAA) was keen to lure O’Connor and his fellow Irishman Con Leahy to compete for Great Britain. Although O’Connor was 34 and approaching the twilight of a successful track career, the British believed he and Leahy could increase their medal count. However, O’Connor and Leahy had other plans; they were determined to compete for Ireland, to go out in a burst of Irish green (Quinn, 2004).

O’Connor and Leahy traveled to Athens with two other Irish athletes – John Daly and John McGough – and their passages were paid by everyday Irish people who wanted to see Ireland represented at the Olympics. The Irish athletes had made it clear to Olympic powerbrokers their desire to represent Ireland. But to their great dismay, upon their arrival they learned – by reading Olympic souvenir programs – that they were listed with the British delegation.³ To compete at the 1906 Athens Games athletes were required to be affiliated with a National Olympic Committee. Because Ireland was still governed from Westminster, it had not yet formed such a committee. O’Connor wrote an appeal but was promptly denied by Olympic organizers (Lennartz, 2002; Quinn, 2004).

For the first time in Olympic history, Athens featured a “March of Nations,” which resembled modern-day opening ceremonies. Foreshadowing their subsequent dissent, the Irish athletes wore bright green blazers embossed with golden shamrocks on the left breast and ornate golden braids along the cuffs and collars, along with matching green caps emblazoned with a shamrock. The athletes straggled behind the rest of the British contingent, conspicuously distancing themselves from the pack and ignoring the English AAA’s demand that they don Union Jacks on their sports coats (Guiney, 1996; Mallon, 1999; Quinn, 2004).

Once the athletics began, O’Connor continued to express his passionate personality. While participating in the long jump, O’Connor argued that Olympic official Matthew Halpin – who doubled as event judge and the manager of the U.S. team – officiated in biased manner. According to O’Connor and others, Halpin allowed U.S. long jumper Myer Prinstein to leapfrog ahead in the jumping order, thereby allowing him to run on a smoother, faster track. Halpin also called

O'Connor for fouls on two of his jumps. O'Connor later told the *Limerick Leader*, "I was enraged ... I was half insane over the injustice." He even said if he were not restrained, he "would have beaten Halpin to a pulp" (Quinn, 2004, p. 183). O'Connor swiftly submitted a written appeal but, given that he was gaining a reputation as a troublemaker, he was again denied. Still, he won the silver medal (Mallon, 1999).

During the medal ceremonies, the iconic act of dissent transpired. When officials hoisted the Union Jack up the flagpole to mark his silver-medal performance, O'Connor sprinted over to the pole and shimmied up it. Atop the flagpole he unfurled a large green flag bearing a golden harp the words *Erin Go Bragh*, or "Ireland Forever." Below, his teammate Con Leahy waved a similar flag and fended off the Greek police, giving O'Connor more time to show his Irish pride (Quinn, 2004). O'Connor later reminisced,

When I climbed a pole about 20 feet in height and remained aloft for some time, waving my large flag and Con waving his from the ground underneath the pole, it caused a great sensation ... I was an accomplished gymnast in my youth and my active climbing of the post excited the spectators.⁴

O'Connor's great grandson Mark Quinn (2004, p. 184) later wrote, "The Irishman's points might well be accredited to Great Britain, but the flying of the Irish flag left none in doubt as to where O'Connor's true allegiances lay." Quinn told me, "Events dictated that he become political. To not become political would be to submit to British authority."⁵ Rosemarie O'Connor Quinn, the granddaughter of the dissident Olympian, added, "Over 800 years of repression and dominance of a colonial power certainly inspired Peter O'Connor to pull down the British flag."⁶

Although Olympic officials were displeased with O'Connor's defiant act of political dissent, they did not expel him from the Games. He went on to win gold in the "hop-step-and-jump" event, known today as the triple jump. When Leahy won a gold medal in the high jump, they reiterated their flag-waving protest, this time from the ground (Quinn, 2004). O'Connor and Leahy demonstrated how nationalism could be a political lever against colonial oppression in the context of sport. They also showed how Olympic rules and regulations could generate dissent. Moreover, they were a lively precursor for future acts of athlete activism at the Games.

Decades later, Czech gymnast Vera Čáslavská also showed how resistance to imperialism could manifest at the Olympics. Čáslavská, the most successful Czech gymnast in the history of the Olympics, took a political stand on the medal stand that challenged Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia. Two months before the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia to crush the "Prague Spring," the inklings of democracy that tried to loosen Soviet control of the country. The Czechoslovak National Olympic Committee came close to withdrawing from the 1968 Games, as the incursion made training

nearly impossible for athletes and major transatlantic airlines were no longer departing from Prague. Less than a month before the Games' opening ceremony, Czechoslovakia decided to persist and sent a 100-member Olympic team to Mexico (Hamilton, 1968). Inspired by politics, Čáslavská vowed not to be bested by Soviet gymnasts; her aim for the Games was to "sweat blood to defeat the invaders' representatives" (Reynolds, 2018).

Čáslavská had already established herself as a world-class gymnast. At the Tokyo 1964 Games she won three gold medals and a silver. She had also demonstrated willingness to be an athlete-activist who was willing to speak out; in April 1968, she signed onto the *Manifesto of 2,000 Words*, which protested Soviet dominance in Czechoslovakia. Four months later, the Soviets invaded and Čáslavská fled into hiding where she trained under suboptimal conditions. Stress abounded. But with this political backdrop, Čáslavská thrived in Mexico City, winning four gold medals and two silvers. She outperformed archrival Soviet gymnasts, to the ebullient cheers of local spectators, and not simply because she selected the "Mexican Hat Dance" as the accompaniment for her final floor performance. To top it off, Čáslavská made a political statement on the medal stand, if a somewhat subtle one, dipping her head in silent protest during the Russian national anthem. Čáslavská was clearly motivated by politics. "I am a Czechoslovak citizen," she later said. "We all tried harder to win in Mexico because it would turn the eyes of the world on our unfortunate country" (Cady, 1969, p. 36). She paid a price for her principles. The Soviet-compliant government in Prague forbade her from traveling abroad or from competing in gymnastics. But years later, with another significant shift in the political winds – the fall of communism and the rise of Vaclav Havel in 1989 – Čáslavská would become the head of the Czech National Olympic Committee as well as the eighth woman coopted as a member of the IOC (Guttmann, 2002).

Čáslavská's action on the medal stand occurred days after what is arguably the most iconic act of athlete activism in the history of the Olympics. On October 16, 1968, Tommie Smith and John Carlos stood in their socks on the medal stand and thrust their black-glove-clad fists toward the sky as they bowed their heads while the U.S. national anthem played. The athletes, who had won gold and bronze in the 200-meter dash, were protesting pervasive poverty and racism in the United States and the wider world. Their shoeless feet and black socks signified poverty. The black gloves symbolized black pride. Carlos's open jacket represented his working-class roots. Both men fastened human-rights buttons onto their track jackets. Silver medalist, Australian Peter Norman, wore a button in solidarity. Carlos later wrote,

We decided that we would wear black gloves to represent strength and unity. We would have beads hanging from our neck, which would represent the history of lynching. We wouldn't wear shoes to symbolize the poverty that still plagued so much of black America. On the medal stand, all we would wear on our feet would be black socks.

(Carlos & Zirin, 2011, p. 110)

This act of dissent spotlights how activist movements in wider society carve space for moments of athlete activism. Carlos and Smith were not only participants in the Civil Rights Movement, but they were also part of an athlete-driven group that was fighting for justice and dignity through sport: the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). Tommie Smith stressed that the organization's name highlighted "human rights, not civil rights – nothing to do with the Panthers or Black Power – all humanity, even those who denied us ours" (Smith & Steele, 2007, p. 161). Among the OPHR's central demands were the "Removal of the anti-semitic and anti-black personality Avery Brundage from his post as Chairman of the International Olympic Committee," the "curtailment of participation of all-white teams and individuals from the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia in all United States Olympic Athletic events," and "the addition of at least two black coaches to the men's track and field coaching staff appointed to coach the 1968 United States Olympic team" (Edwards, 2017 [1969], p. 53). These demands demonstrated the broad nature of athlete concern, from specific sport-based issues to matters of geopolitical justice.

IOC President Avery Brundage was incensed by their medal-stand stand. He insisted that the U.S. Olympic Committee suspend the athletes from the team and dismiss them from the Olympic Village. The USOC obliged, releasing a statement that labeled their dissent "untypical exhibitionism" that "violates the basic standards of sportsmanship and good manners." The USOC then pivoted toward intimidation: "A repetition of such incidents by other members of the U.S. team can only be considered a willful disregard of Olympic principles that would warrant the severest penalties."⁷ IOC member Lord David Burghley echoed this threat: "I will not countenance such actions again. I'll refuse to hold a victory ceremony if any such attempt is made again" (Daley, 1968). Brundage received an abundance of mail about the incident, a mix of supportive letters that backed his anti-politics stance and letters that were critical of his efforts to suppress dissent (Boykoff, 2016, pp.105–109).

Mainstream media backed the Olympic officials, adopting a shut-up-and-play stance that sent a clear message to Olympians who might like to follow the athletes' lead. Arthur Daley (1968) of the *New York Times* wrote, "Smith and Carlos brought their world smack into the Olympic Games, where it did not belong, and created a shattering situation that shook this international sports carnival to its very core. They were also divisive." Brent Musburger (1968) railed in the *Chicago American* against Smith and Carlos, calling them "black-skinned storm troopers" and describing their protest as "a juvenile gesture by a couple of athletes who should have known better." This reaction underscores what sociologist Ben Carrington (2010, p. 4) calls "the fear of the black athlete" as rooted in "the projection of white masculinist fantasies of domination [and] control."

Carlos and Smith were not the only U.S. track stars to protest at the 1968 Games. U.S. sprinter Wyomia Tyus recounts that "many athletes continued to protest despite all the threats to Tommie and Carlos, and I was one of them" (Tyus & Terzakis, 2018, p. 172). Tyus, the first Olympian to win back-to-back gold in the

100-meter dash, explained, “As part of my contribution to the protest for human rights, I had worn black running shorts ... rather than the regular white running shorts that were issued to us.” After winning gold in the 4 × 100 relay, journalists asked her what she thought of Carlos and Smith’s protest. She recalled stating,

We all know that we’re fighting for human rights. That’s what they stood for on the victory stand—human rights for everyone, everywhere. And to support that and to support them, I’m dedicating my medal to them. I believe in what they did.

(Tyus & Terzakis, 2018, p. 173)

In an interview on the *Burn It All Down* podcast (2018), Tyus noted, “there are pictures of us giving the Black power salute, but nobody talks about that.”

The twenty-first century has also brought sporadic outbursts of athlete activism. At the 2012 London Summer Games, Damien Hooper, an Aboriginal boxer from Australia, decided to exhibit Indigenous pride. When he entered his bout against a U.S. boxer he wore a t-shirt featuring the Aboriginal flag. Olympic officials interpreted the action as breaking Rule 50 of the *Olympic Charter* that bans “political, religious or racial propaganda.” Hooper tried to explain his perspective: “I’m Aboriginal, representing my culture, not only my country but all my people as well. That’s what I wanted to do and I’m happy I did it.” He added, “I’m very proud of what I did” (Dirs, 2012). Nevertheless, the Australian Olympic Committee chastised Hooper and reported his action to the IOC. Pressure evaporated after Hooper agreed to not wear the shirt in future bouts. This was a clear example of selective enforcement. After all, when Cathy Freeman won gold in the 400-meter race at the 2000 Sydney Games and celebrated by carrying an Aboriginal flag around the track, she was feted for it (perhaps in part because she also held an Australian flag).

During the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, Russian slopestyle snowboarder Alexey Sobolev rode a snowboard featuring a visual nod to Pussy Riot, the feminist punk-rock performance-art collective whose members had served time in prison for their dissidence. After his run, Sobolev posed next to his snowboard. The press asked whether this was an act of solidarity with Pussy Riot, and he replied cheekily, “Anything is possible” (Dillman, 2014). The following day Dutch slopestyle snowboarder Cheryl Maas thrust her rainbow-clad glove in front of TV cameras camera after completing a run, an act that openly snubbed an anti-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) law in Russia that had rankled athletes from many countries. Maas, herself part of the LGBT community, had previously condemned the IOC for opting to hold the Games in Russia (Ziller, 2014).

When Ethiopian marathoner Feyisa Lilesa crossed the finish line to claim silver at the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics, he raised his arms above his head, creating an X by crossing his wrists. The act was no accident: it is a dissident gesture that the people of the Oromia region use as a symbol against their

shackling by an oppressive government. Lilesa repeated the gesture at a subsequent awards ceremony. Instead of returning to Ethiopia, where he would be in grave danger, he stayed in Brazil to weigh the options for political asylum (Gettleman, 2016). After a stint in Arizona, Lilesa returned to Ethiopia when the political winds shifted and mass protests by the Oromo people spurred the resignation of the one prime minister and the ascension of another, Ahmed Abiy, who encouraged the marathoner to come home. Lilesa appeared in front of the cameras with Abiy as both men made a gesture to indicate that their hands were now unshackled ("Ethiopian Olympic Protest," 2019). With each of these examples of athlete activism at the Olympics in the twenty-first century we see athletes standing on the shoulders of extant movements while amplifying their messages on the global stage, despite the risks of crackdown by the IOC. With the exception of Hooper, Olympic officials did not intervene to publicly condemn their efforts.

Conclusion

John Carlos and Tommie Smith paid a steep price for their athlete activism at the Olympics. They received a steady stream of death threats. Their reputations were besmirched in the media. Employment was scarce. Marriages dissolved from the stress and strain (Carlos & Zirin, 2011; Smith & Steele, 2007). Their post-Olympics experiences highlight "the thrill of victory and the agony of activism," as sociologist Douglas Hartmann (2003, p. 166) puts it, and perhaps helps us understand why more Olympic athletes don't use their high-profile platform to engage politics. However, they never backtracked, and history has vindicated them. In 2016, President Barack Obama honored Carlos and Smith at the White House, noting, "Their powerful silent protest in the 1968 Games was controversial, but it woke folks up and created greater opportunity for those that followed" (Martin, 2016). This spotlights the socio-historical tendency to revere activists the further they slide into the rearview mirror of history.

The postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, and the social commotion around the coronavirus pandemic, has created space to rethink aspects of the Games, from the role of spectators to the potential cost trimmings in the face of an already bloated bill that inevitably escalated with the delay. IOC members have sent mixed messages when it comes to how Olympic organizers will handle the possibility of political expression at the Games. On one hand, they have indicated that athletes will have some freedom to discuss politics at press conferences, something that was provided to athletes as a fig leaf at the 2014 Sochi Games when concerns emerged over Russia's suffocating anti-LGBT law. Sebastian Coe, an IOC member who heads track and field's governing body, stated, "I've been very clear that if an athlete chooses to take the knee on a podium then I'm supportive of that" (Wade, 2020). On the other hand, Richard Pound, the longest-serving IOC member, said the podium is not the place for activism. "There's a time and a place for everything," he said. "You have all kinds

of human rights and you don't go shouting about those things at a church service or at a funeral." Pound added, "If you're asked to wait five or 10 minutes out of respect for your fellow athletes, your human rights really are not infringed" (Harle, 2020). To many, Pound's comments reek of paternalism.

But the IOC's duplicity has additional layers. Although the United Nations has granted the IOC permanent observer status, the IOC's protest guidelines stand in sharp contrast to Article 19 of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." The new IOC guidelines are the wordsmithed inverse of those freedoms. These efforts to suppress political dissent highlight the dialectic of restriction and resistance as it unfolds in the context of the Olympic Games.

Notes

- 1 Avery Brundage, "Address: 67th Solemn Opening Session, Mexico City, Mexico," Avery Brundage Collection, 1908–1975, Box 246, Reel 143, 7 October 1968, p. 9, International Centre for Olympic Studies, London, Ontario.
- 2 In 1901, IOC members proffered a plan to stage the Games every two years, with Athens hosting every four years, alternating with another city. Due to internal pressures at the IOC, Coubertin grudgingly went along. This led to the 1906 "intercalary" Games in Athens. However, the plan was swiftly ditched. Jules Boykoff, *Power games: A political history of the Olympics* (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 36–37.
- 3 Ironically, O'Connor was born in England. Birth certificate on file, courtesy of Rosemarie Quinn O'Connor.
- 4 Peter O'Connor, Letter to Seamus P. O'Ceallaigh, August 27, 1941, pp. 1–2. On file, courtesy of Rosemarie Quinn O'Connor.
- 5 Personal interview, July 1, 2014.
- 6 Personal letter from Rosemarie O'Connor Quinn, May 1, 2015.
- 7 "Statement of the US Olympic Committee," October 17, 1968, Avery Brundage Collection, Box 179, Reel 103, International Centre for Olympic Studies, London, Ontario.

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Educated activism

A focus group study of high school athletes' perceptions of athlete activism

Cole G. Armstrong and Ted Butryn

Introduction

In the months following former National Football League (NFL) quarterback Colin Kaepernick's 2016 on-field protests against police brutality, he became the epicenter of both the issue of police brutality and mistreatment of communities of color, but also about the practice of athlete activism itself. By the start of the 2017 NFL season, Kaepernick was no longer under contract in the NFL, despite competitively comparable individuals having continued employment. Though Kaepernick was not physically on the field, his influence was apparent, and by the third week of the 2017 season over 200 players were engaging in some form of protest during the playing of the National Anthem – protests which continued throughout the 2017–2018 season. The 2017 NFL season was particularly notable as the President of the United States, Donald Trump, consistently opined on the activist actions of players from the NFL (Axson, 2017) elevating the protests and their coverage to the top of the daily news cycle. Indeed, the NFL protests were named by *USA Today's* Tom Schad as the top sports news story of 2017 (Schad, 2017), and Jerry Bembry of *The Undeclared* noted that “2017 will be most remembered as the year of athletes and activism” (Bembry, 2017).

Despite the NFL protests reigniting a debate regarding the place of protest and activism in sport and athletics, the instances referenced above are no means novel. Athletes have, for more than a century, participated in activist action and conversation (Wulf, 2019), whereas scholars have, for decades, critically examined the relationship between sport, society, and politics (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019; Cunningham, Dixon, Singer, Oshiro, Anh, & Weems, 2019; Edwards, 1969; Moore, 2017). Though a retelling of all instances of athlete activism is beyond the scope of this chapter, athletes have consistently protested over time with sport being considered an apt place to speak out against a variety of social injustices (Cunningham et al., 2019; Edwards, 1969; Edwards, 2016; Wulf, 2019). While men's professional sport received the bulk of the media attention during the protests of 2016–2018, athletes and organizations such as Serena Williams, Megan Rapinoe, and The Los Angeles Sparks of

the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) were also at the forefront of the modern athlete as activist movement (Wulf, 2019), and what sport sociologist Henry Edwards called the fifth wave of athlete activism, which is characterized by the use of social media to help athletes reach far wider audiences (Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019). Indeed, female athletes have been a central presence of the recent resurgence of athlete activism. Importantly, while the initial wave of recent athlete activism focused on police brutality, athletes have also weighed in on other important social issues, including mental health and gender pay equity, climate change, and unionization.

In response to the modern generation of athlete activism, scholars from sport management, sport sociology and sport studies, among other disciplines, have developed lines of inquiry into the phenomenon. Scholars have investigated athlete activism in collegiate sport (Agyemang, Singer, & DeLorme, 2010; Melton, 2015), on collegiate campuses (Chaplin & Montez de Oca, 2019; Yan, Pegoraro, & Watanabe, 2018), from an institutional theory perspective (Agyemang, Berg, & Fuller, 2018), in the media (Boykoff & Carrington, 2019; Montez de Oca & Suh, 2019), on social media (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Cooper, Macaulay, & Rodriguez, 2019; Edelman, 2018; Frederick, Pegoraro, & Sanderson (2018); Frederick, Sanderson, & Schlereth, 2017; Gill, 2016; Marston, 2017), and from the perspective of Black male collegiate athletes (Agyemang, Singer, & Delorme, 2010), among others (Lee & Cunningham, 2019).

Despite the rapid increase in research on athlete activism in sport management, sport sociology, and sport studies, few of these studies have qualitatively examined athletes' experiences or perceptions of athlete activism. In addition, there remains very little work on the perceptions and experiences of the stakeholder group comprised of younger athletes (i.e., high school aged) regarding athlete activism. Further, the extent to which athletes identify with and internalize elements of athlete activism in their own identities, and whether the issues that elite athletes are protesting and discussing help to form their athlete role identity, has not been studied. Thus, a gap in the literature exists, as the perspectives of high school aged athletes regarding athlete activism have not been qualitatively investigated. Therefore, understanding the perspectives of high school athletes regarding athlete activism is essential. Guided by stakeholder theory (Friedman, Parent & Mason, 2004) and identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009; Lock & Heere, 2017; Stets & Burke, 2000), we developed the following research question to investigate this important stakeholder group:

RQ1: How do high school athletes in the San Francisco Bay Area perceive, understand, and interact with athlete activism?

Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory and stakeholder management was originally developed by Freeman in the early 1980s in response to a rapidly changing business and social

environment in which managers were experiencing “unprecedented levels of environmental turbulence and change” (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p. 1). The guiding tenet of the development of stakeholder theory was the charge of effectively managing multiple groups and their resultant relationships in a strategic manner. Indeed, as Friedman, Parent, & Mason (2004) explain, stakeholders of an organization can include any number of individuals or groups; however, not all stakeholder groups are necessarily as important to the success of the focal organization. When considering the industry of professional sport and the business model by which these organizations typically operate, sport participants as well as current and potential sport fans comprise important stakeholder groups for professional sport organizations (Nufer & Buhler, 2010).

From this perspective, current high school athletes fit neatly into the category of primary stakeholders for professional sport organizations (Nufer & Buhler, 2010) while also occupying the generational category of Generation Z (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). This is an important classification as we do not view high school athletes simply as current or potential participants and fans, but as stakeholders in position to affect change in sport organizations and thus the broader sport industry. Finally, and important to this handbook, the use of stakeholder theory allows the environment and business of sport to be analyzed while avoiding what Freeman (1994) refers to as the “separation thesis,” which states that “we cannot usefully analyze the world of business as if it is separate from the world of ethics or politics” (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p. 26). While stakeholder theory is instrumental in understanding the importance of high school athletes to professional sport organizations, understanding how these athletes form and activate their individual role identities is equally imperative to understanding their perspective.

Identity

Individuals form much of their identity as a result of the experiences they have throughout their lives (Lock & Heere, 2017). Through these experiences, individuals develop characteristics that collectively serve to form an identity. Burke and Stets (2009) define identity by stating “an identity is a set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society” (p. 3). Due to the dynamic nature of the social world, Burke and Stets (2009) make explicit that individuals will develop many roles throughout the life course. Of particular relevance to the present study is the notion that high school athletes will continually evolve and adopt different role identities as they move through their athletic and social lives. Indeed, scholars in the area of cultural sport psychology have argued that while the athlete’s role is certainly a pivotal aspect of the identity for high school and college athletes, there is also room in for the development of “athlete-as-citizen” identities (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003). Further, sport psychology scholars have focused on the relationship college students’ athletic identities with a more activist-oriented identity (Beachy, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Cornelius, 2018). With a similar interest, we endeavor to understand

how high school athletes perceive of and interact with athlete activism. To do so, in the following section, we outline the method used.

Methods

To investigate the research question, we conducted a series of focus groups in order to develop a rich description of high school athletes' perceptions of athlete activism (Barbour, 2007). The focus groups approach allowed for an understanding of the dialogues that these young student athletes had among friends, teammates, coaches, and family members regarding the rise in athletes' using their platforms to speak about larger social issues. Focus groups were also chosen due to their ability to facilitate a sense of agency among participants. As Sparkes and Smith (2014) stated, focus groups "can constitute spaces for validating experiences that, in turn, could be used to enact political practice or collective resistance" (p. 87). In addition, while focus groups are not always the preferred methodology for examining sensitive issues or topics, scholars have noted that focus groups can allow individuals to have and reflect upon conversations in ways that allow them to "challenge, extend, develop and undermine themselves" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 87) in order to arrive at different perspectives, especially "if groups have been convened to reflect on some common attribute or experience that sets them apart from others, thus providing 'security in numbers'" (Barbour, 2007, p. 21).

Similar to Agyemang et al. (2010), we used a purposive convenience sampling technique with two inclusion criteria: (1) the participants be members of an athletic team at the high school and (2) each participant be willing to discuss athlete activism. It is notable that initial recruitment attempts which included contextual information specifically referring to Colin Kaepernick received few responses. A second recruitment email was developed which framed the study as an opportunity for high school athletes to talk about "athlete activism" and how they viewed "athletes standing up for causes they believe in." After the dissemination of the second recruitment email, several responses were received. Ultimately a total of six focus groups with high school athletes ($n=31$) were conducted, each containing between three and seven participants and lasting between just under one hour to almost one-and-a half hours. Groups were diverse across racial and ethnic identity, gender, sport participation, and (with respect to school) socio-economic status, something that was important given the focus of this study, for as Cooper, Macaulay, and Rodriguez (2019) noted, "examining different types of sport activists and contrasting their engagements with activists outside of sport could provide more insight into the nature/fluidity and influence of activism" (p. 28).

Results and discussion

We developed three interconnected themes via a thematic analysis of the interview data. These themes represent the complexities of the participants'

understanding of athlete activism, and clearly illustrate how important their interactions with others were in helping them to understand the phenomenon. The three themes included *(semi)educated activism*, *agency*, *inspiration and LeBron*, and *hopeful for change*. In the following sections each of the three themes is discussed independently, with a focus on how participants made sense of athlete activism and their own identities within the larger discourses of youth culture and politics.

(Semi)educated activism

The first lengthy conversation that occurred with each of the groups related to how participants made sense of professional athlete protests. To do so, we utilized the NFL protests as an initial entrée, although we explicitly left it open to any of the other forms of athlete activism that have occurred (e.g., NBA, WNBA, women's soccer). Overall, the data clearly showed that the participants had a basic understanding of what the protests in the NFL were about, including what Colin Kaepernick initially kneeled for, and the protest motivations of the NFL players in 2017. When discussing athletes taking a stand for social justice, all but one group focused specifically on the NFL protests, which speaks as much to the position of football within the U.S. context as it does, perhaps, about the protests themselves. Interestingly, a group comprised of only female athletes, most of whom were basketball players, did mention the 2016–2017 protests by WNBA players. However, during the early part of each focus group initial discussions of athlete activism resulted in frequent reference and discussion of Colin Kaepernick, as evidenced in this exchange from focus group #3:

- P1: I think it's really cool what they're doing. I support it totally. People thought of kneeling for the anthem as disrespecting the flag and the military, but it didn't have anything to do with that. It really has nothing to do with disrespecting the flag. He (Kaepernick) wants equality. He'll stand once there is equality.
- P6: He was more just taking a stand against all the disrespect against the African American community and stuff like that. Everybody took offense to that, like oh how dare you disrespect the flag, but they didn't even have a clear understanding of it when in reality we should all be supporting this cause and what this protest is.
- P2: Going back to what [P1] said, a Marine was the one who told him to take a knee because in the Marine Corps taking a knee is the highest ... it's almost like kneeling to a king. It's not disrespectful, it's almost like, I don't know the word for it.
- P6: Like you're giving honor?
- P2: Yeah. Like really high honor. In the media you never hear that ... Colin Kaepernick sacrificed his career essentially for the greater good and trying to get his word out in what he believes.

Another important finding was that despite differences in the depth of their understanding of the protests, the students definitely identified with the overall message of the NFL protests and took the protests to heart. Excerpts from multiple conversations also show that the students had a sense of empathy and at least the beginnings of a sense of agency with respect to using their voices as student athletes. Indeed, in contrast to stereotypical notions of post-millennial entitlement, all of the groups contained exchanges that spoke directly to ideas about having a responsibility to take part in larger social change movements. Two examples are provided below:

I feel like it goes back to being able to step into someone's shoes. I'm not Black, I'm not the one being racially profiled, but there is still that chance that I could be, and that even, for my family, this whole thing that's happening about immigration ... we're racially profiled in different ways so it resonates with me because if I was in their shoes I wouldn't want that happening to me. (P2; FG4)

I push myself to be pretty active because I have this idea: You shouldn't complain if you're not doing something about it ... I feel like educated activism is how we can fix problems, and at least bring it to attention because otherwise people are just going to go with the flow and not make an effort to be a change agent. (P4; FG3)

Sport sociologist and athlete activist, Dr. Harry Edwards, has noted in many interviews that activism without education will not be successful. The following quote aptly describes how certain individuals are developing their own ideas and voices by learning:

People downplay activism like you're not being civil, but it's more than that. It's showing that you care and that it's not okay. The people who say you shouldn't be protesting gun violence, go educate yourself on it. I feel like educated activism is how we can fix problems and at least bring it to attention because otherwise people are just going to go with the flow and now make an effort to be a change agent. (P2; FG4)

From the passage above it is clear that high school athletes view themselves as stakeholders in the broad sporting landscape. Though at times they may feel as if their voices weren't heard – as we saw with certain participants noting their inability to protest due to school rules – many also felt the responsibility to make a difference and to engage at the very least. Whether inspired by LeBron James, Colin Kaepernick, or other athletes, the participants viewed athlete activism favorably. Managerially this finding is important because where many leagues and teams may believe the best way to confront athlete activism is to look the other way or disengage, our participants appreciated and engaged with athletes who voiced their opinions, oftentimes viewing them as leaders and aspirational. Our

findings show that for this group of Generation Z individuals athlete activism provided a way to understand and identify with professional athletes. This group of stakeholders aspire to be educated activists and do not see sport as separate from society and certainly do not fault athletes for their activism.

Agency, inspiration, and LeBron

The second major theme was that despite sometimes incomplete notions of exactly what athletes were protesting, participants across all groups viewed a select few (almost all male) athletes as sources of inspiration and role models for their own social agency. Specifically, while most participants noted that Colin Kaepernick's protests did raise their awareness to issues of police brutality, and somewhat inchoate ideas about social justice, it was NBA star LeBron James who emerged as a key figure whose social justice efforts they resonated with. For many participants, James' words and actions, mainly on his social media, were the catalyst for the athletes to critically evaluate situations and to realize their voice mattered.

In addition, with the exception of a few African American athletes, the participants in this study, while inspired by James' use of his platform to speak out for social change, did not necessarily seek to take on the issues that he was speaking about. Rather, they were in awe of James' engagements on social media, including his calling President Donald Trump a "bum" on Twitter, but they seemed to use James' as an inspiration to develop their own unique voices as young athletes and to take on the issues which were salient to them. Further, the issues they were concerned about were not, by and large, related to police violence in communities of color, but a range of other issues that affected their lives and families. In speaking of athletes taking on the role of activist in response to being challenged my members of their social circle a participant stated:

I think it's a tough argument. He's making so much money. Why's he doing this? He's an athlete, not a politician. There's that one lady who told LeBron to shut and dribble. I was hella pissed. That's LeBron James. You can't disrespect LeBron James like that. And he's doing it for a positive thing. (P3; FG3)

A second participant stated, "You definitely feel more power ... we were actually saying something even though it's just a neighborhood football game. It makes us feel like we're actually doing something" (P6; FG5).

Based on the results of the focus groups, a common characteristic of the Bay Area High School athlete role identity is to be mindful of inequality and activism. Participants wanted to engage with and provide insight into injustice for marginalized populations to their fellow classmates, family members, and significant others. These athletes endeavored to carry on work of LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick by developing their own unique voice, activism, and identity,

while maintaining the tenor and inspiration of James' activism in their actions. This finding was cogently stated by the following participant:

No one likes to come out and say we're treated differently. No one wants to look like you're calling someone a racist. That's kind of looked down upon. But as you have NFL players doing it, it becomes a discussion. And it becomes a discussion we can all participate in. It was very helpful for high school students to be able to press forward with what we're trying to say. (P2; FG1)

Hopeful for change

The final theme, which serves as a uniting through line for the study, centered on the notion that despite the uncertainty regarding the efforts of athletes to facilitate real social change, they felt hopeful for the future. Despite experiencing pitfalls and obstacles in their admittedly awkward efforts to make sense of athlete activism and their desires to insert themselves into these endeavors, a central tenet of the participants of the focus groups was a collective desire to be change agents regardless of whether the issues were those promoted by the high-profile athletes that inspired them. Importantly, the issue of gun violence was one that many of the participants resonated with, even more than police brutality – an issue central to LeBron James' activism. Members of multiple focus groups had participated in student-led walk-outs related to this issue, a finding that was both unexpected and encouraging, as it showed that while their understanding of complex social issues might not be as nuanced as it might be, they did direct their efforts in ways that spoke directly to their experiences. The motivation to facilitate change is expressed in the following statement:

I push myself to be pretty active because I have this idea, if you complain about something ... you shouldn't complain if our not doing something about it. Everyone should do something. Whether it's just through creating discussion or otherwise. Activism is huge and it's a big part of democracy because nobody should be told how to think and how to feel. So, activism plays a huge role and we're lucky to be able to have activism here because places like China and Russia you're not allowed to do that. (P2; FG4)

The crystallization of feelings regarding the issue of gun violence and the desire to be a change agent is represented in the following exchange from focus group #1:

P3: Well the hope is that everyone in the future can look at each other. Like notice him and notice me that we're all the same people. Same traits. I don't have to be scared of a person. I don't have to think I'm a criminal. What is that? Stereotypes. All gone. Just make it slowly fade away.

- P1:** I want the conversation to stick heavily. Because everything is still happening. Injustices are still happening up in Sacramento. Some guy got shot in his backyard. The conversation needs to keep going. Keep happening, each and every day.
- P2:** I feel like just change in the judicial system and as we are human beings that's just asking a lot but just an eye to be open that's just what I kind of hope for what this turns into, and I have my fingers crossed for.

While our focus in the present study was geographically limited, the results help to show the importance these students place on creating change as part of their identity. When asked about how athlete activism has influenced, the voice high school students have the following exchange from focus group #1 epitomized the sentiment of change broadly and change at the local level specifically:

- P1:** To speak up and you need to speak up.
- P3:** Not only when we want to but when we need to. When you stand up for yourself you need to stand up for others. Your voice is strong so use it. And only use it in the right way.
- P2:** And strong not as in like in the term like in the world LeBron was strong in our community. And we're able to make an impact in our community. Like in the Palo Alto community. It's one of the little victories. Changing some heads in the Palo Alto community, not change the world, but for the next generation of minority kids who have to come here. They won't have to go through the things we had to go through.

Implications and conclusion

This chapter speaks to the need to understand the experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders as it relates to athlete activism, especially following the myriad vital protest movements in the United States, and globally in the year 2020. In the time since we conducted these focus groups, students have continued to mobilize, and yet their voices still have not (in our estimation) reached the level of influence that they may be capable of. The three major themes that we developed from our data analysis directly relate to the need for organizations generally, and parents and coaches specifically, to be aware and open to teenage student athletes' engagements with larger social issues, and to be as supportive as possible as they negotiate the ever-changing terrain of athlete activism and identity. It should also be noted, that for these groups of participants, athletes who protested were viewed in a universally favorable manner, speaking directly to the importance of athletes using their voice, protesting, and certainly not shutting up and dribbling. This point is particularly important in the United States context in the aftermath of the 2020 murders of several Black citizens by law enforcement, for as professional athletes continue to use their platform more readily, this future generation of fans will be there to support them.

Regarding future research, given that several participants expressed a discomfort, in certain contexts, with using their voices to protest any social issue (i.e., during player/coach interactions), and given the current political climate in the United States, it would be interesting to examine the experiences of both the athletes and their coaches as it relates to athlete activism. Internationally, there is also an urgent need to examine how athletes from other Western nations have taken up the call for athletes to become more politicized, and to publicly speak out on a variety of social issues. Though research, theory development, and practical understanding of athlete activism has flourished, perhaps we as scholars have not paid enough attention to a vitally important phase in the socialization of young athletes and their identities, when the voice of the youth coach is of the highest import. In addition, we need to understand the perspectives of similar aged individuals in a global context, for by focusing our attention on the next generation of athletes, we gain a window into the future of sport and the social issues with which it is intertwined.

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“It’s our duty to utilize the platform that we have”

Motivations for activism among U.S. collegiate athletes

Yannick Kluch

As an athlete, you’re so ingrained in your community.
When you go to college, you really come into your own community. ...
That is a great catalyst for activism, because you are really motivated
to help your school and help your environment that you’re in.
(Sara, collegiate tennis player in the United States)

I open this chapter on motivations for athlete activism with a quote from one of the participants in my study to highlight the unique challenges and opportunities that collegiate athlete¹ activists in the United States find themselves in during their time in college. As pointed out by Sara, collegiate athletes often feel deeply connected to their campus communities (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014), yet their time on campus is limited to a few years. Athletes’ limited time on campus poses a challenge when it comes to utilizing one’s platform for social justice activism, particularly when considering that collegiate athletes often are highly motivated to contribute to their campus community (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2014), but struggle to translate social values into social action (Gayles, Rockenbach, & Davis, 2012) and tend to be less engaged in political activities than their non-athlete peers (Hoffman, Kihl, & Browning, 2015).

While scholars have established a rigorous body of research on athlete activism at the professional level in recent years (Agyemang, Berg, & Fuller, 2018; Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Khan, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2018), the experiences of collegiate athletes identifying as activists have received less attention in the scholarly discourse. At the collegiate level, scholarly inquiries on athlete activism have largely focused on responses to collegiate athlete activism (Chaplin & Montez de Oca, 2019; Frederick, Sanderson, & Schlereth, 2017), collegiate athlete activists’ use of resources in activist efforts (Yan, Pegoraro & Watanabe, 2018), collegiate athlete activists’ perceptions of social justice activism (Agyemang, Singer & DeLorme, 2010; Mac Intosh, Martin, & Kluch, 2020), support for collegiate athlete activists (McCoy, Oregon, & Sullivan, 2017), perceptions of and ability to engage in activism (Fuller & Agyemang, 2018), as

well as activism in the context of Title IX² (Cooky, 2017). While these studies with no doubt deserve merit, few of them are based on qualitative approaches examining the experiences of contemporary collegiate athlete activists. To provide one such insight into the experiences of collegiate activists, and given the recent (re)emergence of activism in the collegiate athlete experience (Kluch, 2020; Mac Intosh, Martin, & Kluch, 2020), it is the goal of this book chapter to highlight some of the reasons why U.S. collegiate athletes in the current cultural climate engage in activism for social justice causes.³

Due to the unique nature of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, including the ability of some Division I collegiate athletes in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to reach broad audiences, research on the motivations of athlete activism at the collegiate level becomes particularly important when examining the role activism and civic engagement play in U.S. higher education. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Education and the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) made an appeal to institutions of higher education to “ensure that postsecondary study contributes significantly to undergraduate students’ preparation as informed, engaged, and globally knowledgeable citizens” (p. vii). Accordingly, there is a growing body of research on the benefits of civic engagement and activism for students in higher education (e.g., Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Levine & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2010). Because many college athletes view activism as a valuable experience (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2006), this chapter highlights various motivations for athletes to engage in activism in order to guide readers in further empowering athlete activists at the college level to use their platform for social good.

Who becomes a collegiate athlete activist? A profile of the participants

The data presented in this chapter is part of a larger research project examining the construction of activist identities among NCAA Division I collegiate athlete activists.⁴ As part of the larger study, I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with 31 collegiate athletes who identified as activists for social justice causes and were competing at the NCAA Division I level at (or had graduated within two years from) the time of the interview. Interestingly, all participants identified as members of historically marginalized, minoritized, or underrepresented groups in intercollegiate athletics. In fact, 13 participants identified as members of a racially minoritized group, 16 participants identified as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ)+ community, 14 participants identified as women, and three participants identified as international students.⁵ Notably, one of the groups that is absent from the sample is the most privileged group in U.S. intercollegiate athletics: white, cisgender, straight men.

Participants represented a diverse set of sports, attended universities in various locations across the United States, and engaged in a variety of activist causes.

Athletes from 12 intercollegiate sports were part of the study: football, swimming, basketball, cross-country, track and field, softball, diving, gymnastics, lacrosse, tennis, golf, and soccer. The 31 collegiate activists represented most major geographic regions, including the West, the South, the Midwest, and the Northeast. The focus of participants' activism ranged from racial injustice, gender equity, and LGBTQ+ inclusion to disability rights, mental health stigma elimination, and athlete compensation. To provide context to the participants' unique experiences, throughout this book chapter I chose to include information about participants' identities and demographic information (e.g., geographic location of school, class standing) when highlighting their voices throughout the presentation of data.⁶

Why do collegiate athletes become activists? Motivations for activism

Attesting to the changing nature of social constructions of athlete behavior, the college athletes described a variety of motivations for their activism. Below, I will provide a detailed overview of each of the five main motivations.

Using their platform as an athlete. One of the most frequently reported reasons why the collegiate athletes in this study chose to become activists was because they perceived athletes as having an immense amount of power on U.S. university campuses, and they wanted to use that power as a platform to promote social justice. Tristan, a Black, bisexual tennis player who was in his junior year at a college in the South, highlighted that this platform was particularly important for athletes at Division I institutions, because “it kind of gives you a little bit more of a stage to share your story [and] makes you more than just an average person” as people give you “more respect when they realize you are an athlete.” And sophomore softball player Laila, who identified as straight, did not disclose her race, and attended college in the West, elaborated:

People know who we are. Whether I'm a star player or I'm not, ... people know who we are and people watch us. So yeah, when I am out and I'm doing these things I make sure to tell people I play softball at my school. I make sure to wear my athletics gear, because it means something.

The idea that athletes have more visibility for activism given their platform was mirrored by junior diver Nick, a gay, white athlete in the Northeast, who said that for activism “you need a large following, a famous person, leading examples ... and I think athletics has all of those things.”

Much like Laila and Nick, other athletes in this study were highly aware of the primary role sport plays in American society. For example, Jessica, a white, straight swimmer who was an international student in the Midwest, shared her impression that “we're so powerful ... sports are so important in this country ... everyone watches.” Often, the platform they had as an athlete came with a

sense of responsibility, as football senior Kholbe, who identified as multiracial and straight and attended college in the West, summarized best when saying that, “I feel like it’s our duty to utilize the platform that we have and I feel like it’s almost an injustice to not use the platform to speak on social injustices and inequalities.” This sentiment was shared by Hailey, a senior lacrosse player in the Northeast who identified as white and lesbian; she stated that, as a collegiate athlete, “you are the face of the school.”

Underlying many of these statements is the notion that the platform collegiate athletes have for their activism provides them with a certain amount of power. Interestingly, participants such as Hailey and 2016 football graduate Malik, a Black, straight college athlete in the South, related that feeling of power to the impact their activism could have in terms of money at the university. For Hailey, the power of student athletes lay in their ability to create a voice of athletes that students listen to – they have the power and opportunity to be heard that many of their non-athlete peers do not have. Malik reinforced the idea of college athletes’ power being linked to money by stating: “Money talks! When you start affecting people’s pockets, things change, laws get made. [Athletes] have the ability to say things and do things that could really make a difference.”

Providing visibility for minoritized voices. The importance of utilizing one’s platform for activist causes became particularly evident given that all of the participants identified as members of groups that have historically struggled for visibility and acceptance in the world of sport. Athletes such as white first-year swimmer Connor, who identified as gay and competed for a school in the Midwest, Liam (a white, gay swimmer and 2015 graduate of a college in the South), Sara (an Asian American, lesbian tennis player in the South), as well as cross-country and track and field senior Sophia, who identified as white and bisexual and attended school in the Midwest, pointed out that using one’s platform as a collegiate athlete is particularly important for individuals from underrepresented, marginalized, or minoritized communities. Identifying as gay, for example, Connor emphasized:

Student-athletes, especially at the NCAA Division I level, are already kind of given that platform by their university, and so gay student-athletes in particular can kind of help use that platform to get the word out there and help a lot of people ... the more people who are being vocal about it, the better.

Liam, in addition, knew that “as college athletes in this city, you are raised on a pedestal.” He elaborated:

I knew people were looking at me. I knew I had a chance to really shine a light on this issue [being gay]. ... I said “Okay, I want to talk about this, and I want to talk about athletes who are gay, that feel like they can’t be themselves.” I’m going to tell my story, and whatever happens, happens. If there

was someone out there, [...] other schools out there, they're not alone, and they can truly be who they are, and still succeed in their sport.

Similarly, Sara stated during her interview that she wanted to use her platform as an athlete to provide a space for other out-and-proud athletes to "be who they are and pursue their activism." Sophia agreed by suggesting to

put some LGBT kids in the spotlight, because that will ... breed more activists in that area ... they can be really effective in activism, because I think they have a really good position to make a lot of change.

When it came to racially minoritized college athletes, Southern Black football player Tyree (sexual orientation undisclosed) stated that he wanted to use his platform to change harmful stereotypes and narratives facing Black athletes:

A lot of times you hear about the bad, so I'm glad that my platform is something that's positive. It's a different switch-up from "So-and-so got a DUI. Such and such failed a drug test" and you get tired of hearing that narrative around African American male athletes.

It was beliefs such as these that not only point toward the role sport can play in facilitating social change, but also reflected the desire of the athletes in this study to use their unique platform as athletes to provide visibility for underrepresented and minoritized populations that challenge harmful cultural stereotypes and narratives.

Being a role model. With the responsibility that comes with having a big platform for activism in mind, various athletes in this study pointed out that they became activists because they wanted to serve as role models. These athletes often would stress, as Jessica put most accurately, that "people are looking up to us, so you need to do the right thing and be a role model to show what's good and try to do as many good things as possible." Athletes such as Jessica stressed that their status as role models allowed them to have a big impact on their respective communities – or, as she described it, "we have so much impact on our town, on the university, in general. People look up to us, so if they see we do activism, then maybe they are going to do that, too." Jessica's statements show that for her, as for other collegiate athletes in this study, the primary motivation to become an activist was fueled by the idea that their status as role models can positively impact and inspire other members of their communities to join their activist efforts.

The idea that being a role model through activism will create a ripple effect also came up in other interviews, including my interview with Jasmine, a Black softball player in her sophomore year at a college in the West (sexual orientation undisclosed). She shared that she became an activist because "as one person does it and sees that it's making a difference, someone will do the same and try to get

in the mix with using their voice ... it's kinda contagious." In addition, junior lacrosse player Marissa, a white, straight athlete in the Northeast, attested that, "It takes a lot, I think, for one person to stand up. But then once one person stands up, everyone else is okay to stand up." Marissa advocated for more athletes to "just not be afraid to be that first person."

While similar sentiments were expressed by the majority of participants, it was collegiate athletes such as Isaiah (a Black, straight football player in his senior year at a college in the Midwest), Elijah (a Black, straight basketball senior at a Midwestern university), and Kholbe, all of whom came from major athletic programs in the United States, that stressed the importance of strong leadership skills for serving as role models. Isaiah, for example, expressed that, "I've always kind of been looked up to ... especially on my college campus, I'm looked at as a leader and role model." Elijah explicitly stated that,

Whether you want to or not, people look at the athletes as their role models ... with that we have a greater opportunity to try and change their minds to make them think critically, do good things in the world, set good examples.

Kholbe added that he wanted to become a role model because "it was just the opportunity to live out my dreams and then ultimately to become someone that was seen as a leader, not only on the football field and in the team, but also in the community."

Eliminating discrimination. The next theme that emerged from the data was the use of activism to eliminate discrimination. The athletes who were motivated by a strong desire to eliminate discrimination often faced discrimination throughout their lives. Indeed, the participants often gave vivid accounts of how their own experience with discrimination has informed their activism and has made them more aware of social injustice in the United States. For example, various of the 13 athletes in this study who identified as a racially minoritized group reported to have experienced racial discrimination. Malik was one such athlete. He described his experience as a Black man in the following way:

Just being a Black man in America, I've been called the N-word before. I have felt uncomfortable on campus. Wearing my hood around on campus, I felt uncomfortable by the stares that I get, the looks that people give me. ... If somebody is just afraid of you for no reason, when somebody just fears you for no reason ... as a kid, I remember that.

Sophomore softball player Jasmine also stated that she faced discrimination early on in her life. She revealed that when she was younger, she was often ashamed of being Black due to other children teasing her because of her skin color. It was not until her teenage years that Jasmine started to "embrace my Blackness more, and I just became proud of who I am and not try to be anyone else." Likewise,

Anthony, a Black, straight sophomore on his Midwestern university's basketball team, reported that he frequently came "in contact with some form of racism" growing up in a predominately white area.

While many of the examples shared so far include overt types of discrimination, the athletes in this study also disclosed more covert forms of discrimination that motivated them to become activists, most of which represented microaggressions targeted at these athletes. As a Black athlete, for example, Tyree was one of the participants providing examples of behavioral microaggressions. He shared in his interview that often, when walking around his predominantly white campus, he observed that white women would walk away from him or clutch their purse under their arms when encountering him. Further examples of microaggressions were shared by Jasmine and Hannah, a junior softball player in the West who identified as white and lesbian. As a Black woman, Jasmine described moments in which her teammates would "talk about hair and stuff, and my hair ... you don't have to wash it every day, because of the way it is, the texture and all that," which led her teammates to make "just little comments like 'Ewww' or something like that, just kind of like they don't understand." Hannah felt like the microaggressions she experienced were often linked to her sexuality:

Like, someone will find out I'm gay and say "Oh, she's too pretty to be gay." You'll hear little things ... It's not like someone's ever coming out and saying "Oh, I hate gay people." More like a kind of an indirect thing that relates to that.

Hannah's examples illustrate that these athlete activists from underrepresented, marginalized, and minoritized groups often had to navigate both overt and covert discriminatory comments and practices, which motivated them to become activists and prevent such events from happening in the future.

Promoting inclusive environments. A final motivation that emerged from my data was a desire of some collegiate athletes to promote inclusive environments and, by doing so, strengthen the various communities of which they were a part – both physical (e.g., campus community) and symbolic (e.g., the LGBTQ+ community). For these athletes, strengthening a community through activism meant providing a space for everyone to feel included and welcome regardless of their identities. Kholbe perhaps said it best when pointing out that, for him, activism was "an opportunity to just show the solidarity that we have together. Individually, we may be small, but together, we are large." Jessica clarified that strengthening communities is important, because too many individuals still feel excluded; she made clear that, "I just feel like we can do a lot together to make those people feel comfortable, as comfortable as I am right now. I want them to be as happy as I am in my community." In a similar manner, Noah (a white, gay football player who was in his senior year at a school in the Northeast) stressed

that activism provided him with an outlet to “do more specific community work in your outreach to help improve the space you are in.”

For some of these athletes, the community that was the target of their activism was the one they were physically in, such as the athletics community on their university campuses. Marissa, for example, described her campus as “extremely close-knit” given that there is a strong desire to “pull your people along with you, especially within the student-athlete community.” Soccer player Claire, who identified as white and straight and was a 2016 graduate from a college in the Northeast, extended this call to direct one’s activist efforts at strengthening the sense of community among the athletic community by focusing on her teammates specifically. For her, “the person who’s being an activist isn’t doing it for themselves, they’re doing it for the other people, they’re doing it for a bigger cause ... like for their team.” Allison, a Latina swimmer in her junior year at a college in the Midwest, stated that creating an inclusive team environment is important because she wanted her teammates to “be able to perform at their highest level and enjoy college just the same exact way that I can.”

While some collegiate athletes were motivated by the drive to improve the communities they physically resided in, others were focused on promoting inclusive environments in those communities that provided them with a symbolic connection to other individuals based on mutual identity markers. Jada, a junior women’s basketball player at a college in the Northeast who identified as Black and straight, was one of these athletes; she was working toward creating a stronger sense of community among athletes of color at her university. Similarly, Ethan (a Black, gay gymnast in his senior year at a Midwestern school) pointed to an “us versus them” mentality that oftentimes hinders communities from being truly inclusive. As he put it,

If you just single out one minority, you make them different from the majority and you make them completely different from other minorities. You’re just creating more divides between a group that is already being oppressed.

For Ethan, strengthening communities meant creating spaces in which minoritized individuals can coexist and embrace each other to promote inclusive environments.

What’s next? Implications for empowering collegiate athlete activists

This chapter joins a growing number of empirical studies highlighting the firsthand accounts of collegiate athlete activists through in-depth interviews (see e.g., Fuller & Agyemang, 2018). The collegiate athlete activists in this study shared valuable insights into what motivates them to become change agents for social justice during (or shortly after) their time on campus – from using

one's platform as an athlete and providing visibility to underrepresented voices to serving as role models, eliminating discrimination, and promoting inclusive environments. While this chapter provides insights into why collegiate athletes become activists, the study does not come without limitations. First, the sample focuses exclusively on Division I athletes. Future research should investigate why and how collegiate athletes in Divisions II and III⁷ as well as in the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) engage in activism to identify ways in which athletes beyond the Division I level can be empowered to use their platform for activist purposes. Similarly, scholars should examine how college athletes in different countries navigate activism and activist spaces.⁸ While voices of minoritized college athletes should be centered in research on activism, future inquiries should study the experiences and motivations of collegiate athlete activists holding more privileged identities in the community of sport – such as white, straight, and cisgender men advocating for social justice – to identify strategies for allyship benefiting minoritized groups.

I want to close this chapter by identifying strategies for scholars and practitioners to empower more collegiate athlete activists to utilize their platform to advance social justice goals. First, as has become evident through the voices highlighted in this chapter, the collegiate athlete activists in this study were highly aware of the platform that comes with being a Division I college athlete. Scholars and administrators should provide opportunities for these athletes to utilize that platform in meaningful ways. For instance, many Division I schools have staff that are tasked with athlete development, life skills, and/or career development. Implementing programming focused on inclusive leadership can help collegiate athletes be more effective activists. Such programming can include developing workshops and trainings, drafting a social media plan, identifying partners across campus that can inform activist agendas, or attending media trainings focused on communicating social justice messages. Given athletes' increased commitment to activism, specific professional development on how to find and utilize one's voice for activism should be incorporated in college athlete development programming at various levels of an athlete's time on campus.

Second, participants frequently underlined the importance of using one's activism to highlight marginalized and underrepresented voices, fight discrimination, and facilitate inclusive environments. Some of this work can easily be supported by faculty and administrators. For instance, athletic department leadership can help identify opportunities for collegiate athletes to get trained in bystander intervention and facilitating difficult conversations. To highlight marginalized and underrepresented voices specifically, faculty and staff should work with the communications staff both within the athletic department and at the university to identify ways in which such voices can be provided a platform (e.g., through an annual social media campaign or celebrating cultural heritage months). These athletes should also be given opportunities to share their experience – which often informs their activism – in spaces such as team meetings, athletic department gatherings, or coaches meetings.

Finally, few activists can be successful without a support system, which is why faculty and administrators need to do their best to provide such systems of support for collegiate athlete activists. For instance, athletics staff and faculty working with collegiate athlete activists should be able to connect them with mental health resources, given that activism can be an emotionally exhausting and draining activity – especially for individuals from underrepresented and minoritized groups. Faculty with expertise in the area of the athletes’ activism can also serve as a great source of support on college campuses, especially when an athlete activist is motivated to use their platform for social good but faces resistance within their team, from their coach, or in the athletic department. Given that collegiate athletes often feel so strongly connected to their school – as captured by the quote from Sara I opened this chapter with – it is crucial for those who want to empower athletes to be agents for social change to strengthen the sense of community by connecting like-minded collegiate athlete activists and providing them with a space in which they can develop a collective voice, nurture activist efforts, and positively impact the communities that are so close to their hearts.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this book chapter, I use the terms *collegiate athlete* and *college athlete* to refer to students who are competing as athletes in varsity programs at schools that are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States. While I use the terms above, my participants often use *student-athlete* when sharing their experiences in college. The terms are often used interchangeably, yet scholars have pointed out that the term *student-athlete* is not free of ideological bias but rather serves as a euphemism used to reinforce the myth of amateurism in U.S. intercollegiate athletics (Staurowsky, 2004; Staurowsky & Sack, 2005).
- 2 Title IX states that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” It is considered a landmark ruling for gender equity in higher education and led to a significant increase of opportunities for girls and women to participate in intercollegiate sport (Cooky, 2017).
- 3 While the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is comprised of three Divisions, this study focuses on activism at the Division I level. Colleges and universities competing in Division I are able to offer multiyear, cost-of-attendance scholarships, oversee the largest athletics budgets, and on average have the largest undergraduate enrollment across the three Divisions (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2020).
- 4 In the larger project, I examine the ways in which collegiate athlete activists negotiated the at times competing identities as students, athletes, and activists. Part of this research, focused on how the athletes defined activism, is published in Kluch (2020).
- 5 Please note that these identity categories are not mutually exclusive, and multiple participants identified as minoritized/marginalized/underrepresented due to multiple, intersecting social identity categories.

- 6 Rather than the researcher assigning pseudonyms, participants were given the option to choose their own pseudonym. In addition, participants were asked to provide demographic information (e.g., gender identity, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation) as well as information regarding their class standing (first-year, sophomore, junior, senior, graduated) and location of their school/college/university.
- 7 Fuller and Agyemang (2018) provide an excellent in-depth, qualitative study focused on Black college athlete activists at the Division III level.
- 8 For one such study looking at college athlete activism in South Korea, see Nam et al. (2018).

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Financial implications for athlete activists

The cost of taking a stance

Samuel Schmidt

Introduction

The year was 1990 and there was a tightly contested U.S. Senate race in North Carolina, the home state of basketball great Michael Jordan. Harvey Gantt, a Black Democrat, was seeking to beat incumbent, segregationist, and white Republican, Jesse Helms. When asked about the Senate race and whether he supported Democrat Gantt, Jordan reportedly stated, “Republicans buy sneakers, too” (Washington, 2020). While there is controversy surrounding the intent behind the statement, Jordan’s comment has been synonymous with the idea that Jordan was unwilling to sacrifice his brand (and potential earnings) to wade into politics and social issues. Researchers and journalists have pointed to this quote as one reason for the lack of activism by prominent athletes in the 1990s and 2000s. After all, Jordan is the world’s first athlete billionaire and still earns roughly \$145 million per year (Gaines, Borden, & Askinasi, 2020). Yet, the 2010s saw a different type of athlete; one willing to incur negative financial ramifications in order to stand up for oppressed populations. Athletes like LeBron James, Colin Kaepernick, Megan Rapinoe, Serena Williams, and many others in today’s society used their platform as athletes to speak out against racism, sexism, and many other societal ills. They engaged in activism on and off the field, despite the warnings about the negative financial consequences of their actions.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the financial implications of athlete activism in today’s athletic environment. The chapter does not intend to explain how much an athlete would gain or lose for engaging in activism; there are too many factors that go into developing a uniform answer for “What is the financial cost of athlete activism?” The players’ race, ethnicity, sex, identified gender, age, ability, and income are just a few of the factors from the human perspective. What the activism is, how the activism manifests itself, and what sport the athlete(s) plays are also factors. While some researchers have attempted to understand the general theme of if activism hurts or helps an athlete, it is obvious that there are too many factors that give us a uniform statement that athlete activism will always hurt/help an athlete from a financial viewpoint.

This chapter will examine specific cases from athletes and corporations to paint a broad picture of the financial implications of athlete activism. First, an overview of the players involved in the 2016 National Football League (NFL) protests will help us understand how athletes who knelt for the anthem were treated compared to those who did not kneel. Then, specific athletes are examined (i.e., former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick and Olympic thrower Gwen Berry) to understand two athletes' personal stories. The chapter concludes by inspecting the financial impact of athlete activism from corporations like Nike and the NFL. This chapter is designed to help understand the financial trends of athlete activism in the sport industry. Using actual examples of athlete activists, this chapter will hope to provide more information as to the cost of taking a stance.

The 2016 NFL protests

While the 2016 NFL protests were not the first known instance of activism happening on a league-wide basis, it certainly stands as an important cultural moment in the recent history of athlete activism. As a refresher, Colin Kaepernick (an ex-San Francisco 49er quarterback) originally sat during the national anthem in the 2016 NFL preseason. Kaepernick, when asked about his actions, replied that he “was not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color” (Haislop, 2020). Former Seattle Seahawks player and Green Beret, Nate Boyer, wrote an open letter to Kaepernick explaining how sitting during the anthem hurt him as a former military member. Boyer and Kaepernick met in person to discuss the protest and Kaepernick changed his protest from sitting during the national anthem to kneeling out of respect for those in the military. Kaepernick's activism quickly spread, however, as teammates and other members around the league joined him in his protest.

Whether it was sitting for the national anthem, kneeling for the national anthem, standing with one arm raised in the air (akin to the 1968 Olympic Black Power salute), or standing arm-in-arms, Kaepernick was not alone in his protest. David Niven, researcher at the University of Cincinnati, authored an in-depth examination into the economic impact of the NFL anthem protests. Niven asked the simple question of: “What were the financial consequences for the players that kneeled during the national anthem in protest of the treatment of Black and Brown lives in America?” Niven (2019) utilized the performances of the athletes and contracts to come to the answer.

Niven's study revealed a strong finding: the NFL athletes that kneeled for the national anthem in 2016 were more likely to receive less money and more likely to switch teams than their non-protestor counterparts. While protestors saw their guaranteed money grow by \$1.14 million, non-protestors saw their guaranteed money increase to \$3 million. Ultimately, the owners believed that the value of non-protestors was higher than protestors. In other words, the market value for the protestors was dampened by the owners. Additionally, non-protesting athletes

were more likely to find a new team than continue to play for their same team. Roughly 30 percent of non-protestors switched teams during the 2017 offseason, but 55 percent of protestors wound up on a new team. Another important factor in all of this concerns the fact that the group of protestors (and non-protestors) that were compared by Niven (2019) were almost *identical* in their metrics of performance, perceptions of performance (selected to a Pro Bowl), amount of games played, and age. Undoubtedly, the market value for these athletes that protested during the 2016–17 season was dampened by owners/general managers.

Shortly after the 2016–17 NFL protests, almost all of the NFL owners/teams made public statements about players kneeling and freedom of speech. In reviewing the public statements, owners were able to bring several color-blind narratives into their statements about the protests. Across the league, owners attempted to control the narrative by using a supposedly apolitical role in the protest's rhetoric, while maintaining white power and privilege. Additionally, owners tried to almost take credit for the protest by stating their "support" of the players who protested, even if there was little support provided besides a public statement (McGannon & Butryn, 2020). It is no wonder how NFL franchise owners and general managers managed to dampen the value of those that protested. Whether it was a subconscious act or not, athletes who protested were punished by owners for speaking out. While most protesting athletes retained their job in the NFL, one athlete would see his lost.

Colin Kaepernick's protest

Moving from the general trends of those protesting to a specific example of the activism of one player and the consequences he incurred starts with Colin Kaepernick. Before examining the consequences of his activism, it is important to understand the context in which his career earnings were impacted. The former Nevada Wolf Pack quarterback was selected 36th overall in 2011 NFL Draft by the San Francisco 49ers. Kaepernick signed a four-year \$5.12 million deal. His first year was seen learning from former first overall pick, Alex Smith. In his second year in the NFL, Kaepernick replaced Smith in Week 10 and took the 49ers to the plays with an 11-4-1 record. The 49ers made it to Super Bowl XLVII, largely behind Kaepernick's performance. Kaepernick and the 49ers had another stellar season, losing to the eventual Super Bowl champions Seattle Seahawks in the NFC Championship Game. Kaepernick signed a record extension with the 49ers, worth up to \$126 million over seven years.

Despite there being \$61 million in "guaranteed money" of the total \$126 million contract, Kaepernick only received \$39.4 million of his signed contract with San Francisco (Gaines, 2017). Kaepernick made an estimated \$13, \$12, and \$14 million in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively. During this time, Kaepernick and the team's performances were starting to decline. Seeing a slight decline in performance, Kaepernick agreed to restructure his contract with the 49ers. Giving up \$14.5 million in injury guarantees, Kaepernick was able to opt out

of his contract with the 49ers early. This decision was made in part for multiple reasons. First, Kaepernick was benched as starting quarterback during the 2016–17 season. He knew the team leadership was starting to lose faith in him. Second, Kaepernick had several injuries hampering him: his left shoulder, right thumb, left knee, and left leg. He figured a fresh start after healing from injuries might be the best scenario for him. Third, having been through three different head coaches in his time with San Francisco and a new general manager coming in 2017, Kaepernick knew leadership probably wanted their person as quarterback.

In 2016, the year Kaepernick started his protest, the quarterback saw his best statistical season since 2013. Kaepernick regained his position as starting quarterback. Despite the team going 1–10 during his tenure as starter (largely behind a defense giving up 30 points a game), Kaepernick completed 60 percent of his passes and threw for 16 touchdowns and only four interceptions. Kaepernick was, however, in the bottom half of the NFL in production and Quarterback Rating (QBR). After another disappointing season, Kaepernick opted out of his contract and became a free agent. Many believed the 49ers would have cut Kaepernick anyway, as new General Manager John Lynch stated, “We gave him the option: ‘You can opt out, we can release you, whatever’. And he chose to opt out, but that was just a formality.” (Brinson, 2017, para. 4).

Kaepernick pledged to play in the 2017–18 if he was given a chance. He was not given that chance as Kaepernick was not signed by a team since his last contract with the 49ers. The former quarterback hosted workouts and public appearances, but few teams contacted him about becoming a member of their team. Another player who joined Kaepernick in protest, Eric Reid, also experienced struggles as he was a free agent waiting to be signed by a team. Reid, a former first-round pick of the 49ers and the first NFL player to join Kaepernick in the protest, went unsigned for almost an entire year after the protest before landing with the Carolina Panthers. Reid had one of his best seasons during the 2017–18 season before becoming a free agent.

Why was Kaepernick not signed? Multiple reasons were theorized. Some believed Kaepernick was a distraction as the media would focus on his activism and not the team’s performance. Along this same vein, some believed Kaepernick would not focus on the game, but doing his charitable work instead. Others did not want to receive a tweet or backlash of any form from then-President Donald Trump. Some owners were afraid that fans would not want Kaepernick on their team. There was even a belief that Kaepernick’s vegan diet was a concern (Lyles Jr., 2017).

Due to the list of mediocre players being signed ahead of Kaepernick and Reid, the two NFL players filed a grievance in October 2017 under the NFL’s collective bargaining agreement, alleging that the owners conspired to keep Kaepernick and Reid out of the NFL. Kaepernick and Reid faced a difficult challenge: proving that the NFL owners specifically kept the players out of the league due to their protest. The fact that they were unsigned was not enough to prove they were colluded against. The players had to provide evidence that teams entered into

an agreement to prevent the players from being signed. Despite the uphill battle facing Kaepernick and Reid, the NFL reached a settlement with the athletes ending the collusion grievance in early 2019. While the settled amount was kept secret due to a confidentiality agreement, a report came forward that Kaepernick and Reid settled for less than \$10 million (which they split roughly evenly after lawyer costs and fees; Belson, 2019). Kaepernick was seeking lost compensation that he may have earned if he was signed by a team (in the ball park of \$12–14 million), but wound up with likely less than one-third of that total. Reid ended up getting signed to a one-year contract with the Carolina Panthers for \$823,000 (he earned \$5.7 million in the previous year) in 2017. Kaepernick, however, remained unsigned.

Colin Kaepernick's activism off the field

One might think that after he kneeled for the anthem in 2016 that Kaepernick would cease his activist efforts. After all, he was labeled a “distraction” to teams and was not getting any income as he was unsigned. This could not be farther from the truth. Despite losing his career and being personally threatened, Kaepernick continued his activism and sought to make society a better place.

After the divorce from the 49ers in 2016, Kaepernick stated he was going to continue to kneel during the national anthem. He was not willing to backdown on his stance of the poor treatment of people of color in the United States. While his refusal to stand made headlines, little attention was brought to his continuing activism efforts. In late 2016, Kaepernick announced he was going to be donating \$1 million to communities in need (Bishop & Baskin, 2017). The last \$100,000 of his commitment was a project he called #10for10. He partnered with celebrities and donated \$10,000 to a cause of their choice, provided they donated \$10,000 also. The \$1.02 million that he donated (or encouraged the others to donate) went to buy parolees suits so they could get jobs after being incarcerated, as well as prison reform, food for oppressed communities, helping oppressed mothers, community–police relations, reproductive rights (shortly after it was gutted by Donald Trump), and many more (Willingham, 2018).

The \$1 million campaign certainly made headlines for the unemployed former quarterback. The most impact he may have had through his activism was the creation of the “Know Your Rights Camp.” In October of 2016, Kaepernick hosted a “Know Your Rights” camp for hundreds of Black and Latinx children in the San Francisco Bay Area (Bieler, 2016). This camp occurred during a 49ers’ bye week. The goal of the camp was to learn about financial literacy, pursuing higher education, being physically fit and healthy, confrontations with law enforcement, and other lessons to combat oppressive issues that people of color face daily. Kaepernick used the success of the first camp to turn the campaign into a 501(c)(3) and visit more cities to widen the impact of the camp. Per the Camp’s website, the camps have engaged with over 1,400 children in seven cities, saw a 274 percent increase in participants since 2016, and 98 percent of attendees

increased their understanding of their rights (Know Your Rights Camp, n.d.). He continued to work with the organization and in 2020 donated \$100,000 to the Know Your Rights Campaign COVID-19 Relief Fund (Gleeson, 2020).

Seeing Kaepernick's activism, two corporations backed the former quarterback and aided his activist efforts: Nike and Disney. Kaepernick had been a Nike partner since 2011 (when he entered the league) and had a good relationship with the company. In 2017, however, Nike was considering (and close to) dropping Kaepernick as their partner. Nike's top communications executive persuaded other Nike executives to keep Kaepernick as a partner, despite Kaepernick being unemployed. Nike double-downed and opted to make Kaepernick the center of the "Just Do It" 30th Anniversary campaign in 2018. As a result of the campaign, Nike and Kaepernick created a partnership that would see Nike releasing Kaepernick-branded shoes and apparel and donating money to the Know Your Rights Camp.

In July of 2020, it was announced that Kaepernick partnered with media conglomerate Disney to continue his activism (Lopez, 2020). ESPN Films created an exclusive documentary series that chronicled Kaepernick's life after 2016. The series, hosted on Walt Disney Television, ESPN, Hulu, Pixar, and The Undefeated, will explore Kaepernick's activism and the projects he is involved with to further his activism. The deal with Disney came after months of creating media about himself and the plights he was passionate about. Since 2017, Kaepernick started a publishing company, partnered with Netflix for series about his teenage years, and planned to write articles for the blogging platform Medium (of which he became a director). The details of the deal were not released, but more than likely is similar to the deal with Nike that included some cash payment and a contribution to Kaepernick's mission.

There has been a tremendous amount of consequences for Kaepernick's activism. He saw his jersey burned, death threats, 32 teams and an entire league keep him from work, and plenty of other backlash. Kaepernick was also named GQ's Citizen of the Year in 2017, won the Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award in 2018, and had his number seven jersey be the highest selling jersey (despite not playing; Cobb, 2018). From an economic standpoint, it is easy to say Kaepernick lost tens of millions of dollars. Had he not protested, Kaepernick (who completed nearly 60 percent of his passes and a 16:4 touchdown to interception ratio in the season before he was cut) would likely have signed with another team. Notable quarterbacks also drafted in the 2011 draft, Andy Dalton, Cam Newton, and Tyrod Taylor, made an average of \$11.96 million per year from 2017 to 2020. Kaepernick's performance on the field would put him right on par with those quarterbacks, if not above their average. Given that, it is safe to say that Kaepernick lost between \$40 and \$48 million in contracts with NFL organizations if he had played from 2016 to 2020 as those other quarterbacks did. That does not even count endorsements, which probably would add several million. All in all, there is strong indication that the financial ramifications from Kaepernick's activism would eclipse \$50 million.

Gwen Berry

It is important to recognize that not all athletes that engage in activism are in the NFL. Many athlete activists are those that are not receiving national attention. A prime example of this is U.S. Track and Field athlete Gwen Berry. Berry, an Olympic hammer thrower, is one of the best athletes in her field as she was ranked fifth in hammer throw in 2020 and reached as high as third in the world according to Track & Field News' world rankings. Berry has many accolades to back up her rankings, including 2013, 2014, and 2016 USA Indoor Champion gold medalist, London 2012 alternate, placed 14th at Rio 2016, gold medalist at the 2014 Pan American Sports Festival, and the 2019 Pan American Games gold medalist.

The 2019 Pan American Games, however, was a chance for Berry to make a statement as she accepted her gold medal on the podium. Berry bowed her head and raised her fist into the air as The Star-Spangled Banner was concluding. The protest was synonymous with Tommie Smith and John Carlos' protest, both in message and in action. Berry thought about a recent trip to a former slave plantation, her time at Mississippi Freedom School where she learned about Black history, her hometown Ferguson, Missouri, and her father, an Iraq War veteran (Scoby, 2019). Just like Smith and Carlos, she protested a system that is broken. For her actions, Berry was given a 12-month probationary period by the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee. Shortly after her protest, the International Olympic Committee banned any kind of demonstration or political propaganda at any Olympic site (Berry, 2020).

Recently, Berry started to examine the impact of her activism. Without surprise, verbal insults were thrown her way for her actions. But what of the financial impacts a top Track and Field athlete could face for one's activism? After her protest, the USA Track and Field Foundation (USATFF) offered Berry grants totaling \$5,500 in 2019 (Kilgore, 2020). Yet, 2020 saw a different story for Berry. On July 1, 2020, the USATFF announced it was given a grant increase from Stephen A. Schwarzman (billionaire businessman and philanthropist) of \$250,000, bringing the total to \$875,000. This money was given to provide a financial safety net until the pandemic had concluded for 100 USA Track and Field athletes (USATF Foundation, n.d.). Twenty-five athletes received \$20,000 and 75 received \$5,000.

Of the 100 Track and Field athletes to receive grants, Gwen Berry – the sixth-ranked hammer thrower in the world in 2019 (along with winning Pan-Am gold medal) – was not one of them (Bushnell, 2020). Instead, five other U.S. hammer throwers were provided grants. Berry immediately noted her exclusion from the list. Two days later (July 3), the USATFF announced that another 39 track and field athletes would receive \$5,000 to offset pandemic costs. USATFF released a statement stating that they had awarded Gwen one of the additional grants of \$5,000, but she declined the grant.

Other than losing grants, she also lost money from sponsors. Nike, the very same organization that signed fellow athlete activist Colin Kaepernick and an

organization that is a giant in the track and field industry, cut ties with Berry without given a reason (Kilgore, 2020). Berry surmises that it was due to her not medaling at the World Championships in the fall despite being ranked third in the world. Still, that seems hard to believe given Nike's support of an unemployed Colin Kaepernick and their revenues. Overall, Berry estimated she lost about \$50,000, mostly from sponsorships (Heroux, 2020). She accredits that to *two-thirds* of her income. Whether the loss of money was from her activism or for other reasons, it is not an accident that losing roughly 66 percent of her income came after her decision to protest the treatment of Black lives in America.

Corporations

While it is clear the athletes were impacted, how about the teams? Specifically, were people less likely to attend games due to the 2016 protests? In an examination of home game attendance for 2017, researchers determined that there was little evidence to support that the protests influenced NFL game attendance (Wantanabe & Cunningham, 2020). The levels of implicit racial bias (automatic response to stimuli) were a bigger factor in NFL game attendance. In areas where there was higher implicit racial bias toward minorities, NFL attendance was likely to decline. It was not the protests that kept people from games, it was the views toward minorities that had a bigger influence on NFL game attendance. So, while the protesting athletes were financially harmed because of the protest by the NFL general managers and owners, owners were not financially harmed by the protests. In fact, the NFL reached an all-time high at the time of \$14 billion for the 2016–17 season, an increase of \$900m from the prior season (Lauterbach, 2017).

The other entity noted in this chapter, Nike, also made money off the back of Kaepernick. Nike signed Kaepernick to an endorsement deal in 2018, a year and a half after his NFL protest. Nike's stock slipped about 3 percent on September 4, the day after the campaign announcement and #NikeBoycott was trending on Twitter (Thomas, 2018). Still, the campaign created \$43 million worth of media exposure for Nike. By the end of September, the stock had seen a 5 percent increase and a \$6 billion increase in value (Abad-Santos, 2018). So, while Nike gained \$6 *billion* from their advertisement with Kaepernick, Kaepernick lost out on an estimated \$50 *million* from not playing in the NFL. Further, Nike witnessed value in Kaepernick, signed him to a long-term deal, and continued to make money off their campaign with him. At the same time, Nike dropped Berry as a sponsor, despite her strong accolades within her sport.

Conclusion

As mentioned, the goal of this chapter was to examine athlete activism from a financial standpoint. Evidence was provided that overall, athletes end up losing money when they engage in activism on the field. The protesting players in

the NFL lost out on millions of dollars on average, despite performing virtually the same as non-protesting athletes. Kaepernick was estimated to lose roughly \$50 million. He was able to make some of that as he signed deals with Nike, Disney, and Netflix for undisclosed amounts. Berry perhaps is the one in the worst situation of all and one that is witnessed by many athletes who are not in every day news. While the money she lost is not the face value of those in the NFL or other major sports, Berry lost an estimated \$50,000. To think that an athlete can peacefully protest the poor treatment of Black and marginalized people in America, only to lose 66 percent of their income is alarming. So, while corporations like the NFL and Nike are providing a platform or funds for athletes to engage in activism and seeing financial gains, athletes are still getting left behind. For the athletes, the negative financial consequences are real and impactful while organizations that associated themselves with the athletes are oftentimes profiting.

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The changing face of Black athlete activism

Pariah today, hero tomorrow?

Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown and DeShon Foxx

Introduction

One thing that remains true in our current society is that “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage all the time” (Baldwin, on National Public Radio, 2020). The power with which Baldwin’s words ring are deeply connected to the state of sports and athlete activism. The West in general, and the United States in particular, has a complex history with respect to the intersection of race, sport, and activism. For instance, sociologist, Dr. Victor Ray, poignantly notes that there is “... a common American political narrative: venerating dead black heroes while pillorying the living. The United States has a history of lionizing black folks it helped to send to the grave” (May 31, 2018). Though Ray (2018) wasn’t speaking specifically about Black athletes, his words resonate, nonetheless. During their heyday, athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos were loathed by the American mainstream (white masses).

Perhaps it was their confidence in themselves that sparked some of the vitriol that they received. After all, Muhammad Ali for instance, was never shy about his skills. In fact, in 1967, Ali famously stated, that he was “America. I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me – black, confident, cocky, my name, not yours; my religion, not yours, my goals, my own. Get used to me” (LeTourneau, 2016). Fortunately for us, in the cases of Ali, Smith, and Carlos in particular we did not have to wait for their demise to see them *lionized* within our society; unfortunately, that is not always so. For instance, Jack Johnson the “Galveston Giant” and the first Black heavyweight champion of the world was not venerated until after his death. Johnson’s victory in an Australian boxing ring in 1908 shifted understanding of sport, masculinity, and society drastically. The title of heavyweight champion was viewed as the pinnacle of athleticism and masculine identity, and until 1908, that social space was solidly the domain of cis-hetero white men. Johnson’s victory over the Canadian Tommy Burns, however, forever changed the nature of *the game* (sports).

Until the “Galveston Giant” punched his way to prominence in bout after bout, it was widely recognized that “athletic superiority” belonged to white men as did most social spaces. However, Johnson’s continued victories over his white opponents challenged that ideology. Johnson’s presence in the landscape of sport helped to solidify the now widely known trope of “the black athlete.” Boxing was, as noted by Dr. Harry Edwards (2018) was to become the sport most heavily infiltrated by Blacks insofar as it was the first sport in America that permitted the widespread competition between black and white competitors at least within the lower levels.

The image of “the black athlete” is now widely recognizable within the Western imagination, and is, as noted by Fanon (1952, 2008) and others (*see also* Brown, 2015; Carrington, 2010), an expression that has become “singularly eroticized,” (p. 137). By this, Fanon seeks to highlight the ways in which the “black athlete,” as a trope operates as a stand in for blackness writ large. On that point, Fanon (1952, 2008) continued by noting that “the negro” (read: Black) conjures up notions of “biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent, boxer, Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Senegalese troops, savage, animal, devil, sin” among the white psyche (p. 166). Though Fanon’s findings were published in 1952 in his text, *Black Skin, White Masks*, the ways in which blackness continues to be perceived within the Western imaginary is undeniably related to these earlier tropes—savage, animal, penis, and others.

Though understandings of blackness as “potent,” “strong,” and “athletic,” may seem harmless (especially as these are attributes that remain desirable within the social space of sport), it is important to reflect upon the ways that such notions attached themselves to *all* Black athletes – male, female, trans, and non-binary alike. As noted by Carrington (2010) and others, “the black athlete,” trope has functioned to stymie representations of black women athletes in particular. That is to say, the language around blackness as described by Fanon (1952, 2008) has functioned to frame how women athletes (as well as non-binary and trans athletes) are viewed within the mainstream and discussed within the media. Such a frame has served to damage images and reputations of black women athletes insofar as their representations are often linked back to centuries old discourses about black women as “mannish amazons,” and “potential if not actual hermaphrodites” (Carrington, 2010, p. 80). The framing of Black sportswomen as “masculine,” has been continuously noted by feminist and black feminist scholars of sport (*see* Cooky, Dycus, & Dworkin, 2013; Brown, 2015; Brown, 2018), particularly with respect to the South African runner Caster Semenya who in 2009 became the subject of discussion about what “womanness” truly entails and has remained central to discourse ever since.

So, while the representation of black sportsmen benefit (to an extent) from being framed as hypermasculine, hypersexual beings, the effects are not the same for black sportswomen or those who fall beyond the traditional gender binary. Furthermore, though it may serve cis-hetero sportsmen to be framed in such a way, what potential harm does it do to those sportsmen who exist beyond the

cis-hetero spectrum? Furthermore, the white imaginations construct of black athletes with respect to the white racial frame (Feagin, 2009), as devil and sin serve to reinforce the ways that black athletes are vilified (turned pariahs) particularly through the use of the media industrial complex. Black athletes often become “pariahs,” for taking a stance against the racist policies and procedures within the U.S. and abroad, or for stepping “out of line,” with respect to spoken as well as unspoken politics. Jack Johnson, who was convicted by an all-white jury in 1913 and then “*magnanimously* pardoned,” by President Donald Trump in 2018, was harried in large part for his various public dalliances with white women, is just one example. In the pages that follow, this chapter aims to situate the experiences of Black sportspeople within this process of vilification to lionization in the eyes of Western society writ large.

First, this chapter offers a brief overview of the relationship between race and resistance within sport. Next, we discuss Black athlete activism during the Civil Rights and Black Power era, with a particular look at the 1968 Olympic Games. Following a look at the 1968 Olympic Games, this chapter turns to a discussion of the 1980s and 1990s, quieter but not silent times with respect to Black athlete activism. From there, we discuss the contemporary Black athlete activist movement and highlight the contributions as well as the struggles of black athletes such as Maya Moore and Colin Kaepernick and the importance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a catalyst for social change. Lastly, we conclude with an eye on the future; who are the pariahs of today that may become the (mainstream) heroes of tomorrow? Though there are many who wish that athletes in general, and black athletes in particular would “shut up and play,” the linkages between race, sport and politics cannot, nor should they be, ignored. Sports do not exist within an apolitical bubble contrary to what some may wish. Rather, sports, like other social spaces, exist within the context of our society at any given moment – and that will not change.

Race and resistance: Black athlete activism

The *race* to resistance is fundamental to the makings of America, and much of that metaphorical *race* has been run with notions of rac(ism) in mind. The foundation of this nation, built upon *europatriarchal knowledge* (Salami, 2020), was always met with resistance by those of various *races* (Indigenous and people of African descent in particular), even as they fought side by side with those who would later enslave and seek to destroy them. Black people in America have fought in every war, those fought on the stolen land on which we still reside as well as the lands abroad that the United States sought to conquer in one way or another. Simultaneously, we too have fought and resisted against the solidification of europatriarchal knowledge as the primary system of both thought and governance. In this chapter we recognize and use the concept of europatriarchal knowledge in the way of previous Black feminist scholars including the work Minna Salami (2020). That is to say, we recognize that the dominant frame under

which we live is bound by europatriarchal knowledge which is more than *empire* or *white supremacist capitalist patriarchy* (Salami, 2020); rather, it encapsulates the totality of the complex realities under which we live as well as resist.

In our *race* toward nation building, athletes in general and Black athletes in particular have often stood against imperialistic endeavors. Using their platforms and putting not only their livelihoods but also their very bodies on the line, they have pushed back against nation building at the expense of the most vulnerable. Most notably perhaps and fitting along with the overall thread of this chapter – pariahs today, heroes tomorrow – is the force, the legend, Muhammad Ali. Born Cassius Clay in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky, Muhammad Ali – also known as “the Greatest of All Time” (GOAT) – will continue to be remembered for many things, perhaps most notably, for his stance against the Vietnam war. Ali infamously stated that he didn’t have “no quarrel with them Viet Cong,” (Wolfson, 2018), after all,

...they never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. ... Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people?
(Wolfson, 2018)

Ali’s comments on the war and his refusal to be swept up into the draft cost him and his family a lot. Ali lost millions and faced the threat of imprisonment (Wolfson, 2018). The sacrifices that he made in the name of Black liberation and anti-war status solidify his place as a quintessential Black athlete activist. Ali’s strong stance was embodied by Black athletes who followed his lead, and athletes such as tennis player Arthur Ashe argued that had Ali not done what he did, it is likely that track and field athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos may not have raised their fists in protest during the 1968 Summer Olympics (Wolfson, 2018).

It is interesting to reflect upon the role that Black boxers have played in the creation of the trope of the Black athlete in general (Jack Johnson), and later the consummate Black athlete activist (Muhammad Ali). Other athletes, however, would follow in the footsteps that these two men left behind. Those athletes would lead to a more nuanced understanding of not only the trope of the Black athlete, but the very notion of Black athlete activism as well.

Black power and the struggle for Civil Rights: The 1968 Summer Olympics

The Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s set the backdrop for what would become one of the most memorable summer Olympic Games in the history of the world. In the United States, men, women, and children were protesting for their rights to exist as citizens in a nation that had for generations after slavery continued to treat them as less than. Students, scholars, athletes, organizers, clergymen, and everyone in between found ways to contribute to

the struggle. Bus boycotts, voter registration drives, breakfast programs, freedom rides and Black militancy, set the nation's teeth on edge. Alongside the images of Black people being beaten with batons, water hoses, and attacked by dogs in the United States and abroad, were images of Black athletes in protest.

One of the most widely discussed instances of Black athlete protest during the 1960s took place during the 1968 Summer Olympic Games held in Mexico City. Black athletes from across the United States had been in talks long before the games took place, to discuss the role that Black athletes should play in this mega event (Edwards, 1969, 2017). These Games have long been regarded as one of the most notable moments in the history of sports activism in general as it was centered around the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), and Black athlete activism in particular, as Black athletes took center stage. Yet, the story of the 1968 Summer Olympic Games goes beyond the gestures made by Smith and Carlos – gestures that had them branded pariahs, for decades. After Smith and Carlos raised their gloved fists in protest, another sprinter had shown their discontent with the treatment of Black and other oppressed folks worldwide. The 100-meter champion Wyomia Tyus whose return to the 1968 Olympic Games would earn her the title of the first American to win back-to-back gold medals in consecutive Olympic Games showed her support of the struggle for justice by wearing black shorts rather than the regulation team white (Wilson, 2020). Tyus' silent protest, as well as her triumph as the first American to win gold consecutively would remain largely unrecognized for decades, but her contribution was no less important than that of the three men who stood on the podium for the 200 meters. The 1968 Olympic Games remain a signifier of the role that Black athletes can play in the charge for social change.

The now iconic image of Smith and Carlos' standing on the podium, bare foot, each with one fist raised in the air in a black glove in the symbol of the Black power movement beside the Australian sprinter Peter Norman, who is often regulated to the position of "the third man," or "the forgotten hero" (Montague, 2012), is now one of the most widely known images in general, and of the movement for Black liberation in particular. Norman's contribution, wearing a pin for the Olympic Human Rights campaign in solidarity, is a story for another day, and another chapter.

Quieter times, but not silent: Black athlete activism in the 1980s and 1990s

The 1980s and 1990s, like most of this nation's past, was a time of anti-Black racism that manifested itself in the form of police brutality, continued discrimination, and the continuous "war on drugs" that seemed to target specific demographics in different ways. The 1980s were the beginning of Nancy Reagan's campaign to "Just Say No," while Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (1986), that established mandatory minimum prison sentences for particular drug offenses (War on Drugs, 2019). Specifically, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act allocated

longer prison sentences for offenses that involved the same amount of crack cocaine as powder cocaine, the former used mostly by Black Americans and the latter by white Americans (War on Drugs, 2019). Under this act, possessing five grams of crack led to an automatic five-year sentence, while it took 500 grams of powder cocaine to receive the same sentence.

Black people in America have continuously been criminalized, as well as institutionalized, and this era was no exception. Such policies as mandatory sentencing led to a rapid rise in the incarceration rates for nonviolent drug offenses for all Americans however (War on Drugs, 2019). The increase was a dramatic one, with the nonviolent drug offense population sprouting from 50,000 in 1980 to 400,000 in 1997 (War on Drugs, 2019). Black people in America were more often the subjects of arrests and profiling on suspicion of drug use compared to whites (War on Drugs, 2019), even though drug use between Blacks and whites are similar, and Black people in America are slightly *less likely* to use drugs than their white counterparts (The Hamilton Project, 2015). Yet, the data on drug-related arrests shows that black people in America are significantly more likely to be arrested for a drug-related offense than their white counterparts (The Hamilton Project, 2015). Specifically, although Black and white people in America use as well as sell drugs at similar rates, Black people in America are 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for a drug-related offense (The Hamilton Project, 2015).

In addition to harsher sentencing policies on drug use that specifically targeted Black people in America, the 1990s also saw the civil unrest that came with the acquittal of the four officers (three of whom were white) who savagely beat Rodney King, an African American man in Los Angeles, California, an incident caught on film. That same month, a Korean store owner in South Los Angeles shot and killed 15-year-old Latasha Harlins, an African American girl accused of attempting to steal orange juice (Sastry & Bates, 2017). It was later discovered that Latasha was in fact clutching money to pay for the juice when she was murdered, as a result, the store owner received probation and a \$500 fine (Sastry & Bates, 2017). The death of this teenage girl only heightened tensions between the Black and Asian communities in a city that was already ripe for violence to erupt. Beyond those rising tensions between these two racial/ethnic groups living in close proximity, the incidents of police violence and anti-Blackness contributed to the anger of the black community and the civil unrest that resulted as a matter of course. Anger that took the form of “riots” in LA and other cities as a means of putting that anger into action.

Rioting, however, often put those that were most vulnerable in the path of police, leaving the space for even more violence to ensue. For Black people in America in general and California in particular during this time, the police were not seen as being there to “protect and serve” them. But rather as having the power and privilege to harass them without cause (Sastry & Bates, 2017). According to an interview with NPR’s Grisby Bates on the topic of the LA riots, a look back at the time, “The LAPD didn’t even feel it was necessary to distinguish between pruning out a suspected criminal; where they had probable cause

to stop ... African American judges and senators and prominent athletes and celebrities simply because they were driving nice cars” (Sastry & Bates, 2017).

This was an era to be remembered for many reasons, yet when it comes to the Black athletes of this period most are known for playing the games rather than being vocal (Holland, 2018), in the ways that we have come to know and see them today. Yet, while this era may not be remembered for athletes taking a knee, or sitting out games in protest, it must be noted that athletes of this era did contribute, predominantly financially, to social causes during this period (Holland, 2018). What the 1980s and 1990s serve to remind us of is that activism takes on many forms. While these may have been “quieter times,” when it came for athletes standing up for social change against issues of anti-Black racism and criminalization, they were not, for all intents and purposes, silent.

Say it loud! I’m Black and I’m proud: Contemporary Black athlete activists

Contemporary Black athletic activism has blossomed alongside a new moment for black liberation, #Black Lives Matter (BLM). Manifesting on the heels of the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a Florida resident often depicted in the news as a “white Latino man,” who murdered an unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin. Martin, while walking back home, was pursued by Zimmerman who decided that his hoodie clad, candy and soda carrying person was a threat. An altercation ensued, though police told Zimmerman not to engage, and the end result was the loss of Martin’s life. Seventeen months later, Zimmerman was acquitted, and the world was once again reminded of the fact that Black lives have less value than others within society. It was within this context that three Black and queer women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi launched a movement – #BlackLivesMatter. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement began “as a call to action in response to the state-sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism” prevalent not only in the United States but worldwide (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>). In the age of social media prominence, BLM grew to be much more than just a hashtag; it also seeks to highlight the ways that black people in America and beyond continue to be subjected to violence, discrimination, and anti-Black racism.

Like Cullors, Garza, and Tometi, the contemporary era of Black athletic activism has been led in large part by women in general, and Black women in particular. So often in discussions of movements for social justice and social change, the voices and names of women are overshadowed or completely silenced in favor of the voices of men. Yet as easily as we can bring up Frederick Douglas, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, so too should we remember Assata Shakur, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hammer and Angela Davis. While generations from now may have no hard time remembering the name Colin Kaepernick, it is my hope that they first recall the work on the women of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) in general and players such as Maya Moore in particular. In 2019 (and now 2020), Moore decided to sit out the WNBA season in favor

of fighting for social justice. In 2019 her efforts were directed in large part to fighting for the release of Jonathan Irons who had been wrongfully convicted as a teenager. Her efforts and the efforts of others would in the end secure Irons' release. Moore, however, began her work for social change before 2019. In 2016 Moore began advocating for social justice with respect to the criminal justice system – specifically law enforcement and the criminal justice system writ large (Streeter, 2020). Following a series of police shootings of unarmed black men and women, many that resulted in death, Moore and the Minnesota Lynx helped to pave the way for one of the first large-scale Black athlete protests for racial justice in general and the Black Lives Matter Movement in particular (Streeter, 2020).

Just as we will look back at 2016 and remember Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem in protest of anti-Black racism and racist police violence, we should remember the work of the WNBA as a collective as well as individual players such as Maya Moore. The WNBA dedicated their 2020 basketball season to Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Emergency Medical Technical (EMT) who was fatally shot by Louisville Metro Police Officers, Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankinson, and Myles Cosgrove on March 13, 2020. In respect of Taylor and other Black women who have lost their lives at the hands of police violence, the WNBA has advocated loudly for the world to #SayHerName. This campaign aimed to bring light to the often-invisible stories and names of black women and girls who too have been the victims of racist police violence (AAPF, 2014). Research shows that the risk of being killed by police for Black men is approximately 2.5 times more likely than their white counterparts; for Black women they are approximately 1.4 times more likely to be murdered by police than white women (Edwards, Lee & Esposito, 2019). Both Black men and women are significantly more likely to die at the hands of police violence than most other populations in the United States; American Indian/Alaskan Native women, however, have a slightly higher likelihood of dying at the hands of police than black women (4.2 and 3.7 per 100,000, respectively) (Edwards, 2019). Nevertheless, too often the names and stories of the black women and girls who have their lives taken by police violence are left out of the conversation, making #SayHerName is a vital part of the overall discussion in the fight for racial justice.

With the latest decision in the Breonna Taylor case, we have once again seen that Black women in society are less valuable than even four walls (the charge of “wanton endangerment” radically dismisses the value of black women’s lives). Who will stand in the name of Black women? How many more names, how many more lives? If history tells us anything those who will stand for us, are us – Black athletes included.

Concluding thoughts: Pariah today, hero tomorrow? The changing face of Black athlete activism

Tommie Smith, John Carlos, and Muhammad Ali had the opportunity to live to see their reputations restored and their contributions to the struggle recognized

by the mainstream. Jack Johnson died (as a pariah) before his name was cleared and he was pardoned by President Donald Trump. What will be the legacy of athletes such as Maya Moore? Colin Kaepernick? Eric Reid? The WNBA? Venus and Serena Williams? Naomi Osaka? Images of former “fans” setting Kaepernick merchandise on fire are still seared into the American psyche, and Colin Kaepernick remains without a position in the NFL. Will Maya Moore’s legacy of activism in the pursuit of justice be overshadowed by her marriage to Johnathan Irons? These and more are the questions we must ask ourselves. But most importantly we wonder, who are the pariahs of today, and who will be our heroes tomorrow?

This chapter aimed to highlight the changing face of Black athlete activism over time through a focus on the history of race making and sport in America, as well as a focus on specific epochs. The Black Power and Civil Rights era of the United States brought to the forefront the role that black athletes can play in the fight for liberation, laying the foundation for what was to come. The 1980s and 1990s presented us with a different approach to activism, one that was less about being out front and speaking out loud, and more about contributing to social causes in less obvious, often monetary ways. This contemporary moment, marked in part by a global pandemic (COVID-19), has brought Black athlete activism back to the front lines. Protests, athletes wearing suits and masks with the names of the Black women and men slain by police, kneeling in protest, starting campaigns to “know your rights,” and more is where we find ourselves. There is still work to be done, and it seems as though many black athletes are in the struggle for the long haul. Will their collective and individual voices be enough to move the needle on the scales of justice, that is a question that only time will be able to answer.

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Disability, sport and social activism

Para athlete activism

Damian Haslett and Brett Smith

Introduction

The recent growth of research focused on parasport¹ athlete activism² (Bundon, & Hurd Clarke, 2014; Braye, 2016; Choi, Haslett, & Smith, 2019; Choi, Haslett, Monforte, & Smith, 2020; Haslett, Choi, & Smith, 2020; Haslett, & Smith, 2020; Haslett, Monforte, Choi, & Smith, 2020; Smith, Bundon, & Best, 2016) has offered a distinctive perspective to athlete activism literature. Para-athlete activism can be broadly defined as action taken by para-athletes to resist and transform attitudes and structures that can socially oppress disabled people, within parasport contexts or in wider society (Smith et al., 2016; Haslett, & Smith, 2020). This chapter provides an overview of the latest developments in para-athlete activism research. First, we explain how the historical relationship between disability activism and parasport contexts is a story with two sides. Following this is a section on research about para-athlete activism for parasport improvement. Here, we draw on empirical studies that addressed if, how and when para-athletes advocate for social change within parasport contexts. Next, we focus on para-athlete activism for broader social good. Here, we will discuss research that sought to understand the various contributions that para-athletes make toward disability activism in wider society, outside of sport contexts. In the final section, we critically reflect on promoting para-athlete activism. Research that poses a challenge to the International Paralympic Committee's strategy (see IPC, 2019) to promote para-athletes as "disability activists" is highlighted. We close the chapter with some future directions for para-athlete activism research.

Disability activism and parasport: A story with two sides

Scholars who write about the relationship between disability activism and parasport contexts draw attention to a story with two sides (for overview see Haslett & Smith, 2020). On one side of this story, disability activism has played a significant role in the development, and subsequent popularity of parasport. This role is first seen in the various contributions that disability activism has made

toward the development of parasport. For example, the Paralympic Games were founded on social activism to improve the lives of disabled people (Brittain & Beacom, 2016). This foundation of activism becomes apparent when “equality milestones” are reached throughout the history of the Paralympic Games, such as the Paralympic and Olympic Summer Games being held in the same host city from 1988 onwards. In addition to this foundation of activism within the Paralympic Games, the implicit role of activism that underpins international, national and local level disability legislation has also contributed to the development of parasport, in various ways.

At an international level, disability legislation such as the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, United Nations, 2006) have helped the development of parasport by eroding attitudinal and structural barriers for disabled people (e.g. prejudice or inaccessible environments) across different cultural contexts (e.g. Devine et al., 2017). For instance, Article 30 of the UNCRPD recognizes physical activity and sport as important parts of any person’s citizenship. At national levels too, legislation has helped the development of parasport within different countries. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act (www.adata.org), passed in 1990, prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of disability, and also requires newly constructed sports facilities to be accessible to disabled people. Indeed, at local levels, laws have also contributed to the development of parasport. For example, in 2005, Tatyana McFadden, wheelchair racer and Paralympian, who was excluded from sport in her high school, filed a lawsuit against the state of Maryland in the United States (Mascarinas & Blauwet, 2018). This powerful instance of para-athlete activism resulted in the 2008 Maryland Fitness and Athletics Equity for Students with Disabilities Act, ensuring equal opportunities for young disabled people in Maryland to participate in physical education and try out for athletic programs (Mascarinas & Blauwet, 2018). It should also be noted that the Paralympic Games is becoming increasingly popular as a sporting spectacular. For example, the Paralympic Games is now a contender to be considered the world’s third largest sporting event. This popularity has, in turn, provided parasport and para-athletes with a platform to contribute *back* to the landscape of disability activism, in the following three ways.

The first way that parasport contributes back to disability activism is through an implicit awareness-raising campaign that runs alongside the growth of the Paralympic Movement (Mascarinas & Blauwet, 2018). For example, the increased visibility of parasports and representation of para-athletes as strong, capable, thriving disabled people serves to challenge prevailing negative stereotypes about disability (i.e. disabled people as less than, incapable or limited). The second way that parasport might contribute back to disability activism is through explicit mandatory legacy agendas that are included in the host city’s contract for the Paralympic Games. It is now an established mandate that all Olympic and Paralympic venues must be fully accessible. In addition to enabling access to sporting venues, this mandate brings with it broad implications for the

host city and host country. For instance, the city of Beijing (2008 Paralympic Games) explicitly sought to improve accessibility to the public transport system, the built environment and places of business. Lifts, for example, were added to several sections of the Great Wall of China to ensure access to wheelchair users (Mascarinas & Blauwet, 2018).

The third more recent way involves structured initiatives that promote para-athlete activism. For example, Strategic Priority 3 of the IPC Strategic Plan 2019 to 2022 (IPC, 2019) aims to utilize the growing platform and credible voices of para-athletes to highlight social barriers that are disabling people with impairment (objective 3.3) and cultivate a generation of para-athletes to act as advocates for the Paralympic movement and disability rights (objective 3.4). Further in this chapter, we will critique the IPC's plans to promote para-athlete activism, but we first explain the other side of this story.

This involves arguments that cast doubt about parasport as a suitable context for disability activism. These arguments come from disability activists and critical disability studies scholars. Fundamental to this, it has been argued that there is little mention of parasport in the history of the disability rights movement (Peers, 2018). There are a number of reasons for this historic disregard. First, disability activists have historically been concerned that ableist discourses that often surround parasport are counterproductive to the aims of disability activism. For example, Shakespeare (2016) argued that prevailing media and parasport marketing discourses of individual athletes "overcoming their limitations and triumphing against the odds" (p. 1138) misrepresent disability and perpetuate ableism – a normative favoritism toward certain abilities (i.e. non-disabled people). For him and other critical disability scholars, these ableist discourses also shift the focus away from social barriers that oppress disabled people (e.g. poverty) and (re)produces disability and only a biological limitation (Shakespeare, 2016).

Second, there is evidence disabled people's organizations (DPOs) cast doubt on the success of host cities' legacy claims. For example, as Brittain and Beacom (2016) explained, claims that London 2012 Paralympics improved the lives disabled people in the U.K. are at odds with findings from DPOs. These DPOs argued that any Paralympic legacy must be viewed in the context of large-scale benefit cuts in the U.K. at the time that affected disabled people directly and societal attitudes toward disabled people (e.g., portrayed as benefit scroungers in the media). Therefore, parasport contexts can be a source of annoyance for disability activists and critical disability scholars because overselling social legacy could create a division between DPOs and parasport systems.

Finally, disability activists and critical disability scholars have historically cast doubt on the IPC as an organization to promote disability activism. For example, disability activists have accused the IPC of being a "paternalistic" structure run for disabled people by able-bodied people in contrast to their preferred "self-determined organizations," run by disabled people for disabled people (Peers, 2018). Furthermore, activists claim that Paralympians are not suitable advocates for disability issues because typical experiences of "disability" are too far away

from the image of a Paralympian (Braye et al., 2015). This is in part because the IPC has gradually moved toward an elite Olympic sports model (see Brittain & Beacom, 2016), a move that increasingly excludes and differentiates disabled bodies (Howe & Silva, 2016). For instance, many disabled people do not have the physical ability to participate in parasports, even at a recreational level (Howe & Silva, 2016). This situation demonstrates a hierarchy of ability within parasport contexts that could serve to undermine the agendas of disability activism (e.g. social inclusion).

Despite these doubts, it is important to note that critical disability scholars increasingly welcome the potential of parasport as a context disability activism (Braye, 2017; Goodley, 2016; Shakespeare, 2016). Braye (2017), for example, argued that because the Paralympics Games portrays a false impression that disabled people have equal opportunities in wider society, it should be explicitly utilized as a platform to raise emotive disability issues (e.g. a site for overt protests such as para-athletes turning their backs to national flags). Considering this story with two sides as an historical backdrop, we now turn to recent empirical studies that have explored the experiences of para-athlete activism in different ways. For example, in recent years, scholars have sought to answer research questions such as: how do para-athletes campaign against discriminatory practices inside parasport contexts? (Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2014); how do para-athletes contribute toward disability activism in wider society? (Smith et al., 2016); and is parasport even a suitable context to promote disability activism? (Haslett et al., 2020b). Reflecting on such writings, para-athlete activism research can be separated into the three following sections of this chapter.

Para-athlete activism for parasport improvement

Although disability inequalities within parasport are inextricably linked to disability politics in wider society (Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2014), it is evident from empirical studies in Canadian (Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2014), British (Smith et al., 2016), South Korean (Choi et al., 2019) and Irish contexts (Haslett et al., 2020a) that para-athletes prefer to advocate for social change to improve parasport contexts. That is in contrast to utilizing their “platforms” to contribute to disability activism for broader social good (as we will discuss in the next section). For example, Smith et al. (2016) highlighted that *all* 36 elite British para-athletes who they interviewed and observed in different contexts often performed a *sporting activist identity* “defined as a type of identity that advocates for change inside sport for the purpose of transforming policy, practices, and organizations that are believed to restrict one’s own individual or team sporting success” (p. 141). Moreover, taken together, these studies, from different cultural contexts, provided information about why, how and when para-athletes advocate to improve parasport contexts.

There are a number of areas where para-athletes feel advocacy is required to improve parasport. Importantly, many of these advocacy areas involve, either

implicitly or explicably, challenging ableist attitudes or structures. Ableism refers to oppressive consequences for disabled people as a result of culturally situated normative favoritism for certain abilities within social institutions, such as sport or media (Campbell, 2008). Some advocacy areas include the need for increased *visibility and respect* for para-athletes, as well as improved *leadership and coaching* in parasport contexts. For example, para-athletes report that they still face disrespecting public attitudes (e.g. media misrepresentation) that are underpinned by ableist disability stereotypes that are well documented in parasport research (see Rees, Robinson & Shields, 2017). In addition, it is evident that para-athletes feel some coaches and leaders (e.g. national governing bodies) don't fully understand or respect the nuances of parasport and/or the lived experience of disability.

Other advocacy areas include the need for better access to *funding and sponsorship*. Brittain et al. (2019) argued that a lack of *funding and sponsorship* within parasport contexts is mediated by the consequence of an ableist ideology. That is, para-athletes face specific economic barriers (e.g. cost of equipment, travel for competitive sport opportunities) and, at the same time, there is a normative preference for economic capital flow toward non-disabled sports (Brittain et al., 2019). Further areas that para-athletes advocate for include the need for increased participation in parasport, specifically for female athletes and athletes with higher support needs (see Slocum, Kim & Blauwet, 2018), as well as the need for a consistent, fair, correct and clearly communicated classification system (Smith et al., 2016). In addition to advocacy areas within parasport, studies have addressed how para-athletes advocate to improve parasport.

Bundon and Hurd Clarke (2014), for example, explored the various advocacy styles that Canadian para-athletes adopted to promote changes to improve parasport contexts such as creating more accessible and inclusive sports environments. They described a continuum of advocacy styles among para-athletes. These included more congenial styles (e.g. making friendly and quiet suggestions for change), to the more confrontational styles (e.g. demanding inclusive policies and insisting on rights), to a mixture of congenial and confrontational styles (e.g. engaging in a power struggle). Importantly, the athletes in their study reported that their choice of strategy was influenced by the perceived backlash and effectiveness of advocating. Studies like Bundon and Hurd Clarke (2014) demonstrate how athletes advocate to improve parasport is inextricably linked to the ways in which power operates in the lives of para-athletes.

To give an example, high-profile athletes with high public visibility, as well as media training, have *power* to create social change within parasport contexts, by for example, using their platform to publicly challenge ableist attitudes and structures. Paradoxically, however, forms of institutional power prevent para-athletes empowered with public visibility from creating strong social change. For example, media representation favors more "able-bodied" para-athletes from more "able-bodied" parasports who experience little overt discrimination in sport or society and are therefore less well positioned or inclined to challenge ableist

attitudes and structures. Brittain and Beacom (2016) argued that this favoritism involves hegemonic ableism within mainstream media and is interconnected to the continued “Olympicification” of parasport where more “able-bodied” para-athletes access more sporting opportunities and sporting success.

Para-athlete activism for broader social good

In addition to research about activism for parasport improvement, authors have investigated para-athlete activism for broader social good (Braye, 2016; Choi et al., 2019; Haslett et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016). For example, authors have sought to answer questions such as: how do – or why don’t – para-athletes contribute toward disability activism in wider society, outside of parasport contexts? (Haslett et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016); what do para-athletes understand about disability rights movements and disability activism in broader society? (Braye, 2016); and are elite para-athletes more or less likely to engage in social activism than disabled non-athletes? (Choi et al., 2019).

Smith et al. (2016) contended that para-athletes who are activists for broader social good perform what they termed a *political activist identity* “defined as a type of identity that advocates for change outside sport for the purpose of resisting and transforming discourses, attitudes, non-verbal acts, policies, and environmental structures that socially oppress people in their everyday lives” (p. 143). This involves, for example, para-athletes signing petitions, engaging in organized protest rallies or writing to their local Member of Parliament about disability discrimination in wider society. In this qualitative study with U.K.-based elite para-athletes, Smith et al. (2016) also interpreted why and when athletes performed a *political activist identity*. For example, they questioned why all para-athletes in their sample advocated for parasport improvement but only some adopted a *political activist identity*. They observed that athletes who defined themselves as “athlete first” (e.g., “I am an athlete with a disability”) eschewed a *political activist identity* because they lived in a sporting bubble that largely shielded them from everyday discrimination in society. In contrast, athletes who defined themselves as “disabled first” (e.g., “I’m a disabled athlete”) adopted a *political activist identity* because, as Smith et al. (2016) said, these athletes spent time outside the “sporting bubble” and were, in turn, prompted to take political action after hearing stories of oppression outside sport contexts.

Moreover, Smith et al. (2016) highlighted the role that retirement from elite disabled sport played when athletes adopted a *political activist identity*. They described how some athletes in their study adopted a *political activist identity* when they retired from elite sport. That is, they engaged in various forms of political activism in order to challenge the discrimination they *now* faced outside the “sporting bubble” such as discriminatory barriers to employment encountered after leaving sport (Bundon et al., 2018). These athletes performed a *political activist identity* by, for instance, confronting senior people in organizations to demand oppressive policies and structures were changed, such as inaccessible

environments. Smith et al. (2016) further argued how a “political activist identity” and “disabled first discourse” promotes socio-political conceptualizations of disability, such as a social relational model or a human rights model of disability (see Smith & Bundon, 2018), thereby bolstering possibilities for social change and further para-athlete activism. Powis (2018) also honed-in on the role that “disabled first discourse” played on para-athlete activism for broader social good. Reflecting on his ethnographic fieldwork with the England Visually Impaired Cricket squad, Powis (2018) surmised that engagement in disability activism for broader social good is not compatible with para-athletes who choose to reject a disabled first identity.

In another U.K.-based qualitative study, Braye (2016) found that five of the six retired U.K. Paralympians he interviewed were not explicitly aware of disability rights movements and did not identify as “disability activists” but nevertheless contributed toward disability equity in wider society. That is, they made a difference through, for example, giving motivational talks or even by working in jobs not immediately associated with disability. This study demonstrates how para-athlete activism comes in many – passive and active – forms and that para-athletes can have a good understanding of disability and social change without specific knowledge of disability politics and disability activism in broader society. Then, in a (mixed-)methodologically impressive South Korean-based study, Choi et al. (2019) first hypothesized that disabled non-athletes would be more likely to engage in general social activist behaviors than elite para-athletes, such as voting, protesting, boycotting or socio-political engagement. However, they found that para-athletes in their sample scored higher than disabled non-athletes on their version of Corning and Myers’ (2002) Activism Orientation Scale. Thus, their quantitative findings indicated that elite athletes were actually more willing to engage in general social activist behaviors than disabled non-athletes. Their interviews then suggested that para-athletes with a “high general social activist orientation” were motivated to engage in activism for broader social good by their high social influence, as well as the spotlight of the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games. In contrast, para-athletes with a “low social activist orientation” faced barriers to engaging in social activism such as emotional cost or the fear of a perceived backlash (e.g. being disadvantaged within sport contexts).

Finally, in an Irish-based qualitative study that addressed para-athlete activism for broader social good, Haslett et al. (2020a) challenged previous work by Smith et al. (2016) and Powis (2018) that characterized athlete activism as a dichotomy (e.g. this athlete either is or is not a political activist because they do or do not adopt a disabled first identity). First, Haslett et al. (2020a) theorized para-athlete activism as a contextually informed continuum of behavior change. For example, they found that the 28 para-athletes in the sample contributed toward disability activism in wider society through a range of “activisms”. These para-athlete activisms ranged from “institutionalized” actions (e.g. passively but publicly representing disability) to occasional acts of protest (e.g. unreflective tweets or ad-hoc actions to highlight disability rights issues) to more specific and developed

social missions (e.g. mental health or disability awareness ambassadors) to high-risk actions such as public statements that “speak truth to power” but risk the withdrawal of support (e.g. sponsorship).

Secondly, Haslett et al. (2020a) found that because para-athletes have opportunities to do activism “in different ways in different places at different times to different degrees”, some “activisms” will connect with some athletes and disconnect with others. They explained how this disconnect played out in the form of “identity politics” tensions, evident through (hyper)critical discourses about different “activist” identities among their sample. Haslett et al. (2020) thus argued that researchers that seek to find out how para-athletes *should do* activism are in danger of producing a dichotomy and a more useful future-forming research question is to explore the many ways how athletes *might do* activism. Finally, Haslett et al. (2020a) described the important influences of ableism on parasport cultures and the performance of disability activism for broader social good. For example, they highlighted how, increasingly, media representation favors more “able-bodied” para-athletes from more “able-bodied” parasports who are less likely to directly experience forms of discrimination and thus less inclined to use their social platform to highlight the oppression of disabled people in wider society. This study usefully provides an evidence base for parasport cultures that wish to connect with disability activism for boarder social good.

Promoting para-athlete activism

As highlighted previously, in 2019 the International Paralympic Committee produced a new strategy (IPC, 2019) where a key aspect is to promote disability activism through parasport; for instance, by encouraging National Paralympic Committees and para-athletes and to act as advocates for disability rights. Although promoting activism through parasport is also supported by many academic arguments (see Haslett & Smith, 2020), recent empirical studies that addressed promoting para-athlete activism, from Western and Eastern perspectives, pose significant challenges to realization of this international-level strategy at national levels.

From a Western perspective, Haslett et al. (2020b) interviewed a group of Irish disability activists, currently active elite para-athletes, as well as members of the Irish National Paralympic Committee (NPC). They sought to understand what promoting disability activism through parasport means to these three groups of key stakeholders within a national-level socio-political and parasport context. They found that the different stakeholder groups drew on different activist discourses to argue for and against promoting para-athlete activism, and this resulted in argumentative tensions both within and between stakeholders. For example, on the one hand, the disability activist group argued that NPCs have a responsibility to promote disability activism through parasport because “disability is always political”. On the other hand, they drew upon the disability activist slogan “nothing about us without us” to argue against promoting “top-down” activist initiatives that can

be perceived as led by non-disabled people. Haslett et al. (2020b) also argued that tensions between preferences for different activist identity performances across the groups posed a challenge to the IPC's strategy. For example, they explained when the para-athlete group's preference for performing a "positive role model identity" can be in conflict with the disability activist's desire for para-athletes to perform "disability activist identity." Moreover, the NPC group in this study argued that promoting a disability activist discourse around parasport contexts is problematic because it conflicts with their current sports marketing vision to "see the athletic ability not the disability" – meaning that they want to promote stories of sport rather than disability or disability activism.

From an Eastern perspective, Choi et al. (2020) interviewed South Korean NPC members and para-athletes to understand the influence that Confucian values had on encouraging or discouraging parasport activism. Posing a further challenge to the IPC strategy, they described how Confucian values can be a barrier to promoting para-athlete activism in collectivist, hierarchical cultures such as South Korea. For example, Choi et al. (2020) explained how the Confucian value of position hierarchy – that literally means respect to the ruler as superior – can be a barrier to activism. That is, in a hierarchical Eastern culture, para-athletes who are deemed to occupy a "low position," either within parasport systems or wider society, will not do activism for fear of disrespecting those who are deemed to occupy a "high position" (e.g., NPC board members, non-disabled people). Similarly, the Confucian value of age hierarchy, where young people should respect their elders, can discourage young para-athletes from engaging in activism. In another example, Choi et al. (2020) explained the Confucian influence of factionalism – a value on strong informal personal connection – on parasport activism. For instance, para-athletes without strong perceived personal connections with influential people (e.g., similar educational background or hometown) can be discouraged from activism.

Taken together, these studies highlight a need for the IPC's strategy to be considered not only at international level but also at national and cultural levels. This is because in order to promote activism it is evident that there is a need to recognize the cultural contexts in which activist identities are situated, the influence of values inherent in Western neo-liberalism and Eastern forms of Confucianism, the tensions that exist between various activist identities, and the discursive control that these identities are subject to. Moreover, as Haslett et al. (2020b) suggested, the IPC's "top-down" strategy can be acted with, resisted or (re)interpreted at a national level due to different political systems (e.g. democratic, authoritarian), institutionalized cultural values and political interests.

Some future directions: Expanding research on disability, sport and activism

Although the recent growth of parasport athlete activism research offers a unique contemporary perspective on athlete activism, there is much work to be done.

We will conclude this chapter by suggesting five possible directions of travel. First, as para-athlete activism becomes a regular feature of Paralympic sport, the more understanding researchers have of different perspectives will be important, such as sports media, sports marketing, recreational level para-athletes, and non-Global North contexts. Second, the current evidence base is clearly *Paralympic-centric* with an emphasis on, for instance, the Paralympic Games, the IPC's global-level policies around activism, and elite-level *physically* disabled athletes within Paralympic sport systems. Therefore, there is a research value in expanding the field to explore narratives of activism surrounding, for example, the Invictus Games (parasport event for wounded soldiers) or the Special Olympics (sports organization for people intellectually disabled people). Third, the current evidence base is clearly *disability-centric* with an emphasis on, for example, how disabled athletes and disability sport systems contribute just to disability activism. In the same way that disability is often left off the wider diversity train we are concerned that para-athlete activism will be treated as something “a little bit different” than “mainstream” sports activism that challenges, for example, sexism and racism. Contemplating a move to intersectionality, future studies are needed to understand the intersections and contradictions of disability, gender, race, class and sexuality within sports activism. For example, studies could explore disability activism that comes from non-disabled sport contexts.

Fourth, future research should consider the advocacy voice of para-athletes (Culver & Werthner, 2017) as a policy factor influencing the development of parasport. Should disability activism be incorporated into parasport policy at all levels? Should National Paralympic Committees be penalized for not challenging ableism (e.g. removal of places at the Paralympic Games) or be rewarded when they do? Finally, it is important that researchers seek to contextualize disability activism within wider contemporary athlete activism debates. For example, increasingly ubiquitous global activist movements, such as Black Lives Matter, have reignited a debate surrounding the Olympic charter rule 50 that states – “no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas”. However, as we have noted, the IPC – who are committed to the Olympic charter rule 50 – plan to use the increasingly powerful platform of parasport and para-athletes to highlight disability discrimination. Further research is thus needed to understand parasport athlete activism in the context of paradoxical positions that global sport organizations take to suppress, and at the same time, promote political activism through sport. We hope this chapter helps scholars and practitioners to think more critically about parasport athlete activism as a contemporary perspective on athlete activism.

Notes

- 1 “Disability sport,” “Paralympic sport” and “parasport” are terms that are often used interchangeably. Whereas “disability sport” is a general term used to describe sports that accommodate people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities, “Paralympic

sport” is often used as a term to describe sports that specifically compete in the Paralympic Games. Given the developmental goals of the International Paralympic Committee, in this chapter, we will use “parasport” and “para-athletes” as terms to accommodate athletes from both “Paralympic sport” and “disability sport”.

- 2 “Activism” and “advocacy” are overlapping terms that are often used interchangeably. In this chapter we will, in general, adopt the term “para-athlete activism” recognizing that some parasport authors prefer to describe para-athletes as advocates for social change rather than activist.

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Disabled athlete activism

Using an emancipatory theological approach to promote the use of disabled athletes in disability activism in the U.K.

Stuart Braye and Tom Gibbons

Introduction

The aims of both the Disabled People's Movement (DPM) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) are to enhance equality for disabled people in society. Yet, previous research has suggested that disability activists of the DPM in the U.K. tend to have a negative view of the IPC. Through focusing on the creation of “superhuman” athletes in an attempt to broaden the appeal of the Paralympic Games spectacle to a wider audience, disability activists have argued that the IPC appear to have ignored the discrimination faced by the majority of disabled people in their everyday lives (Braye et al., 2013).

In an attempt to begin to overcome this disconnect between the DPM in the U.K. and the IPC, in this chapter, an emancipatory and practical theological perspective is advocated (Swinton & Mowat, 2006). More specifically, the practical theological perspectives of Paulo Freire (1993) and Gustavo Gutiérrez (2001) are utilized alongside Michael Oliver's (1983) social model of disability to highlight and seek to improve the currently low involvement of disabled athletes in disability activism in the U.K. While Oliver's social model is, arguably, the most widely utilized emancipatory framework within both disability studies and Paralympic studies, Freire's work on the emancipation of oppressed groups and Gutiérrez's theology of liberation have not previously been applied to the topic of disabled athlete activism.

Theology and the relationship between disability and sport

Christianity is the fastest growing intersection between religion and sport (Watson & Parker, 2014). Furthermore, Twietmeyer (2015, p. 216) argues that theological questions and arguments are important to sports studies as “a legitimate topic of inquiry” to impact theory and practice. Recent research has suggested there is a necessity to challenge the secular bias inherent in the sociology of sport (Gibbons, 2018; Shilling & Mellor, 2014). The application of theology to disabled people in sport is a more recent phenomena, with specific

consideration given to both the Paralympic Games and the Special Olympics (Watson, 2012a, 2012b; Watson & Parker, 2012, 2013; 2015). By contrast, disability studies have largely failed to make full use of the opportunities afforded by the Paralympic Games as a vehicle for highlighting political issues. Not making full use of theology would also be to fail disability studies. A theological analysis of the Paralympic Games that strengthens political arguments is both original and contributes to disability studies and Paralympic studies. However, in the case of Watson and Parker's work (2012, 2013, 2015), they admit that their ideas emerged from two areas of research, namely "disability sport" and "theology of disability" rather than disability studies and Paralympic sports specifically. This is not to say that these fields are not mentioned, but rather that an activist theological perspective on the Paralympic Games is missing from disability studies and Paralympic studies.

We begin the chapter with a brief justification for the use of theology in the sociological study of disability. In the second section, we discuss how our emancipatory theological approach can be aligned with Oliver's work on the emancipation of disabled people. In the third section of the chapter we critically analyze the relationship between the DPM in the U.K. and the IPC using our emancipatory theological approach. We conclude our analysis by reflecting on the merits of using an emancipatory theological approach for studying the role of disabled athletes in disability activism in the U.K. We end by arguing that since the aims and objectives of both the Paralympic Movement and the DPM are to enhance equality for disabled people, it would be in their shared interests to encourage disabled athletes to be involved in disability activism.

Why theology?

Theology and the sociological study of disability

Brewer (2007) identified that the relationship between sociology and Christianity, more specifically Christian sociology, remains underdeveloped. He further suggests that the Christian approach has always been committed to social reform. Indeed, it would be rather naïve to dismiss the impact of Christianity on modern social reform, as Trigg (2007, p. 40) states:

The campaign for the abolition of slavery in the British Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the American civil rights movement in the twentieth, were both examples of reforms brought about largely by those who were explicitly inspired by Christian belief in the love of God for all.

It is implied in some disability studies and Paralympic studies work that the Old Testament suggests that God is against disabled people in some way (Barnes & Mercer, 2011; Shakespeare, 2000; Thomas, 2003). However, within the discipline of theology there is a long tradition of discussing disability that draws upon

the biblical information covered in the narrative between the Old Testament book of Leviticus, through to Jesus' healing of numerous disabled people in the New Testament gospels, continued by the apostles in the Book of Acts (Brock & Swinton, 2012). Practical theology is intended to raise consciousness to everyday situations that are generally hidden from society (Swinton & Mowat, 2006).

Shakespeare and Watson (2001) criticized Oliver's (1983) social model of disability, suggesting that it is time to move beyond political debates around disability and impairment and start again. British disabled activist Hunt's (1966) seminal work *Stigma*, which laid the foundations for Oliver's later social model, contained theology. For instance, Hunt referred to two Bible passages as follows: "Involuntarily we walk – or more often sit – in the valley of the shadow of death" (Hunt, 1966, p. 156). This is taken from Psalm 23:4, which reads, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Although this is a fairly well-known biblical passage, Hunt (1966, p. 158) goes on to refer to a rather more obscure passage stating:

The articulate person with a severe disability may to some extent represent and speak on behalf of all those who perhaps cannot interpret their predicament, or protest themselves – the weak, sick, poor and aged throughout the world.

This is probably a deliberate reference to Proverbs 31:8–9, which reads:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

This reference is unlikely to be a coincidence bearing in mind Hunt (1966, pp. 156–157, emphasis added) demonstrates a deeper understanding of theology by referring to eight biblical doctrines in the following short paragraph:

Then there are traces of a desire to externalize *evil*, to find a *scapegoat*, in attitudes to the *sick*. Sometimes people are evidently trying to reassure themselves that they are "*saved*", *justified*, in a state of *grace* ... Our experience of subjection as sick people may give us a sense of being *holy* and *predestined* in contrast to our condescending, prejudiced fellow men.

The doctrines alluded to above are of evil, atonement (scapegoat), sickness, salvation, justification, grace, holiness and predestination (Grudem, 2011). It is evident that Hunt found merit in using biblical references to make sense of his own personal experiences of disability, as well as to explain and find meaning in the lives of all disabled people and their relationships with others.

Furthermore, it may be that Christian theological thought on disability and the Bible provided the first written forays into disability studies, for instance,

“Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind” (Leviticus 19:14). Two American disability activists, theologians and sociologists, Creamer (2009, 2012) and Eiesland (1994), have suggested some difficulties between biblical references to disability and disabled activist views. However, their work was not related to the Paralympic Games. Creamer’s (2009, 2012) work is the most explicit in terms of amalgamating theology and disability studies under the banner of “disability theology.” The engagement of disability studies with biblical literature is “still in its infancy” and a Christian theological and activist perspective on the Paralympic Games has not yet been fully explored (Langford, 2018, p. 397). This sets a clear call for research that intersects the Paralympic Games with disability studies and a theological perspective.

Aligning Freire and Gutiérrez with Oliver’s work on the emancipation of disabled people

Freire’s work on the emancipation of oppressed groups and Gutiérrez’s theology of liberation can be applied to the emancipation of disabled people. Paulo Freire (1944–1986) was a Brazilian educator who published *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Portuguese in 1968. His work centered on the education of illiterate adults in the Third World. However, his educational philosophy can readily be applied to other oppressed groups. Gustavo Gutiérrez (born 1928) is a Peruvian philosopher, Roman Catholic theologian and Dominican priest who first published *A Theology of Liberation* in 1971. His work centered on encouraging the Church to identify and work with the world’s poorest people.

Freire (1993, p. 18) introduced the concept of “conscientização”, which refers to “learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive element of reality.” The DPM in the U.K. has a history of being critical of charities for disabled people and dialogue has been difficult (Shakespeare, 2000). This ongoing situation places the DPM in a unique position when compared to other oppressed groups and this “antidialogue,” as Freire (1993) called it, has been a hindrance to the DPM in the U.K.

Hunt (1966) and other U.K. activists at that time epitomize Freire’s (1993) description of oppressed people who had learned to perceive their position and begin to take action against it. Their problem was that those in control of the oppressive regime in which they found themselves (such as hospitals and residential homes for disabled people) were unwilling to engage in dialogue with their views. In respect of the DPM in the U.K., the key *learning* element has been the social model of disability (i.e. focusing on the changes that society ought to make to accommodate disabled people rather than focusing on their physical and intellectual impairments as problems to be cured). Freire (1993, p. 19) further suggests that “radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates.” In this respect Oliver’s (1992) emancipatory research paradigm (ERP), which includes the social model of disability, is meant to empower – liberate and emancipate – disabled people by including them, and the social model is a radical critical position to

take. The power position of the DPM is to criticize oppression and emancipate disabled people. However, Freire (1993) does not simply advocate a critical position without dialogue, he asserts that dialogue between the oppressed and their oppressors is essential.

Gutiérrez's (2001) theology of liberation demands a commitment to the poor and marginalized with a view to being with vulnerable people in the world as they suffer as Christ did when he was on earth. He advocates that charity is rediscovered as the focus of Christian life and that this is identified as love and faith in action. He argues that this is to be done sacrificially by the giving of oneself to others for their liberation. Gutiérrez (2001) asserts that true freedom is liberation from everything that may impede it, and from external forces and pressures which disempower vulnerable people. One of his criticisms is that emancipation has the danger of being considered in abstract terms only and not as real freedom.

Some U.K.-based activists adhering to the social model of disability may struggle to accept Freire's (1993) assertion that a dialogical approach between the oppressed and oppressor is a necessary part of emancipation. Indeed, being aware of the social model and being critical of the social and political experience of disabled people without embracing a dialogical approach would, in Freire's (1993) view, not be activism. A one-sided antidialogical approach was what he called "sectarianism," a stance that he describes as follows:

Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; Radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. Conversely, sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) "reality."

(Freire, 1993, p. 19)

In the following section of this chapter, Oliver's (1983, 1992) ERP and social model will be used with Freire's (1993) emancipatory approach and Gutiérrez's (2001) theology of liberation, to make sense of the DPM, the IPC and the disability issues associated with the Paralympic Games and disability equality in the U.K. The two "sides" that Freire (1993) refers to as the oppressed and the oppressors are in this instance the DPM and the IPC.

An emancipatory theological analysis of the relationship between the U.K.-based DPM and the IPC

During the run up to the London 2012 Paralympic Games, U.K.-based disabled activists, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), protested against Paralympic sponsor Atos' assessment of disabled people to work on behalf of the U.K.

government. These protests, though regarded as successful by DPAC, when viewed through the emancipatory theological lens of Freire (1993) and Gutiérrez (2001), are more abstract than they are real.

One irony evident in the Paralympic Games is the unwillingness of the IPC to engage with disability activist organizations worldwide, such as U.K.-based DPAC. However, the DPM appears unwilling to approach the IPC. Freire (1993) would see this unwillingness as contributing to the continuation of disability oppression because the IPC is assuming a role for all disabled people but without dialogue with the DPM. In this sense disabled athletes may be contributing to their own oppression by colluding with the role the IPC has taken.

As evident in Braye et al.'s (2013) study, disabled activists tended to view Paralympic athletes in negative terms, while athletes often, and ironically, avoid association with disability. For example, in a study exploring activist identities of Paralympic athletes, Smith et al. (2016) state that 29 of their 36 participants rejected the term "disabled" and regarded themselves as athletes only. Smith et al. (2016, p. 142) identified seven athletes who described themselves as a "disabled athlete" and as having a "political activist identity." However, British Paralympic athletes who identify as activists appear to have had a limited profile during any Paralympic Games to date. The reason for this may be apparent from one of Smith et al.'s (2016, p. 142) participants who said that he did not express his opinions aggressively because, "I'd be out of the team I reckon if I did ... I don't go overboard. There's too much to lose." However, there is no evidence to suggest that any Paralympic athlete has ever been removed from the British team for this reason.

It is also hard to reconcile a strong activist identity in any disabled person who would subject themselves to the nondisabled controlled IPC (Pring, 2016). However, it is not uncommon for sports governing bodies like the British Paralympic Association (BPA) to control what can and cannot be said and it is doubtful that they would create avenues for athletes to use the Paralympics as a vehicle for airing any activist views (Pring, 2016). This is evident in other sports, of course, where athletes rarely speak out against discrimination and doing so often leads to being ostracized. In the U.K. today, it is evident that the IPC have more influence than the DPM when it comes to views on disability equality and this is a cause for concern.

Paralympic athletes remained silent regarding the Atos connection while former Paralympian, and then IPC president, Sir Philip Craven, sought to publicly defend Atos (Braye, 2017). Freire (1993, p. 124) viewed the appointment of leaders from oppressed groups selected by the oppressors as a strategy to avoid "the unity of the oppressed as a class." As with a hegemonic perspective, it looks positive but changes nothing in terms of who holds the power (Owen, 2015). The apparent difference in thinking about disability between activists and retired Paralympic athletes helps to maintain the IPC's position (Braye, 2017). Craven's appointment as IPC president coupled with his negative view of activists is the "divide and rule" dimension that Freire (1993, p. 122) said was fundamental to

oppressive action. Gutiérrez (2001) argues that Bible-based faith and Christian love is a form of charity that is evident by the giving of one's self to the benefit of others. This distinguishing feature of liberating practice applies to the DPM in the U.K. when compared to the IPC which has limited ability to empower disabled people beyond sport. Braye (2017) also criticized the idea that the so-called Paralympic "movement" is a movement similar to the DPM.

Braye (2019) uses the Paralympic Games and the IPC's vision statements to suggest that the success of Paralympic athletes like Tanni Grey-Thompson are at the expense of other disabled people. Through the application of biblical text, a theological argument is used to criticize abortion on the grounds of impairment, further arguing that if such terminations had not been carried out in the U.K. in the 1960s and beyond, then more disabled people may have been able to compete in the Paralympic Games. The termination of disabled children continues on a daily basis with 3,269 in 2018, under "Ground E" of the U.K. Abortion Act of 1967, which relates to disabled children specifically (U.K. Department of Health, 2019). This form of oppression faced by disabled people is the removal of self-determination by having one's life terminated. Freire (1993, p. 66) states:

Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

Perhaps this is the most violent example of prevention from engaging when disabled children are seen as objects that harm humankind. In contrast to the DPM in the U.K., the IPC and Paralympic athletes appear to have nothing to say about termination on the grounds of impairment. Again, Freire's thoughts on what it is to be human offers some insight here:

But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated yet is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.

(Freire, 1993, pp. 25–26)

Gutiérrez (2001) draws attention to the Old Testament account of the oppression of the Jewish nation when in slavery to the Egyptians and the enforced birth control by feticide and infanticide that they endured (Exodus 1:15–22). Aside from disabled people, no other minority group in U.K. society is subject to this type of oppression and Gutiérrez (2001) argues that true liberation is the giving of life. The dichotomy of humanization and dehumanization explored in Braye (2019) criticizes the IPC's notion of being an equality advocate. In one sense it is

a mockery of equality for a nation to support a Paralympic ideal and at the same time support the termination of children on the basis of impairment. There is disabled sport and there is disabled termination and the advances of both contrast a positive media portrayal of disabled people. The fact that the IPC and Paralympic athletes appear to have nothing to say about it reinforces the irony of the IPC's claim to be a disability advocate for the rights of all disabled people across the world (IPC, 2019).

The termination of disabled children and the celebrity of Paralympic athletes are two ends of a spectrum that is difficult to reconcile. Ward (2011) analyzes celebrity from a theological perspective that may offer some insight to this issue. Despite the success of the Paralympic Games, particularly the coverage of London 2012 on the U.K.'s Channel 4, few disabled athletes on the British team are breaking into the realm of celebrity status. Ward (2011, p. 111) states: "Celebrities are sacred because they represent the sum of the possibilities for the self." He is suggesting that we judge between celebrities and negotiate our own identities in pursuit of our "possible or ideal self." This may create a problem in relation to the potential of disabled athletes as celebrities because people might not desire to have a particular impairment. For instance, Britain's Richard Whitehead is a double through knee amputee and multiple gold medal winning sprinter. Though it may be inspiring to watch him compete, desiring his impairment is quite another matter. Therefore, Ward's (2011) paradigm demonstrates that Paralympic athletes and unborn disabled children may share similar undesired attributes.

The aim of Braye (2019) was to draw attention to the ease with which society appears to view the termination of disabled children and demonstrate that the Paralympics can be utilized to highlight this practice. If it is acceptable for society to say "no" to disabled babies, then the logical consequence is to conclude that society is saying "no" to disabled children, adults or athletes. However, if this argument is reversed and society is saying "yes" to disabled athletes, then it ought to follow that society is also saying "yes" to disabled adults, children and babies. However, the issue is clearly not that easily defined, and a Christian perspective is that no human being should deny another the right to life, any kind of life, as seen in one of the ten commandments "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13), and the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount not to be angry with anyone, and to hate no one (Matthew 5 and 7). Biblical narrative associated with vulnerability is broad, from the Old Testament "do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind" (Leviticus 19:14) to the New Testament "look after orphans and widows" (James 1:27). Jesus also advocates looking after the hungry, thirsty, strangers, people in need of clothes, the sick and prisoners (Matthew 25:35–39). Once modern society steps away from these principles it appears that disabled people are particularly vulnerable.

Freire (1993, p. 67) asserts that it is "fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation." If this is the case, it is crucial to the emancipation of disabled people in the U.K. that the IPC do not override the

views of the DPM. Advances in disability rights are sharply contrasted against advances in medical technology, particularly genetic testing in utero for the purposes of termination (Saxton, 2017). Furthermore, no other group in society is so debated and judged about its right to exist than disabled people. The law courts sit in judgment of a disabled child's right to live, a disabled adult's right to life saving treatment and sometimes their right to die. The passage between birth and death is precarious, shortened, devalued and undesired. Consequently, the right to be ordinary is removed in the face of a sports spectacle called the Paralympic Games which demands that disabled people be "superhuman" or face being labelled sub-human and subsequently disposed of. Freire's (1993) view of dialogue between oppressed and oppressors to achieve emancipation of the former is a concern as there appears to be only anti-dialogue and disagreement between the IPC and U.K.-DPM at this present time.

Conclusion

It is clear that perhaps more ought to be written about theology and disability activism, particularly related to Paralympic sport. In light of Freire's (1993) emancipatory approach, the use of theology should also include consideration of his dialogical view as well as Gutiérrez's (2001) liberation from disempowering pressures. The Bible has not been widely used to make political points about disability in the U.K. with specific reference to the Paralympic Games. There may be a misconception of the Bible as out of date and irrelevant to the modern phenomenon of the Paralympic Games, with only select publications thus far conflating theology, disability activism and the Paralympic Games (Braye, 2014, 2017, 2019).

In addition, Watson and Parker's (2015) edited text includes studies that broadly cover the Paralympics, disability sport and the Special Olympics for people with learning difficulties. The paucity of theology within sports sociology is most likely due the secular bias highlighted recently (Gibbons, 2018; Gibbons, Watson & Mierzwinski, 2017). Bearing in mind the sociological secular bias and the lack of a combined theological and disability studies perspective on the Paralympic Games, we argue that an emancipatory theological approach is much needed as part of the bridge between disability studies and Paralympic studies.

The main focus of this chapter has been to use a theological perspective to critically analyze the role of disabled athletes in disability activism in the U.K. A theological perspective brings an original analysis to the IPC's potential to negatively impact the DPM in the U.K. The emotive issue around the Paralympics related to the feticide and infanticide of disabled children highlights the ignorance of disabled athletes toward the key human right to life. It is necessary to test the positive narrative around the Paralympic Games and theology as a means to see some of the realities for disabled people in their everyday lives in the U.K. This is especially important when an opposite view is perpetuated by powerful institutions, such as the IPC. Applying theology, in much the same way as sociological

theory, to make sense of a phenomenon such as the Paralympic Games provides a useful and unique contribution to the notion of Paralympic athletes as activists. A consideration of the work of Freire (1993) and Gutiérrez (2001) on emancipation illuminates this theological view of activism and the Paralympic Games. In conclusion, we argue that since the aims and objectives of both the Paralympic Movement and the DPM are to enhance equality for disabled people, it would be in their shared interests to encourage disabled athletes to be involved in disability activism.

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Revising trans-exclusionary narratives in women's sports activism

Who are the “women” of women's athletics?

Valerie Moyer

Introduction

U.S. and international sports governing bodies have seen a wave of legislation, lawsuits, and court decisions trying to determine who is defined as a “woman” in the arena of sports. A bill was introduced to the U.S. Senate on September 22, 2020, to “protect women's sports” threatening to withdraw federal funding for schools that allow trans women to participate on their correct sports teams (Avery, 2020). Outside of the United States, the Swiss Supreme Court denied South African gold medalist Caster Semenya's appeal to compete without the intervention of testosterone suppressants, siding with the track and field governing body, World Athletics', exclusionary regulation (Savage, 2020). In 2020, there were 17 states in the United States to put forth legislation that would ban transgender people from sports. Idaho, whose anti-trans legislation was later blocked in court, also included provisions to allow “gender verification” for all women and girls in sport, down to the high school level (*Trans Rights Under Attack in 2020*, 2020). Most recently, former Democratic Party presidential candidate, Tulsi Gabbard, introduced another bill titled the “Protect Women's Sports Act of 2020” to the U.S. House of Representatives that would restrict Title IX only to people assigned female at birth (Selbe, 2020). Some of these instances, either legislation or lawsuits, are backed by conservative political groups, and were viewed as stoking right-wing fears before the 2020 U.S. election. However, there is at least one example of a new organization, Fair Play for Women, a U.K.-based group started in 2017, whose main purpose is to “protect” women's sports (among other sex-segregated women's spaces) by supporting measures that would exclude transgender women and women with high testosterone¹ (*Fair Play For Women*, n.d.).

Instead of addressing each of these political measures individually, this chapter highlights and challenges some of the common refrains. One key narrative is the idea that women have fought too hard to be included in athletic institutions for this to be taken away. By citing Title IX and portraying trans women and women with high testosterone as outsiders, this argument draws on a narrow narrative of who constitutes a “woman” in sport. This chapter will critique this nominally feminist line of argument by highlighting more radical aspects of women's sport

that are overlooked in this rhetoric. I argue that the very fact of women participating in sport has historically destabilized the gender category altogether, and that a similar anxiety flares up with each debate and touchstone “victory” for women’s sport. This is especially pronounced in the history of track and field, which remains at the center of controversy today. This chapter dissects current conservative activist rhetoric around “protecting women’s sport,” while looking back at the racial and gendered history of track and field in the twentieth century to call for a more radically inclusive definition of “women athletes.”

In drawing attention to the potential for women’s sports to destabilize the gender binary and ideas about sexed athletic capacity, I risk romanticizing the bodies and subject positions of gender nonconforming athletes as inherently transgressive. This is not the intention of this chapter. Rather, in tracing the history of women athletes deemed gender nonconforming by sports officials, I aim to point out the precarity of the sex binary itself, and the anxieties over the boundary of woman-ness, which are set off with the smallest agitation. As many scholars have pointed out, the sex binary is itself a racist and colonialist construct used to support white supremacist evolutionary theories that positioned white or European races as the most civilized, advanced, and therefore sexually dimorphic. Indeed, Kyla Schuller argues that “the rhetoric of distinct sexes of male and female consolidated as a function of race” and that we should consider “the category of woman ... as an instrument of racial thought” (Schuller, 2017, p. 17). Zine Magubane revisits the colonial medical history of the category of “intersex” in critiquing the de-contextualized use of the term in reference to Caster Semenya, arguing that, “In the process of proclaiming its inherent progressiveness ... feminist scholars emptied intersex of racial or national history” (Magubane, 2014, p. 768). Magubane argues for a reevaluation of the influence of race and nation in the creation and use of the category intersex, reminding readers of the dehumanizing history of labeling African, and in this case study, specifically South African women’s bodies as intersex, or outside of the category “woman” (Magubane, 2014). This work is important in understanding both the very real harm that comes from being read as gender nonconforming within a sex binary co-constituted and historically forged through white supremacy and colonialism as well as the inherent problematics of defending or policing the boundary of “femaleness.”

To understand the rhetoric of “protecting” women’s sport,² I tracked headlines across a wide range of news outlets, including op-ed pieces throughout 2020 to capture differing language and arguments used in issues relating to transgender athletes and female athletes with high testosterone. Through this research, I have noted three main points in the rhetoric used to “protect” women’s sport and re-draw exclusionary lines around the sexed category. I should mention that there are of course other kinds of conservative rhetoric happening, such as dead naming, using the wrong pronouns, and a persistent mis-defining of both trans women and women with intersex variations as “biological men” or “boys,” but this is not the focus of my analysis. Rather, this chapter focuses on the

more insidious use of the history of women's sport and the precarity of women's athletics in bolstering an anti-trans and anti-intersex stance. The three rhetorical refrains I focus on here are: sex segregation as the primary tool to ensure fairness; woman as a knowable and stable category; and the idea that women's sport has overcome barriers but is still in a precarious and easily threatened position.

Sex segregation as the sole instrument of fairness

Defenders of women's sport often cite the need for sex-segregated competition categories in order to ensure fairness. Indeed, fairness is an often-used line of reasoning in court and legislative decisions policing the category of "women" in sports. In the Court of Arbitration in Sport's decision upholding the World Athletics policy in regards to Caster Semenya's case, they even deemed this policy was discriminatory, yet necessary to ensure fairness (Maese, 2019). The elusiveness of a true "level playing field" has been pointed out by many feminist sports scholars, who argue that in addition to biological variations that confer athletic advantage, other social and economic factors like access to training facilities, food, air quality, and societal norms about who can and should do sports also produce athletic advantages or disparities (Mitra, 2015; Rand, 2013). Yet, the pull of the mythical "even playing field" endures. In these arguments, a separate category for women is seen as the only way to ensure fairness.

In this line of argument, it is sometimes stated that fairness is the whole reason *why* there is a separate category for women's sports in the first place. Without important historical context, this presents sex segregation in sports as a timeless, ahistorical necessity. This ignores other important fears, anxieties, and political views that kept women out of athletics initially, and then allowed competition in a separate category. By looking back at the arguments around women's track and field at the Olympics in the early twentieth century, we can also read the women's category as a contained concession from within a masculinist political sporting structure.

The first modern Olympics were held in 1896, but women were not allowed to compete. Olympic officials felt that the Games were the pinnacle of sport and therefore "essentially masculine in nature" (Cahn, 1995, p. 114). Some sports for women were slowly added, including swimming in 1912, but the addition of women's track and field was particularly offensive to Olympic officials. Sport historian Susan K. Cahn (1995, p. 114) depicts this portrayal of track and field:

Where sport in general connoted masculinity, track and field had a particularly masculine image. It featured power and speed unmediated by equipment, teamwork, or complicated rules. Thinly clad running, throwing, and jumping athletes appeared to demonstrate "naked" athletic prowess as they exhibited their strained faces and muscles for an audience entranced by elemental human exertion.

Furthermore, track and field was a relatively affordable sport that was more accessible to Black women and lower class women in the United States, as opposed to sports that relied on racially segregated or expensive club membership such as tennis or swimming. This also contributed to the sport's image as improperly feminine, or even masculinizing.

It was only through activism inside and outside of the International Olympics Committee that women's track and field was added to the Olympic Games. Sport historian Lindsay Parks Pieper describes the work of French feminist Alice Milliat, who "formed the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) ... in 1921 after several failed lobbying attempts to secure women's track and field in the 1920 Games." The Federation went on to hold "the Women's Olympic Games" in 1922 which simultaneously "expanded the role of women in sport; and ... challenged the gender order" (Pieper, 2016, p. 17). It was through this inside-outside approach, of forming a new organization outside of the Olympics so that women could compete, while lobbying from within that women's athletics was eventually added to the Olympic program in 1928.

In this reading, there was far more of a concern about women competing in athletics *at all* than there was a concern about creating an even playing field for competition. Even after women's track and field was allowed, events that were 800 meters or longer were discontinued for women after some competitors allegedly fainted upon crossing the finish line at the 1928 Games (Pieper, 2016). In this way, the allowance of women's athletics alongside men was made in concession, not out of support, and was quickly contained when women showed too much physical exertion. The understanding of the women's sport as a constrained, lesser category from the start needs to be held up against the ideal of sex segregation as the sole system to preserve the illusion of a level playing field.

Woman as a stable category

Rhetoric mounted in favor of "protecting" women's sport tends to depict women as a stable gender and sex category, and trans women and women with high testosterone as outsiders or threats to the integrity of the group. However, the history of women's athletics, and particularly the history of sex testing in women's sport, tells a different story. There is a way to read the history of sex testing in women's sport as a necessary evil – agreeing with the premise, but not the execution. That is not how I read it in this chapter. Instead, I argue that the history of sex testing points to the inherent instability of the sex category, as well as the potentially destabilizing force of the figure of the woman athlete.

Many scholars have traced the history of sex testing, making the corrective move to look almost as far back as women were allowed to compete in the early twentieth century. In this historiography, the 1936 Olympics is an important moment of anxiety over women athletes' sex, against the intermingling backdrop of the rise of Nazism, and a debate about racial athletic superiority on the world stage. American Helen Stephens and Polish runner Stella Walsh finished first and

second respectively in the 100 meters. The Polish press claimed Stephens must be a man due to her dominant performance, and when the American press fired back alleging Walsh was not female, they were both “checked” (in an unspecified way) and declared women by officials. Within the same Games, a German high jumper, Dora/Herman Ratjen, was later described by historians as a “gender fraud,” or a man disguised as a woman at the behest of the Nazi party. However, sport and medical historian Vanessa Heggie corrects this notion, stating:

an investigative journalist from *Der Spiegel* pursued the question of Ratjen’s gender, and retrieved original material from the Department for Sexual Medicine at Kiel University Hospital, which reinterprets Ratjen’s story in a way entirely consistent with contemporary gender controversies, and which undermines our typical story of fascist/ communist transgression. According to these records, Ratjen’s gender ambiguity was not discovered at a sporting event, or revealed to a journalist in the 1950s, but was due to an ID card challenge made by a German police officer at a train station.

(Heggie, 2010, p. 9)

Similarly, Walsh was later revealed to have intersex anatomy in a police autopsy after she was murdered during a robbery in 1980, after a long and celebrated career in track and field competing for the United States upon emigrating from Poland.

Throughout the longer history of sex testing, which officially begins in the form of mandatory chromosome screenings for all women athletes in the 1968 Olympics, there are an unknown number of women who have been publicly or discreetly disqualified and banned from the sport. Chromosome screenings were continued at the Olympics until the very late 1990s, even as the exact method for testing and policy execution changes, with pushback from athletes, some officials, and scientific experts. Throughout these decades, the need to identify and protect women with XX chromosomes in their sport was couched within Cold War rhetoric that continually questioned the femaleness of Soviet women athletes (Pieper, 2016). The breadth of physical traits that make up biological sex, the range of variation within these sex characteristics, as well as the disconnect between chromosomes and athletic advantage were debated at the time and continue to be analyzed by current scholars (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2018). Disability studies scholar Ellen Samuels calls this chase, and the impossibility of pinning down a single biological trait that makes one a “woman” a “fantasy of identification” (Samuels, 2014).

Layers of historical narratives have built up around women athletes with intersex variations in such a way that they are part of a “cannon” as Heggie describes and could be read as outliers in women’s sport. Yet, if we understand these figures (and the unknown number of other women who were systematically excluded) as an integral part of women’s sport, then it is the category of “XX women” that is in fact carefully and painstakingly constructed and fabricated.

Furthermore, historians have also drawn attention to the idea that sport had physical masculinizing effects for women, both physiologically and symbolically challenging the established boundaries of “woman.” Historian Clare Tebbutt points to two stories of trans men (to use current, though anachronistic, vocabulary), and former track and field athletes that circulated in the press in Europe during the 1930s, fueling anxieties about the figure of the woman athlete:

In 1936 there were two high-profile cases of former women athletes being declared to be men—Briton Mark Weston and Czech Zdenek Koubek ... The coverage of Weston and Koubek's official changes of sex coincided with the summer Olympic Games in Berlin, underlining the need for officials to determine who could compete as a woman athlete and the difficulties this task entailed ... This points to three key ideas: that there was a popular familiarity with the idea that sex was not always stable or immediately intelligible, that an association was made between changing sex and women's athletics and that sports organisations faced difficulties having to officiate over who qualified as female.

(Tebbutt, 2015, p. 722)

This historical instance also points to the longer history of transgender identity in connection with athletics but does not support the fantastic fear that male athletes will somehow “become women” or identify as transgender for the sole purpose of athletic advantage in the women's category.

Instead, the research by Tebbutt points to a different anxiety, that “if sex changeability was associated with women's sport, women's sport was also seen to bring about changes to sex and gender” (2015, p. 728). Interest in sport was so closely tied to maleness and masculinity, that it was used as part of the diagnostic criteria in “sexual disorders.” Furthermore, “the physical effects of sports practice, especially muscles, were treated by some as akin to male secondary sex characteristics, meaning that women athletes were instigating their own changes in sex” (Tebbutt, 2015, p. 734). Instead of the looming, but fictitious, figure of the fraudulent transgender woman who has transitioned purely for athletic advantage, the history of women athletes ruffles up anxiety over the inherent changeability of sex through athletic participation. These histories contest any readily apparent, natural, or knowable category of “woman” and point to the ways the figure of the woman athlete has historically destabilized the sex binary. Instead, the women's category must be vigilantly policed and scrutinized in order to be *produced* as uniform and fair in the first place.

Women's sport as ever-precarious

Inequities between men's and women's sport are abundant, including by not limited media coverage, funding, and pay, and a huge gender gap in leadership, coaching, and administrative positions. Yet, this is taken out of context

and mobilized as an ever-precarious position when discussed by “protectors” of women’s sport. There is the notion that women’s sport has overcome many structural barriers in order to be legitimized and for female-assigned bodies to be taken seriously as athletes. This is certainly true, and the passage of Title IX is an important legislative gain in this narrative. However, the idea that the main threats to women’s sport are trans women and women with high testosterone positions them as scapegoats, blaming broader structural sexism and racism on already marginalized groups of people. Furthermore, the stark inequities and blatant discrimination that trans and intersex women experience is precisely the type of structural inequity that Title IX was built to address. At the same time, the “protecting” women’s sports rhetoric leans into this precarious position of women’s sports, using the “victim-like” stance to call for greater vigilance and protection in policing the bounds of femaleness.

Scholars of women’s sport point out repeatedly the strengths and inadequacies of Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education and was passed in the United States in 1972 (*Equal Access to Education: Forty Years of Title IX*, 2012). This has led to far more funding and athletic scholarship opportunity for women at the collegiate level, and in turn increased sports opportunities for girls, while increasing the number of women who pursue sports after college. Yet as Cheryl Cooky and Nicole M. Lavoie (2012, p. 44) discuss:

Many of those who fought for Title IX assumed that a rise in female sports participation would automatically translate to increased leadership opportunities for women in sport. This expectation has not been borne out. Despite the fact that female athletic participation is at a historic high at all levels of sport, women are a scarce minority in positions of power within sports organizations.

Additionally, because Title IX is focused on sex discrimination, it also does not adequately protect or create structural change and access to sport for Black women and women of color who are affected by the intersectional power structures of race and gender nor does it address class, disability, or sexuality (Evans, 1998). This is to say, Title IX is both a victory and a part of an ongoing fight for gender equity in sport. Yet it is not trans women, or women with intersex variations who are to blame for unequal media coverage, funding, or the scant number of women in sports leadership positions.

In addition to the scapegoating of trans women and women with high testosterone for larger structures of sexism, I also argue that the effectiveness of rhetoric in defense of an ever-precarious position hinges on the privilege of whiteness and white femininity, particularly in the United States. Katrina Karkazis and Rebecca Jordan-Young articulate “race as a ghost variable” within ostensibly “scientific” debates around women with high testosterone in sports, and that “racial haunting” helps explain “how sports regulations that limit

naturally occurring testosterone levels in women athletes disproportionately harm women of color in the Global South" (Karkazis & Jordan-Young, 2020, p. 766). If we return to Schuller's argument that "woman" is a racial instrument, one of the facets operating here is the protection of white women against a racialized and gender nonconforming "threat." We have seen historically in the United States that Black women have not been read as victims, vulnerable, or in need of protection, despite facing multiple subjugations (Jacobs, 2017; Epstein et al., 2017). In recent controversies over women's sports, whether it's the unyielding scrutiny toward Caster Semenya, or the media portrayal of young Black trans women track athletes in the United States, photo coverage and descriptions often continue these tropes of the muscular, "dominant," and therefore also "threatening" and gender nonconforming Black women athlete, from which the properly gendered white woman must be protected. This is not to say that this presentation is always intentional, but it certainly draws its power from the particular national history of gender and racial formations in the United States.

This kind of advocacy for protecting women's sports relies simultaneously on a position of privilege and empowerment, while bonding over victimhood. bell hooks describes the problems of bonding in a shared "sisterhood" of victimization, a tactic she saw within "bourgeois women's liberationists." This embrace of the "victim" position is often not feasible or viable for the most marginalized, hooks argues: "ironically, the women who were most eager to be seen as 'victims', who overwhelmingly stressed the role of victim, were more privileged and powerful than the vast majority of women in our society" (hooks, 1986, p. 128). I argue that there is a similar pattern at work in current debates over women's sports, in which more privileged women – those who are cisgender and are deemed gender conforming – embrace the "victim-like" position, and weaponize the ever-precarious status of women's sports to defend this stance.

Conclusion

By contrasting rhetoric used in "protecting" women's sports with the history of women's athletics and activism, this chapter highlights the narrowness and decontextualized nature of these arguments. I identified three main themes or ideas which are often repeated in different ways throughout this nominally feminist line of reasoning: (1) that sex segregation is meant to ensure fairness for women and is the sole or optimal way to do so, (2) that "woman" is a stable, knowable, and natural category, and (3) that women's sports has come so far, yet its position is threatened by gender nonconforming women who are construed as outsiders. In tracing an alternate genealogy of women's sports, I highlight instead: (1) an understanding of the addition of women's athletics to the Olympics as a constrained concession, which still does not ensure an

even playing field, let alone one equal to men's sport; (2) the history of sex testing in women's sport reveals deep anxieties about the "changeability" of sex, as well as women athletes' potential to destabilize the sex binary; and (3) that while women's sport faces stark inequity, it is not transwomen and women with high testosterone who are threatening to these systems, but rather broader structural sexism and racism. "Protecting" women's sport once again relegates women to bonding over shared victimhood, which clearly obscures important power differences within this group, as well as blatantly ignoring and invalidating the actual victims – women of color from the Global South targeted for "sex testing" at the international level of sports, and trans women who are portrayed as threatening and dominant.

While this chapter functions largely as a critique to conservative "feminist" positions on women's sports, I also think that it is through these historical readings that we can begin understanding the category of women's sport differently. This might mean understanding "woman" as an inherently unstable signifier when combined with "athlete," and that the sex-segregated categories are not equal or analogous but are instead a stark hierarchy through which women's sports and women athletes' bodies are kept down and contained. Instead of continually policing and harmfully producing a classification of "XX women," why not understand women's sport as a radical space of gender contestation? Rather than holding on to the small, painstakingly carved toehold of "protection" for appropriately gendered women athletes, why not reclaim the inherent instability of sex that is part of the history of women's sport, and intervene in the harmful re-production of the gender binary?

Notes

- 1 In this piece I refer to women with intersex traits as "women with high testosterone," or "women with intersex variations." This is the imperfect, but most respectful way to refer to women athletes under scrutiny who have been non-consensually revealed to have intersex traits, yet identify as women, not as intersex.
- 2 From here on out, I will use the phrase "protecting" women's sport, or "protectors" of women's sport to connote the trans exclusive and anti-intersex stance within current political debates around women's sport.

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Doddie Weir and the activism of health, nationhood and storytelling

Leslie Crang

Introduction

George Wilson Weir, typically known as Doddie, is a former rugby union international. In a playing career spanning 17 years, he competed for a range of clubs in Scotland and England and at the international level (for both Scotland and the British Lions). In 2016, over a decade after he retired from professional rugby union, Doddie developed motor neuron disease (MND). The following year, he created the My Name's Doddie Foundation to raise awareness of MND in his name and provide practical support for sufferers of the disease and their families. His work with the foundation won him the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Helen Rollason award in 2019. The foundation raises funds and works with other charities such as the MND Association and MND Scotland to administer and manage grants to individuals and organizations.

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2020), MND is defined as a group of progressive neurological disorders that destroy motor neurons, the cells that control skeletal muscle activity such as walking, breathing, speaking, and swallowing. MND is sometimes called amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, hereafter). Discovered by French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot in 1874 (Rowland, 2001), it is a terminal deteriorative illness that some sufferers live with for years, but with a steady decrease in mobility. The only known drug available that can treat the disease and delay its onset is Riluzole, discovered in 1995, which has been "modestly effective in aiding sufferers of the disease" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 67). Due to the uncertainty around the life expectancy of sufferers, those who have the condition, including Doddie, have called MND a "life sentence" (Weir, 2019, p. 4).

The disease is described as "underlying the ongoing degeneration of motor neurons" (Walhout et al., 2017, p.22). Findings are inconclusive about the cause of MND and who is likely to be more (or less) susceptible to it. Notably, some research into MND has cited a correlation between physical activity and contact sport (Chio et al., 2005). However, this has been debated and there are claims that more research is required before any direct connection can be proved (Ilzecka, 2019). Doddie himself was critical of suggesting that his sporting lifestyle

was the cause of his illness, and he has used his media presence and foundation to underline this (Beattie, 2017).

In recent years, the profile of MND has been raised through charity fundraising activities. For example, in 2015, a highly successful international social media campaign, the Ice Bucket Challenge was popularized by the American ALS Association (Kilgo et al., 2020). The challenge, which went viral worldwide, involved cold water being poured over a person while being filmed. People were then encouraged to share on social media and designate a friend or colleague to do the same. Although highly successful in raising \$220,000,000 for the American ALS association charity (Vogt, 2015), the use of digital media in the Ice Bucket challenge has not been without its critics, with some regarding this as a form of slacktivism, which Christensen (2011) argued refers to “political activities that have no impact on real-life political outcomes but only serve to increase the feel-good factor of the participants.” Others felt it was a “middle class wet t-shirt competition” (Wicks, 2014, p. 79), failing to address the real issues of the disease.

The appeal of the Ice Bucket challenge is emotional, and this is an important component in persuasive communication. For example, people invited to take part were friends or family online. Kilgo et al. (2017, p. 269) have spoken of the use of this, saying that “We expect that emotions will be strategically useful for coverage of a social health campaign to raise awareness and donations for a fatal disease (such as ALS) that has no current cure.” This is similar to the tactics employed by the Doddie Weir Foundation. Doddie can be found dressed in his charity tartan, talking to people online about new events, challenges, and his family.

MND has also seen increased media attention as several celebrities have suffered from and highlighted the disease. They include former South African rugby captain Joost van der Westhuizen, whose international career spanned ten years from 1993 to 2003 (van der Westhuizen & Schwegler, 2016). Like Doddie, Van der Westhuizen raised awareness of MND by using his shirt number to name his foundation J9 (The J9 Foundation, 2017). Since van der Westhuizen’s death in 2017, his website has been inactive. Doddie met van der Westhuizen in 2016, during an international match between South Africa and Scotland; he was at the game to raise awareness of MND. Although Doddie had yet to discover that he had the illness, he would later study the J9 Foundation as an example to draw on when establishing his own (Jackson, 2019).

MND has an early association with sport; as the first hitter with the New York Yankees baseball team during the 1920s and 1930s, Lou Gehrig had lost his form with the New York Yankees due to the disease. In March 1940, MND started being referred to as Lou Gehrig’s Disease (Lerner, 2009). His illness and decline would be portrayed in the film *The Pride of the Yankees*, released in 1942. Sandomir (2018, p. 10) has said of Gehrig and the film that it showed an “inspirational athlete [who] gave him the opportunity of becoming a symbol of quiet courage in the face of slow, certain death.”

Van der Westhuizen and Gehrig share the tragedy of the illness and their response to it. They are sports stars who have leveraged their sporting prowess to raise the awareness of the disease through the media (be this film or mainstream media), in the same way as Doddie.

Sports activism

Sport has a long history of athletes using their celebrity to campaign for political, social and health issues. Dr Harry Edwards' (2018) seminal work outlines the four stages of black activism. In the first half of the twentieth century, the initial stage refers to the "right to be here" through participation in athletics and other events. The second stage (1946 through early 1960s) focused on breaking down race and class barriers. Perhaps the most ubiquitous example is Jackie Robinson becoming the first African American Major League baseball player. In the third stage (the mid-1960s through 1970s), athletes demanded dignity and respect, best characterized by the iconic images and actions of boxer Muhammad Ali. Finally, a fourth period has emerged more recently due to Colin Kaepernick's stance against police brutality toward people of color in the United States. The most prominent example of this likely includes athletes in a range of sports taking the knee during the national anthem (Bembry, 2017).

Similarly, Tredway's (2019) research outlines five periods of feminist activism in women's tennis, which she describes as trailblazers, founders, joiners, sustainers and throwbacks. *Trailblazers* set the stage for formidable social activism, especially women's equality, both financially and socially, beginning in 1968. The *founders*, who created the "original 9," a group of nine women tennis players who, along with promoter Gladys Heldman, took a stand against the disparity between men and women's tennis prize money and created the Virginia Slims tournament. *Joiners*, which is seen as the Chris Evert/Martina Navratilova era of 1974–1990, saw the players influenced by founders, though both saw the benefits of individual endorsements. Tredway (2019) argued that *sustainers* existed from 1987, with Steffi Graf winning her Grand Slam, to the present day. This incorporates those who, with the corporatization of tennis, distance themselves from earlier pioneers. Finally, *throwbacks* focus on the increased emphasis on social justice. Tredway's examples include Amelie Mauresmo's coming out without fanfare, Venus Williams's fight for equal prize money at Wimbledon, and Naomi Osaka's wearing different face masks with the name of African Americans killed in the United States, supporting Black Lives Matter.

When examining Doddie's activism, his "soft" approach is closer to that of basketball player "Magic" Johnson, who used his position to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS after informing the press that he was HIV+ in 1991 (Weinberg, 1991). Subsequent research has shown that through disclosing his illness and acting as a role model, attitudes and behaviors relating to HIV prevention, such as using condoms and testing, improved significantly (Brown & Basil, 1995).

Thus, in soft activism, Doddie has created a foundation and raised the profile of MND (of himself and fellow sufferers) through his media presence. For example, during 2020, Doddie, alongside athletes Stephen Darby and Rob Burrow, discussed the impact of COVID and lockdown on BBC Breakfast (BBC Breakfast, 2020). Similarities between Johnson and Doddie can also be drawn in other media appearances. In 1991, after informing the press of his HIV status, Johnson appeared with his wife and young child, Cookie, which nurtured a positive family image (Nelson, 1994). Doddie has also used the image of him as a husband and father in his media appearances. Doddie, like Johnson, contrasts starkly with the image of fellow MND sufferer Joost van der Westhuizen, whose appearance on his website is alone in a wheelchair. Van der Westhuizen, unlike Doddie, was divorced after a scandal which negatively impacted his previous golden boy image in South African Rugby and society (van der Westhuizen, 2017).

In addition, Doddie's activism is a form of what Palmer (2020) describes as "fitness philanthropy." She writes:

Consumer-oriented philanthropic solutions to health or social problems that draw on physical activity-based events such as fun runs, bike rides, long swims, epic hikes and multi-sport challenges in which participants seek to raise money awareness of a variety of health and social causes (p. 1).

Indeed, Doddie uses sport as a means of raising money for and awareness of his foundation. As well as a variety of sponsored sporting events that are regularly updated on Doddie's Foundation website (My Name's Doddie Foundation, 2021), the annual rugby union fixture between Scotland and Wales is now called the Doddie Weir Cup, raising awareness of – though not funding for – MND (Doddie Weir Cup: Scottish Rugby defends decision not to donate to MND charity, 2018). Although these may look like individual charitable actions, Palmer (2020) contends they are still an "inherently political act" (p. 1). She also writes how support for philanthropic foundations represents "a unique form of giving [for both the participant and sponsor] in which displays of fitness are increasingly also displays of 'good citizenship'" (p. 3).

This can also be linked to Crawford's (2006) work on the notion of "healthism" in which he writes: "A growing enthusiasm for promoting the holistic health of 'body, mind and spirit' and 'a striking moralization of health among middle-class Americans'" (p. 410).

A strong media presence

Alongside the sponsored events outlined in the previous sections, one of the main ways in which Doddie promotes his "soft" form of activism is via his online presence. The foundation's website is regularly updated with information regarding upcoming sponsorship events and the goals it has set itself. He

discusses his life and the work of his foundation. Importantly, Doddie places his brand firmly as the focal point for the organization and the story it tells. The My Name's 5 Doddie Foundation has the acronym MND and uses his shirt number to represent an "S." This further underlines the organization's purpose while also including and referencing his association with shirt number 5. He has three Twitter campaign accounts, each of which uses "Doddie" and the number "5" in the handle.

Many athletes have used their club and international shirt numbers to the advantage of their causes (be they political, social or health). David Beckham's work for UNICEF – "The David Beckham UNICEF Fund" – for example, famously has the web address "7.org." Naturally, this capitalized on Beckham's association with the number 7 shirt for England and Manchester United (Palmer, 2020, p. 38). Somewhat notably, however, this did not change when Beckham transferred to Real Madrid, where his squad number changed (Taylor, 2003). In addition to Beckham, other athletes have used their number for their foundations; for example, Derek Jeter, baseball shortstop of the New York Yankees (1996–2014). Jeter's shirt number was the number 2, which has now been retired (Allen, 2017). He created the "Turn 2 Foundation" to motivate young people to turn away from drugs and alcohol and "Turn 2" healthy lifestyles (Derek Jeter's Turn 2 Foundation, 2021). Doddie benefits from his popularity in, and the nature of, his portrayal by mainstream media during his time as a player and afterwards, especially his pride of being Scottish. Doddie has previously remarked on this in interviews (Maguire & Tuck, 1998).

Doddie portrays himself humbly as a Scottish farmer, appearing in tartan. Doddie grew up in the Borders area of Scotland, which is often regarded as the heartland of Scottish rugby (Drysdale, 2011, p. 30). Indeed, his background of coming from a proud farming community, in which local identity and rivalries are essential, but not the person's definition, was made clear in his 2019 autobiography, *My Name's 5 Doddie*.

Doddie also benefits from what Horton and Wohl (1956) have previously referred to as a "parasocial interaction." People identify and form a relationship with a celebrity, despite never meeting them. Kassing and Sanderson's (2009) work on sports personalities and parasocial interaction examined Floyd Landis' online persona when he won the yellow shirt at the 2006 Tour De France. Similarly, people have celebrated that Doddie is a relatively "normal" guy, as evidenced by his declining a taxi ride or enjoying a drink (Pengelly, 2018).

Nationhood and tartan

National identity has played an essential role in the success of Doddie's foundation, forming a critical part of its brand identity. Doddie has always identified as a Scot, saying in his autobiography: "I'm very proud to wear tartan. It identifies me, it identifies where I'm from. In other words, I am what it says on the tin" (2019, p. 22). Evidencing his Scottishness is his creation of a new Scottish tartan to

raise funds for his foundation. In this context, one can argue that his use of tartan is a form of “nation branding,” the practice of applying marketing strategies to a country to enhance its reputation (Kerr & Wiseman, 2013, p. 354). It has also assisted in giving a brand identity to the Doddie Weir Foundation.

The foundation explains why Doddie’s tartan takes colors from the international and club teams he played for throughout his career. The use of color in tartan historically relates to the hierarchical standing within the “clans” of Scotland, where more colors indicate higher social status (Rae, 2019). However, the use of tartan is problematic as it is not representative of *all* of Scotland. As sports historian Richard Holt (1990) pointed out, for example: “Industrial [Northern] Scotland did not wear the kilt. Like South Wales, it had its own identity, its own Scottishness” (p. 254).

Again, the use of clothing to indicate a form of activism is not unique. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of athletes using their status for greater social good is the 1968 Mexico Olympic Games. Specifically, John Carlos and Tommie Smith used a black glove to underline their rejection of racism in the United States during this period (Ingle, 2020). More recently, basketball player LeBron James wore a pair of sneakers which had “equality” written on them. And, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, during the 2020 US Open, Naomi Osaka wore a different mask in each game to raise awareness of Black Lives Matter.

While the examples above are highly political and based on race and the United States, Doddie’s use of clothing is significantly different. His is a form of fitness philanthropy and social entrepreneurship to raise funds for MND causes, combining the foundation’s goals with a business concept (Ratten, 2010). Palmer (2020) has discussed the use of clothing in the Mothers’ Day classic race in Australia as “carefully orchestrated, corporate affair[s]” (p. 84).

The power of “activist” storytelling

Storytelling provides a powerful hook to gain people’s interest. In narrating his story, Doddie makes the most of his profile as both a “grounded” family man and a rugby player. For example, he chose to go public about his MND on leaving Scotland in 2017 to travel with his sons to the Lions Tour in New Zealand, 20 years on from his only appearance with the Lions (in South Africa, 1997). Releasing the news as his flight departed to New Zealand, he subsequently appeared pitch-side at the first test and was then present throughout the tour. Doddie brought the trip forward so his family could enjoy the series while he was still in good health (Weir, 2019).

Doddie’s importance to the 1997 Lions tour was largely off the pitch. Second to the Lions captain, Martin Johnson, he was more of a squad player than a starter. But his appearances in the tour’s official documentary, *Living with the Lions*, made him a well-known character. Before the advent of social media, it gave rugby fans

a unique insight into the tour, as England winger John Bentley was given charge of a mini camera during their time in South Africa. *Living with the Lions* is very much a sporting documentary. John Grierson, the pioneer of the documentary in the 1920s, believed in the social purpose of documentary to combat ignorance and prejudice and advance social progress (McDonald, 2007). The documentary during the 1990s, though, would be influenced by filmmakers like Michael Moore and be character and story-led – as in this case.

Doddie is given the job of the camera person at various points and we see rugby players differently than we have previously. Harris (2010, p. 65) says of the film that we see the forwards in aggressive stances, with cauliflower ears, pacing up and down, and throwing up in toilets. We also see Doddie losing his composure and breaking down after being told he'll no longer take part in the tour after sustaining a severe injury (Hewett, 1997). This gives us an insight into Doddie, the foundation leader.

Doddie releasing information about his illness on his way to the 2017 Lions tour in New Zealand shares elements of the activism that scholars have documented elsewhere (Edwards, 2018; Tredway, 2019); in creating publicity and a story. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this form of promotion has been termed the “theater of pity,” which examines how celebrities can portray themselves and others to gain support. Chouliaraki (2012, p. 1), for example, writes:

[That] celebrity introduces into the theatrical dynamics of pity a crucial communicative figure, a figure who commands the necessary symbolic capital to articulate personal dispositions of acting and feeling as exemplary public dispositions at given historical moments.

Interestingly, and of note here, Chouliaraki's research examined a non-sporting context and how Katherine Hepburn and Angelina Jolie's work had created “testimonies of suffering.” Departing from these findings, Doddie's testimony is also through humor in his autobiography: “Life, with or without MND summed up in one act. Highs, lows and laughter” (2019, p. 319). Such an outlook could be conceptualized by Branagan's (2007) notion of “humorous activism.”

Doddie discusses the high points of his life (for example, marriage and fatherhood) and contrasts that with what the disease has taken away from him. He uses the decline of Joost van der Westhuizen as a reflective device, comparing his fitness when they played against each other in the 1990s to see him struggling with MND at Murrayfield in 2015, where van der Westhuizen was guest of honor. By meeting van der Westhuizen, Doddie commented how he was inspired to create a foundation with a different intention. While van der Westhuizen's foundation was looking for a cure or new drug to be tested worldwide, Doddie intends to assist people in living comfortably, investing some funds into finding a cure but with the rest helping people who suffer from the illness and their families (Pengelly, 2018).

Conclusion

Unlike “hard” activists, such as Le Bron James, Doddie’s “soft” activism is less aggressive. Using Palmer’s notion of fitness philanthropy, he has made the most of his appeal as an athlete and drawn on national symbols and storytelling to raise the profile of his cause. Doddie’s storytelling is made more impactful by his parasocial interaction, being seen as famous yet also relatable. This narrative is not uncommon. The unsympathetically titled “theater of pity” often acts as a “hook” to engage people in the charity sector. His steady decline can be seen in media appearances and struggles to move and speak eloquently following his diagnosis. Doddie’s form of activism, though not as highly politicized as others, and his foundation, has been successful. He recently raised the significant sum of £500,000 for MND in just two weeks (Mellon, 2021).

Unlike other athletes, Doddie’s activism is likely to prevail in the longer term, even as his illness worsens and beyond that. Doddie’s activism has established a brand identity associated with sport and nationality. The online presence of his foundation, his tartan and charity sporting events such as the annual Wales versus Scotland match will continue in his absence, and so should the support it provides for sufferers of MND.

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Elite athlete activism for gender equality in sport

Women's football in Spain

Celia Valiente

This chapter studies elite female athletes' activism in favor of gender equality in sport. The topic has already received some scholarly attention, albeit mainly in the English-speaking world (e.g., Cooky, 2018; Steidinger, 2020; Tredway, 2019, 2020). In Spain, professional female footballers have advanced principally (but not exclusively) economic demands (more pay and more work). These female athletes have used a combination of nonconfrontational and confrontational tactics. Regarding nonconfrontational tactics, female footballers have emphatically defended that they were requesting an improved status, albeit not one equal to that of male footballers. As for confrontational tactics, in November 2019, professional female footballers went on a weekend-long strike, and did not participate in domestic tournaments. Because of their activism, the situation of elite women's football in Spain is improving. The first agreement regulating better pay and better sporting conditions in professional women's football was signed in February 2020.

The sources for this chapter include bibliography, press clippings, and data and documents from sport and football management institutions and organizations. This chapter is organized in four parts: the first reviews existing literature on the topic of elite female athlete activism and presents the research questions; the second presents the empirical case; the third analyzes elite female footballers' activism in Spain, paying particular attention to the goals, tactics, and achievements of the mobilization; and the final part draws conclusions and identifies recommendations for future research. While this chapter is not a history of women's football in Spain, it is a study of professional female footballers' activism to improve the status of women within the elite game in Spain.

Literature review and theoretical considerations

The history of sports in various countries of the Western world shows that organized sport was originally configured as a masculine arena where boys and men practiced, trained, and competed (Dunning, 1986). Historical accounts document individual and collective women's efforts to participate in sporting

activities, which, for the most part, were forbidden (Cahn, 2015; Hall, 2016; Hargreaves, 1994; Valiente, 2019, 2020). More recently in Western countries, elite female athletes (both active and retired) have requested an improvement of the status of sporting women (Cooky, 2018). How have elite female athletes and ex-athletes mobilized (individually and collectively) on gender issues? In other words, what have been the goals, tactics, and achievements sought and gained by elite female athletes' activism?

Existing scholarship shows that, at times, high-profile female athletes protest individually and other times collectively. The individual/collective dimension of athletes' activism is to some extent related to the individual/team characteristics of their sports. It is reasonable to expect individual activism in individual sports; for instance, the mobilization of world-class tennis player Serena Williams defending female players' rights regarding maternity, including retention of their ranking during maternity leave (Steidinger, 2020). Similarly, it is intuitive to presume collective activism in team sports, where whole teams or parts of them advance claims. This was the case of members of the U.S. women's national ice-hockey team, for example, when demanding improved and sustained investment in their team (Steidinger, 2020).

Conversely, scholarship also documents cases of collective action in individual sports; for instance, in tennis, in the early 1970s, nine top-ranked U.S. female players (including tennis legend and later "Battle of the Sexes" champion, Billie Jean King) demanded equal prize money and an increased number of women's tennis contests. These women helped create a vibrant women's tennis tour, and in 1973, together with other highly ranked female tennis players, helped establish the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) to manage the women's tour and defend players' interests (Cahn, 2015; Tredway, 2019, 2020). Individual activism in team sports has also occurred. Elite female footballer and first *Women's Ballon d'Or*¹ winner Ada Hegerberg from Norway refused to participate in the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France because of the unequal treatment of women's and men's football (Irigoyen, 2020).

Similarly, Megan Rapinoe's activism during the same tournament has also been covered in this volume (see Chapter 15).

As for the goals of high-profile female athletes' activism, economic objectives, such as higher salaries and prize money, are the core of some protests. An example of a mobilization pursuing an economic goal is the Venus Williams' fight in 2005–2007 for equal prize money at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships (Cahn, 2015; Tredway, 2020). That elite female athletes' activism pursues economic goals is understandable, as these athletes are professionals with athletically demanding careers that are normally very short. Economic objectives are, by their very nature, quantifiable, and thus clearly stated. Other times, world-class female athletes have requested better sporting conditions to train and compete. In addition, elite female athletes have demanded respect and resources for athletes who are not white and heterosexual (Cahn, 2015). In recent years, the fight against sexual violence and abuse of sporting females has been a major goal of top-ranked female athletes' activism (Steidinger, 2020).

Academic studies describe a variety of tactics to pursue this equality. Some world-class female athletes have used non-confrontational tactics to pursue their goals; for instance, polite statements about the justice of their claims. By contrast, other top-ranked female athlete activists have utilized (or have threatened to utilize) confrontational tactics, including strikes, boycotts, and litigation. For example, when pursuing sufficient and sustained investment in their team, in 2017, members of the U.S. women's national ice hockey team told the Ice Hockey Federation that they intended to boycott the world championships (Cooky, 2018; Steidinger, 2020). Comparatively speaking, litigation against institutions and organizations that manage sport seems to be particularly common in the United States (Steidinger, 2020). However, this fact probably reflects the general legal culture of the United States, which is more inclined to litigation than of other societies.

With respect to achievements, cases of (relative) success have also been described in academic studies. In women's tennis, the aforementioned (and other) mobilizations demanding equal prize money resulted in the achievement of this goal in Grand Slam tournaments and some second-tier tournaments. However, in lower-tier contests, female champions are still paid less than male champions (Cahn, 2015; Cooky, 2018; Steidinger, 2020). It is important to note that professional tennis is "the most lucrative sport for women," that is, "the highest-profile sport in the world of women" (Tredway, 2020, p. 28). On the contrary, examples of short-term and long-term non-success also exist.

Three caveats are necessary at this point. First, when elite female athletes and ex-athletes mobilize on behalf of gender and sexuality issues in sport, they do not always pursue progressive causes but also reactionary causes. A case in point is that of Margaret Court, world-class tennis player in the 1960s and 1970s, and later a Christian Minister. In an interview in 1990, Court accused Martina Navratilova and other female players of ruining tennis because they are lesbians. Court also claimed that Navratilova was a bad model for younger players. These derogatory comments initiated a subsequent long and on-going Court's homophobic activism in and outside sport (Tredway, 2020). Of importance is the fact that Court is not a former elite tennis player among many, but "the most decorated player in the history of tennis, male or female" (Tredway, 2020, p. 141).

Second, top-ranked female athletes' activism in sport is not always targeted at gender but also at other social justice causes within sport. Although this type of mobilization is not the object of this chapter, it is worth mentioning world-class U.S. tennis players Venus and Serena Williams' fight against racism in tennis, which led them, among other actions, to boycott the Indian Wells tennis tournament from 2001. Serena resumed her participation in this competition in 2015, and Venus, in 2016. In fact, this mobilization is related, for instance, to Serena Williams' activism on issues of social justice outside sport, including prisoners' rights and policing, which disproportionately affect African Americans (Tredway, 2020).

Third, it is key to emphasize that women (and men) constitute an internally heterogeneous group. Subsequently, one should not assume that all elite female athletes are aware of gender hierarchies within sport and are in favor of gender equality (although only a minority of them become activists). We should not presuppose either that all top-ranked male athletes are indifferent or hostile toward gender equality in the world of sports. In fact, advances toward gender equality in sport have been obtained often thanks to female athletes' agitation combined with support provided by male athletes and male sport decision-makers (Steidinger, 2020; Tredway, 2020).

Selection of the empirical case

This chapter will provide an empirical analysis of women's football in Spain, and the ways in which its athletes have engaged in activist behaviors for gender equality. Literature on sporting women's activism is primarily restricted to English-speaking countries (Cooky, 2018; Steidinger, 2020; Tredway, 2019, 2020); thus, the study of Spain increases the range of scholarly analysis. Moreover, the case of Spain is important in the world of football, as the men's national team is one of the most successful in recent years. Some of the best club sides in the world are also from Spain, including Barcelona and Real Madrid, and some of the world's best paid footballers, such as Lionel Messi, are (or have been) footballers contracted to Spanish teams (Gómez, 2020). Spanish football also has a significant global following, and its presence in mass media is overwhelming (Llopis-Goig, 2015). The Spanish Football Federation is the national sport federation with the highest number of registered players. It has 1,095,604 registered players; that is just above 2 percent of the Spanish population (2019 data; Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, 2020, p. 114).

In contrast, women's football in Spain is not a first-class player (Markovits, 2019). The Spanish Football Federation only has 71,276 female registered players, who account for 6 percent of the total number of football registered players (2019 data; Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte 2020, pp. 114–115). With the exception of a few key matches, the presence of women's football in Spanish mass media is minimal. Again, but for some exceptions, the main women's teams often train at night and on sand fields. But in recent years, however, elite female footballers have been mobilized collectively demanding a better status for professional women's football. This chapter now provides an analysis of this activism.

Elite female footballers mobilizing for better pay and working conditions in Spain

In the fall of 2018, negotiations started toward what would eventually become the first collective agreement of women's football. Employers – that is, football clubs – were represented by the Association of Women's Football Clubs (*Asociación de Clubes de Fútbol Femenino*, ACFF). Elite female footballers were represented by

unions: the Association of Spanish Footballers (*Asociación de Futbolistas Españoles*, AFE), Footballers ON (*Futbolistas ON*) and the General Workers' Union (*Unión General de Trabajadores*, UGT). The long negotiation process lasted over a year and concluded on February 18, 2020, when an agreement was signed. This collective mobilization is described next, specifically highlighting the goals of the mobilization, the tactics used, and the achievements obtained.

Economic goals

In their collective mobilization, professional female footballers mainly (but not exclusively) requested better economic conditions. Particularly thorny in the negotiation process were two related issues: minimum pay and minimum amount of work. Around these two issues, the two parts in the negotiation took different (and, in the short-term, non-negotiable) positions. For example, in October 2019, unions requested a minimum yearly salary of €20,000 but the ACFF offered €16,000. On the other hand, many elite female footballers were hired by their clubs on a part-time basis. Unions demanded that professional female footballers are hired for at least 75 percent of the full-time week, while the ACFF offered only to hire female footballers for at least 50 percent of the full-time week. On other issues, including maternity protection and paid holidays, both parties reached a compromise, but not regarding minimum pay and amount of work. Negotiations stalled several times in 2019 around these two issues (Calonge, 2019a).

To put elite female footballers' demands on minimum pay and amount of work in perspective, it is important to note that the agreement, if binding, would apply to all professional female footballers in Spain (that is, women who play football at the highest possible level). Since these conditions are minimum standards, clubs can grant their female footballers more generous salaries, and some of them do. On the other hand, the differences regarding women's and men's football remain enormous. For instance, the 2015 four-year collective agreement for professional men's football established for the 2016–17 season a minimum yearly salary of €155,000 in the first league and €77,500 in the second league. These amounts would be updated to inflation in the remaining seasons covered by the agreement. These amounts applied to full-time footballers, as footballers are not hired part-time (Resolution of November 23, 2015, of the General Directorate of Employment, registering and making public the collective agreement on professional football).

Nonconfrontational and confrontational tactics

In their collective mobilization for higher pay and better working conditions, professional female footballers in Spain have used a combination of nonconfrontational and confrontational tactics. Nonconfrontational tactics have consisted in polite requests for improvement of their training and working

conditions, and explanations about the moderate and reasonable nature of their demands. Elite female footballers have insisted that they were simply asking for an improvement of their own status and not equal conditions to elite male footballers. Female footballers in Spain have consistently repeated that they understand that male football is ahead in terms of the number of people who play the sport at amateur and professional levels, the number of spectators (live or from a distance), capacity to attract sponsors, and victories obtained at the international level. For example, in the fall of 2018, at the beginning of the negotiation process, María Ruiz, player of the Club Deportivo Tacón and representative of the AFE, one of the unions, declared that “we are talking about minimum pay, and not obviously about what is being paid to men One cannot ask for a fortune that clubs cannot deliver. This strategy would jeopardize women’s football” (Matatoros, 2018).² In an interview with the main Spanish newspaper *El País*, Aitana Bonmartí, player of Barcelona and the Spanish national team, stated that “the pending task was to solve certain problems simply to make possible that women’s football continues to grow in the future.” She also said that “female footballers were demanding only minimum decent conditions and nothing else” (Calonge, 2019b). However, in contrast with Spain, in other parts of the world, elite female footballers explicitly request equal pay, and not only better (but unequal) pay. This has been the case, for instance, of some members of the US national women’s team (Steidinger, 2020).

Patience has been a nonconfrontational virtue amply exercised by elite female footballers, as negotiations were not progressing. In 2018 and well into 2019, female footballers continued training and competing, and reaching sporting milestones in spite of negotiation deadlocks. For example, in May 2019, a team from Spain, Barcelona, for the first time ever, became a finalist in the UEFA Women’s Champions League in Budapest. In that final match, Barcelona lost against Olympique Lyon (Cabezas, 2019). In the summer of 2019, Spain took part at the FIFA Women’s World Cup in France. Also for the first time ever, the Spanish national team made it to the last 16 in this competition (Giovio, 2019). In addition, throughout the whole negotiation process, elite female footballers participated in sport mega-events watched by increasing numbers of spectators. The most famous of these large-scale sport events was probably a March 2019 match between Barcelona and Atlético de Madrid at the Wanda Metropolitan Stadium in Madrid, watched by over 60,000 spectators (Wrack, 2019). In this context, sport mega-events are important because they show that women’s football has the potential to attract spectators, sponsors and societal attention in general (Valiente, in press).

In 2019, elite female footballers started to believe that nonconfrontational tactics would not be enough to make their employer, the ACFF, sign a collective agreement with conditions acceptable for female footballers. They threatened to use (and eventually used) a confrontational tactic par excellence: a strike. Thus, in the third weekend of November 2019, elite female footballers went on strike and no match of the first league was played (Calonge, 2019c). Nonetheless, even

around that time, female footballers continued to use nonconfrontational tactics. For example, two months after the strike, Andrea Sánchez Falcón, player of Barcelona and the Spanish national team, was asked by the main Spanish newspaper ABC if the objective of female footballers' activism was equality between men's and women's football. Sánchez Falcón answered the question by clarifying that "the challenge was basic equality at a decent level *among female footballers* [emphasis added]" (Font, 2020). To clarify her point, she implicitly referred to professional female footballers who have other jobs outside football in order to make ends meet. Sánchez Falcón mentioned the case of female footballers who also work as nurses. If they worked night shifts, they would be in a disadvantaged position in the weekend for a competition in comparison with female footballers whose unique job was professional soccer (Font, 2020).

The main achievement: An agreement on professional women's football

Negotiations between the unions and the ACFF continued after the November 2019 strike. An agreement was finally reached three months later and on February 18, 2020, it was agreed that full-time footballers would be paid an annual salary of €16,000. Female footballers had to be hired for at least 75 percent of the full-time week; that is, with a minimum yearly salary of €12,000. The protection of female footballers was also strengthened in several other circumstances, including maternity, injury, and disability. The treatment of female footballers was improved on several dimensions including paid holidays, seniority rights, and maximum length of training camps. The agreement would be binding retrospectively from July 1, 2019 onward, once it was published in the state official newsletter (Caleya, 2020; Calonge, 2020; Díaz-Agero, 2020). It was finally published in mid-August 2020 (Resolution of August 11, 2020, of the General Directorate of Employment, registering and making public the collective agreement on women's professional football).

To put in context the advancement obtained by this agreement, it is worth mentioning that the minimum yearly salary set for the best female footballers of the country is slightly above the general yearly minimum wage for the whole economy (€12,600 in 2019). Nonetheless, although one is tempted to consider that the minimum yearly salary for professional female footballers set by the agreement is low, actors involved in the negotiation process usually consider that the agreement is still an important advancement (Caleya, 2020; Calonge, 2020; Díaz-Agero, 2020).

A firm assessment of the achievements gained with the agreement, however, is still pending. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt interruption to training and competition in women's football. Weeks afterward, the Spanish Football Federation decided that the 2019–20 women's football session should end (Romero, 2020). Conversely, however, the major leagues of men's football resumed in June 2020 (Yunta, 2020). The effect of COVID-19 on sport

in general, and women's football in particular, makes it reasonable to wait to understand the full impact of the agreement on the status of professional women's football (Clarkson et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the mobilization of professional female footballers in Spain to improve their sporting conditions. From 2018 onward, these elite female footballers have requested mainly economic demands, particularly higher pay and more work. In their mobilization, top-ranked female footballers have used mainly nonconfrontational tactics, although in late 2019 they participated in a strike, which is a confrontational tactic. While activists at times might achieve little, it can often result in the improvement of the status of individuals and groups. Thanks in part to professional female footballers' mobilization, the first collective agreement on professional women's football was signed in February 2020. Although it is still too soon to assess the full impact of this agreement, it is safe to argue, at least tentatively, that the agreement improves the status of professional female footballers in Spain.

Moving beyond the Spanish case, this chapter specifies the ways in which female athletes' activism contributes to the improvement of women's status in sport, and also identifies the limitations of this achievement. Clearly (and narrowly defined) goals seem to be easier to reach than diffusely and broadly defined goals. An example of a clear and narrowly defined goal analyzed in this chapter is that the yearly salary of professional female footballers reaches a certain threshold. Nonconfrontational tactics are recommended as these do not usually produce backlash. The example of women's football in Spain includes polite and nonthreatening statements about the moderation and feasibility of the claims advanced by elite athletes' activism. However, confrontational tactics such as strikes are a possibility to be used (and that should be used) in case other tactics do not produce results. The main limitation achieved through athletes' activism of the type analyzed here is that the improvement of women's sporting conditions obtained through mobilization is not synonymous of gender equality – particularly when compared to men's football in Spain, for example, but a small (although important) step in the enhancement of the status of women's sport.

The findings of this chapter suggest at least three topics for future research. First, activism by elite female footballers in Spain resulted in a collective agreement that will probably improve the sporting conditions of these footballers (and as time passes, of future footballers in the women's first league, too). It is less clear whether this mobilization will also affect women's football as a whole. The sport may become more interesting for girls and women once the first league becomes more professional. Or there may be other impacts of this mobilization in female football (or no impact at all). Subsequently, the question is pending for future analysis. Second, this chapter has studied elite athletes' activism. Much remains

unknown about activism by amateur female footballers. Do they mobilize at all? If they do, what are the goals, tactics and achievements of their activism? The analysis of the thousands of amateur female footballers is another task awaiting scholarly inquiry, especially if we want to understand different levels of sport. Finally, it is important not to forget that gender is not only about women, and that men are also gendered beings. In what ways do elite male footballers fight for the improvement of their status? In what ways is male footballers' activism different from, and similar to, female footballers' activism? The comparative analysis of elite female and male athletes' mobilizations is another important intellectual enterprise waiting to be undertaken.

Notes

- 1 *Women's Ballon d'Or* is an annual prize to the best female footballer presented by French weekly magazine *France Football* for the first time in 2018.
- 2 In this chapter, translation from Spanish to English are by the author.

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Athlete activism relative to clothing

A case study of Ibtihaj Muhammad and the sport hijab

Linda K. Fuller

Introduction

“Sports makes for an imperfect reflection of society,” Hua Hsu (2017) has declared, adding, “It’s the stories we tell ourselves about achievement and meritocracy, the integrity of hallowed statistical feats, even the puritanical attitude toward performance-enhancing drugs.” The topic of athlete activism, we keep learning, is hardly limited by gender or gender orientation, race, politics, civil rights, economics, and/or religion. Another issue needs to be factored in: Clothing as comment (Ford, 2021). The history of clothing as protest probably dates to Adam and Eve, who had to wear clothes given to them as they were expelled from Eden. Similar socially constructed miscreants, such as prisoners, jesters, and jugglers have worn striped outfits to make them stand apart from the norm, and to this day we are all judged by our appearances – in the case of female athletes, that indicates various levels of objectification (Cantelon, 2010b).

For women that is particularly true, depending on their choices of colors (e.g., Suffrage white to signify purity or women Democrats for Trump’s 2020 State of the Union speech, actresses wearing black gowns for #MeToo solidarity), defiant early acts such as wearing pants (thanks to Amelia Bloomer), hats (berets in support of Che guevara or pink Pussyhats in opposition to the election of Donald Trump), pins (e.g., peace signs, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer [LGBTQ] symbols), and of course those ubiquitous T-shirts screaming slogans such as *Gender is a social construct*; *Nevertheless, she persisted*; *Injustice for some is injustice for all*, and/or sweatshirts suggesting we *legalize equality*, or *I belong to me* have all been critical to self-expression, liberation, and advocacy. Consider: there is even a website called shirtactivism.com. Vanessa Friedman (2020), fashion editor for *The New York Times*, has recently reviewed clothing used for social justice protests:

Almost every protest movement has its visual signifiers: images etched in the collective memory that crystallize the causes for which they were fought. The white dresses of the suffragists and the women’s rights movements. The neat black suits and white button-up shirts of the original civil rights

protests. The Black Panthers in leathers and turtlenecks. The followers of Mahatma Gandhi in Gandhi caps and khadi shirts. The sans-culottes of the French Revolution and the yellow vest of the French revolt centuries later.

During the coronavirus pandemic, mask-wearing became (mis)interpreted by some people as a political (rather than scientific) statement, with fashion activism becoming more than open messages about ethics and interests. We continue to embrace clothing to express our (non)conformity and identity.

Theoretical approach: Gendered critical discourse analysis

Accepting norms between men and women, and recognizing ongoing rhetorical, economic, and sociopolitical power plays between sexes while allowing for differences, my developing theory of gendered critical discourse analysis (GCDA) has implications for female athletes, able and other-abled, in terms of racial, religious, and human rights (Fuller, 2012). Words matter, especially in the \$60+ billion patriarchal industry of sport. The presidential debates in the United States between incumbent Donald Trump and opponent Joe Biden, for example, have compared to a boxing match, with terms knock-out punch statements, bulldozing tactics, landing jabs, parrying attacks, delivering hard lefts, and having knockouts.

Fencing, the sport discussed here, has been described as “An art, a science, an entertainment, a sacred rite with an historically religious role” (Fuller, 2018, p. 97), with this description of its language:

Of all sports arguably the most romantic,” writes Richard Cohen (2002, p. xxii), “[fencing] also most closely simulates the act of armed manslaughter. Ever since the third millennium B.C. language has, in metaphor and aphorism, been filled with images of assaulting, parrying, thrusting, slashing, and cutting.” Consider some of its clothing alone: gloves, breeches, mask, chest protector, and plastron, which is an underarm protector worn under the jacket. Then too, electric equipment is attached, such as the “body cord,” which helps detect whether a weapon has touched the opponent. Attacking is basic, feints false, the lunge is basic, flicks are fundamental, and the dueling surface is called the piste. *Touché!*

(Ibid., p. 100)

The literature on clothing and activism

Just as today we talk about how words matter, back in 1996 Emma Tarlo made the argument that *Clothing Matters*; using India as a case study, she explored how clothes have been used there as means of asserting power, challenging authority, and instigating social change as elites turned to Western styles at the same time

that Gandhi was adopting the loincloth to symbolize a rejection of European power. Clothing had played a pivotal role in the civil rights arena, ranging from dashikis to soul-style jewelry, shoes, and hairstyles. Tanisha C. Ford (2015, p. 21) has described how 1960s activism worked as a prequel to the Black Lives Matter movement:

In wearing African-inspired clothing and large hoop earrings and sporting Afros and cornrow braids, Americans and Britons of African descent envisioned soul style as a symbolic baptism in freedom's waters through which they could be reborn, liberated from the cultural and social bondage of their slave or colonial pasts.

While Djurdia Bartlett (2019, p. 56) declares that, "Fashion is equally characterized by contradiction, velocity, intensity, spread, fun and affect, which only intensifies the interdependent relationship between politics and fashion in the digital age," cultural critic Richard Ford (2021) of Stanford Law School claims that our clothing has long revealed our canons and customs.

Yet, while athletes have used clothing as part of their personae for centuries, some of that activism has hardly been loud, or overbearing, maybe even not noticeable. Here, you will learn of an effort not only to destigmatize but instead to educate and sensitize ignorant people about a rich heritage of using clothing as part of one's identity. Underscored by a theory interested in analyzing the language surrounding the phenomenon of athlete activism and clothing and reviewing the literature on clothing and activism, this chapter includes cultural, religious, sporting, clothing, and financial considerations before introducing a theoretical approach to discussing the rhetoric of an exemplar for this topic: American fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad.

Considerations about clothing and activism

First, it must be noted that this discussion of athlete activism and clothing comes with a number of considerations: cultural, religious, sporting, financial, and clothing per se. The subject of sporting attire, as will be demonstrated here, can be widely (mis)interpreted, and can have deep implications.

Cultural considerations

Female athletes have traditionally been held to cultural norms and constraints such that their emancipation has varied widely around the world. Only recently, for example, have some competitors even been allowed to participate in the Olympic Games, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Brunei being notable holdouts who only recently have succumbed to global pressure (Al Saied and Creedon, 2020). Uniformly, I have observed, as we move toward a culture of athleisurewear:

Both sporting and non-sporting publics have opinions about what girls and women should wear while engaging in athletic forays both private and professional. Titillating or tortuous, appealing or atrocious, skimpy or serious, those uniforms that sportswomen wear have long been under scrutiny in terms of their interpretation, mediation, and simple comfort.

(Fuller, 2020 a,b)

Culture matters in issues of clothing and sports activism.

Religious considerations

In 1996, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, point guard of the Denver Nuggets, stayed seated while *The Star-Spangled Banner* was being played before the basketball game started, claiming that the American flag was “a symbol of oppression, of tyranny” against his Muslim faith. While there are numerous ways to discuss interactions between religion and sport, emphasis here will be on Islam (Fuller, 2016a), the world’s second-largest religion (after Christianity), with nearly two billion adherents believing that there is only one God – Allah, and that Muhammad is his messenger.

As part of an emphasis on modesty and privacy, many Muslim women opt to wear hijab (حجاب), a veil that typically covers the head and chest, when they are in the presence of men. While wearing hijab in public is the law in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the province of Aceh in Indonesia, at the other end of the spectrum its appearance has been banned in parts of Europe and even by some people of the Muslim faith (Bilefsky, 2020). In 2011, soccer’s governing body, the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), blocked the Iranian women’s soccer team from its qualifying match because its players wore hijabs (McLaughlin & Torres, 2014). Then, at 2012 London, an Egyptian pentathlete, a Saudi judoka, and a United Arab Emirati weightlifter all competed in hijabs (Phippen, 2016).

Verse #31 of the Quran reads “Wa-l-yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna ‘alā juyūbihinna” (“Let them [women] draw their scarves over their bosoms”), a dictum that has led to wide interpretation; so, many Muslim women would-be athletes find themselves quite restricted. While the religion of Islam promotes good fitness and health for everyone, the Prophet Muhammad having encouraged physical activity as healthful for all, yet women have traditionally been considered subordinate both societally and sexually. If they do sport, their entire bodies ideally should be covered. Islam encourages sport and stresses the importance of spiritual and moral training accompanying physical training, seeing it was a means of enhancing mutual love and cooperation among people, so a good Muslim never forgets the etiquette of giving counterparts good treatment. According to *Islamic Life*,¹ the following are tips for a Muslim practicing sports:

- 1 A Muslim should not occupy himself with sports to the extent that leads to neglecting religious and other duties.
- 2 A Muslim is not permitted to give himself loose rein in practicing sports in a way that involves inflicting harm on others. Practicing sports in crowded streets, for example, thus causing traffic jam is not an Islamic way for example.
- 3 Blind fanaticism in favor or against a team has nothing to do with Islam, for this really contradicts the Islamic teachings calling for unity and love.
- 4 While practicing sports there should be no room for foul words, bad behavior, and slandering.
- 5 Islam does not allow matches or games that involve both sexes, in a way that opens channels for seduction, temptation, and corruption.
- 6 Islam rejects also all games and sports that stir sexual urge or encourage moral perversion such as women practicing dancing and being watched by the public.

“Hijab trends are an important part of civilizing hijab in socio-cultural life,” Fatjri Nur Tajuddin (2018, p. 23) has written. “Headscarves in the arena of Islamic culture experience a distortion of meaning ... (it) cannot be used as a sign of one’s obedience or devotion.” Males are to practice sports that suits their nature and vice versa. In Islam, it is not allowed for females to practice sports that are unique for men. By way of example, “Disputes over what female Muslim athletes can wear have arisen in soccer, swimming, track, gymnastics and, most recently, weightlifting, putting the athletes in the difficult situation of having to choose between their religion and sport,” Christina Ng (2011) has noted.

Turkish fencer Halet Cambel (1916–2014) was the first Muslim female Olympian, competing in the women’s individual foil event at 1936 Berlin; more notably, she reportedly refused, on political grounds, an invitation to meet Hitler. After studying archaeology at the Sorbonne in Paris, Cambel received a doctorate at the University of Istanbul and she played a key role in deciphering Hittite hieroglyphics. We might think of Halet Cambel as a pioneer, as by the time of 2004 Athens, when women made up 40 percent of athletes and when female competitors came from Kuwait (sprinter Dana Al-Nassrallah) and Libya (swimmer Amira Drahi), half of their number was Muslim (Fuller, 2016).

“The rules under different sports federations do not specifically ban hijab,” *Rolling Stone* (Alvarez, 2017) points out, “but the general language in which headgear is banned inadvertently prohibits hijab during competition, and it can also affect Sikh and Jewish athletes who choose to observe their faith by covering their heads.”

Religion matters in issues of clothing and sports activism.

Sporting considerations

Along with feminist interests in sport equities ranging from pay to participation, even within areas of the world there are enormous discrepancies. Africa,

for example, has Boruboru in South Sudan, “girlball” that prohibits men from the playing field (Fuller, 2019), Somaliland so many endeavors that, “They are proving that there is no contradiction in being a Somali, a devout Muslim, and a woman athlete, all at once” (Brown, 2020, p. 23). In most sporting circumstances, though, it can easily be argued that girls and women become empowered just by their participation (Maguire, 2006).

Sport matters, clearly, in clothing and activism.

Financial considerations

Seeing dollar signs, sports companies have jumped on the bandwagon to encourage clothing marked by its symbol(s) in global arenas. An entire subject unto itself, sport economics prevails, mega-events like the Olympics being big business (Fuller, 2016, 2018) in terms of broadcasting rights, media relations, brand building, and marketing. For purposes here, think Nike, whose \$27 billion enterprise (Safronova, 2017) quite naturally extends to Muslim markets (Grubic, 2020). In 2018, it introduced the well-received Pro Hijab, described as “constructed from soft, sweat-wicking mesh with tiny holes for optimal breathability. Designed to fully cover your head and neck, an interior strap helps prevent it from slipping as you move.” At \$35, it can easily be worn with the full-coverage Nike Victory swimsuit for \$600. The most recent figures, according to Statista.com, are that the global sports market was \$471 billion in U.S. dollars, apparel values at \$167.7 billion and estimated to reach \$248.1 billion by 2026, according to alliedmarketresearch.com. And don’t think that Nike has been in the sports hijab movement just to be politically correct: Its “Equality” ad for Black History Month 2020 featured hijabi Nurah Regan running alongside Dalilah Muhammad, who took Gold in the 400 hurdles at 2016 Rio.

Money matters in issues of clothing and sports activism.

Considerations about clothing per se

As women’s athletics continues to grow in popularity, and as masculine sporting values such as competitiveness and toughness are assimilated by both girls and women, the lines between their identities and clothing choices can become blurred (Sirabian, 2010; Fuller 2020). Yet, it must be clear that in many countries women have hardly any choice of clothing, never mind for sport. Said to be in the name of modesty, in fact far too many females have been forbidden to do various sports, and some have even received death threats for participating (think of Algerian runner Hassisa Boulmerka at 1992 Barcelona for “showing her legs”). Traditionally, the female hijab veil has served as a symbol of personal or family values. Cindy van den Bremen, founder of Capsters sport hair covering, has pointed out,

The choice to cover yourself should be yours and yours only. Both the Muslim community as well as people outside the community are forcing their

ideas upon the women to cover or not. So there is social pressure as well as connotations that are based on assumptions and stereotypes.

(cited in Culpepper, 2016)

Now that the Muslim market for female athletes has been discovered, a number of companies have gotten on board. Australian designer Aheda Zanetti has created the “Hijood,” a hood/hijab breathable mix; Raqtive uses microfiber fabric in its Sports Hijab Pro; LiaWear Action, by Latifa Ihsan Ali, features modest swimsuits and sportswear; and Asiya Sport, founded for G.I.R.L.S (Girls Initiative in Recreation and Leisurely Sports), is for girls-only gyms. Perhaps the best example of how Islamic depictions appear in the media is the burkini-clad Muslim model Halima Aden in *Sports Illustrated*’s 2019 swimsuit issue – a long way from bikinis, but an ideal way for her to show her independence (Humphries, 2019).

Clothing clearly matters in sports activism.

Ibtihaj Muhammad

Already a star beyond the sabre in the Muslim American community long before she appeared on the global stage, fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad made her name as the first Olympian on Team USA to wear a hijab. “Some people won’t understand your hijab, Mama has said. But if you understand who you are, one day you will too,” she has written in her 2019 autobiography *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family*.

At London 2012 it was thrilling to see Muslim women representing their countries at the Games – “Vanguards, shattering stereotypes, subverting cultural-religious mores, and creating a legacy that will benefit female Olympians of all creeds for years to come,” as Cathleen Falsani (2012) reported it. Deliberately choosing fencing because it allowed her to cover her body, Ibtihaj early on declared that

I think my motto in this whole experience is that sports is something you can do in hijab, and you shouldn’t let your faith compromise how athletically gifted you become. Just like race or gender, religion should not hinder you from achieving your goals.

(cited in Tillman, 2011)

Profiled in *Essence*, ESPN.com, the *Wall Street Journal*, as well as being a guest of then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, part of Ibtihaj’s story is that she originally took up fencing as a means to get into a good college. At Duke, she studied international relations, African American studies, and Arabic, and continued her interest in fencing. The problem was, she insisted on wearing her headscarf, which continued the discrimination, if overshadowed by the number of friends and fans she has won over. Marium Sattar, reporting on awards hosted

by the Muslim Women's Sport Foundation in 2012, saw Ibtihaj's participation as breaking new ground, paving the way for players wanting to choose modesty in competition (Sattar, 2012). Khalid El Khatib (2018) has called her a woman of firsts:

She was the first athlete to wear a hijab when competing for the U.S. in the Olympics. She was also the first Muslim-American woman to win a medal. For challenging convention and remaining true to herself, Muhammad is celebrated as a pioneer in athletics. But when it comes to her greatest achievement, she's most proud of the dialogue these actions have initiated. "I'm showing people that Muslim women should be part of the conversation when it comes to sports," Muhammad says.

At 2016 Rio, Ibtihaj Muhammad became the first hijab-clad, Muslim American woman to win a medal, *The Guardian* (Carpenter, 2016b) calling her "one of the best symbols against intolerance." Al Jazeera (Shabi, 2016) streamed:

If you're celebrating the fact that Muslim women are making it to the Olympics against incredible odds, maybe also mention that women all over, regardless of faith, face giant obstacles to compete in sporting professions where men are promoted, pushed and rewarded so much more.

With 264,000 followers on Instagram and 62,000 on Twitter, she is truly a force, countering notions of "the other."

Since her Olympic victory, in addition to serving on the U.S. Department of State's Empowering Women and Girls Through Sport Initiative, Ibtihaj has written her autobiography about her difficulties as a female Muslim athlete (*Proud: My Fight for an Unlikely American Dream*, 2018) as well as another book for young readers, about bullying (*The Proudest Blue*). In 2017, Mattel produced a "shero" Barbie doll in her honor, the company's first to wear a hijab (Adely, 2017); its marketing vice president, Seial Shah Miller, announcing, "By honoring her story, we hope this doll reminds them that they can be and do anything" – a direct contradiction to the notion of female oppression. "I'm proud to know that little girls everywhere can now play with a Barbie who chooses to wear hijab!" the fencer is quoted as tweeting (in Taylor, 2017), adding, "This is a childhood dream come true."

More relevant to this analysis, Ibtihaj Muhammad has also started her own trailblazing clothing line with her siblings. They decided to call it Louella, after their grandmother, which she describes in *Proud* (2018, p. 210):

It's such a beautiful name, and I thought it would be a great way to remember her. She was such a source of inspiration and strength for me, and I wanted to have her memory live on this way. I thought about our last days together in Newark and how much she wanted me to succeed. I was so sad she hadn't

lived long enough to see me make Team USA. This felt like a way to keep her memory alive.

Louella features a wide array of dresses, skirts, sweaters, jumpsuits, and pants – all affordable and modest. The website reads

LOUELLA BY IBTIHAJ endeavors to deliver a fresh, vibrant, and affordable take on modest women's fashion. For our consumers, modesty is not just a trend, it is a way of life. Taking inspirational cues from luxury fashion houses, our silhouettes are modern, functional, and stylish. We create easy-to-wear pieces to help provide intimacy and comfort. Pieces perfect for providing a loose and forgiving silhouette which not only feels cool but also avoids restricting our bodies and the way we move.

Reportedly frustrated at the lack of dresses to wear at the many public functions she needed to attend, Ibtihaj is said to handle much of the marketing and daily operations of the business (Carpenter, 2016a). In an interview with *The Washington Post* (Ottesen, 2019), she describes the motivation behind creating her clothing company:

Growing up, if you wanted a dress, you had to buy, like, a tank top dress from one store, find a matching long-sleeve from another store, and then you still had to find a hijab. It was just a lot. So even though I don't have any experience in starting a business, I just felt like someone had to do it. Why not me and my siblings? The demand was always there; there was no one accommodating this really expansive group of women who don't necessarily want to wear, you know, barely-there tops or miniskirts or anything like that. And it's not just about dressing the Muslim woman, it's about providing modest clothing for women who want to express themselves through what they wear.

Fitting the strictures of both contemporary fashion and her religion, the company allows customers to be modest, comfortable, and stylish. Her story, Khaled A. Beydoun (2016) points out, is far more than being the first American Olympian to wear hijab: "She championed a cause long-ignored by non-Muslims and Muslims alike: the distinct experience of African American Muslims ... She claimed bronze. But her story, and the ignored narratives her Olympic excellence made possible, is golden." Small wonder that she has been named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, that she has been featured as one of *Sports Illustrated's* Fashionable 50, and that she continues today as an entrepreneur and motivational speaker. Most recently, she has been seen modeling 2020 Tokyo Olympics kits at Nike's New York Fashion Week show, proudly wearing hijab on the catwalk.

Concluding thoughts about athlete activism and clothing

“Social and political tensions globally have re-asserted the role of fashion as a vehicle for protest,” Rose Mary Roche (2020) reminds us.

Scandals and discord in institutions such as Hollywood, the Catholic Church, the US government and the Brexit-stricken UK House of Commons have shaken beliefs and provoked a visible reaction, particularly from women. Now choosing what to wear is no longer simply about style.

At a time when we are being sensitized to race and recognition within the fashion industry – finding mostly Black designers largely left out not only in openings and retrospectives, but also generally in museum collections, it behooves us to remain open and flexible. Aljazeera (Love, 2019) strongly suggests athletes, as role models, have a responsibility to speak out on topics such as inequality and discrimination.

In 2018, The Tucson (Arizona) Museum of Art sponsored an exhibit called *Dress Matters: Clothing as Metaphor* that featured more than four dozen artists interpreting it as symbols of power and identity:

At once functional and aesthetic, garments are worn to protect the body from the elements, enhance the beauty of the wearer, establish rank in society, and signal to others our differences or similarities. Garments also point to interpersonal issues and conditions as well as larger societal and cultural concerns.

Whether dealing with sustainability and/or other environmental issues, or more personally whether we use clothing – consciously or unconsciously to push our opinions – we continue to realize that what we wear speaks volumes about us.

Fashion, Ibtihaj Muhammad reminds us, is more than just a choice of clothing; rather, it is a lifestyle decision. Fencing fulfilled her two passions of wanting to compete in sport and wanting to stay within a commitment to her faith. By wearing the hijab, she was able not only to become an Olympic athlete but to also become a “shero” to young women in need of role models as well as helping her Muslim sisters be both fashionable and functional. The Louella website declares, appropriately, “Conscious clothing. Why not?”

Note

- 1 http://www.islamiclife.com/health/2013/tips_for_muslim_practicing_sports.php

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Braids, beads, catsuits and tutus

Serena Williams' intersectional resistance through fashion

Shaonta' E. Allen

Introduction

For decades, athletes have used their sport platforms to take political stands and promote social change (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010; Edwards, 2017(1970)). The present chapter contributes to scholarly conversations surrounding athlete activism by highlighting how fashion – a prominent aspect of social life and a defining aspect of sport culture – is used as a mechanism to protest social inequality. Specifically, I conduct a case study analysis to argue that Serena Williams uses fashion to resist the intersecting dimensions of oppression she experiences in tennis.

As a Black woman, Serena's mere presence in the tennis world disrupts the notions of what tennis is and who it is for. In this way, her existence is resistance to the raced, classed, and gendered expectations of the sport. This chapter examines how Serena uses her physical appearance to challenge various oppressive structures within the tennis industry. This case study contends that fashion has and continues to serve as a mechanism of resistance within sport. Intersectional research such as this engenders critical insights about the routinization of social inequality while also promoting social justice and inspiring social change.

Background

To say Serena has excelled in tennis would be an understatement. *Time* magazine added her to the "100 Most Influential People" list in both 2010 and 2014, *Sports Illustrated* named her "SportsPerson of the Year" in 2015, and Nike crowned her with the "Greatest Athlete of All Time" title in 2016. She is the "the world's top-earning female athlete" (Cocozza, 2016) and has been recognized with a series of honors throughout her career such as ESPN ESPY awards,¹ NAACP Image awards,² Olympic gold medals, and of course, 23 Grand Slam singles titles. Despite her ability to achieve this level of success, Serena has also faced many challenges while navigating professional tennis spaces.

Much of the conflict that Serena has endured in tennis is correlated with the sport's general reputation as a white space governed by a hegemonic white male

culture (Douglas, 2012). Embedded into this white culture that dictates the professional tennis world are gender and class ideals. Scholars have referred to tennis as “a milieu of whiteness, upper-classness, male-domination, as well as unquestioned heteronormativity” (Tredway, 2019, p. 1565). The literature also characterizes tennis as a sport guided by “elitist notions of decency” (Shultz, 2005, p. 340). Commonly affiliated with white, wealthy country clubs, tennis has been exclusionary from its outset. When white, wealthy culture is normalized, Blackness, as a result, is marginalized (Shultz, 2005). These circumstances, however, create an ideal platform for resistance. Serena takes advantage of her celebrity status in tennis and the opportunity it presents to create change. Racial capitalism, or the assigning and extracting of economic value from people of color, sees how Black athletic bodies serve as cultural currency in the broad public imaginary (Douglas, 2002, p. 4), and so throughout this chapter I articulate how Serena Williams exchanges her “currency” into resistance.

In many ways, Serena holds an “outsider within” status in professional tennis. This status is ascribed to individuals who occupy space in social locations with unequal power dynamics that result in their marginalization (Collins, 1986, 2000). Serena’s experience could also be deemed an example of Combs’ (2016) “bodies out of place” theory as the products of her body (e.g., her talent and athleticism) are accepted in tennis while the Black culture that her body represents, is not. Sports media is particularly responsible for the overwhelming attention paid to Serena’s body. Media coverage reinforces the idea that Serena (and her sister Venus) are “trespassers whose presence undermines the cultural integrity of women’s tennis” (Douglas, 2002, p. 5). Ifekwunigwe (2009, p. 134) similarly notes that sports journalism manufactures a “racialized and sexualized sporting female aesthetic” in which Serena has been juxtaposed to throughout her career. It is quite clear that professional women’s tennis is inundated with dominant raced, classed, and gendered ideals, and that Serena disrupts this matrix of domination. Despite the persistent body-shaming, Serena embraces her body and “performs Blackness like no other person in the history of tennis” (Tredway, 2018, p. 63). She outright rejects the white norms embedded in the tennis industry (Collins, 2005) and one key element of her resistance has been her wardrobe. The following section further conceptualizes fashion as a form of resistance in sport.

Cosmetically contested terrain: Fashion as resistance in sport

Sport is an arena through which cultural norms are berthed and contested; where racial, gender, and economic politics construct dominant ideologies while also inspiring countercultural ideals (Messner, 1988). For this reason, the institution of sport is often referred to as contested terrain. Hartmann (2002, p. 405) specifically argues that sport is a “contested racial terrain” because racial ideologies, images, and inequalities are challenged, deconstructed, and transformed. As noted earlier, the struggles and contestations that occur in sport are not just about

racial politics but also include gender and class politics as well. Spencer (2004) argues that the social world of tennis is plagued by “sincere fictions” – a term coined by Feagin, Vera, and Batur (2001) referencing the ideological justifications white people expend to maintain their cultural dominance. Serena’s authenticity, though, undermines this dominance through the process of resistance.

Resistance is a broad concept that is rarely defined when used in scholarly literature. Resistance refers to actions that are intended to produce social change. Specifically, I see that Serena engages in cultural resistance, which Hollander and Einwohner (2004, p. 536) define as individual or collective efforts within marginalized communities to maintain subcultures and countercultures from assimilation into the dominant culture. Hollander and Einwohner additionally note that resistance is generally comprised of action (behavior) and opposition (challenge). Patricia Hill Collins has even described resistance as “doing something that is not expected” (2000, p. 98). This framing is particularly fitting because, on more occasions than one, Serena’s wardrobe has caught viewers, and tennis authorities alike, by surprise.

The white gaze is so strong within tennis, Serena’s clothing has often been described as disrespectful toward the sport – a quite ironic interpretation given her consistent championship-level and record-breaking performances. The present study adds to discussions on the resistive potential of clothing by highlighting how Serena’s attire has persistently been objectified and used to legitimize her mistreatment in the sport. Because Serena’s wardrobe has been deemed inappropriate, she is able to embrace its denigrated status and rearticulate its value as a source of empowerment.

Fashion is often conceptualized as a reflection of identity. One’s style reflects “the construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes” (Tulloch, 2010, p. 276). Scholars note that fashion trends like makeup, clothes, and hair work to distinguish social categories and as such are important to consider when examining interlocking systems of power (Edwards & Esposito, 2020). Clothing for Black people has historically served as an opportunity to reflect Black culture (Ford, 2019). Black women in particular have traditionally used “clothing to write new ‘body narratives,’ new renderings of their personal narratives that reflected their more expansive view of freedom; through their clothing, they projected a sense of sexual freedom, gender nonconformity, and upward social mobility” (Ford, 2015, p. 7). Serena has certainly used her apparel to project her freedom and agency over cultural norms and scripts that would otherwise flatten her Black womanhood within tennis spaces. As an urban Black girl in professional tennis, Serena’s experience is a prime example of what Deborah King refers to as “multiple jeopardy” or the simultaneous impact of several forms of oppression and the multiplicative relationships between them. King states that, “a Black woman’s survival depends on her ability to use all the economic, social, and cultural resources available to her from both the larger society and within her community” (King, 1988, p. 49). Fashion is a resource that unquestionably encompasses social, cultural, and economic elements. In this

chapter, I examine to what extent Serena uses fashion to resist intersectional inequality in tennis. Particularly, I focus on how she embodies resistance through her unapologetic Blackness and fashion choices.

Data and methods

To examine how fashion operates as a resistance tactic, this chapter focuses exclusively on Serena Williams. Serena's exceptional talent has led to frequent surveillance of her behaviors and fashion decisions, both on and off the tennis court, in media, popular culture, and in scholarly literature. In this regard, Serena's life and professional experiences are ideal for exploring fashion as a form of resistance in sport.

For this study, I collected data from academic outlets and various pop-cultural texts (e.g., magazines, televised materials, and social media content). I use intersectional analysis to make sense of these data. Intersectional epistemology sees dimensions of difference as dynamic rather than static, and as such, analyses conducted in this tradition focus on oppression, relationality, complexity, context, comparison, and deconstruction (Misra et al., 2020). Specifically, the aim of my intersectional analysis is twofold: (1) to provide evidence that Serena has experienced oppression within the professional tennis industry as a result of her race, class, gender, and their interconnections; and (2) to provide evidence that Serena has used fashion to resist this oppression. Because the complexities and multidimensional realities of media representations are implicated in social inequality, power, and social justice, intersectional analysis is a sufficient methodological approach for the present case study (Edwards & Esposito, 2020).

Self-adornment as self-preservation

In many ways, Serena has been "othered" in the tennis industry, and this marginalization is in large part due to problematic perceptions of her body and her fashion choices. In this section, I focus on two components of Serena's fashion, hair and body, to exemplify how she strategically uses her apparel to promote rather than conceal her Black womanhood, thus resisting sociocultural politics that favor white cultural norms. In order to make salient the resistance evident in Serena's fashion choices, it is important to reemphasize the contentious duality of her body. Critics and sportscasters frequently described Serena's body with deficit framings that ultimately compare her to Eurocentric beauty standards. She has been described as masculine and referred to as a "she-male," which only further indicate the prevalence of a heterosexual white male gaze within sport, and specifically tennis (Ifekwunigwe, 2009). Serena's body is often perceived as both unfeminine and hypermasculine due to her muscles and athleticism (Shultz, 2005). McCullough (2018) notes how the tennis establishment claims Serena's "body does not belong ... because her body was too powerful, too large, too shapely ... too Black."

Here, I shift the conversation away from others' perceptions of her body toward how she reclaims autonomy over it, particularly regarding the adornments and apparel she puts on. It is precisely because her body is consumed and conceived as deviant that it has become the optimal resource for resistance. As Martin (2018, p. 19) explains, "... Serena's use of fashion is viewed as a form of protest and resistance to established, white rules, and not in a positive light from those in decision making authority." The following sections will further explore how Serena's hair and clothing decisions disrupt white cultural hegemony in tennis by centering her identity as an urban Black woman.

The politics of professionalism and black hair

Black hair has a long tradition of confounding white people. For this reason, styles that embrace natural Black hair textures have historically been deemed inappropriate and unprofessional. Current school and workplace policies continue to ban many Black hair options such as locs and afros. As a result of this legacy, hair style choice for professional Black women is an extremely political act. Scholarly literature acknowledges this hair dilemma – professional Black women are often forced into two options: (1) assimilate into mainstream culture and adopt hairstyles that reflect Eurocentric standards of beauty or (2) embrace cultural hair aesthetics to affirm racial identity (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). I argue that Serena falls into the latter category.

In the early phase of her career, Serena's hairstyles represented defiance to white and wealthy cultural norms. Serena made an undoubtable statement by wearing braids and beads as she emerged on the professional tennis scene despite Eurocentric standards of beauty that deem Black hair as unprofessional. Embracing and adorning her coils, Serena presented an unapologetically Black stance, one that promotes Black values and traditions within predominantly white spaces (Allen & Miles, 2020). Her hair caught the attention of many. One article reported, "the most memorable fashion choice from Serena's early days were the hair beads that gave her and Venus a distinctive family look and successfully set them apart from the rest of the field" (Chase, 2018). Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly (2018, p. 4) note that Black hair expression has been subjected to both official and unofficial forms of white surveillance and this is evidenced in the oft cited notion that braids and beads worked to "mark" Serena as an outsider in the sport. For instance, Spencer (2004, p. 122) notes how "[c]ommentary that dismisses their unique cultural hairstyles serves to mark the Williams sisters as 'Others'..." Additionally, Douglas (2002) states that:

descriptions of their bodies have emphasized how their hairstyles, size, and shape are different from the other players. Initially the media were "stuck on the beads," on one occasion going so far as to call them "childish," more recently they have become preoccupied with the fact that a Black woman (Serena) has blonde hair (p. 4).

Finally, Collins (2005, p. 135) described how the Williams sisters “play with their hair fixed in beaded, African-influenced cornrows that are occasionally dyed blond ... Their working-class origins mean that they don’t fit into the traditional tennis world and they express little desire to mimic their white counterparts.” Serena’s braided and beaded hair undeniably resisted and opposed the standards of professional tennis – standards that attempt to flatten her identity as a Black woman from Compton, California.

Clothing Black womanhood and Black motherhood

Constructions and definitions of womanhood have historically excluded Black women. As a result, Black femininity is constantly contested in society. Womanhood is generally associated with feminine qualities like thinness, softness, and gentleness. Socioeconomic politics, though, have historically dissociated Black American women from these qualities. From enslaved women in the past to those who occupy professional spaces like Serena does today, Black women are often masculinized as primarily workers in a society dependent upon racial capitalism. Within the contested terrain of tennis, Serena reclaims her femininity and womanhood through clothes that accentuate her curvy body and with statements about wifehood and motherhood.

Serena has publicly shared how her attire goes through specific phases: a trendy phase (e.g., use of nontraditional materials like denim), a romantic phase (e.g., red/pink, flowy style with bows), and a feral phase (e.g., animal prints) (Friedman, 2015). Her fashion choices have also been practical decisions, too. For example, the literature suggests that tighter clothing can enhance performance utility as it, “reduces wind resistance, is less likely to be caught in equipment or the grasp of one’s opponent, helps regulate body temperature, and can prevent injuries” (Shultz, 2005, p. 345). My focus here, though, is on the ways Serena’s wardrobe choices reflect her agency as a Black woman. Chase (2018) notes that “Serena used fashion to frame the mood” so next, I discuss how she embedded her emotions into her ensembles.

One of the most prominent examples of Serena’s fashion statements is the infamous catsuit. This full-body, black outfit was first introduced to tennis viewership during the 2002 U.S. Open tournament. Serena helped design the catsuit constructed by Puma stating “this is an innovative outfit. It’s really sexy. I love it” (Shultz, 2005, p. 345). Here, Serena reclaims her body as sexy rather than masculine like others had described it before. She recently brought the catsuit back for the 2018 French Open tournament asserting the outfit made her feel like a warrior princess from Wakanda, a fictional uncolonized African country popularized in Marvel’s *Black Panther* film. The catsuit nickname was criticized for drawing on “longstanding, racist ideologies that equate African heritage [and Black athletes] with animality” (Shultz, 2005, p. 344). Sports media noted how Serena “dons the catsuit to remake her body into a site of power and agency, and through it, other Black female bodies who have been told they are too much and not deserving

of full humanity” are affirmed as well (McCullough, 2018). The ensemble was eventually perceived as too Afrocentric because rules were changed to prevent outfits like it in the future (Murphy, 2019). The catsuit was banned by the French Tennis Federation, yet this didn’t stifle Serena’s efforts to draw attention to the gendered racism she experienced. She instead entered the subsequent U.S. Open Tournament donning a custom-made Nike one-sleeved leotard and tulle tutu skirt. Again, with this instance, she used clothing in a strategic way to affirm her femininity despite structural efforts to negate it.

Another important aspect of Serena’s womanhood is her journey into wifehood and motherhood. In 2017, she welcomed her daughter Alexis Olympia and married Alexis Ohanian. In the years following, her resistance through fashion began to reflect these new aspects of her feminine identity. Specifically, “after having a child and undergoing life-threatening complications in the context of a medical system where Black women are more likely to die in childbirth than any other demographic,” Serena used fashion to bring her identity as a new mother to the tennis court as well (McCullough, 2018). This is also a form of resistance because “the bodies of mothers, regardless of their race, have historically been considered out of place in the world of sports” (Martin, 2018, p. 90). In marriage and motherhood, Serena shifted toward the “romantic” phase of her fashion aesthetic. One tournament dress during this phase was comprised of a “tulle skirt, single long sleeve and nude colorblock at chest to mimic an off-shoulder look” (Marija, 2018). In an effort to signify her femininity on another occasion, “Serena wore a simple white long-sleeved Nike dress, but she introduced fishnet tights which became a staple of her fashion in 2018. The reason was again blood clots and to vamp up the look” (Marija, 2018). To further exemplify the intentionality behind her dress, Serena tweeted after wearing the fishnet tights, “For all the moms out there who had a tough recovery from pregnancy—here you go. If I can do it, so can you.” Here, she not only resists the normalization of masculinity within the sporting industry, but also uses her attire as an opportunity to make room for other working mothers to feel welcome in and beyond sports.

On several other occasions, Serena discussed her fashion in ways that highlighted Black culture and womanhood. She attended fashion design school in 2002 and has worked with brands like Nike and Puma before launching her clothing line so it’s not surprising that she would weave symbols into her clothing. For instance, Serena shared that her outfit at the 2016 U.S. Open tournament was in part inspired by the *Wonder Woman* movie. “Her pink compression sleeves (black at night) were meant to evoke ‘a character of power and strength who is also unafraid to exhibit a softer side.’ Who was that character? ‘It’s me,’ she said with her typical bravado” (Chase, 2018). It is clear that Serena takes pride in innovating her wardrobe, which in turn innovates others’ understanding of Black womanhood.

Resistance, by its nature of opposing long-held power structures, is often met with backlash. This was true in Serena’s case as well. The French Tennis

Federation vowed to change rules regarding apparel in direct response to Serena's fashion choices (Murphy, 2019). Martin (2018) noted that:

It is not uncommon for sporting associations to have dress codes and traditions, such as wearing white at Wimbledon, but what is also not uncommon is for dress codes to change to reflect a desire to make Black athletes, both men, and women, to conform to expectations established by those with decision-making authority in an effort to appeal the largely white fan base (p. 91).

It is important to note that white woman tennis players have similarly been criticized for their attire; however, Serena's case is distinct because her fashion was sanctioned as a result of its appeal to Black people. Ultimately, Serena disregarded pressures to appease white viewers and instead worked to preserve her identity as a Black woman with her apparel. In this we can see her challenge to the dominant culture. To establish one's own countercultural beliefs and in turn, root your actions and identity in those beliefs, is the epitome of resistance.

The significance of self-definition and self-valuation

Serena made conscious and intentional decisions about her choices of clothing and personal style (Shultz, 2005, p. 345). Her ulterior motive was quite legible as one scholar describes: "With her ever-changing hairstyles and dress codes, Serena Williams actively challenges the same prevailing representations of the Black embodied sporting female aesthetic while also defying the conventional etiquette of the predominantly white elite tennis world" (Ifekwunigwe, 2018, p. 123). Her resistance not only opposed the status quo but also exemplified the processes of self-definition and self-valuation. Self-definition "offers a powerful challenge to the externally defined, controlling images of African American women" (Collins, 2000, p. 114). Specifically, self-definition is about challenging externally constructed stereotypical images of Black womanhood. Collins (1986, p. S17) states, "When Black females choose to value those aspects of Afro-American womanhood that are stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned in ... popular media, they are actually questioning some of the basic ideas used to control dominated groups." Ultimately self-definition and self-valuation resist dehumanization of marginalized groups as well as broad systems of domination (Collins, 1986).

Fashion, for Serena, is a counterhegemonic praxis. In choosing her apparel, she also chooses to debunk long-held stereotypes about Black women, Black bodies, and Black people's capacity to succeed, excel, survive, and thrive. Serena's "expressions of (Black) pleasure and joy threaten the status quo, because self-actualization is one way to challenge sexism and white supremacy" (Douglas, 2012, p. 132). Through her wardrobe, she is able to define for herself what Black

womanhood is and what it can be. For instance, during an interview, she once stated,

I'm Serena, I'm happy to be Serena, and I will always be Serena. And if I'm not true to myself, then who am I? ... Not everyone's going to like the way I look ... What matters most is that I like myself.

(Cococzca, 2016)

Serena's love for herself is what allowed her to reject the deficit notions of Black culture and Black womanhood that are embedded into the professional tennis environment.

In 2015, Serena collaborated with Nike to release her *Serena Greatness* apparel line. One of the jackets featured in the line "had the message 'you are strong, powerful and beautiful,' written in her own handwriting, on the inside lining" (Chase, 2018). In this, we can see that Serena took the language used to "other" her and reformed it into something feminine and encouraging. Serena once stated, "You can be beautiful and powerful at the same time" (Chase, 2018). This is resistance because she embraces the prominent and controlling "strong Black woman" image and rearticulates it as something positive.

Serena embodies the tension many characterize as "the ghetto" clashing with "the suburbs." Some scholars see Serena as occupying the space between the two. Ifekwunigwe (2009, p. 132) notes, "Serena Williams (and other Black (women) celebrity performers) can and do simultaneously signify 'the ghetto' and 'the suburb' as two intersectional symbolic spaces where differential discourse on class and 'race' are (re)produced." Others have perceived Serena as experiencing "ghettocentrism." Tredway (2018, p. 72) defines ghettocentrism as "the phenomenon that occurs in our society where Black athletes are fetishized for their athletic skills while Black people more generally face continual hardships stemming from institutionalized racism." Serena exploits ghettocentrism for her benefit by utilizing the Black cultural aesthetic that is deemed ghetto (her body and fashion style) and centers it in a white, wealthy tennis world (Andrews, Mower, & Silk, 2011). Ultimately her existence is resistance because she refuses to let the white hegemonic culture of professional tennis go unchallenged. Instead, she uses her body – from the clothes she wears accentuating her curves to the signature ballerina twirl she gives after winning a match – to import Black womanhood into professional tennis spaces.

Conclusion

From a young Black girl in Compton, California, to her present-day status as a Black wife, mother, and celebrity athlete, Serena has maintained an unashamed commitment to Black womanhood throughout her life course. She has consistently brought Black cultural artifacts into the white tennis industry through

her fashion choices, thus confronting the interlocking system of oppression in sports. This chapter surveyed Serena's demonstrable love of her Black self and of Blackness, in general (Douglas, 2012). This love, in an overwhelmingly white tennis world, is radical. Moreover, I argue that her clothing choices, reflective of the value Serena places on Blackness, is resistance. As Tredway (2019) notes:

Serena does not aspire to “act white.” She seems to aspire for tennis greatness (which she has already achieved) while maintaining a strong Black aesthetic and performance, which, as can be seen by the Black women who have followed—Madison Keys, Sloane Stephens, and Taylor Townsend—has opened the door for Black women to enter the world of tennis with less of a need to replicate white social mores (p. 1571).

Serena has challenged not only tennis but also the culture within it, making things more accessible to future generations of women athletes of color.³

This discussion contributes to our understandings of racial protest and resistance in sport. Scholars remind us that “sport is a particularly important site for racial resistance because it is one of the few arenas open and encouraged for African Americans in an otherwise deeply racist society” (Hartmann, 2002, p. 412). Serena has consistently used her celebrity status and her style to draw attention to the marginalization she's experienced as a Black woman. Serena and her sister Venus' wardrobe “actively make space for their Black bodies in a sport that continually seeks to shut them out. Their choice of dress speaks in ways that their words cannot” (McCullough, 2018). This case ultimately encourages individuals with marginalized identities to employ a variety of tactics, including fashion, to resist deficit notions of personhood when navigating hostile and contested environments like sport. Additionally, this case promotes the use of self-definition and self-valuation as processes of empowerment. Just as Serena reminds us, if we aren't true to ourselves, then who are we?

Notes

- 1 The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) is the preeminent sports channel offered on cable television. Each year they host the Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly (ESPY) award ceremony to acknowledge sports-related achievements at both the individual and team levels.
- 2 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People promotes racial equity in the United States and annually distributes Image Awards to honor and celebrate outstanding achievements across 40 categories including media, popular culture, sport, and politics.
- 3 Naomi Osaka and Cori “Coco” Gauff are two additional young Black women tennis players who have quickly excelled in the sport and have both identified Serena a primary source of inspiration.

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“I’m not going to the f***ing White House”

Fan discourse about Megan Rapinoe during the 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup

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Introduction

On June 26, 2019, US President Donald Trump took to Twitter to admonish USWNT co-captain Megan Rapinoe. He implored her to win the tournament and to “never disrespect our Country, the White House, or our Flag, especially since so much has been done for her & the team” (Das, 2019, ¶ 10). His tweets were apparently offered in response to a viral video that had surfaced a few days earlier. In the video, released by *EightbyEight* magazine, Rapinoe was asked on camera – while she was preparing for a pre-tournament photoshoot with teammates – if she was excited about the prospect of going to the White House. Looking down as she laced up her cleats, Rapinoe responded by letting out a “tsk” before saying without looking up, “I’m not going to the f***ing White House.” The moment occurred several months before the World Cup. However, it emerged during the tournament, provoking the public rebuke from President Trump and a media frenzy that could have derailed the USWNT’s pursuit of the championship. A day after Trump’s tweets on the evening before the much-anticipated quarterfinal matchup against France, Rapinoe appeared alongside coach Jill Ellis at a press conference. She said, “I stand by the comments that I made about not wanting to go to the White House, with the exception of the expletive” – entertainingly adding “My mom would be very upset about that” (Das, 2019). She then elaborated:

But I think obviously answering with a lot of passion, considering how much time and effort and pride we take in the platform that we have, and using it for good, and for leaving the game in a better place and hopefully the world in a better place—I don’t think that I would want to go and I would encourage my teammates to think hard about lending that platform or having that co-opted by an administration that doesn’t feel the same way and fight for the same things we fight for (¶ 3).

A request from Rapinoe to forego any further questions on the topic followed and the press conference shifted to the impending match. Rapinoe’s justification

directly referenced the high-profile status the team had achieved in their pursuit of a second consecutive World Cup title and sought to place her earlier comment within the ongoing activism efforts team members had undertaken with regard to pay equity for women athletes and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) rights.

As the tournament played out, Rapinoe took center stage leading the USWNT to victory with two goals in the quarterfinal against France and another in the final against the Netherlands. Later that same year, she received the Ballon d'Or (Golden Ball) award for the best female soccer player of the season. Accusations, however, ensued from pundits and fans who claimed that her activism instead of her on-field performances determined the outcome of the accolade (RT, 2019). Despite some criticism, others celebrated her legacy of activism that included campaigning for prisoners' rights on behalf of her brother who had been in and out of jail, becoming the first white American athlete to kneel during the national anthem in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, and opposing U.S. Soccer's gendered pay structure – all of which led Rapinoe to characterize herself as a walking protest (Kuper, 2019).

Against the backdrop of Rapinoe's continuous activism, this chapter considers the public's reaction to her flippant comment about not going to the White House. This involved examining a conversation that emerged on the social news website Reddit regarding Rapinoe's comment. Remarks from that conversation, which ranged from derogatory to supportive, represented a snapshot of fan opinions of Rapinoe as an athlete and potential activist. Those comments were analyzed using a grounded theory approach and produced several notable themes.

The American tradition of having championship teams visit the White House began with the Washington Senators baseball team in 1925 when they visited Calvin Coolidge. The first NBA champions visited the White House in 1963 – when the Boston Celtics met John F. Kennedy. The first collegiate champions (i.e., Indiana University men's basketball team) met with Gerald Ford in 1976. Interestingly, the first Super Bowl champions did not appear at the White House until Jimmy Carter extended an invitation in 1980 to the Pittsburgh Steelers. That same city's hockey team (i.e., the Pittsburgh Penguins) became the first Stanley Cup champions to be welcomed to the White House by George H. W. Bush in 1991. The tradition became more consistent and routine during Reagan's presidency and now includes about a dozen professional, collegiate, and national team visits annually (Neumann, 2016).

The visit represents a collective, national, and symbolic acknowledgment of sporting success for championship teams. But increasingly it has been construed as an endorsement of a given administration, which in turn casts athletes who eschew invitations as partisan actors. Refusals from athletes across sports and championship teams are not uncommon and are not necessarily politically motivated (Bembry, 2018; Neumann, 2016). Athletes who have dismissed invitations include sporting legends like NBA greats Larry Bird and Michael Jordan and the NFL's Tom Brady – all of whom avoided having their absences politicized

by providing little or no comment. In contrast, other athletes have publicly disclosed their political standpoints. For example, NFL Ravens center Matt Brik, an avowed Catholic and pro-life activist, rejected an invitation from the Obama administration due to its support for Planned Parenthood (Bembry, 2018), whereas Washington Nationals pitcher Sean Doolittle cited Donald Trump's divisive rhetoric as the reason he refused to be part of his World Series championship team's visit (Bumbaca, 2019). Thus, Rapinoe's dismissive statement positions her as an athlete activist contesting a well-established albeit routinely challenged American tradition.

Literature review

Although both sports professionals and fans often claim that sport should be apolitical (Thiel, Villanova, Toms, Thing, & Dolan, 2016), the position of sport within American society makes such a proposition impossible. Sport is not simply a neutral pastime enjoyed by a small portion of the population. Indeed, sport is one of the largest industries in America with approximately six out of every ten Americans self-identifying as sports fans (Jones, 2015). While it is in the interest of those who benefit from sport to maintain the veneer of being apolitical in order to appeal to as broad a viewership as possible (McAllister, 1998), claiming a neutral position also can be read as political (Thiel et al., 2016). In attempting to shroud this reality, professionals and fans alike ignore the very real political influence sport exerts over millions of Americans (Houlihan, 1994; Sage, 1998). To wit, a Senate investigation found that the U.S. Department of Defense had spent over \$10 million across 22 contracts with professional sports leagues to promote the military (Everett, 2015), the effect of which can be seen in a study that found a positive relationship between sport fandom and support for the military (Thorson & Serazio, 2018).

Despite some fans preferring to keep politics out of sport (Cavalier & Newhall, 2018; Thorson & Serazio, 2018), athletes often resist the decoupling of sport and politics when they recognize that their status enables them to promote pro-social and progressive outlooks (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Accordingly, athlete activism has a long history in America ranging from Muhammad Ali to Colin Kaepernick (Brown & Brison, 2018). Yet athlete activism and the politicization of sport tend to be met with mixed reactions from fans. For example, U.S. Soccer's effort to show support for marriage equality and the LGBTQ community through a public campaign created an outcry among fans who believed that sport and politics should be kept separate (Cavalier & Newhall, 2018). Some fans also believed that sports stars were unqualified to speak about politics and that they violated the sanctity of sport when they chose to do so, while others complimented athletes for exercising their right to political expression and acting as positive influences (Serazio & Thorson, 2020). This ambivalence surfaced when some fans reported feeling that athlete activism was incompatible with sport, while others encouraged it (Frederick, Sanderson, & Schlereth, 2017).

Consequently, there is a lack of consistency regarding fan perspectives on athlete activism, wavering between an uncompromising view that contends sport and politics should remain independent and a more pragmatic one that recognizes the prospect of athletes using their status and popularity to affect change.

A range of factors may influence how fans frame athlete involvement in politics. Media consumers identify with celebrities when they feel they share similarities (Soukup, 2006), and this may extend to activism. One's political alignment also appears to exert some influence regarding how fans perceive athlete activism. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that fan identification and media consumption decreased when fans perceived that athletes criticized presidents they supported or backed positions they found troubling (Mudrick, Sauder, & Davies, 2019). Similarly, fans who reported higher levels of patriotism and nationalism were more likely to respond negatively to athlete activism (Smith, 2019). Additionally, fans may overlook militarized nationalism in sport but react negatively to leftist politics that they believe will upset the status quo (Serazio & Thorson, 2020). All of this suggests that fan reactions to athlete activism vary considerably and differ according to targets of identification. To better understand the phenomenon of athlete activism and the specific construction of Rapinoe's politicized stance on attending a White House victory celebration, we pose the following research questions:

- R₁: What themes emerge from consideration of fan discourse about Megan Rapinoe?
- R₂: What implications arise from the ways fans frame and discuss athlete activism?

Methodology

Reddit is a social news website generating on average over one billion unique visitors per month (Statista, 2019). The website allows users to post links, articles, images, videos, or text within topic-based communities called subreddits. Users comment on posts within subreddits, thereby building a discussion on a given topic. The popularity of the website combined with few barriers to access attracts a diverse population of users. A robust conversation about Rapinoe's intention to decline an invitation to the White House developed after a news article on the topic appeared on site. The shared article, written by Kathryn Krawczyk, appeared on the webpage of *The Week* – a magazine that covers a variety of current events from various political viewpoints – and included an embedded video of Rapinoe voicing her original White House comment (Krawczyk, 2019). This work considered that conversation as a representative public dialogue that, in turn, constituted a purposive sample of individual comments for analysis ($N = 506$).

Grounded theory served as the analytical tool used to uncover the thematic content of the conversation examined (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This entailed the first two authors reviewing the texts independently and repeatedly until themes emerged from the data, then conferring about relevant content until reaching

consensus on the major thematic content and exemplar texts representing each emergent theme. This process continued until categories became exhaustive and data reached saturation. The third author provided a secondary review of emergent categories and the affiliated exemplars to further validate their composition.

Results

Four major themes emerged from fan comments: discrediting, resistance, patriotism, and general support. Discrediting involved attempts to insult or discredit either Megan Rapinoe, the USWNT, or their activism. Resistance entailed opposition to President Trump, his administration, and the Republican party. Patriotism concerned debate about whether Rapinoe's comment and her previous activism exhibited patriotism. General support implied endorsement of Rapinoe's position and her action with succinct and encouraging comments.

Discrediting

Discrediting involved showing obvious disgust for Rapinoe and her actions and challenging her relevancy and the significance of the USWNT as public figures. It also involved questioning her credibility as a successful athlete and devaluing athlete activism as something akin to slacktivism (Morozov, 2009). People conveyed general disgust for and absolute disparagement of Rapinoe, suggesting that her comment should not surprise anyone because "she's trashy" while declaring "what a loser." Additionally, comments directed at Rapinoe specifically included insults and proclamations about her relevancy (e.g., "No one cares, you irrelevant narcissistic athlete"), often tinged with a degree of sarcasm (e.g., "the president of the united states and his staff will be devastated to learn someone from the women's soccer team won't visit the white house") that bled into commentary about women's sports broadly. For example, one comment asserted that "No one cares. Female sports are awful," before suggesting that empty WNBA arenas confirm that no one "watches this trash." The conflation of irrelevance and women's sport participation reflected historically ingrained discourses of sexism and misogyny inherent in sport (Hall, 1988; Messner, 1988). Commenters weaponized these tropes as part of a superficial exercise designed to trivialize her comments and invalidate their cultural reach.

Discrediting also occurred when people emphasized athletic achievement, thereby depoliticizing the context. Comments like "Seriously, pretty obnoxious and presumptuous. Win first, then get invited, then worry about it" and "Have to win first and she's been playing like ass" seemed to suggest that activism would be irrelevant if not tethered to success and achievement. Comments such as these revealed discourse rooted in the "stick to sports" mantra that works to bifurcate sport and politics (Thiel et al., 2016).

Additionally, posters discredited Rapinoe's activism by undermining its novelty. For example, one commenter suggested that Rapinoe's stance on not going

to the White House was “boring” as it merely made her one of many athletes and celebrities who do not like Trump “just like the majority of Americans”—asking instead “Why doesn’t she go to the White House and give him a piece of her mind face to face?” The implication being that her posturing was less powerful than if she in fact confronted the president directly. Others panned her effort as childish and naïve (e.g., “Oh wow you want an award for that”). These and other comments framed Rapinoe’s advocacy as a version of slacktivism that makes one feel good but “has zero political or social impact” (Morozov, 2009, ¶ 1).

Resistance

Resistance materialized when commenters positioned themselves as co-participants in the larger resistance movement against President Trump that Rapinoe’s comment seemed to invoke. Accordingly, they described her as an “American hero” and as “a great example of the proper American spirit.” This association manifested along three tangents. The first consisted of general attacks against Trump like one that claimed he had made “the office a farce” and that as such actually going to the White House was “an insult as long as he occupies it.” The second tangent entailed comments about impeaching Trump. For instance, one post suggested that Rapinoe “should do a running knee slide on the white house [sic] lawn and rip off her shirt with ‘impeach Trump’ in big letters on her sports bra.” Beyond outwardly echoing repeated calls to impeach Trump, this comment also references specific and general soccer knowledge by intertextually linking a customary goal celebration (i.e., the knee slide) with the now infamous goal celebration that marked the USWNT victory in the 1999 World Cup when Brandi Chastain removed her shirt to celebrate triumphantly in a sports bra. For soccer aficionados, the specific imagery summoned amplifies the pertinence of the suggested action, certainly in comparison to interpretations less informed readers may have drawn.

The final tangent referenced accusations about Trump’s infidelity and sexual misconduct. For example, one contributor suggested that Rapinoe “would be sexually assaulted or raped by the President” if she attended the White House celebration because “The POTUS [President of the United States] is literally a rapist.” Another reasoned that Rapinoe would not want to go “because she isn’t a fan of fast food on fancy platters, or a fan of rapist sociopath traitorous liars.” While the initial claim of this comment joked about a previous team’s visit that became newsworthy because the fit athletes received the fast food that President Trump apparently favored, the latter part provided a strident and utter indictment of his character. Thus, participants in the discussion framed Rapinoe as representative of the larger opposition to his presidency, affirmed through charges that as a morally dubious character, he had devalued the office and therefore deserved to be impeached. From this vantage point, a clear cohort of posters positioned themselves as part of the resistance that Rapinoe had captured with her comment.

Patriotism

With regard to patriotism, some comments alluded to Rapinoe's previous activism vis-à-vis kneeling during the national anthem. For example, one comment queried, "Doesn't she kneel during the anthem while representing the country?" before suggesting that "Cognitive dissonance is required with this one." Statements like these put Rapinoe's more recent comment on a timeline of activism punctuated by seemingly unpatriotic acts that people associated with disrespect for the flag, country, military, and veterans. For instance, commentary like, "If you want to kneel before the flag, don't show up" intimated that protesting the anthem would disqualify someone from a White House visit for not behaving "like a patriot." Her recent comment, then, denoted a continuation of her unpatriotic tenor as "an America hater plain and simple" for some contributors.

In contrast, others construed her comment and previous behavior as quite patriotic due to the fact that they perceived President Trump as "the most un-American POTUS we've ever had" – making her behavior "a great representation of America." Aligning with remarks that situated Rapinoe as emblematic of the larger resistance to Trump, these posts framed such actions as truly patriotic. Other contributors sought to bring some clarity and logic to the patriotism tug-of-war. For instance, one asked fellow readers to understand that hating the President did not equate to hating the country, before asking them to consider a simple premise: "Going to the white house is a reward because it's an honor to meet the president. If you don't consider meeting the president an honor, why would you go?" This question and similar posts (re)positioned Rapinoe's comments as justified and reasonable. Thus, contributors framed Rapinoe's behavior in response to how they conceptualized her previous activism, how they construed patriotism, and how they understood and deployed cultural interpretations of President Trump, the office of the presidency, the national anthem, and the role of dissent.

General support

This last group of comments showed direct support for Rapinoe and her actions without further explanation or justification. They were voiced as simple, straightforward affirmations (e.g., "Good"), but also as more direct and enthusiastic assertions (i.e., "We support her!!!!"). Accordingly, they resembled the general positive grouping of comments previously identified from fans debating US Soccer's foray into supporting marriage equality (Cavalier & Newhall, 2018). Like those comments, these tended to exist as single posts that drew little in the way of replies or feedback. They also were the least nuanced in comparison to the other types of comments shared (Cavalier & Newhall, 2018). While not triggering reaction individually, collectively they did infer a degree of unrestrained endorsement of Rapinoe and her activism.

Discussion

Holistically the Reddit conversation about Megan Rapinoe's White House comments evolved along several themes. Accompanying the simple and clear-cut supportive comments was discourse about credibility, resistance, and patriotism. Part of the discourse actively sought to discredit Rapinoe by dismissing her relevancy specifically as a public figure, trivializing women's sport generally, and construing athlete activism as ineffectual and unpopular. Comments forwarding these premises ranged from outright attacks on Rapinoe's character to posts that infantilized her efforts as derivative and impotent. In contrast, the resistance theme characterized Rapinoe as an exemplar of the defiance required to contest President Trump and his administration. Discourse around resistance aroused calls for impeachment and impugning the president's character and morals while permitting contributors to frame Rapinoe as emblematic of a collective desire to express opposition publicly. The final theme of patriotism oscillated between accusations of Rapinoe's ongoing unpatriotic attitude and affirmations of the courage she exhibited by taking a clear stand. These differing perspectives derived from how contributors framed her actions relative to political symbols like the presidency and the national anthem. Overall, the conversation revealed a great deal about the American public's perspective on both Megan Rapinoe and athlete activism.

In addition to the specific themes derived from an examination of the larger conversation, three major implications stem from these findings pertaining to athlete activism. The first concerns how athlete activism shapes the fan-athlete identification calculus. According to Bruce (2013), sports media is a powerful site for naturalizing differences so that fans can easily differentiate between insider and outsider groupings. Beloved athletes advocating for positions that deviate from fans' political or social orientations may bring naturalized differences into greater relief – forcing fans to recalibrate their affinity for these athletes. This can occur when fans experience an identity threat or “potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity” (Petriglieri, 2011, p. 644). That is, sports consumers may identify as Americans and as sports fans, thereby triggering an identity threat when athletes attack something people deem to be symbolically American like the flag or the president (Smith, 2019). Many of the posts attacking Rapinoe indicated that commenters experienced a social identity threat of this type, with their identities as fans and Americans challenged by Rapinoe's statement. This forced them to cast her as inconsequential or treacherous. In contrast, fans whose positions aligned with her stance championed Rapinoe as an influential and idealistic representative of their shared viewpoints.

A second major implication is the way in which fan reactions to athlete activism implicated gender and sexuality. Historically and habitually the reporting of women's sport has been deficient compared to the coverage received by men (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015). Sport has been inscribed as male space (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016) – perpetuated not only by disproportionate media

coverage but also by discourse that represents sport as masculine and women's place in it peripheral (Meân, 2001; Meân & Kassing, 2008). Moreover, women's physical appearance and sexuality routinely preempt their athletic performances for spectators and media (Bruce, 2013; Clavio & Geurin, 2011). Comments directed toward Rapinoe induced these same biases when fans attempted to discredit her activism by suggesting that she was irrelevant, and that women's sports were substandard. Posts like these sought to leverage long-standing conceptions of women's sports as subpar and female athletes as unworthy of consideration beyond their appearance and sexuality. Fortunately, other contributors countered with ample comments that positioned Rapinoe as simply an athlete and activist regardless of gender.

The third and final implication relates to the larger discourse around the (de) politicization of sport. Sport and politics routinely mix; however, the common notion that they should remain separate readily emerged in the fan comments examined here. Rendering athlete activism as inconsequential, as commenters sought to do here, is one way fans may attempt to remove politics from sport. Another is to make overt claims aimed at disconnecting politics and sport. Both of these practices appeared in the current data, as fans attempted to discredit Rapinoe by casting her efforts as irrelevant and her motivations as misguided (i.e., she should be sticking to sports alone). In contrast, narratives of patriotism and resistance hyper-politicized Rapinoe and her actions. This divergence suggests that fans differ with regard to their tolerance for and consumption of athlete activism and the politicization of sport – aligning with previous findings that indicate athlete activists may struggle to achieve public consensus on the importance and relevance of their efforts (Cavalier & Newhall, 2018; Frederick et al., 2017; Martin & McHendry, 2016; Serazio & Thorson, 2020).

While assessing only comments appearing on the Reddit platform is a limitation, this work does signal the continuing divergence among fans to either support athletes as activists or to denounce them as treacherous. This could be due to the demographic-spanning appeal of sport that captivates many different types of fans. Accordingly, it may be shortsighted to expect that athlete activism will gain greater appeal and become more accepted in sport. To the contrary, it most likely will remain the domain of those willing to tolerate being publicly admonished, dismissed, and scorned for what they deem to be a worthy cause. Those athletes can expect to deepen their connection with some fans while jeopardizing their standing with others – signifying the ever-present “win some, lose some” sports refrain that all athletes essentially internalize.

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Across field and classroom

The activism of Adam Goodes and the role of Australian teachers in tackling racism

Sam Schulz, Faye Rosas Blanch and Sam Elliott

The Final Quarter

Comprised entirely of archival footage, *The Final Quarter* details the last three years of Sydney Swans footballer and Adnyamathanha/Narungga¹ man Adam Goodes' highly celebrated career. The film follows a watershed when Goodes was called an "ape" by a 13-year old, white female spectator during the 2013 Indigenous round – an annual event coinciding with National Reconciliation Week that celebrates Aboriginal players and cultures. Upon hearing the slur, Goodes stopped, gestured toward the Collingwood fan, and communicated with security who escorted her from the stadium. Later, Goodes disclosed how deeply hurt he was, not simply owing to the slur's historical dimensions and a lifetime of having dealt with racism but because it had been delivered by such a young person. In a press conference the following day, Goodes clarified that it was not the 13-year-old at fault but a culture that naturalizes racism.

Responses to the incident were fast with many key Australian Football League (AFL) figures, including Collingwood President Eddie McGuire, publicly declaring their support for Goodes, ostensibly reinforcing the AFL's long-term efforts to arrest racism as vested in Rule 35. The latter are a set of vilification laws instituted by the League in 1995 for prohibiting racist or anti-social behavior (AFL, 2013). In keeping with the Rule, McGuire reinforced that the Collingwood Club has zero tolerance for vilification and he assured the football public that Australian society has "come such a long way," meaning that we are now more enlightened about racism (cited in Gorman et al., 2016, p. 473).

Amplifying the fragility of this statement, McGuire "gaffed" on radio four days later that Goodes audition for the role of King Kong in the upcoming musical. The joke "fopped" and McGuire – well known in Australia with prominence across multiple platforms – quickly explained, "it was just a slip of the tongue" (Rudolph, 2013). Other AFL managers – all white men – were equally swift in stating that "Eddie doesn't have a racial bone in his body" (Darling, 2019). Conservative commentators – notably, Andrew Bolt, Alan Jones and Sam Newman – were vehement in their view that the real problem was not racism but left-leaning "political correctness." Bolt (2013) mobilized the argument that

Goodes was playing the race card to garner sympathy and he defended the “innocent 13-year-old victim.” This incited vast numbers of Australians who expressed “their disgust at Goodes on social media” (D’Cruz, 2018, p. 132), initiating two years of sustained racial abuse that ultimately fueled his retirement.

To a predominantly white population insufficiently educated about racism yet increasingly fed a media diet of “not racism” and backlash politics (Lentin, 2020), the logics promulgated by Australia’s conservative commentariat could make sense. *The Final Quarter* captured these dynamics and their regressive consequences by, among other means, juxtaposing several key moments from Australia’s football past with what was now happening. When asked in 1993 to clarify the racist abuse of Aboriginal players by Collingwood fans, the film included footage of then club President Allan McAlister explaining, “As long as they conduct themselves like white people [...] like human beings [...] everything will be ok” (cited in Darling, 2019). Like McGuire 20 years later, McAlister downplayed the remarks, designating them a slip of the tongue.

Rather than develop enlightenment, the documentary skillfully showed how far Australia had, and has, to go. Stoked by conservative commentary, social media became a groundswell that manifested in booing by vast numbers of spectators whenever Goodes was on field. Adding to the complexity were at least two factors: first, in 2014 Goodes was awarded Australian of the Year for his anti-racism activism, which provoked commentators like Newman to label him an “agent provocateur” determined to politicize AFL football (D’Cruz, 2018). Second, many spectators laid claim to booing, not in response to Goodes’ activism but in line with the “football defense” – the conviction that Goodes played unprofessionally by “staging for free kicks.”² In the lead up to the 2015 Indigenous round, booing by opposition crowds intensified alongside widely divergent commentary over “what racism is” and whether the booing “was racist.” AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan called for an end to the booing, adding “I’m not sure if it is racism?” (cited in Darling, 2019), while panelists on the *Marngrook Footy Show*³ lamented, “how are they qualified on mainstream football media to say what is racism?” (cited in Darling, 2019).

Sentiments boiled over during the 2015 fixture when Goodes performed a “war cry dance” to celebrate a goal. He explained that the dance, which culminated in an imaginary boomerang being thrown into the crowd, was an opportunity to show Aboriginal passion and pride. Indigenous scholar Larissa Behrendt (2015) expressed disappointment that the dance was not received with the same respect afforded the Māori haka, especially in the context of Indigenous round. Yet, insights of this nature were mostly eclipsed by voices that interpreted the boomerang as a spear, and the dance “an aggressive act of war” (Liddle, 2015). Revealing the way in which epistemic power accrues to “white”⁴ subjectivity in Australia, the preponderance of social commentary centered on the views of a small number of white male sports commentators and media personalities, including McGuire who declared the dance “deliberately provocative” and defended the booing crowd’s behavior.

The booing continued unabated for 17 weeks until an exhausted Goodes retired. *The Final Quarter* captured these events providing insights into Australian racism and its entanglements with football politics; however, like the booing it will be interpreted according to viewers' racialized logics. To apprehend the lessons that the film offers, especially for teachers wishing to use it as part of an anti-racism pedagogy, it must be viewed with appreciation of the historical contours of Australian racism.

"Post-racial" Australia

One way of understanding the racist backlash against Goodes, which continues to be framed by Australia's powerful conservative commentariat as "not racist," is thus to locate it within a context of post-racism and its antecedents.

Australia was born racist and the term "ape" has a long and violent history. Claimed by the British in the late 1700s under the legal fiction of *Terra Nullius*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not only dispossessed of land, refuted sovereignty and decimated by diseases against which they had no immunity, they were also denied their humanity. Considered closer to primates than humans, Aboriginal peoples were variously conceptualized by white settlers as, "'wild animals', 'vermin', 'scarcely human' [and ...] fair game for white sportsmen" (Evans et al. cited in Tatz, 2013, p. 56). The genocidal actions of the white settlers had the greatest impact on the Indigenous population, which within the first 100 years of colonization was devastated. In many parts of Australia, it was not unusual that "Aboriginal children were abducted for use as forced labour, women were raped and tortured and given poisoned flour, and men were shot" (Tatz, 2003, p. 78).

Vindicating these overt racist acts, were Enlightenment logics establishing "humanness" as universal while conferring epistemological dominance to the white man. Humanness was considered incongruous with inhuman qualities and "the universalisation and normalisation of whiteness as the representation of humanity worked to locate the racialised other in the liminal space between the human/animal" (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 77). Enlightenment reason established Anglo-centric whiteness as the pinnacle of Australian society and this was fortified by the White Australia policy,⁵ which endured from Federation in 1901 until 1973. Hopes for a pure White Nation were nevertheless superseded by the pragmatic need to attract non-British migrants, which eventually forced the birth of a more "multicultural" Australia. Through the 1970s and into 1980s, overt forms of racism fell from favor amidst a seemingly more enlightened white mainstream, with this elision of overt racism reflecting the conflation of discourses from the colonial period, which were blatantly racist, with discourses relating to equality and diversity under multiculturalism (Green et al., 2007). This shift reflects what Hage (2002) terms "benevolent whiteness" – the continuation of racist attitudes and structures under a pretense of inclusion.

Overt forms of racism thus hadn't vanished under multiculturalism but were superseded by more insidious expressions that continued to secure white racial hegemony. In the field of education, teacher education programs started to focus on preparing "culturally sensitive" white teachers through the late 1970s and into the 1980s. However, schooling remained overwhelmingly Anglo-centric in terms of its staffing, curriculum and pedagogy. Within the context of Australian football, the landscape transformed through the 1980s with recruiters scouring the nation for Aboriginal players. Nevertheless, these ostensibly positive developments were offset by entrenched understandings of Indigenous peoples as "instinctual and animalistic" as reflected in media reportage that articulated them together with "black magic": the idea that their abilities are "primeval," thus negating "the hours of training and application that they had endured to become elite sportspeople" (Gorman et al., 2015, pp. 1953–1954).

In wider Australia, multiple forms of racism persisted, including overt declarations framed by sanitizing statements – *slips of the tongue* – that deflect critique or responsibility. Embedded in such statements is the belief that racism must be intentional to "be" racist; however, denying racism reproduces its violence (Lentin, 2020). Covert or "everyday" forms of racism then found fertile ground inside Australia's neoliberal turn. Notably from the mid-1990s, neoliberal restructuring destabilized the small if problematic gains in racial equity that had been made during earlier periods. Conservative governments attempted to reshape Australian society into a collection of individuals "unfettered" by structures such as race, while paradoxically promoting the nation's exclusively white British roots (Stratton, 2011). When Rule 35 was introduced in 1995, it sat uneasily inside these dynamics whereby policies recognizing social groups were dismantled in favor of "standardized" accountability regimes that individualize responsibility. This approach meshed seamlessly with discourses of post-racism, which then peaked in the United States with the 2009 inauguration of President Barack Obama. The belief was, if a black president could be elected then racial equality had been achieved and all Western individuals were free to flourish.

In Australia, post-racism meant that Aboriginal and other racially marginalized groups could no longer complain about racial inequalities. Racial incidents were either overt expressions of the "one bad apple" or "the famed Australian humour" (Kamalani, 2019, p. 4). Post-racism is not merely a belief that problems associated with racism have been resolved, it is the denial of the extent of racism over the course of history – a form of neoliberal "post-truth" whereby histories of racist violence and the racist structuring of society are swept from public view. Post-racism has since merged with "post-truth" in ways that exacerbate racial inequalities and is frequently mobilized by its most outspoken proponents in the form of political *incorrectness* – a signifier allowing overt racist sentiments to become normalized as logical while anti-racist critique is framed as "political correctness" that poses significant threats to "ordinary society" (Gantt Shafer, 2017).

Under post-racism, Australia has borne witness to a surge of racist media framed by its envoys as "logic." News headlines have propounded that non-white

immigration is giving rise to a tidal wave of new tribes dividing us (Bolt, 2018), or that we are being swamped by African gangs alongside illiterate invaders who take Australian jobs while languishing on government handouts (Bourke cited in Gray & Nicholas, 2019). With respect to Goodes, the same brand of commentary worked to recode his calls for recognition of ongoing racism as a form of “reverse racism” (Bolt, 2013), which harms “genuine” Australians. Within a post-racial milieu, it was as though Goodes had “broken the contract of whiteness. He had been included – been recognised with a great honour – and instead of meekly accepting it and being quiet, Goodes was daring to speak” (Phillips & Klugman, 2016, p. 9).

Race and Australian education

Education can play a role in reproducing this white-dominated social hegemony or contribute toward its transformation. The creators of *The Final Quarter* were clear in their view that dismantling racism cannot be the task of activists like Goodes alone. However, while the film and associated resources have been offered freely to all Australian schools, the decision to embrace an anti-racism pedagogy is optional, thus highlighting the racialized landscape of Australian schooling which teachers must learn to “see” to negotiate.

This includes appreciating that prior to the 1960s, Aboriginal children were mostly excluded from mainstream schools based on their “ineducability” (Austin, 2018) or treated to a minimum education in segregated institutions to protect whites from “racial contamination” (Anderson, 2002). With the slow demise of the White Australia Policy, dominant sentiments shifted, and Aboriginal children were gradually absorbed into mainstream schools to benevolently offset Aboriginal culture. When assimilation was officially abandoned in the 1970s, a new era emerged that went some way toward challenging deficit assumptions; however, from the mid-1990s, educational focus has been on aligning all students with standardized performance measures to securitize the nation and reduce the educational gap – where achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-indigenous students have been dominantly conceptualized as the need for Aboriginal students to “rise up” and reach normative targets.

Despite 13 years of annual Closing the Gap reports,⁶ educational gaps along various axes of oppression have swelled under neoliberal governance. Australian schooling remains a largely Anglo-centric site that is subtly but powerfully racialized, thus, institutional racism plays a crucial if whitewashed role in mediating student outcomes. While there are two official policies that go some way toward centralizing Indigenous needs and perspectives – that is, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander “overlay” to the national curriculum and two of 37 teaching standards – the former is optional, the latter can be satisfied tokenistically and neither framework puts white racial hegemony on trial. Moreover, neither policy directly tackles racism, and both have emerged alongside high-stakes imperatives standardized on the cultural capitals of urban dwelling English language speakers

(Wigglesworth et al., 2011). This means that Indigenous content and discussions about racism struggle for legitimacy within Australian schooling and choosing to adopt an anti-racism pedagogy turns significantly on individual teacher attitudes.

The research on which this chapter builds explores pre-service teachers' fundamental beliefs about their roles and interpretations of *The Final Quarter* as an optional yet timely vehicle for teaching about racism. Participants drew from two Indigenous Education topics that form essential components of a Bachelor of Education degree at a public Australian university. The majority cohort are "white" (i.e. members of Australia's dominant racial group), and the topics lead them to reflect on their positionalities in the process of developing racial literacy: that is, the capacity to perceive myriad forms of racism and engage in pedagogies that contribute toward their transformation. All 400 students were treated to screenings of the documentary during the final week of the topics in 2019. Participation in the research was optional, and roughly two-thirds completed a qualitative questionnaire covering a range of questions pertinent to the film and their future careers. Students were made aware of the study in lectures and via the university's online learning system. Ethical clearance was granted by the institution, and once collated, immersion in the data enabled identification of common interpretive repertoires. Our evaluation thus involved a form of critical discourse analysis whereby focus is drawn, not to the ways in which language is used by participants to describe reality, but to construct it with reference to "race."

In what follows, we center our analysis on participants' constructions of racism, their understandings of Collingwood President Eddie McGuire in his highly mediatized knowledge productions, and their sense-making of Goodes' "war cry dance." These analyses help to inform the final discussion in which we contemplate the affective power of *The Final Quarter* and value of cross-sectorial alliances in advancing anti-racism activism.

Constructing racism

When anti-racism education is based on misconceptions, it can do more harm than good. Questionnaires sought to determine students' sense-making in relation to racism, in several ways. As outlined, the majority cohort are white and many enter the degree with limited understandings of Indigenous perspectives, some having never met an Aboriginal person. Many are confused or even shocked to think that "race" is something other than biological fact, and their understandings of racism, at least initially, will often assume an individualistic purview: that is, something that is participated in by extreme or ignorant individuals but otherwise non-existent.

Despite having participated in 12 weeks of topics designed to challenge, stretch and contextualize their thinking, students can carry stubborn beliefs or gaps in prior learning, which are difficult to disrupt. This was reflected in a small percentage of responses to the question, *how do you define racism?*

- A. Discrimination against people based on the color of their skin.
- A. A person whos [sic] words or actions discriminate against skin color.
- A. [..... question left blank].

Simplistic responses like these reflect an inability or refusal to engage in viewpoints that transcend the “one bad apple” perception of racism. This viewpoint limits teachers’ capacities to understand or challenge racism’s myriad forms or take responsibility for racisms in which they may remain deeply implicated. For example, by virtue of being non-indigenous Australians, most students in the topics participate unwittingly in the ongoing colonization of unceded territory. Nonetheless, many more students provided nuanced responses that described racism in individual, internalized, institutional, structural and cultural terms, as well as in terms of actions or inactions, that reproduce racial hierarchy. For instance, when identifying examples of racism in the documentary, despite having left the previous question blank, the following student wrote:

- A. It was blatant, overt racism when McAlister said, “as long as they conduct themselves like white people ...” Use of the word “ape” was overt racism. It was racism when white people denied or downplayed racism. [...] It was racism when white people didn’t take responsibility, saying “only Adam can stop the booing ...” *IT TOOK SEVENTEEN WEEKS FOR COACHES/OFFICIALS/ AFL TO CALL FOR A STOP TO THE BOOING. THIS IS INSTITUTIONAL INACTION = RACISM!*
(original emphasis)

When given the chance to elaborate, many students demonstrated clear passion and capacity to not only identify overt racial expressions, but much more covert slippages and maneuvers and there was some indication that students’ positionalities were pivotal in sharpening their insights. For example, the following respondent identified as African born Australian.⁷ In response to the question, *how is racism shown in the documentary*, they provided the ensuing analysis which signaled lived appreciation of “epistemological racism,” or the propensity of white society to not only speak on behalf of non-white peoples but to circumscribe “what is thinkable”:

- A. I couldn’t help but notice that white people were the ones that [sic] spoke about racism. The notion that their opinion on the subject was the one that defined the feelings and emotions of black people ... *That is racism.*
(original emphasis)

In terms of the authority as well as “blind spots” that Australia’s racial organization imparts on white subjectivities, we were interested to know how students made sense of Eddie McGuire. In the documentary, McGuire functions as a relay point for overt and subtle expressions of racism and his positional identity is characterized by layers of privilege that afford him innocence and influence. For some students, despite expressing a relatively sound grasp of racism in response to previous questions, when it came to McGuire, they would lapse into complicity with whiteness by excusing or minimizing his “slips”:

- A. Yes, he’s part of the problem but he apologized [for associating Goodes with King Kong], and that’s important.
- A. I think McGuire, despite his slip up, is a good authoritative figure when it comes to opinions on racism.

These exonerations signal the insidious ways in which “deflection, distancing and denial” shore up post-racial racism (Lentin, 2020), and how challenging it can be for students to see beyond these common features of contemporary Australian life. Likewise, determining whether “some” booing can be considered racist while “other” booing (informed by the football defense) can be disentangled from racist structures, discourses and intersubjective relations was another stumbling block. However, in terms of McGuire, most respondents put him squarely on trial:

- A. McGuire doesn’t recognize his own privilege/position. He says the right things, then completely undermines all anti-racist progress.
- A. One minute he is apologizing, the next he uses covert racism [...] His status allows him to be free of consequences.

The risk, of course, is that even when students do identify McGuire’s complicity in racial violence, they can return to a view in which he alone is “problematized,” draining their theorizations of political potential. In this sense, it was affirming to see most express sentiments in which McGuire is noted for his *positionality*; in other words, as a proxy for structurally advantaged yet complacent Australians who must take greater responsibility for learning about racism.

Another sticking point in students’ responses was Goodes’ “war cry dance.” In the topics, we explicitly privilege Indigenous voice because marginalized perspectives can help structurally privileged groups to “see” and challenge racism. In this vein, we use such stories to illuminate how racism continues to perform its power in Australia through its systems and citizens, including via mainstream media. From an Indigenous viewpoint, Goodes was forced to leave a game that he was brilliant at and loved, as self-protection from media personalities who defined their right to objectify an Indigenous Australian worthy of respect and love. The topics utilize Indigenous stories to contextualize the understanding that since colonization, Aboriginal peoples have persistently endeavored to survive and

find ways to love their bodies, minds and blackness amidst a milieu that too often defines “standing up against racism” or “showing Aboriginal cultural pride” as *un-Australian*. Simply *being* Australian is thus a complex predicament for Indigenous peoples, which *The Final Quarter* effectively captures.

Having engaged with many such counter stories by the time of the documentary viewing, it was clear that some students had utilized this learning to engage with Aboriginal perspectives in ways that challenge dominant paradigms, including the viewpoints of conservative media. Nonetheless, mainstream media is a powerful site of racialized knowledge production that engages and informs its citizens, including a minority of participants who perceived logic in the racist furor surrounding Goodes. This standpoint crystallized most clearly in the comment:

- A. It [the dance] looked threatening, similar to running a finger across the throat.

However, for others, engaging meaningfully with Indigenous perspectives meant entering a space of re-learning and connection, as enunciated in responses where the dance was conceptualized:

- A. As an expression of cultural pride.
- A. [An example of Aboriginal people] taking control over Indigenous identity.

Particularly reflexive respondents utilized this question to express an expanded awareness of “context,” which helped them to interpret the dance from a race cognizant position:

- A. [Backlash against the dance] exposed how racist Australia is.
- A. [The dance] was beautiful; he was standing up for himself and his people in a world that is ignorant.

One student articulated the simple yet profound realization:

- A. To be black and proud is a threat to White Australia.

Discussion and conclusion

In *The Final Quarter*, Goodes reflects upon his growing up years describing a life punctuated by daily racism: going to the shops to buy milk, walking home from school, he laments, “when will it ever end?” We are living at a time when race continues to “matter” in multiple and complex ways. Yet, the political will

to recognize, educate about or produce policies capable of combatting racist violence – from the persistent, everyday racism described by Goodes to the very denial of Aboriginal sovereignty – remains seriously lacking in Australia. Lentin (2020) persuasively argues that racism, including extreme racial violence, is on the rise worldwide. And while “racist ideas, practices and policies do not always result in violence or death, [...] they are never very far away” (p. 3). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain the most socio-economically disadvantaged group in Australia, their mortality and morbidity rates far outstrip white Australians, and they are oppressed along virtually every social indicator. Underlying these dynamics are institutionalized and systemic racisms in relation to which the dominant group, though they/we remain privileged by them, can mostly remain innocent. Yet, denial of racism entrenches its violence.

AFL football is one site where Australia’s simmering racisms can surface given that football brings together diverse communities in fierce competition. This is not to say racism doesn’t exist elsewhere. Rather, football magnifies aspects of the social contexts, histories and politics that constitute Australia’s racial fabric. And while AFL with its reach and popularity constitutes a powerful mode of public pedagogy, schooling is a core cultural experience for virtually all young Australians, which should be equally powerful in shaping public awareness. Our brief analyses show that 12 weeks is limited for shaping pre-service teachers’ capacities and desires to adopt an anti-racism pedagogy. Nonetheless, they also indicate that unlike existing policy frameworks, *The Final Quarter* inspired passion in respondents in ways that warrant further inquiry into the affective power of Indigenous storytelling. Alongside this work, we advocate in favor of anti-racism alliances that traverse field and classroom to advance racial equity in ways that support activist teachers and athletes alike.

Notes

- 1 The terms Aboriginal, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander are colonial constructions that homogenize First peoples. Where possible we privilege specific nations.
- 2 The “football defense” argues that Goodes’ “flopped” or staged for free kicks, an aspect of the game that is decried. Spectators adopting the “defense” could use it to distance themselves from racism by drawing on public discourses concerning how the game should be played.
- 3 An Indigenous production comprised entirely of Indigenous football commentators and hosts, axed in 2019 after 12 years on SBS television.
- 4 “White” denotes the entwinement of race, class and gender in the making of white identity.
- 5 Formerly the Immigration Restriction Act 1901.
- 6 “Closing the Gap” is a government report that tracks the nation’s progress in achieving equality for Aboriginal peoples in education, health, and life expectancy.
- 7 Questionnaires were anonymous, but students had the option to culturally self-identify.

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“Best way to silence the haters?”

Raheem Sterling’s use of social media and selective press interviews in the fight against racism

Jonathan Cable

Introduction

English footballer Raheem Sterling is no stranger to the media spotlight. On 28 May 2018, *The Sun* newspaper published a front-page article criticizing the Manchester City and England player’s choice of getting a gun tattoo on his leg (Moyes & Diaz, 2018). This, and other reports depicting aspects of Sterling’s lifestyle, has led to British journalism coming under increased scrutiny for its continued negative stereotypical representation of non-white football players. Sterling suffered racist abuse in December 2017 when leaving training at Manchester City a man started to verbally abuse him calling him a “black scouse c**t” and “I hope your mother and child wake up dead in the morning, you n****r” (Press Association, 2017). Sterling was also kicked four times. Secondly, he has consistently used non-traditionally football outlets to make his case and campaign against racism. For instance, in an interview with eminent sports journalist Rory Smith (2019), he said that the way he is covered is “one million percent” based on the color of his skin. He has also spoken to the *Wall Street Journal* (2019), appeared in *Complex UK* (Pellatt, 2019), on the athlete driven *Players’ Tribune* (Sterling, 2018a) and in the *Financial Times* (Mance, 2019).

Several of these interviews came after Sterling’s experience of racism while playing against Chelsea in their home ground Stamford Bridge in December 2018 (*Observer Sport*, 2018). Following the incident Sterling used his Instagram account for activism by questioning press coverage of two young Manchester City players buying houses, one white and one black; the difference in story was stark and will be explored in more detail later (Sterling, 2018b). In doing this Sterling is performing a framing analysis as set out by Entman (1993) whereby frames have three functions. The first and second frames diagnose the cause of issues and make a judgment based on this diagnosis such as an explicit link between the incident at Chelsea and the representation of black footballers. Then he suggests solutions by asking for “fair publicity” (Sterling, 2018b). Sterling’s Instagram post was not about himself even though the press have scrutinized his private life, including buying a house (Moriarty & Wilkins, 2016). It is this coverage and Sterling’s own framing that is at the heart of this chapter. The key question under

investigation is how the conflicting and contrasting frames around Sterling have changed over time.

Accordingly, this chapter explores how Sterling is framed by analyzing a mixture of press coverage, including Sterling's media interviews, and his social media. Furthermore, it details how racism became framed in a similar way to the social movements framing of issues (see Snow & Benford, 1992; Sireau, 2009; Cable, 2016; Boykoff & Carrington, 2019). This was conducted to argue that the power of alternative platforms allows athletes to confront racism, and discriminative press stereotypes. Social media and athlete self-representation challenges the press' communicative power by breaking and redistributing what Entman (1993) defined as the "imprint of power" found in the press' dominant framing of contentious issues.

Race, nationality and media framing

There are two clear ideas informing the research in this chapter. The first is around race and nationalism and how Sterling's status as an England international impacted on his representation. This leads to the second theme of media representation and the use of racial stereotyping and presenting a certain type of English identity within which players must perform to be accepted by the press (Carrington, 2001). Athletes' private lives are frequently reported beyond the sports pages akin to celebrities where scandal can, and does, create a vortex of publicity around individuals (Whannel, 2002). Moreover, celebrity gossip is used as a form of social control and player conduct either garners public recognition or public condemnation (Levin et al., 1988). Critcher (1991) has spoken about this as players being defined by the culture outside of sport, which is often shaped and defined by the press. In other words, Sterling's representation is divorced from his playing ability and is more centered on his race, background and celebrity status.

The representation of male footballers in England is connected to ideas around nation. The men's English national team is seen to represent national identity and the reporting of the team serves to use positives and negatives to discipline said identity (Carrington, 1998). I have written previously about how a nation sees itself reflected in football media and the formation of the Proper Football Man archetype, a majority white, English challenge to globalization processes defending against a perceived foreign threat (Cable, 2021). To see how race has worked in the past we need to draw on two former England internationals Ian Wright and John Barnes. Wright embodies a more traditional, populist form of nationalism but has challenged racism in the past (Carrington, 2001, p. 104). Wright described the Sterling coverage as containing a "certain amount of racism" (quoted in BBC Sport, 2018). Barnes was seemingly never fully accepted despite being an English international being middle class and Jamaican-born impacted on his representation (Carrington, 2001, pp. 110–112).

Like Barnes, Sterling is Jamaican-born but grew up in London with little money. What these players have had to do is balance racial identity and national

identity. The assumption is that Englishness is synonymous with whiteness, regardless of evidence to the contrary, and the mythical constructs of identity in journalism results in "myth upholds some beliefs but degrades others. It celebrates but also excoriates. It affirms but it also denies" (Lule, 2001, p. 119). The mix of race and nationalism is in line with Billig's (1995) classic study *Banal Nationalism* and the everyday flagging of nation. He states that:

As men scan for the results of their avoured team, they read of the deeds of other men doing battle, in the cause of that larger body, the team. And often the team is the nation battling for honor against foreigners.

(Billig, 1995, p. 124)

Steering this argument toward how athletes are covered brings into consideration constructions of celebrity and the focus on the private lives of high-profile individuals. Those covered in papers like *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* become situated in society through their background and private life, and this narrative is what sets the agenda for discussions of the England men's national team. This is what Marshall (2014, p. 241) argues is "the capacity of these public figures to embody the collective in the individual, which identifies their cultural signs as powerful."

What has been mentioned so far plays into concepts and ideas around how different societal actors frame issues. On a basic level, a frame is defined as the presentation of an issue from the viewpoint of a particular actor. Here in lies a fundamental conflict between whose frame becomes the most salient. In the past the media acted as a "validator" in deciding "whose views need to be taken seriously" (Gamson & Meyer, 1996, p. 290). Furthermore, Entman insists that frames put forth an "imprint of power" onto a text (1993, p. 55). Social media presents an entirely different arena for issues to be defined. High-profile individuals' reach on social media outstrips many of the media outlets who cover them. This plays into what McDonald and Birrell (1999, p. 284) argue as "a particular incident or celebrity as the site for exploring the complex interrelated and fluid character of power relations as they are constituted along the axes of ability, class, gender, and nationality." The power of the legacy press as the sole arbiter of definition is under challenge from social media. In this sense it is a political platform where the athlete leads the agenda, and the legacy media are left to react. Andrews and Jackson (2001) could not have foreseen the advent of social media and its impact when they wrote "Celebrities are crafted as contextually sensitive points of cultural negotiation, between those controlling the dominant modes and mechanisms of cultural production, and their perceptions of the audience's practices of cultural reception" (p. 5). For how this applies in a social media context we look to Marshall (2019, p. 7) who argued:

This production of an online persona – where persona can be defined as the way in which an individual produces strategically a version of themselves to

negotiate their way into some form of collective – transforms these same billions into mediatized versions of themselves.

Social media is where the contemporary battle lines of cultural production / persona and reception now reside, and where definitional power over issues is distributed.

Methods

The data for this article is drawn from February 2010 and the first mention of Sterling on social media, and July 2019 just before the 2019/20 season. The Twitter feeds of *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*'s news and dedicated sports accounts were used along with Sterling's own personal account, seven handles in total. Tweets for the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* were collected using Twitter's advanced search for "Raheem OR Sterling" on the various *Sun* and *Daily Mail* Twitter handles, and then analyzed using content analysis. The number of tweets broke down as follows: 3,402 from news organizations; these were then split into personal (Sterling the person) 845; sporting (Sterling the athlete) 2,313; and both 244. This chapter combines the personal and both tweets (1089), Sterling's own tweets numbered 1,113. This gives a total of 4,514 gathered and 2,202 analyzed.

Unlike individual journalists the official feeds of publications act like a one-way broadcast tool as there is no interaction with the audience. Moreover, as Cable and Mottershead (2018) pointed out in their research into sporting outlets' use of clickbait on Twitter, these official feeds are seemingly more about generating traffic than engaging with the social aspect of the platform. This has a part to play in what they promote. For instance, in a physical newspaper the back page was reserved for sporting importance and the front for the general agenda (Hall, 1978). In a digital age those stories pushed on social media are deemed to be the most important. These are the reports with the highest social media news value, which newspapers want the audience to read and share (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). Not only that, they are the stories that are deemed most likely to attract the biggest audience.

Similar data collection techniques were used for gathering Sterling's media interviews. The search terms used were "Raheem Sterling" and "interview" on Twitter and Google Advanced Search. This garnered 99 results over the aforementioned timeframe. The interviews were chosen on the basis that they were one-on-one and not part of a press conference. In addition, Sterling's Instagram feed was examined between all available dates from when the account started in December 2013, through to the end of July 2019, totaling 361 posts. These different sources of information were analyzed using framing, and how topics and issues are constructed and portrayed. From a media standpoint this is the "*selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution*" (Entman, 2003, p. 417 emphasis in original). Whereas Sterling's communications performed

more of a diagnostic function akin to protest groups where the explanation of the underlying issues ranges from the overarching problem to a direct chain of causality (Sireau, 2009, pp. 136–137).

Findings and discussion

The findings of this research details Sterling’s shift from being an object of fascination to leading the news agenda. Furthermore, the media coverage before the racist incidents at Chelsea in December 2018 and post-racist abuse in Montenegro while on England duty in March 2019 provides context to why Sterling came to publish the Instagram post questioning the representation of Black athletes (2018b). What becomes clear in early coverage is that they play on stereotypes around black athlete’s work ethic and intelligence/mentality (see McLoughlin, 2020 for example). The first of these three, work ethic, is apparent in a story around Sterling wanting to be rested from England duty because of tiredness in October 2014. There were 23 tweets during this period made some reference to tiredness. There are, however, clear differences between the sport pages of each outlet and their more general news services. The *Daily Mail* sport section takes a considerate approach tweeting “Don’t kill Sterling for pulling out of the England team. It’s a cry for help” (MailSport, 2014a). But *The Sun* is heavily critical using a quote from former professional footballer Alan Shearer: “The working man who is up at 6am does not want to hear how tired a 19-year-old footballer is” (*The Sun*, 2014a). This is clearly questioning Sterling’s work ethic and coming from an ex-professional adds to its authority. Furthermore, the front-page story “‘Tired’ Raheem Sterling at 3am 3 Lions party” (*The Sun*, 2014b) questions the validity of Sterling’s claim and acts as a form of public discipline. The *Mail* reports the same story (MailSport, 2014b) but it is balanced by both of Sterling’s managers at England and Liverpool who criticize the media, and state it was Sterling’s day off (MailSport, 2014c).

The disciplinary nature of gossipy, celebrity style reporting around Sterling was common. Footballing heroes and role models are meant to embody certain characteristics. Therefore, the focus on Sterling’s personal actions and characteristics is an attempt to set the boundaries for what and how a footballer is supposed to act. For example, *The Sun*’s main feed tweeted about Sterling having his teeth straightened (*The Sun*, 2015a) or who he was dating (*The Sun*, 2015b). Sterling’s position as a role model was questioned in April 2015 when *The Sun* ran an “exclusive” story about Sterling inhaling nitrous oxide aka “hippy crack” (*The Sun*, 2015c). *The Sun* tweeted the story 25 times over 21 hours. A second video was published in June, and this time *The Sun* makes an explicit mention of his proposed transfer in the headline “£50m? You’re having a laughing gas” (*The Sun*, 2015d). *The Mail* during this period had its own moral panic running photographs of Sterling smoking a shisha pipe (MailFootball, 2015).

When the England team and nationality are involved, the criticisms become even more amplified. During the European Championships in 2016 Sterling is scapegoated as one of the guilty men who are deemed responsible for the failings

of the national team (Wagg, 1986). Sterling's mentality is questioned by *The Sun* with stories about him seeing a psychiatrist (TheSunFootball, 2016a), or referring to himself as "the hated one" (TheSunFootball, 2016b). But the big story of the championships came after England were eliminated by Iceland. Videos of Sterling buying his mother a house were framed as if he was flaunting his wealth (The Sun, 2016). This was perceived to "insult," "infuriate" fans, and he is described as a "flop" (Moriarty & Wilkins, 2016). How Sterling used money and presenting him as a "footie idiot" places serious questions on the player's intelligence and whether he "deserves" to earn a lot of money. It conflates playing ability and value with personal life. This level of distortion happens again before the men's World Cup in Russia 2018 over Sterling's choice of tattoo, a M16 assault rifle (The Sun, 2018). Sterling took to Instagram to explain that the tattoo is about his father's death (quoted on BBC News, 2018). Even though the scrutiny of Sterling's lifestyle is similar to celebrities' his race and birthplace, Jamaica, adds an extra layer of complexity to his depictions and echoes the situation faced by former England international and Jamaica-born John Barnes (Carrington, 2001). Sterling was located through his birthplace as far back as 2011 setting him up as an "other" when compared to white English footballers (see MailSport, 2011).

Furthermore, Carrington (1998) argues that race and national identity are often merged. The presence of England duty in the coverage only served to heighten the representations of Sterling and the racial undertones and stereotypes of the language used. It is a form of exclusion by inclusion from a "narrow and closed white male English identity" (ibid., p. 101). The depictions of Sterling go counter to the traditional, working class boy done good where footballing heroes and role models are meant to fit into. Therefore, the focus on Sterling's personal actions and characteristics is an attempt to set the boundaries for how a footballer is supposed to act, coupled with a more celebrity style of journalism, which demonizes the banal disciplining players to fit into a more traditional, nostalgic style of sports star (Cricher, 1979, 1991). As *The Guardian* journalist Richard Williams once said (quoted in Boyle, 2006, p. 103), "A 22-year-old has money and wealth, so there isn't that chance to experience an understanding of their way of life." The papers take it upon themselves to be a window onto that life. The coverage of his tattoo did lead to reflection in the sports pages with Neil Ashton of *The Sun* walking back some of their criticism (TheSunFootball, 2018), and the *Mail's* Oliver Holt defending Sterling (MailSport, 2018). The dominant framing of Sterling weakened, in the sport pages at least. But it took high-profile racist incidents to completely overhaul his framing.

The racist abuse Sterling received at Chelsea and his Instagram response cannot be under-emphasized as the turning point in the focus of personal / both tweets from each outlet. There were 89 tweets from *The Sun* and *Mail* during December 2018, 74 of them contained references to racism. Only three racism stories appeared on *The Sun's* main Twitter account during this period, and none were put out by the *Daily Mail's* main feed. To use a physical newspaper analogy there is a real divergence in the types of stories that appear on the front and the

back of the newspapers. It is evident that there is a more thoughtful and reflective process happening in the sports pages, but the more general news sections are still fixated on sensationalism, stereotypes and critique. The different editorial stances toward these types of stories from the general news and sports desks, with different editors guide the style of language and tone used.

For example, sports journalist Dave Kidd in *The Sun* denied that journalists were racist but did admit that stereotypes may trigger racists:

If people hold racist views and read about the “bling” lifestyles of young black footballers, this can reinforce their racism and make them more likely to act hatefully.

(Kidd, 2018)

However, the general news desk at *The Sun* was less introspective calling media blame “race rubbish” in an anonymous editorial:

Our coverage of his off-field behaviour has nothing to do with skin colour. The suggestion is ridiculous and offensive — and the idea it inspired racists is baseless. His media mates should engage their brains before dishing out accusations without a shred of evidence.

(*The Sun*, 2018)

Similarly, when England played away to Montenegro toward the end of March in 2019, several players received racist abuse from the crowd. *The Sun* called to “stamp it out now” on their back page (SunSport, 2019), and the *Mail* incorporated Sterling’s own tweet about scoring “Best way to silence the haters ... and yeah I mean racists” into their own headline (MailSport, 2019; sterling7, 2019b). Across the sample there is only one tweet that is overtly racist, which focuses on Sterling’s hair: “Raheem Sterling wears a pineapple on his head and Twitter goes mad ...” (SunSport 2015). The article the tweet points to goes further and refers to the hair style as “barmy” and “whacky” stating, “The 21-year-old has drawn stark comparison to ex-Nottingham Forest ace Jason Lee, who introduced the ‘pineapple’ hairstyle to the beautiful game in the ‘90s” (Gannon, 2015).

This quote ignores the racial connotations of the “pineapple” reference, which traces its history to an unedifying moment on David Baddiel and Frank Skinner’s *Fantasy Football League* where footballer Jason Lee was ridiculed for his hairstyle (Carrington, 1998). This included segments where Baddiel wore blackface with a pineapple on his head (ibid.). Furthermore, Carrington argues the political significance of dreadlocks and the implications of this “joke”:

Rather it constituted a public challenge to one of the most powerfully symbolic forms of black cultural resistance to white supremacy by trying to belittle and therefore undermine such expressions.

(Carrington, 1998 p. 108)

The knock-on effect for Lee was that he received abuse from the terraces when he played, and in an interview with *TalkSport* in 2020 Lee said that Baddiel and Skinner had gone “too far” (Moore, 2020). *The Sun*’s tweet in this instance perpetuated these prejudices. If a Black footballer deviates from accepted and expected norms of what a footballer “should” look like they are vilified for it.

Sterling’s self-representation

Social media provides the opportunity to uncover how athletes want to be spoken about. Sterling’s awareness of how this information is used has clearly grown throughout his career along with his power over his own narrative. Looking at the overall analysis of his social media and interviews is as follows:

- Twitter – most active (1,113 tweets), instant, reactionary, and platform for political commentary. This was where he discusses racism the most.
- Instagram (361 posts) – benign, post-game analysis, and more personal.
- Interviews (99 times) – much more in-depth discussion his background and issues.

Sterling’s social media activity is most frequent before his transfer from Liverpool to Manchester City in 2015 (386 in total, 309 pre-June 2015). Post-transfer this drops off until the racist incident at Chelsea in December 2018 (49 times). After this event he uses his account to draw focus onto other racist incidents. For example, two of his five most user-engaged tweets were about racism. Such as, posting a “hear no evil” monkey emoji in response to Leonardo Bonucci’s downplaying of monkey noises directed at then Juventus player Moises Kean (sterling7, 2019a), and the aforementioned “best way to silence the haters” (sterling7, 2019b). Instagram only had five posts (1 per cent), which made any reference to racism, but the post in reaction to the Chelsea incident is his second most liked Instagram post during this period (Sterling, 2018b). In the post Sterling points out the headlines where the Black player is criticized by focusing on their weekly wage, “splashes out,” “never started a Premier League match,” and there is no mention of his mother (Joseph, 2018). In contrast the white player is described as a “starlet” who in a much more altruistic gesture bought a “home for his mum” (Herbert, 2018). The text accompanying his post states:

For example you have two young players starting out there careers both play for the same team, both have done the right thing. Which is buy a new house for there mothers who have put in a lot of time and love into helping them get where they are, but look how the news papers get there message across for the young black player and then for the young white payer. I think this in unacceptable both innocent have not done a thing wrong but just by the way it has been worded. This young black kid is looked at in a bad light. Which helps fuel racism an aggressive behaviour, so for all the news papers

that don't understand why people are racist in this day and age all i have to say is have a second thought about fair publicity an give all players an equal chance.

(Sterling, 2018b)

Sterling's Instagram post was a reaction to five years of negative coverage and stereotyping of other Black athletes. It served as a focusing event which Kingdon (2003, p. 197) describes as “an event has only transient effects unless accompanied by a firmer indication of a problem, by a pre-existing perception, or by a combination with other similar events.” The racist incident and impact of Sterling's post on the shaping of perceptions was powerful.

In terms of Sterling's interviews, the outlets he has spoken to most is the BBC (nine times) and tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mirror* (eight times). Conspicuous by their absence is *The Sun* who did not have a one-on-one interview during this sample period. Some of the outlets are non-football orientated such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*. Across the sample Sterling often talks about his personal life, his upbringing both in Jamaica and England, the support of his mum and sister in helping with his career, the death of his father, and his faith. Pre-December 2018 the way Sterling discusses press coverage in interviews is to express confusion at why he is reported on in a particular way. In 2018, however, he recognizes his news value. During an interview with Copa 90 he makes reference to his every movement having news value:

...if I go out tonight something is going to happen ... until football has finished I'm going to try to keep as much as I can, stay at my house, watch TV and no-one can say nothing.

(Copa 90, 2018)

In the *Players' Tribune* article, he goes further to reflect on the reporting of buying his mum a house “it was unbelievable what some people were writing. [...] They hate what they don't even know” (Sterling, 2018a).

But post-Chelsea abuse Sterling explicitly points to his race as the reason behind this coverage. In a *New York Times* interview Sterling believed this was the case “one million percent” (Smith, 2019). Sterling's personal stance against racism is different to say Kaepernick in that it does not come from someone who professes an overt political consciousness. For example, the following is from his interview with magazine GQ:

ALASTAIR CAMPBELL: Are you political?

RAHEEM STERLING: No, not really (Campbell, 2019).

His stance on racism had a considerable impact on how he was covered. This is mentioned in the background color given to an interview with the *Financial Times* where it states:

Since December [2018], *MailOnline* has published more than 1,000 stories mentioning him, but not one derogatory headline. The Sun switched to labeling him “Generous Raheem Sterling”, after he bought 550 tickets for pupils from his old school in Wembley to attend City’s FA Cup semi-final there.

(Mance, 2019)

This is a shift brought about through a counter-framing on social media thereby challenging the prevailing narratives around himself and other Black athletes. His position meant that what he said could not be ignored by the press especially, in an advertising-driven, digital business model where celebrities are newsworthy, football is newsworthy, and England players are at the pinnacle of where these two intersect.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this chapter comes in two sections. The first reflects on the impact of Sterling more generally, and the second considers the power relations between athletes and outlets. Sterling’s impact more generally is evident in how he is now seen. Following Sterling’s Instagram post about race and media coverage, his then boot sponsor Nike recreated their Kaepernick advert, which said “Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything” with Sterling stating “Speaking up doesn’t always make life easier. But easy never changed anything” (Oakes, 2018). Then in 2020 during the global pandemic and protests by Black Lives Matter (BLM) following the death of George Floyd, Sterling was a guest on the BBC’s flagship political program *Newsnight* to talk about BLM but also Black representation in football management (2020). What is evident post-Kaepernick/Sterling is that athletes, especially Black athletes, are willing to stand up for what they believe in. One example includes Manchester United’s Marcus Rashford, who has campaigned to end child food poverty in the U.K., summed up this newfound power by tweeting “The greater the platform, the louder the voice” (MarcusRashford, 2020). Despite these gains, the press still focuses on the banal; the *Daily Mail* wrote an article about Rashford buying houses and attempt to diminish his campaigning (Buckwell & Aitchison, 2020).

As these results highlight sports people are treated like celebrities in the press’ search for heroic role models and critique only serves to demonstrate that athletes are corrupt. But when this includes stereotypes around race and nationality it becomes insidious. Gossip and clickbait is driven by the economic necessity of an industry with an ever-increasing thirst for content which leads to everything being published. Super stardom means that a player must meet rather excessive and unreasonable demands of the media. For England internationals the weight of nation and expectation only adds to these pressures. What has changed since the rapid proliferation of social media is that the legacy media has lost its captive audience. Players now have their own platforms with which to communicate with fans directly, and have bigger social media followings. This has radically

shifted the power balance between press and players in favor of the players. They no longer need the press for publicity. Instead, high-profile players can pick and choose who and when to speak to outlets on their own terms. In doing so Sterling succeeded in changing his press framing for the better, creating his own “imprint of power” he helped to raise the important issue of racism throughout all of society – not just in football.

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Online activism and athlete advocacy in professional women's golf

Risk or reward?

Niamh Kitching, Ali Bowes and Meghan MacLaren

Introduction

In recent times, online media has become central to commentary on, and presentations (self or otherwise) of female athletes. Social media platforms have given rise to the “accessible athlete,” enabling athletes and organizations to bypass mainstream media outlets and present their product to the audiences unfiltered (Sheffer & Schultz, 2013). Sports media academics have pointed to the potential for digital media, such as social networking sites and online blogs, to redress the lack of coverage and challenge prevailing hegemonic media representations of female athletes (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Bruce & Hardin, 2014; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Further, while female athlete activism is being increasingly reported on (e.g. Cooky, 2017, 2018; Tredway, 2020), and while cultural icons such as Billie Jean King, and more recently, Megan Rapinoe, have been the subject of academic analyses (e.g. Schmidt et al., 2019), the self-narratives of female athlete activists are not well evidenced in the literature. Notably, recent evidence informs us that many female athletes are under pressure to feel grateful for the opportunity to compete as professionals, thereby inhibiting them from speaking critically about their involvement (Pavlidis, 2020). This chapter makes a novel contribution to this field, particularly in the presentation of MacLaren's direct voice and her role as co-author.

In line with Cooky and Antunovic's (2020) recent call in relation to athlete activism to tell stories differently, this chapter examines the online blog posts of professional golfer and athlete advocate, Meghan MacLaren. While competing on the Ladies European Tour (LET), MacLaren simultaneously documents her life as a professional athlete through her online blog (www.megmaclaren.com), much of which intertwines her career trajectory alongside the structural and institutional inequality she faces as a female athlete. Building on other collaborations in which the authors appraise MacLaren's blog through a myriad of feminist lenses, and examine MacLaren's self-representations (Kitching et al., 2020), this chapter considers the potential for athlete activism to stimulate discussion and change in women's professional golf. We firstly present a shortened analysis of MacLaren's online posts, thereby prompting questions around female

athlete advocacy and activism. We then presented these questions directly to MacLaren, and she responds in her own writing, thus contributing as a co-author. The chapter considers the risks and rewards and the social and economic implications for female protagonists who speak out in male-dominated arenas such as professional sport. We also explore the delicate balance for athlete advocates between advancing their sport and maintaining personal well-being in and through online media.

Digital media and female athletes

Much has been documented about the ways in which sportswomen negotiate multiple demands to self-present in online spaces. A number of authors have examined individual female professional athletes and their interactions with sports media, including Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) branding and representation of Ronda Rousey (McClearen, 2018), Women's Tennis Association (WTA) acceptance of Serena Williams (Tredway, 2018), golf governing bodies' Twitter representations of female professional golfers (Bowes & Kitching, 2019b), and print media representations of professional golfer Leona Maguire (Kitching & Bowes, 2020). Blogging has received some attention for the way that the medium can provide a space for sportswomen, fans and commentators to share, debate and enhance the visibility of women's sport (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Bruce & Hardin, 2014). Antunovic and Hardin (2013) attest that as blogging gains popularity, women's ubiquity in the blogosphere increases, and therefore can assist "women's efforts toward social change and provide visibility to their endeavours" (p. 1374). Skateboarding blogs have offered alternatives to other online representations, where participants embraced more fluid definitions of sporting femininities, rejected male/female binaries and challenged male-dominated institutions (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012, 2013).

Online media not only provide opportunities for female athletes to self-represent on their own terms, but also present sportswomen, fans and commentators a space to share, debate and discuss women's sport (Bruce & Hardin, 2014). Some comment that female athletes operating online can contest the discourses that devalue sportswomen and transform the traditional hegemonic representation of female athletes (Antunovic & Hardin, 2012; Bruce & Hardin, 2014; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016). Conversely Sanderson (2013) comments that social/online media can provide a venue for sexist commentary, while Mogaji et al. (2020) caution that there are risks associated with using social media, and sportswomen must be mindful of online "trolls." A study on female athletes at the Rio 2016 Olympics found that they felt pressure to post sexually suggestive images and that they received unwanted private communications from male fans (Geurin, 2017). In terms of blogs, Antunovic and Hardin (2013) caution that some women's sports blogs reproduce hegemonic norms around gendered sporting bodies, while their engagement with broader social issues varies, a point that Thorpe et al. (2017) also make. Thus, while research points to the benefits of online spaces for

female athletes, there is caution about the wider impact on the representation of female athletes.

Professional women's golf

Golf has always been a contested site for women, from the early days of hidden games (George, 2010), to the modern day, where they have been othered or objectified (Mitchell et al., 2016), and struggle for access, opportunity and employment (Kitching et al., 2017). Professional women's golf developed much later than its male equivalent and has struggled to catch up in terms of visibility, endorsements and prize money. An ethnographic examination of the LPGA tour found that women golfers were "outsiders" in the world of women's professional golf (Crosset, 1995). Traditional media depictions of women professional golfers have shown how televised, print media and magazine coverage of golf have continued to use representations that reinforce divisions of gender, class, disability and race (e.g. Billings et al., 2006). More recently, our own work has demonstrated that while there has been some progress, print and online media are reproducing images which continue to "other" women within golf cultures (Bowes & Kitching, 2019a, 2019b; Kitching & Bowes, 2020).

In spite of this evidence, women's golf has gained ground in recent years. The Royal and Ancient (R&A) have published the Women in Golf Charter, which, it is hoped, national golf federations, golf bodies and golf clubs will sign up to, to encourage more women and girls to stay in golf (The Royal & Ancient, 2020). A number of high profile – previously dissenting – golf venues have opened their doors to female members, including Royal Troon, the venue for the 2020 Women's Open Championship, and after formally inviting women members to join the club for the first time in 2019, Muirfield in Scotland will host the Women's Open championship in 2022. In 2019 the prize fund for the tournament jumped by a huge 40 per cent to \$4.5 million, though the winner still earns just 35 per cent of winner's purse at the men's Open championship (BBC Sport, 2019). In mid-2020 the Ladies European Tour signed a deal with the LPGA, which would potentially provide a bigger platform for players through more tournaments, visibility and sponsor support (Ladies European Tour, 2020b).

Meghan MacLaren

Meghan MacLaren is a professional golfer from England, and a two-time winner on the Ladies European Tour (LET). As of September 2020, she ranked 23rd on the LET order of merit and 284th in the official world golf rankings (Ladies European Tour, 2020a; Rolex Rankings, 2020). She has become as well known for her honest and insightful engagement on social media – through Twitter and her blog (www.megmaclaren.com) – as she has for her golf. Through her posts, MacLaren has established herself as an advocate for increased pay, terms and opportunities for women players. In 2019 MacLaren was identified by *Golf*

Monthly as one of the top 10 professional golfers to follow on Twitter, the only female to appear on the list (Heath, 2019). While MacLaren's blogging has raised her profile, and while women's professional golf has made some progress in the years since she turned professional, concurrently, her golf game has plateaued. MacLaren is aware that her advocacy for women's professional golf could be to the detriment of her own golf, where she acknowledges, "I spend half my time worrying that I'm sucking life out of my own golfing potential by concerning myself with the life of the LET" (3 July 2019). This brings us to the research question for this chapter: what are the risks and/or rewards associated with online athlete activism for a female professional athlete operating in an individual, male-dominated sport?

Perspectives

When considering the significance of athlete activism, contemporary perspectives on feminism have much to offer in terms of the traditional tenets of female athlete power and agency, along with the intersections of athlete subjectivities and representational politics. In this chapter, we use postfeminism in order to understand the agentic role of MacLaren as an athlete advocate. In line with neo-liberalism, Gill (2007) articulates postfeminism as a cultural sentiment, where femininity is marked by discipline, intensified self-surveillance and individualized empowerment. What sets postfeminism apart from neoliberal feminist perspectives is the recognition of underlying social and historical relations, and the patriarchal and capitalist conditions that are at play. Through this perspective we can consider the operations of alternative media formats such as online blogs and interrogate the way women athletes are both enabled and responsible for raising their profiles via social media, while concurrently recognizing inherent patriarchal and capitalist cultural conditions. In the way that Gill (2016) and Fullagar et al. (2018) put forward postfeminism as a critical object of inquiry or category of analysis, we use postfeminism in this chapter alongside critical feminism, which is concerned with social institutions and underlying social relations, oppressive structures and problems of inequality. Critical postfeminism as used here recognizes the potential for knowledge production that can lead to social change and the emergence of new possibilities and actions. The next sections detail what we have learned from our previous collaborations, followed by the methodological approach used in this chapter.

Activism and advocacy to this point

Given that our previous two analyses adopted similar theoretical positions, and that they will inevitably inform and shape this chapter, we believe it is salient to outline some of our key findings to this point. In this section we give a short account of our analysis of MacLaren's blog, focusing on the political activism

and athlete advocacy evidenced. In Kitching et al. (2020) we examined how MacLaren self-represented through her blogposts and found that she wrote and represented both trust and doubt, self-represented as real, authentic and true, was determined to publicly respond to others. In the latter theme MacLaren illustrated the dilemma she faced in airing her views, where she abandoned the expectation that a female athlete – and especially one under financial or sponsorship constraints – might comply in relation to politically sensitive issues. For example:

There are many times I want to continue a “conversation” with somebody online, only in the effort to enlighten them (or, grudgingly, be enlightened myself), and yet the responsible mini-me sitting on my shoulder desperately jumps on the lock button to force me into a better use of my time. Some people don’t want their minds changed, no matter what you present them with. (29 October 2018)

Among other themes, we found that she held herself publicly accountable in confronting the issues in women’s professional golf. In her open letter from 3 July 2019, MacLaren refers to male professionals and their opposition to her equality arguments:

We deserve respect. I’ll say that in every interview I ever do, and defend myself as rationally as possible on social media despite being told by a mixture of nobodies, golf fans, and male tour professionals, in both casual ignorance and blind contempt, that I am wrong. That we are not worth it.

In MacLaren’s 2019 blog posts, there was a gradual shift in her writing in becoming more vocal on behalf of the players, for example, “I haven’t yet moved past the stage of caring. I hope I never do ... I like to think I’m a good representative for our tour” (3 July 2019). She spoke in support of other female golfers, including Se Ri Pak, who she juxtaposed against coach and commentator Hank Haney who had made disparaging comments toward Asian players: “Se Ri Pak is responsible for far more major champions than Hank Haney ever will be” (3 June 2019). In the same post MacLaren acknowledges that she is exhausted from the critical stance she takes, where she “probably comes across as a whiny woman who will never be satisfied,” but she also comments “things are changing, and I’m excited to be a part of this world that is making them change” (3 June 2019). Another element that arose in this paper is MacLaren’s acknowledgement that change may be beyond the players alone. Clearly, she is aware of the wider patriarchal and cultural conditions in golf, but she also excused this perspective with market forces and was careful not to upset those who work in and for women’s golf, thereby demonstrating the limit to her agency and activism (Kitching et al., unpublished).

Methodological approach

To this point we have outlined a condensed description and analysis of the activism and advocacy elements of Meghan MacLaren's blog. Our previous work with MacLaren offers additional depth on elements that are not elaborated on here, such as ethical considerations (Kitching et al., unpublished). This chapter uses the same collaborative approach as Kitching et al. (2020), where the primary authors (Kitching & Bowes, 2020) collaborate with MacLaren as a research participant and co-author, and where MacLaren responds to the primary authors in her own written word, a role that was not found heretofore with athletes in the literature. Using our central research question around the risks and rewards of being an online athlete advocate, the primary authors gathered sub questions which were emailed to MacLaren in September 2020. These included: what progress has been made on gender equality in women's professional golf, what opportunities have you gained or rejected, what (if anything) have you lost, and what (if any) harm/distraction has happened? MacLaren was invited to respond in her own written words, which she did in October 2020.

Meghan MacLaren's response: October 2020

When I look now at the bigger picture of gender equality/inequality in golf in comparison to when I first really remember getting involved in the "debate", I think there has been huge progress. I say that as much with regards to the conversation around the issue as the actual realities, which I think still have a long way to go – but this is mainly due to how far behind women's golf has been historically. When I look at social media interaction – not just with me personally – with this issue, I have definitely noticed a shift in the general perception and reaction – there seems to be a lot more agreement with the need for female golfers to be given more opportunity and respect – whereas a couple of years ago I felt there was far more resistance and shutting down of the conversation. That to me is a sign of progress, even if it hasn't had a huge impact on the financial reality or media coverage etc. I've come to recognize all the interaction I've had on social media and outside of that, even if it was at times very negative, has maybe been a small part in the way the entire conversation has started to shift. Things that I wouldn't necessarily have noticed before, such as gendered language or omissions of female perspectives, has [sic] definitely become more positive. Hopefully as that becomes the norm, more companies will recognize their responsibility to treat male and female athletes as equal, and the opportunity and access will continue to rise for female golfers. The creation of the Rose Ladies Series this summer, and the consequent backing of several high profile companies, is the perfect example of that.

I haven't had any explicit sponsorship or financial opportunity from anything I've done or said on social media or beyond. I possibly receive more media attention – my blogs have become more well received and my followers on Twitter have increased as a result.

I have since started a monthly column for the magazine Today's Golfer, so that could be a result of my online presence, although I did previously write for Women & Golf magazine as well. Today's Golfer is a paid column whereas Women & Golf was not. I also worked with the BBC 5 Live team for radio commentary of the 2019 Open Championship at Portrush, which was a paid opportunity. Obviously it's always hard to know why or where these opportunities come from, but I am on good terms with many people in the media, which I guess comes in part from my willingness to share my thoughts honestly and speak up about important issues.

To be honest, I haven't involved myself as much in social media "debate" over the last few months. This is mainly due to the fact I think things are progressing and the conversation is changing, as I stated earlier – and so I don't think there is as much to be gained from highlighting disparities in the men's and women's game. Previously I thought there was a big lack of awareness and that was something I felt the need to draw attention to, as I didn't think we had a chance of change when so few people knew or even cared. Having said that, there is also a side of it that is negative, and while it may not have ever affected my golf, I am aware of it negatively affecting my mental well-being on occasion. I am lucky in that I can put that to the side, particularly if I think there is a positive overall impact, but I would be lying if I said there weren't times comments online have made me angry or upset. I've also felt that when I have seen it directed at other people speaking out on similar issues too.

One thing I also think is worth mentioning is the issue of Saudi Arabia. I'm turning down the opportunity to play for more money in two weeks than I may earn all year, because I am aware I'm standing for more than just my golf. It's obviously a personal decision and there are many points to this particular debate, and I can't say with certainty what my stance would be if social media didn't exist. But there is definitely an element of how I have come to present myself, as authentically as possible, through social media and how that fits with this issue. I'm not comfortable with speaking up about every issue, be it political or humanitarian or anything else, but I do recognize my willingness to not separate the lines between "golfer" and "person," which creates situations with both positive and negative consequences.

The risks and rewards of athlete activism

Postfeminist frameworks inform us that female athletes have choice and control over their self-representations and interactions online, but also that these choices are framed through patriarchal cultural conditions. We see in MacLaren's concluding paragraph above, how, as an athlete who is not willing to "separate the lines between 'golfer' and 'person,'" she has difficult ethical choices to make in her profession. In November 2020, the LET ran a double series of tournaments in Saudi Arabia, and, in response to concerns regarding human rights, MacLaren took a principled stance in choosing to boycott the tournaments for a greater good. In so doing, she missed out on the opportunity to compete, enhance her world ranking, and earn increased prize money, all of which are so crucial to her upward trajectory in professional golf. While MacLaren is demonstrating freedom

of choice here, she also exhibits the self-surveillance and public accountability previously documented (Kitching et al., unpublished), where there is “definitely an element of how I have come to present myself.” While her stance might depict individualized empowerment within postfeminism, she does so not for her own individual benefit, but for reasons of morality and integrity, and ultimately, for the benefit of others.

The limited opportunities MacLaren has gained from her blog exposure are clearly colored by the negative attention she receives through online media; in this regard Kavanagh et al. (2019) highlight that increased online connection comes with the potential for misuse and abuse, especially for sportswomen. Previously, we documented how MacLaren was determined to respond to others and defend her position (Kitching et al., 2020). In this piece she mentions that there was “resistance and shutting down of the conversation.” The interactions she had on social media were “at times very negative” and it appears that she has partly stepped away from online interactions in recent times in a need to protect her mindset, where she says “I am aware of it negatively affecting my mental well-being on occasion.” This perhaps demonstrates a threshold to the benefits of female athlete activism through social media, and also, how easily disaffected some athlete advocates could become given the tirade of negative commentary they may receive.

Under postfeminist frameworks, the burden of responsibility to find solutions to gender inequality often falls on individual women themselves. In our previous work, MacLaren had mentioned that change in professional women’s golf might be “beyond us,” and she confirms this here, saying, “I didn’t think we had a chance of change when so few people knew or even cared.” Although she has had negative interactions on social media, she has begun to realize that it has played “a small part in the way the entire conversation has started to shift.” Here, she admits that there has been “huge progress,” there has been a “shift in the general perception and reaction,” and that “the conversation is changing.” MacLaren has also acknowledged her contribution in playing “a small part in the way the entire conversation has started to shift.” This is a small win for MacLaren who, as a sole trader, and with the greater good as a goal, has taken on the burden of female athlete advocacy, particularly in the context of patriarchal and structural inequalities that exist. Significantly, she comments that this is all progress, even if it “hasn’t had a huge impact on the financial reality or media coverage.”

Conclusion

When Meghan MacLaren initiated her online blog, she used it to journal her thoughts around her game and make sense of her golf performances. In 2017 that all changed, when she began to unselfishly speak out on behalf of women’s professional golf. In this study, we see that when female athletes use their voices in a political way, they initiate important conversations and they can effect positive change. However, in the platforming of their voices online, there is recognition

that standing up for the greater good is not always the most sensible strategy. While documenting the peaks and troughs of her golf, MacLaren has simultaneously experienced the highs and lows of online interactions. In using digital platforms to voice their views, there is a balance to be achieved between contributing to incremental progress and the female athlete's personal well-being. MacLaren has admitted that negative interactions have left her "angry or upset," which must serve as a distraction for an elite athlete.

Female athlete advocates such as MacLaren have an important role in shaping the future of patriarchal institutions, and historically male spaces such as golf. Yet if they are not on the world stage of Rapinoe or Williams, they can become ostracized or even forgotten within their sport. Athletes in MacLaren's position have much more to lose than to gain from the incremental progress they make in their sport. While we know from Allison (2020) that professional female athletes value moral judgments, players who sacrifice material reward for emotional satisfaction and advocate for future change, we also know that they can little afford to speak out. MacLaren's boycott of the Saudi Arabia tournament is incredibly admirable, given the potential detrimental impact on her season and earnings, while she may also face isolation from her fellow players (who may be similarly compromised), the LET and sponsors. In channeling critical postfeminism, and the emergence of new possibilities and actions related to feminism, we suggest that opportunities for reflection and support among the research community be made for such female athletes.

Acknowledgement

To finish, the primary authors wish to speak directly to Meghan: thank you for your strength, courage and unselfish acts which have – we are certain – brought about change in golf. We have come only a tiny way along your journey in golf, and our hope is that you will truly realize your world-beating qualities on a big stage, both on and off the golf course.

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Psychological benefits for the athlete activist

Travis R. Sheadler

Introduction

While some athletes may be unaware of social injustices, others may perceive that they lack the social influence and creativity necessary to initiate change (Agyemang et al., 2010; Fuller & Agyemang, 2018). Meanwhile, athletes that do engage in activism often risk various aspects of their careers and lives in the hopes of initiating change. Fans, for example, often boo athlete activists and urge for them to be benched or cut from the roster. Universities and corporations, too, frequently rescind their scholarships and endorsements (Candaele & Dreier, 2004; Frederick et al., 2017; Kaufman, 2008). Perhaps a more interesting concern that prevents athletes from engaging in activism, though, is one from both coaches and athletes: the fear that activism will increase distress and, therefore, increase the need for emotional regulation that will distract from sport performance, ultimately limiting one's capacity for athletic success (e.g., Smith et al., 2016). These many concerns commonly lead to coaches and athletes, along with other sports personnel, to be conflict-avoidant (i.e., discourage and avoid activism).

Activism, however, is connected to several benefits. Klar and Kasser (2009), for example, showed that activism is associated with greater positive affect, self-actualization, hope, meaning in life, life satisfaction, flourishing, and vitality. Moreover, several athlete activists have been able to sustain athletic success before and after engaging in activism. Most research on athlete activism, though, is concentrated within sport sociology and sport management with only few studies within sport psychology (e.g., Sappington et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, in this chapter, I hope to encourage dialogue of athlete activism within sport psychology by examining an often-understudied aspect of athlete activism. More specifically, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach by drawing upon research from various fields to theorize the possible benefits that athlete activism may have for the athlete activist.

Resilience and minority stress

Resilience is “the role of mental processes and behavior in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effects of stressors” (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 675). It is important to note resilience is not synonymous with the absence of negative outcomes, but is the presence of greater positive adaptations and fewer negative adaptations. An athlete who is strengthening their resilience from racial trauma, for instance, may still experience some trauma-related stress, but is also embracing signs of posttraumatic growth.

Several scholars have utilized this conceptualization of resilience to propose and refine various models of resilience within and outside of sport. Galli and Vealey (2008), for instance, identified adversity, sociocultural influences (e.g., social support, cultural identities), and personal resources (e.g., motivation) as important moderators of resilience. Other important moderators of resilience for performance slumps include meta-cognitive skills and reappraisal techniques along with positivity, confidence, focus, competitiveness, strong work ethic, passion, enjoyment, awareness of one’s strengths, and energy (Brown et al., 2020; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). It is important to mindfully reflect on the situation and to reevaluate a stressor as a challenge, or opportunity for growth, in order to grow from the stressful experience and to experience positive outcomes. When doing so, Brown et al. (2020) suggested that it is not just important to identify opportunities for growth, but also important to recognize and accept any negative outcomes or obstacles that one may experience. This acceptance can help one appropriately cope with and manage negativity and, ideally, find some positivity from it. Singh et al. (2014) studied trans activists and agreed that it is important to reframe challenges to develop resilience. They also noted other positive moderators such as the ability to define one’s self, proactive agency, and affirming social support. Importantly, they identified several threats to developing resilience including inaccessible health care, emotional and social isolation, employment discrimination, lack of financial support, and gender policing (e.g., conversion therapy, verbal harassment).

Given the circumstances of these various threats, research on resilience, especially within athlete activism, should consider the unique experiences of athletes who hold underprivileged identities. Minority stress theory posits that individuals from minority groups experience unique stressors that others often live without (Meyer, 2003a, 2003b; Meyer & Frost, 2013). These stressors certainly pose risks to an athlete’s development and performance.

Indeed, minority stress may be a negative moderator of resilience, stunting the development of resilience within athlete activism. These stressors include but are not limited to microaggressions, regular discrimination, systemic discrimination, anticipated stress, racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, and identity difficulties (e.g., Meyer et al., 2011). Kimball and Freysinger (2003) confirmed that a minority race, gender, and/or social class acts as an additional stressor for athletes. Participants in the study explained that they struggled with

fewer resources and greater pressure to perform and prove their worthiness. These competing forces pin minority athletes into situations that make it less possible to succeed. In fact, Utsey et al. (2008) even argued that race-related stress is a stronger risk factor of psychological distress compared to other life stressors for African Americans. It may be unsurprising then that these stressors exacerbate health disparities by increasing risks for depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and suicide (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2012; King et al., 2008; Marshal et al., 2008).

Nonetheless, these additional stressors do not always transpire into negative health outcomes. Similar to resilience models, certain moderators are important for minorities to experience positive outcomes. These include social support and other support services, role models, community belongingness, relatedness (Riggle et al., 2008; Riggle et al., 2011; Rostosky et al., 2010; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Sossou et al., 2008), and several other protective factors and resources. Interestingly, Singh and McKleroy (2011) found that a connection to a transgender activist community facilitates resilience among transgender individuals. Indeed, Frost et al. (2019) found that, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, minority stress and activism each mediated the connection between economic precarity and well-being. Specifically, greater levels of minority stress were related to poorer well-being whereas activism was associated with greater well-being. The authors found that this is especially true for LGBTQ youth who were racial minorities. Moreover, Comas-Díaz (2016) suggested that racial trauma can be treated by counselors through multiple steps that include a needs assessment and the reprocessing of one's trauma. Comas-Díaz argued that this type of racial trauma recovery promotes both psychological decolonization and social action engagement. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2006) agreed, noting that demanding equality is one important step to appropriately helping clients with processing and managing racial trauma. Utsey et al. (2008) similarly suggested that resilience can facilitate activism by counteracting racial prejudice and discrimination.

These findings suggest that minority athletes do indeed experience identity-related stress, but factors such as activism and connection to other athlete activists, among other moderators, can allow them to prosper. Because marginalized (e.g., Black, LGBTQ+) athletes are commonly at the center of athlete activism, it is important to understand the role of minority stress in athlete activism. This understanding will ideally help important stakeholders (e.g., sport psychologists, coaches, researchers) in their efforts to dismantle systems that perpetuate minority stress and promote systems that support resilience and enable activism to be leveraged to further enhance resilience.

Psychological benefits of activism

It is important, then, to continue this discussion by elaborating on the effects and process of athlete activism. Because most athlete activism research does

not detail psychological benefits, it is important to consider research outside sport. Importantly, Ginwright (2010) eloquently explained that activism is more than just a problem-focused strategy; rather, it is “possibility-focused” because it engenders hope, explaining that activism is “the capacity for people to act and respond to sociocultural forces in ways that contribute to collective well-being” (p. 85). This suggests that activism not only impacts the problem (i.e., social injustice), but it also impacts the activist. It offers the activist an opportunity to act, facilitating one’s sense of control, hope, and overall well-being. Indeed, activism may be a moderator of resilience because of the focus on solving an issue. More specifically, activism requires a mindset that emphasizes challenge, growth, change, agency, and control, all key elements of resilience.

Similarly, Kaufman and Wolff (2010) interviewed 21 athlete activists who recognized that both sport and activism require discipline, goal-setting, long-term planning, fearlessness, focus, and the pursuit of progress. The authors indicated that several key elements that facilitate the development of an activist identity can be promoted within sport including social consciousness (i.e., awareness of social issues), meritocracy (i.e., fairness), responsible citizenship (i.e., sportspersonship and duty to society), and interdependence (i.e., teamwork). Indeed, Agyemang et al. (2010) found that leadership skills strengthened within sport can be used to benefit activism. Together, these findings suggest that sport has the potential to foster transferable skills that are beneficial in other contexts, including in activism.

In addition to the transferable skills offered in sport, activism may also provide short- and long-term benefits. Rabkin et al. (2018), for example, learned that participation in a grassroots organization facilitated posttraumatic growth even 28 years after participation in activism. Specifically, HIV/AIDS activists who participated in the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)¹ developed greater confidence, self-concept, meaning in life, hope, and agency. It is worth mentioning, though, that these participants also experienced negative outcomes related to activism. Activists experienced decreased sense of purpose and relatedness to others, including one’s connectedness to the community and to friends. Interestingly, however, these negative effects manifested when activists ceased their engagement in activism. Thus, activism through a grassroots organization may have provided activists with greater perceived connectedness to others and perceived social support. Social support, therefore, may be a significant moderator between athlete activism and resilience.

Unfortunately, though, athlete activists battle against fans, community members, and others who attempt to tarnish the athlete activist’s image. Perhaps, though, social support from family, friends, teammates, significant other, coach, fans, sport psychologist, and others would be impactful for not just the success of the athlete activist’s cause, but also for their ability to use this as an opportunity for resilience. Based on Comas-Díaz’s (2016) recommendations for using social action to help someone through racial trauma, sport psychologists, for example,

should consider helping athletes develop greater skills related to storytelling, advocacy, activism, psychoeducation, solidarity, and campaigning.

Many athletes, however, dismiss the need to develop non-athlete identities and simply focus most their attention on sport (Carapinha et al., 2018). While some athletes do not experience negative outcomes with the transition out of sport, athletes with excessively strong athletic identities and weak identities associated within other contexts are at greater risk of experiencing negative outcomes of sport retirement (e.g., loss of identity, increased distress and anxiety, mental health issues; Brown & Potrac, 2009; Park et al., 2013; Warriner & Lavallee, 2008). Developing multiple identities, therefore, can serve as a pre-retirement protective factor for athletes. Interestingly, retired Paralympic athletes regretted not becoming activists pre-retirement when they still had the spotlight and believed that becoming an athlete activist would have led to more positive and less negative outcomes related to sport retirement (Smith et al., 2016). The authors even found athletes who did develop activist identities pre-retirement experienced smoother transitions out of sport. In summary, evidence suggests that activism has the capability of enhancing one's overall well-being and certain transferable performance-related constructs (e.g., self-confidence, agency) that may promote resilience.

Resilience and athlete activism

An important piece of resilience is the reappraisal of a threat as a challenge. Nonetheless, it is important to note that I am not arguing that the barriers that prevent athlete activism along with the injustices that inspire it are beneficial. Rather, I am recognizing that activism is rooted in some goal to achieve a more desirable outcome. Athlete activists may view the current situation as a challenge to enact socio-political change and simultaneously accept personal responsibility to take the necessary actions. Moreover, it is not critical for athlete activists to accept the barriers, but it is critical to accept that change does not come without stress (i.e., activism is not easy). Notably, though, stress can be leveraged as energy (i.e., motivation) and can have enhancing effects. Indeed, Crum et al. (2013) conceptualized stress mindsets, arguing that positive perceptions of stress can enhance one's well-being and performance. Jamieson et al. (2018) also explained that stress can be used to enhance performance if one (a) acknowledges the stress; (b) approaches the stressor(s); and (c) optimizes one's response to stress. Importantly, they recognized that stress is an unavoidable aspect of life, and even suggested that the experience of stress can improve one's long-term stress response in various contexts. Therefore, it is important to explore how to develop resilience when challenged by the various stressors of activism.

Indeed, certain moderators are necessary to facilitate a stronger stress mindset and to foster resilience. Social support, for example, is noted as a common moderator of resilience. Indeed, social support, hope, and optimism were identified

as important moderators of resilience in one review (Kwon, 2013). Meanwhile, others noted that LGBTQ+ people develop stronger resilience when supported by the LGBTQ+ community (Riggle et al., 2008).

Social support may be necessary to help minimize the barriers to athlete activism. Social support might offset the derogatory comments and threats that athletes receive from fans and might reinforce one's commitment to activism by removing barriers and promoting self-esteem and relatedness, important factors in self-determined motivation, well-being, and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Syzmanski (2009), for example, found that self-esteem protected gay and bisexual men from the effects of homophobic discrimination. Indeed, self-esteem may not protect athlete activists from experiencing barriers, but may protect them from the negative consequences and may promote positive results via other pathways.

For example, collective action and storytelling, two forms of activism, provide one with personal agency to improve their life (Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Scholars also recognize the importance of mental toughness within peak sport performances (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould et al., 2002) whereas mental toughness is measured in part by a sense of control over life's various challenges (Clough et al., 2002). Indeed, mental toughness protects athletes against burnout and mental health issues by promoting control via problem-focused coping (Nicholls et al., 2008). Perhaps, then, activism provides a context in which athletes can develop agency which can enhance coping skills and stress response. Therefore, agency may be a transferable skill between sport and activism that facilitates both social justice and resilience to achieve a better society and optimal performance.

Similarly, Singh et al. (2011) found that transgender activists find resilience in activism. One participant in their study even compared the emotions of activism to the experience of riding a roller coaster. Specifically, the authors found that activists are exposed to more social injustices, but also experience more positive emotions and resilience. In other words, activists are exposed to a greater risk of stress, but are also likely developing greater coping strategies to manage the stress.

Other scholars have also suggested that self-acceptance and gender and/or racial identity pride are protective factors against minority stress (Grossman et al., 2011; McFadden et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Interestingly, Kluch (2020) found that embracing one's own story associated with a minority status is one form of activism. Moreover, it promotes visibility and can empower others via a sense of relatedness.

Corroborating these many accounts, I conclude that activism may be a context in which athletes develop resilience. The skills (e.g., self-esteem, agency) and resources (e.g., social support) that athlete activists develop within activism allow athletes to develop resilience, despite the stress and barriers associated with activism. In other words, these skills and resources, which can be promoted through activism, can enable athletes to become better at managing stress.

Of course, however, these skills can be promoted in other contexts as well. Given the unique nature of activism as a platform consumed with challenges and

change, though, activism presents as viable context athletes can use to benefit both society and themselves. Moreover, it is important to still recognize that high levels of activism may also have plenty drawbacks, especially when without other moderators of resilience. Indeed, higher levels of activism may increase exposure to various stressors, including prejudice, discrimination, and public condemnation from fans, coaches, teammates, and other stakeholders. Nonetheless, it is my hope that these fans, coaches, teammates, sport administrators, and other stakeholders will vocalize support and act in solidarity with athletes who use their social influence to enact positive social change; and it is my hope that this support, in combination with other moderators as listed throughout this chapter, will enable athlete activists to not experience burnout, fatigue, depression, or other issues associated with high levels of activism (e.g., Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), but will experience positive outcomes (i.e., resilience). Thus, this chapter ends in a call to action for sport researchers, practitioners, and other sport consumers.

A call to action

Sport researchers, clinicians, coaches, administrators, and other key stakeholders should take a greater interest in athlete activism. As athletes are not immune to social issues and stressors, research needs to be conducted to explore the effects of activism engagement on the development of athletes. Similarly, consultants, coaches, administrators, and other key stakeholders need to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for athletes to become empowered to be activists if they wish. Such an empowering environment might allow athlete activists to not only improve society but might also allow athlete activists to reap benefits that may transcend into sport performance.

To more thoroughly understand these possibilities as described in this chapter, and as elucidated in literature mostly external to sport, researchers in sport-related fields need to further investigate the psychosocial impacts of activism on the athlete activists. In these explorations, it would be ignorant to disregard the potential negative effects of athlete activism, though. Scholars, therefore, should document both the positive and negative effects of athlete activism. It may be possible that athlete activism, for example, enhances emotional regulation skills if athletes have high agency and political efficacy, strong perceived social support, and effective self-care routines; but athlete activism may exacerbate emotional dysregulation if athletes have poor agency and political efficacy, weak perceived social support, and ineffective self-care strategies. Indeed, it is important to mention that multiple factors (e.g., strong perceived social support, agency, political efficacy, self-care) likely need to be met to secure the positive effects of athlete activism.

When studying these relationships, researchers should consider implementing intervention designs, including randomized control trials, when possible. Such designs are considered more rigorous and provide the strongest evidence for the existence and strength of relationships. It may be especially helpful to draw upon

research within sport-based positive youth development for examples of how to design curricula inclusive of life skills alongside sport-specific skills. After all, evidence suggests that pairing important life and sport-specific skills in youth sport clinics yields promising outcomes (e.g., Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Hermens et al., 2017). Perhaps, athlete activism interventions can teach how to effectively engage in activism while simultaneously and intentionally strengthening transferable life skills related to agency, self-efficacy, stress mindset, mental toughness, goal-setting, fearlessness, and self-care. The intentional pairing of psychological skills development with activism engagement will ideally enhance the transferability of the skills, ultimately boosting the benefits the athlete activist experiences in both sport and activism.

Beyond research, other stakeholders involved in sport (e.g., coaches, sport psychologists) should apply the knowledge shared throughout this chapter into their practice. It is my hope that this information will help readers become stronger supports for athletes who choose to participate in activism. Indeed, evidence suggests that social support enhances resilience (e.g., Galli & Vealey, 2008). These stakeholders can also support athletes by helping them navigate the challenges associated with activism by increasing social consciousness and critical thinking skills through discussion. Stakeholders may also help athlete activists navigate challenges by strengthening transferable life skills that are connected to resilience (e.g., agency, stress mindset). Therefore, such sport stakeholders have unique opportunities to foster resilience for athlete activists. In other words, instead of discouraging activism, sport stakeholders can accept an athlete's decision to become an activist and facilitate a positive experience of activism that may have implications for health, well-being, and performance.

To conclude, both sport and activism have implications for boosting resilience. In turn, athlete activism is a unique context in which athletes may benefit. While more research is needed to understand this phenomenon, sport stakeholders should empower athlete activists to result in the most growth for both the athlete and society.

Note

- 1 The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power was an organization devoted to ending the AIDS crisis. For more information on ACT UP, visit <https://actupny.org/>.

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