

Gender, Sport and Media Between the Mid-1980s and Early 2000s: Developments, Trajectories and Transformations

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Introduction

In the summer of 2016, at ESPN's annual ESPY (Excellence in Sport Performance Yearly) awards ceremony, former University of Connecticut (UConn) women's basketball centre and 4-time National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) champion Breanna Stewart received the Best Female Athlete award. During her acceptance speech, after thanking her parents, coaches, teammates and fans, Stewart also thanked ESPN and the sports news media. She observed that while at UConn she 'received an enormous amount of media attention'; however now that she playing in the Women's National Basketball Association (she was the number one draft pick in 2016 for the Seattle Storm) she is struck by how professional female athletes do not receive anywhere near the 'amount of fame'. She stated, 'This has to change!' to generous audience applause, and concluded with the following declaration: 'Equality for all, takes each of us.' The acceptance speech was a not-so-veiled critique of the lack of media coverage of female athletes, including the lack of coverage on ESPN. Stewart's call for equality in media coverage of female athletes is one that has been articulated and advocated by feminist sociologists of sport over the past three decades. Indeed, one of the perennial findings in the scholarship on gender, sport and media is the overall lack of coverage of women's sports in mainstream sports media relative to men's, particularly in the United States (Bruce, 2016). This research trend continues

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despite increased opportunities to participate at all levels of sport, including collegiate and professional sports, and the cultural acceptance of female athletes in American society. Moreover, when female athletes are covered by the media, the quality of coverage of women's sports lags behind that of men's sports. The ways in which female athletes are represented in the media often rely upon outdated stereotypes and conventional gender norms and expectations (Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015; Kane and Maxwell, 2011). Thousands of studies have been published over the past several decades, both within and outside the United States, providing empirical evidence of gender inequality in a variety of media outlets including televised media, print media, online media and social media. Often these findings are explained through the theoretical lenses of hegemonic masculinity and sport as the last male preserve. Yet, what is curious to me is the resistance of mainstream media, and in particular mainstream sports media, to the broader shifts in the culture that have occurred over the past three to four decades as a result of social movements within and outside the world of sports.

In this chapter, I will address several thematic developments in the sociology of sport on gender, sport and media, focusing on scholarship from the 1980s through the early 2000s to chart the development and contributions of US feminist scholars to the knowledge on gender, media and sport. This chapter also offers insight into the ongoing legacy of some of the key studies from this era. The chapter concludes with future directions, including an evaluation of the relevance of this work to contemporary understandings of gender, sport and the media.

Before discussing the thematic developments and their influence on my thinking and scholarship, I am compelled to offer a caveat. This chapter provides a particular perspective informed by my own academic biography and the theoretical, methodological and disciplinary standpoints my work is situated. Thus, it is not intended as a comprehensive or exhaustive examination of the literature written by American feminist sport sociologists on gender, media and sport. Admittedly, as author I possess a privileged position and agency in identifying particular scholars and publications and articulating important trajectories in American feminist work on gender and media within the sociology of sport. As such, I wish to acknowledge the potential for certain scholars and texts to be positioned as "canonical" by their inclusion, while conversely others, given their absence through no fault other than my academic training and theoretical and methodological leanings, may be marginalized as a result. So I wish to acknowledge the role my academic background and lineage thus plays in determining the inclusion of certain voices, knowledges and scholarly perspectives and to apologize in advance for those whose work has been inadvertently excluded as a product of my academic training and theoretical

and methodological proclivities and preferences. Thus, absences of particular scholars or publications should be read through this lens and apologies extended to those scholars or texts that have been unjustly omitted.

Thematic Developments and Contributions

One of the significant developments and contributions of American feminist thought in sociology of sport (although it was not unique or specific to American feminism) resides in the conceptualization of sports as a social institution and cultural practice that both constitutes and is constituted by gender. Sports were understood as important sites for the reproduction of and challenge to gendered ideologies, discourses and representations. Moreover, the ways in which sport itself was organized and its cultural meanings could not be understood outside an analysis of gender relations and gendered power dynamics. Critical theories such as feminism allowed for sport to be 'examined as a site through which questions related to social and political power, domination, ideology and agency, and transformative possibilities could be considered' (Cole, 1994, p. 5). Media was a central object of study, given the 'role of the media in circulating and legitimating dominant narratives that construct who we are and how we understand the world around us' (Birrell & Cole, 1994, p. 246). Thus, the media, and sports media in particular, shape cultural meanings and understandings of sport, of social relations and of ourselves (*ibid.*).

Similar to the contemporary moment of feminist sports studies scholarship, American feminist sociologists of sport writing during the 1980s–1990s came from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, were trained and situated differently relative to various disciplinary or multi/inter-disciplinary knowledges. As a result, the approaches, theories and methodologies among these scholars varied, yet what they held in common was a feminist analysis and critique of the institution of sport, and the gendered inequalities that were, and continue to be reproduced, reaffirmed and legitimized within it. Yet, this analysis and critique was also accompanied by a re-envisioning or re-imagining of the potential for sports to be resistive to hegemonic dominance, to be empowering for those who had been historically marginalized; in other words, for sport's potential to be a vehicle for feminist empowerment, practice and change in spite of, or perhaps as the result of, its historical origins as a social institution and cultural practice designed to socialize boys and young men into hegemonic masculinity (Messner, 1988).

Key writings focused on the representations and discourses of women's sports and female athletes in sports media and/or offered theoretical and

conceptual frameworks by which to explain and analyze these representations and discourses. The major contributions of this scholarship were twofold and, it should be noted, are not mutually exclusive or independent of one another. First, American feminist scholars drew upon methodologies in communication and media studies (e.g., textual analysis, content analysis, discursive analysis, framing analysis among others) bringing forward empirical evidence regarding the ‘symbolic annihilation’ (Gerbner, 1978; Tuchmann, 1978) of women in sport media. This research examined the lack of coverage of women’s sports and female athletes in televised news and sports highlight shows (Duncan, Messner, Williams, Jensen, & Wilson, 1994; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003), in *Sports Illustrated* (Kane, 1988), in Olympic media coverage (Duncan, 1990), and in televised broadcasts of sports events and competitions (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). Second, scholars drew upon cultural studies and feminist studies to offer important insights regarding sport media, which did not simply provide a transparent or objective representation of sport events, athletes or controversies. Instead, these scholars asserted, the sport media ‘re-present and re-construct sport in certain frames and through routinized codes and conventions to produce images that benefit particular privileged groups’ (Birrell & Cole, 1994, p. 246), while simultaneously marginalizing others. Sport media and the representation of women’s sports shapes and impacts cultural understandings of female athleticism and critically informed analyses offered insight into broader gendered dynamics and social arrangements. I discuss each major contribution below.

The “Symbolic Annihilation” of Female Athletes

One of the unfortunate, yet enduring trends in sport media coverage, both inside and outside the United States, is the silencing, marginalization and trivialization of women’s sports, what some have referred to as the “symbolic annihilation” of women in the media. Symbolic annihilation, a term coined by Gaye Tuchmann, an American sociologist in the late 1970s, describes the mainstream media’s (i.e., newspapers, magazines, television and its advertisements) practice of either ignoring women, portraying women in stereotypical gendered domestic roles of either homemaker or mother, or, when women are depicted in the public sphere, those representations often focus on women working in “pink-collar” occupations. This was particularly of interest for media scholars given the significant social change that occurred in the 1960s throughout the 1970s, in part driven by the social movements of the 1960s, such as the women’s movements, civil rights movements, and lesbian and gay rights movements, which challenged the gender status quo and offered a critique to the binary roles and

expectations for men and for women. Gerbner (1978), in a collection on mass media edited by Gaye Tuchmann and others wrote,

Instead of mediating even the actual social change that is taking place, the media appear to be cultivating resistance and preparing for a last-ditch defense. And the gap between actual social reality and what is portrayed in the media is widening. (p. 50)

American feminists in the sociology of sport studying the media in the 1980s and 1990s were interested in examining the media coverage of women's sports in part because of Title IX, federal legislation that was passed in 1972 prohibiting educational institutions that receive federal funding from discrimination on the basis of sex. This legislation ushered in a mass movement of girls and women into athletics and sports. Scholars were interested in how the increased participation and the development of competitive sports leagues for girls and women translated into change in the sport media landscape. In a content analysis of the 'most powerful and influential creator of sport images' (Kane, 1988, p. 89), *Sports Illustrated*, a weekly magazine featuring stories on what's happening in the world of sports, Mary Jo Kane, an American feminist sports studies scholar whose devoted her career to research and advocacy for girls and women in sports, asked if the coverage of women's sports had improved since the passage of Title IX. In this article, Kane offers a different approach by moving beyond a comparative lens examining men's to women's sports coverage to analyze how the coverage of women's sports has changed over time and what impact, if any, Title IX had on improving the coverage of women's sports. Moreover, Kane examined what type of coverage female athletes received: were they portrayed in athletic or non-athletic roles and what types of sports are featured? Here Kane was interested in whether female athletes were featured in stereotypically "sex-appropriate sports", such as gymnastics, tennis and golf or "sex-inappropriate sports", such as basketball, weightlifting or wrestling. Kane found that there were no statistically significant differences in the amount of coverage female athletes received prior to or after Title IX. However, women were more likely to be featured in athletic roles than in non-athletic roles in the time period after Title IX. Yet, despite this improvement in coverage, over the course of years sampled, female athletes were statistically more likely to be featured in sex-appropriate sports. Kane concluded that, '15 years after Title IX, female participation in athletics remains heavily influenced by traditional beliefs about what is considered appropriate, ladylike behavior' (p. 97). *Sports Illustrated*, for Kane, is sending clear messages to viewers about which sports are appropriate, accepted and valued for female athletes. She rhetorically asks,

When the vast majority of coverage still focuses on primarily 'feminine' and therefore non-threatening sport behavior, how much progress has actually occurred in challenging traditional stereotypes of what it means to be female and an athlete? (p. 96)

While subsequent studies on media coverage of women's sports did not necessarily investigate differences in coverage before and after Title IX, what most studies did, and continue to do through the 2000s, is to frame and contextualize studies on media coverage of women's sports through the lens of Title IX and its impact on girls' and women's sports participation. With increased participation and growth in women's sports along with increased cultural acceptance of female athletes, we should expect that the sports media would reflect the changes that had occurred in the sports landscape. Yet, the major findings from numerous studies in the 1980s and 1990s on the coverage of women's sports all pointed to the sentiment expressed in Gerbner's quote referenced above. In fact, longitudinal studies illustrated the reality that for certain sports media, televised news and highlight programmes, the 'social reality and what is portrayed in the media' had indeed widened over the course of the 1980s and 1990s (see Duncan et al., 1994; Messner et al., 2003).

Michael A. Messner, a feminist sociologist, and Margaret Carlisle Duncan, a feminist sports studies scholar, public intellectuals who leveraged empirical findings for women's sports advocacy, published a series of studies for the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles that longitudinally examined the quantity and quality of coverage of men's and women's sports on televised news and highlight shows. What is significant for feminist scholars regarding the study of sports news media is the role the mainstream news plays in setting the agenda for what is considered the top or important stories of the day. Thus, studying the news media's coverage of sport sheds light on what value journalists and broadcasters place on women's sports and thus, what messages viewers and audiences may be sent regarding the role and status of women's sports in the broader society. Examining the evening newscasts on the local affiliates in Los Angeles of the three major television networks (ESPN, the largest and most popular cable sports network in the USA would be included in subsequent iterations of the study), Messner and Duncan (see Duncan et al., 1994; Messner et al., 2003) tracked the coverage of men's and women's sport and the types of sports that are featured. They also tracked production values, such as the use of music, graphics, statistics, game footage and interviews as well as a qualitative analysis of the commentary, specifically the ways in which male and female athletes are represented by sports broadcasters. What they found in the early iterations of the study, findings which would

continue in subsequent studies, was an overall lack of coverage of women's sports in the broadcasts. In 1989, the first year of data collection, the coverage of women's sports was 5% (Duncan et al., 1994). Coverage "spiked" in 1999, nearing 9% (Messner et al., 2003) and subsequently declined to near lows of 2–3% in the latest iterations of the study (see Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013; Cooky et al., 2015). Moreover, when examining the quality of coverage—the production values—segments on men's sports were more likely to be accompanied by music, game footage, pre- or post-game interviews with coaches, players or team owners, and graphics. Conversely, in the earlier iterations of the study, women were commonly featured in non-serious gag features (e.g., the "kissing bandit"), pseudo-sports (e.g., naked bungee jumping), and as the objects of sexualized humour. Through the sheer amount of coverage and the high quality of coverage of men's sports alongside the lack of coverage and the trivialization of women's sports and female athletes, assert Messner, Duncan and colleagues, as well as Kane (1988) and others, sport media, rather than reflecting reality or giving viewers and audiences what they want, build and sustain audiences for men's sports and send powerful messages regarding the value and status of women's sports in American culture.

Feminist Cultural Studies of Sport

In 1994, C.L. Cole and Susan Birrell, both feminist cultural studies scholars, published what has now become a "classic" collection of essays in the edited volume, *Women, Sport, and Culture* (see: Birrell & Cole, 1994). In this book are influential articles including the publication of Messner and Duncan's study on gender in televised sports and highlight shows discussed above, as well as chapters outlining key developments in the study of gender and sport broadly, including chapters on sport as the last 'male preserve', (Dunning, 1994) and sport as the maintenance of masculine hegemony (Bryson, 1994) both of which continue to have relevance and resonance for contemporary understandings and analyses of gender and sport. Also in this collection is Messner's article on the female athlete as contested ideological terrain, which will be discussed below, and Cole's chapter titled 'Resisting the canon: Feminist cultural studies, sport, and technologies of the body' (Cole, 1994).

In 'Resisting the canon', Cole (1994) articulates the potential for critical theories (post-Marxism, cultural studies and feminisms) as useful frameworks for the study of sport, gender and the body, given that sport is a site 'through which questions related to social and political power, domination, ideology and agency, and transformative possibilities must be considered' (p. 5). Cole

draws from key elements in socialist feminism and British cultural studies in the development of feminist cultural studies of sport. For Cole, socialist feminism is useful in the feminist cultural studies of sport project in its critique of the sex/gender binary as 'dehistoricized nature and biological difference' and argues instead that the 'gendered body marks, contains and reproduces difference in a sex/gender system' (p. 9). British cultural studies, and in particular Althusser's conceptualization of ideology, offers an understanding of the interdependency of structure, ideology, and subjectivity and asserts ideology as the 'lived relation between individuals and material conditions' (p. 11). For Cole, feminist cultural studies of sport thus,

recognizes sport as a discursive construct that organizes multiple practices (science, medicine, technology, governing, institutions, and the media) that intersect and produce multiple bodies (raced, sexed, classed, heterosexualized, reproductive, prosthetic, cyborg) embedded in normalizing technologies (classification, hierarchization, identity production) and consumer culture. (p. 6)

Later in the chapter she writes,

The logic of the sport/body combination, the seemingly free display of bodies in motion contributes to an illusion that sport, and its bodies, are transparent, set apart from politics, culture, and the economy. (p. 15)

While seemingly not centred on media coverage or representations, Cole's discussion of feminist cultural studies has been useful to contemporary examinations of sport media as it provides scholars with a framework from which to understand how sporting bodies are constituted in and through the media, and the ideological effects of such articulations. Surprisingly, "the body" as a central analytical and theoretical category is often rendered invisible in studies on gender, sport and media, although what is media other than a representation of sporting bodies? Yet, if, as Cole notes, 'sport is most usefully understood as a technology in the Foucauldian sense: an ensemble of knowledges and practices that disciplines, conditions, reshapes, and inscribes the body through the terms and needs of a patriarchal and racist capitalism' (p. 15), examining sport media is central to this feminist cultural studies project. Cole concluded,

...we need to engage with and depart from understandings that limit 'sport' and what counts as sport to its institutional forms. Such a supposedly fixed conceptualization constrains the possibility of understanding how the sport apparatus works in relation to and at the intersection of multiple technologies and in ways that exceed institutional boundaries.

Messner published an article in 1988, re-printed in the *Women, Sport, and Culture* edited collection and elsewhere (see Messner, 2007), that in part discussed the ideological meanings conveyed through the media coverage of the female athlete for the broader politics of gender relations. Messner argued the female athlete was a 'contested ideological terrain', and could not be understood outside the complexity and contradictions inherently embedded in women's participation, given the historical and ideological meaning of modern organized sports in the United States. This was an important development as it provided scholars studying gender, sport and media with a theoretical and conceptual framework for analyzing media coverage and representation.

Tracing the historical trajectory of sports in the USA, Messner notes the rise of organized sports in the twentieth century corresponded with two crises of masculinity, the first occurring during the turn of the twentieth century and the second during the post-World War II era. During the first crisis, sport developed as a 'male-created homosocial cultural sphere that provided men with psychological separation from the perceived feminization of society while also providing dramatic symbolic proof of the "natural superiority" of men over women' (Messner, 1988, 2007, p. 35). During the second crisis, Messner notes, the rise of mass spectator sports corresponded with the economic shift from entrepreneurial capitalism to corporate capitalism which produced the docile consumer. There was also a decline in the centrality of physical prowess in the labour market and the military: a decline that was not accompanied by a similar decline in the psychological need for ideological gender difference. As such, spectator sports, which symbolically illustrated the strength, virility, dominance and power of the male body, rose in prominence to culturally reassert and reaffirm "natural" gender differences and men's dominance over women (Messner, 1988). As such, 'women's movement into sport represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their own bodies and self-definitions, and as such it represents a challenge to the ideological basis of male domination. Yet, it will also be demonstrated that this quest for equality is not without tension...' (Messner, 1988; Messner, 2007, p. 32). For Messner, the social meaning of the muscle/performance gap and the framing of female athletes by the sports media threaten to subvert any counterhegemonic potential posed by female athletes. Thus, the female athlete as "contested ideological terrain".

Messner outlined the media's role as more than just a conduit for gender ideologies; the media provide frameworks of meaning that offer interpretations of sports events, athletes and sports controversies. Given that historically sport has served as a site for the ideological legitimation of male superiority and dominance, Messner argued it was imperative to examine the media frameworks for female athletes. In the context of American organized sports, those

frameworks, as noted above, are the marginalization of women's sports by not covering women's sports events or female athletes, the trivialization of women by sexualizing female athletes or framing female athletes in gendered domestic roles of wives or mothers. Messner argued that this type of framing of female athletes as sexual objects or sexual/gender deviants, thus explaining the prevalence of representations of female athletes as wives and mothers, was unsustainable if the sport media were to retain their legitimacy. Indeed, Messner (1988) suggested women's sports were increasingly being covered by "objective" reporting that did not engage in trivialization and sexualization. Instead, the sport media were treating female athletes as "equal" to male athletes in their coverage while neglecting the reality of the historical and ideological development of sports wherein sports were organized to display and celebrate the extreme abilities and capabilities of the male body. Thus, the media's treatment of female athletes "equal" to their male counterpart, in other words the same, and "objectively" reporting on the statistics regarding and outcomes of sports performances (such as finish times in a marathon, the distance of a tee shot in golf, the speed at which a tennis player serves the ball, the length by which a long jumper can travel or the distance a high jumper can jump, how much weight a weightlifter can lift, and so on), the sport media 'provides support for the ideology of meritocracy while at the same time offers incontrovertible evidence of the 'natural differences' between males and females' (ibid. p. 42). Stated simply, gender ideologies are quite often simultaneously reaffirmed and challenged in sport media coverage of female athletes and women's sports.

Gender, Sport and Media in the Twenty-First Century

At the turn of the twenty-first century, we witnessed new developments and trajectories in the feminist analysis of gender, sport and media. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, many feminist scholars increasingly incorporated what's been termed "third-wave feminism" to their approach to the study of gender, sport and media, which includes a sensitivity to intersectionality and an understanding of sexualization in sports and representations of hetero-sexual femininity as not solely oppressive, as many feminists had argued in the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, but as empowering for female athletes themselves and for female audiences, viewers and consumers.

Mary G. McDonald and Susan Birrell, both feminist cultural studies scholars, published an influential article in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* setting out a methodology for "reading sports" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999) that became

the introductory chapter to their edited collection titled *Reading sport*. This article was significant for the study of gender, sport and media in two main ways. First, at the beginning of this article McDonald & Birrell position intersectionality at the centre of analyses of sport. This is not to say that studies utilizing theories of intersectionality did not exist before, rather McDonald & Birrell were giving a voice and visibility to such approaches and further advocating for the inclusion of this theoretical and methodological perspective. Intersectionality is not simply an examination of the intersections of race, class, gender and other social locations. It is a theoretical explanation and understanding of the processes of domination and subordination, privilege and oppression, and the ways in which individuals and institutions are situated at the intersections of relations of individual and institutional power and agency (Collins, 1990/2009; Crenshaw, 1991). In her various publications, McDonald examined race (and class, sexuality, and so on) within the context of women's sport and did so in a way that was aligned with the tenets of intersectionality. McDonald was at the forefront of scholarship utilizing critical whiteness studies to analyze gender and sports. Here, race is not simply about studying the other, but about studying up, about interrogating white privilege. Despite these efforts, we have yet to dismantle the linkage of race with minority status. In other words, too often race is conflated with racial minority. Yet, this should not detract from the impact of McDonald's scholarship.

Second, the "reading sports" article articulated a theoretical and methodological framework, which drew upon intersectionality, among other approaches, for the study of sports as cultural texts. This impacted the study of gender, sport and media in that the object of analysis was not confined or limited to that content which is produced by media (televised broadcasts, newspapers, magazines) but could encompass a broader range of cultural artefacts and practices to examine the cultural meanings of sports celebrity, for example. Yet, what this approach had in common, and perhaps why scholars studying media found it useful to employ, was the approach, informed by literary theories, to analyzing texts.

Although not explicit in its application of "reading sports" as a theoretical and methodological framework, but certainly illustrating key aspects is the influential book written by Leslie Heywood, a feminist cultural studies scholar, and Shari Dworkin, a feminist sociologist, titled, *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*. In this book, Heywood and Dworkin offer a third-wave feminist analysis of the female athlete, offering a dialogue between the critical approaches of academic feminist analyses of sport, which tend to focus on the "darker side" (2003, p. 5) of girls' and women's sports participation (such as eating disorders, playing through pain, overtraining, etc.) and the

“let’s go” rhetoric of mass-media advocacy. They make a sustained argument for both individual development and collective action, for the cultivation of traditionally masculine characteristics as well as traditionally feminine ones, for women’s and men’s participation in the “male sport” model and the more participatory “female” version, for engagement with and critique of the media as well as recognition of its more affirmative potentialities. Combining personal narratives, social science research and “close readings” of cultural texts such as advertisements, Heywood and Dworkin develop a third-wave analysis of gender and sport that posits sports as a form of “stealth feminism” which allows girls and women to advocate for equality in opportunity and condition without having to use the “f-word” They note,

the newly iconic image of the female athlete is one of the few sites of resistance against this trend [essentialist notions of sex/gender difference]. The image is one of the few spaces where, unlike elsewhere in the media, female masculinity is validated rather than ignored or repressed with a too-easy-insistence on essential sexual difference. (p. 45)

Heywood and Dworkin also suggest cultural images and texts of female athletes be read through the lens of third-wave feminism which allows for the contradictions inherent in discursive and representational frameworks of female athletes without the need to resolve these contradictions or tensions. This framework has been particularly useful for moving away from the “objectification thesis” to acknowledge and explain the nuance and complexity in images of female athletes that may draw upon sexualized imagery yet are not necessarily indicative of a lack of agency on the part of female athletes themselves or the viewers/audiences that consume these images.

Future Directions

Feminist scholars who study sport, gender and media are producing scholarship that is both informed by and deviates from some of these foundational studies. Certainly, feminist cultural studies of sport, intersectionality and the female athlete as a contested terrain remain useful and important theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Moreover, feminist scholars continue to publish studies that utilize conventional communication/media studies methodologies, such as content and textual analysis, to study the media coverage of women’s sports and the media’s representation of female athletes. While those foundations continue to remain impactful and to shape

the field, what has changed as we move further into the twenty-first century is the social, political, cultural and societal dynamics, developments, transitions and transformations which shape sport, media and gender, necessarily impacting how it is we design, employ and engage our investigations into sport media. Very obvious transformations have to do with the media itself. While mainstream media outlets such as newspapers, television and magazines continue to dominate, it has been suggested that their power and influence may be mitigated by the emergence of “new media”: online media outlets, blogs and social media have shifted the power dynamics to some extent and have allowed for diversity in voices, perspectives and representations. Spectators and fans can speak to and against mainstream media coverage, as was evidenced in the objections raised, primarily on social media, to some of the antiquated and sexist representations and coverage of female athletes during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Of course, social media and online platforms are subject to the same capitalist imperatives as traditional media and are not removed from the broader socio-political context and as such do not offer utopian possibilities for new ways of representing sports. Yet, the emergence of new media compels scholars to re-envision the relationships between producer, consumer and text; to re-think the question of author/authorship of texts, to re-examine media hegemony in agenda setting and framing.

Certainly, the historical moment in which media coverage, representations and texts are produced shifts and our frameworks must shift correspondingly. While Title IX remains an important historical context through which to understand gender, sport and media in the United States, we are now approaching the 45th anniversary of Title IX. The cultural impact of the legislation has created a context for girls’ and women’s sport participation in such a way that scholars have noted we are in a “post-Title IX”, postfeminist moment. The primary struggle for American girls and women as a collective is not simply advocating for the right to play, rather, while not entirely different or distinct, it is certainly nuanced and complex. Moreover, if Title IX was passed 45 years ago, what does it mean that the mainstream sport media continue to silence, marginalize and trivialize women’s sports—patterns that were identified in media coverage over 40 years ago? Theoretical and methodological approaches are needed to better understand the resistance of mainstream sport media to capture the realities of contemporary sports in the United States. Indeed, this generation of feminist scholars are engaged with postfeminist theories and frameworks to explore the seeming contradictions and nuances in sport media.

I began this chapter with Breanna Stewart’s call for change regarding the lack of coverage of women’s sports in the mainstream sport media. While certainly there have been both subtle and dramatic changes in the ways in

which female athletes and women's sports are discursively articulated and how they are represented in the media, I find myself surprised at the persistence of sexism, racism and homophobia as well as how much of what scholars were writing in the 1980s and 1990s pertains to the landscape of women's sports today. Unfortunately, given the ways in which notions of progress shape knowledge production, often scholarship that has not been published in the last few years is viewed as "out-of-date", no longer relevant or lacking in theoretical or methodological sophistication compared to the contemporary concepts or frameworks that are in vogue. I would argue that unless feminist scholars immerse ourselves in this foundational scholarship, particularly given the resistance to progressive change when it comes to media and sport, our analyses of contemporary sport media will be limited as a result. I hope that this chapter has provided the reader with an entry point into key developments and trajectories that serve as the foundation for future feminist analyses of sport and media.

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