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An Examination of How the Media Portrayed Professional Female Athletes during the 2023 Women's World Cup in the Match-up between Spain and the United States

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COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	pg. 3
Literature Review.....	pg. 5
Literature Review: Women’s Soccer History in Spain.....	pg. 5
Literature Review: Women’s Soccer History in the United States.....	pg. 5
Literature Review: Title IX.....	pg. 5
Literature Review: Feminist Theory.....	pg. 6
Literature Review: Media Coverage of Female Athletes.....	pg. 7
Literature Review: Women’s World Cup Coverage.....	pg. 13
Research Questions.....	pg. 15
Methodology.....	pg. 15
Findings.....	pg. 18
Discussion.....	pg. 23
Appendix A.....	pg. 27
Appendix B.....	See Packet
References.....	pg. 30

Introduction

The progression of professional female football (soccer) in Spain has been a growing subject since 1971, when the Royal Spanish Football Federation's president, Jose Luis Perez Paya, publicly expressed his disapproval of female athletic attire. In 1988, the Royal Spanish Football Federation formally recognized women's football. For quick comparison, the United States women's national soccer team played its first-ever match in 1988. Before this match, the United States women's professional soccer league spent three years as a national team and was fully recognized by the United States Soccer Federation. Despite the sport's growth in both countries, the women's national teams continue to confront many issues. One of them includes how the media portrays female athletes.

In 1988, FIFA established the Women's World Cup. Women, however, played the sport for approximately 61 years prior, (Guzman 2023). In 1991, the first FIFA Women's World Cup brought in more than half a million television viewers to see all 12 national teams compete. For a quick comparison in 2023, the FIFA Women's World Cup generated close to 2 million Television viewers, (Dixon 2023). The tournament continues to grow its audience and media presence.

The United States Women's Soccer Team has a lengthy history of dominance and success in the Women's World Cup. Out of the 10 tournaments in the history of the FIFA Women's World Cup, the U.S. has won four of the total produced. The United States is the only country to have that many FIFA Women's World Cup Championships, Only Germany has won multiple titles, with two, in the five tournaments where the United States did not come on top, the team finished in the top three. During the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, the USWNT left the tournament at their first early exit ever during round 16.

Meanwhile, Spain has never claimed a top-three spot in the FIFA Women's World Cup and the team has never come close to winning the whole thing until 2023. In the championship ceremony Luis Rubiales, the Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) President kissed Jenni Hermoso without her consent. Jenni Hermoso was one of the key players on the Spanish team during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup tournament.

The coverage of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup from both Spain and the United States showed a common trend of media content surrounding the kiss, and very little pertaining to the tournament, nor Spain's success. The content produced before the tournament showcased pre-tournament logistics, team profiles, and other data predicting a possible outcome of the tournament. The content produced after the tournament showed an overwhelming of media produced surrounding the kiss between Jenni Hermoso and Luis Rubiales. This summary of content highlights both the United States' source and the Spanish media source.

This project is an examination of how the media portrayed professional female athletes during the 2023 World Cup in Spain versus the United States. This project will consist of a literature review of the history of both countries, an overview of feminist theory, and past studies that show current patterns of biases or stereotypical behavior in today's mainstream media. This project will also consist of a cross-examination and comparison between Spain and the United States, specifically examining the timeline of events between the two. The purpose of this study is to compare the media trends of professional female athletes during the 2023 World Cup between Spanish and U.S. media.

Literature Review

Women's Soccer History in Spain

Spain's women's football history is lengthy, yet it all starts and ends with the Royal Spanish Football Federation. The RFEF is the organization that is in charge of soccer operations in Spain. This organization has been a key factor in the growth and depth of Spain's Women's team. When Women's football clubs started in 1970, the RFEF President Jose Luis Perez Paya stated that he wasn't against Women's sports. However, women's athletic clothing was not feminine or aesthetically pleasing. The RFEF prevented Women's football from growing on one major account, in 1972, when Spain was supposed to participate in and host the Women's World Cup, the RFEF opposed the idea. The RFEF finally granted the Women's soccer team a stamp of approval with the creation of the national team and the national cup (Admin & Trials, 2022).

Women's Soccer History in the United States

In the first half of 1921, the nonaffiliated women's soccer leagues were disbanded until the 1950s, when the first organized soccer league began, the Craig Club Girls' Soccer League. (Macfarlane 2023). After this point in time, the United States experienced a steady growth in Women's soccer under a democratic government. In 1985, the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT) was formally recognized by its home country, and with the final bit of approval, the USWNT captured its first FIFA Women's World Championship against Norway in 1991(US Soccer 2023).

Title IX

In June of 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments was signed into law by President Nixon. This law, "prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity," (Women Sports Foundation 2021). From this law, the United States saw substantial progress from 1972 to 1985, when the USWNT became fully recognized. Title IX only made female sports increasingly

popular throughout the United States. Title IX allowed female athletes to start playing their sports without fear of discrimination. However, Title IX did not prohibit the inequality in the media surrounding female athletes.

Feminist Theory

The relatively recent acceptance of women in sports can be partially explained through feminist theory, which analyzes “gender as a category of experience in society” (Coakley, 2000, p. 61). In Coakley’s discussion of feminist theory concerning gender roles in sports, he stated that sports are, “clearly a gendered activity,” (Coakley, 2000, p. 61). Sport “welcomes boys and men more enthusiastically than girls and women,” (Coakley, 2000, p. 61). Coakley then goes on to state that sports serve as a place where traits, values, or skills that are more “masculine” are celebrated, (Coakley, 2000, p.61). This leaves the door open for a discussion regarding the gender roles surrounding sports.

Lisa Cuklanz’s ‘Feminist Theory in Communication’ takes a similar perspective on how feminist theory and communication can become a highlighted point in gender. Cuklanz (2016), identifies patterns in mainstream media such as “sexualized photos of female athletes (and not of male athletes) are similarly due to the treatment of women as ancillary sexual objects and an accompanying bias against the importance of their contribution in the public sphere,” (p. 4). Further, Cuklanz (2016) argued that feminist theory extends beyond gender and power to include “textual elements including race, sexuality, and class” as well as “other categories including religion and ethnicity” (p. 4). Thus, viewing media through a feminist lens offers insight into the power struggle between gender, race, and class.

Media Coverage of Female Athletes

In 2016, Hans C. Schmidt released an analysis of how the media portrays female athletes versus male athletes. Within that analysis, Schmidt identified a study by Angela Lumpkin, where Lumpkin identified three key factors that described how the media proves to be a disadvantage to females in sports.

Lumpkin's first factor is the limited coverage of women's sporting events. Women's sports have been shown to have limited coverage compared to the opposite sex. The second factor from Lumpkin's study is "how women's sports are given a second-class standing," (, p. 58). Women's sports are known as that, not 'the activity' or 'the soccer team', but 'the Women's soccer team.' Additionally, men are given prime spots for their televised athletic events, when it comes to women's it's not necessarily the same. Lumpkin's third factor is a "persistent emphasis on femininity in women's sports coverage," (, p. 58). Women's sports are subject to gendered stereotypical bias, sexualization of that athlete, and more.

Schmidt then noted that women's sports have received little media recognition. Specifically, the total content produced by newspapers that highlight a women's sports team was at 3 percent, for an individual athlete it was five percent. The content produced by televised sports coverage in local sports and national sports programs comes to 8 percent. Additionally, major networks like ESPN's Sports Center produced two percent of broadcasting time, (Schmidt 2016).

In Schmidt's research, he found that women's and men's sports have a gap in the level of coverage with the media. For example, Schmidt utilized examples like March Madness, the Olympics, and high school sports to portray the inequality of coverage between men and women. Schmidt concluded that the total amount of media material produced regarding the Women's

teams in March Madness never exceeded one-quarter of the overall media content (Schmidt 2016). Additionally, Schmidt found that of all the newspaper content produced covering high schools only one-third is primarily focused on female athletes (Schmidt 2016). Schmidt (2016) also concluded that there are similarities between women's Olympic sports compared to the coverage of men's Olympic sports. Some of these similarities include the lack of content on all levels, newspapers, major broadcasting platforms, etc. all produced a low amount of content relating to female athletes.

In addition, he discovered some characteristics of how the media portrays women and men separately. "Women's sports and female athletes are trivialized, deprioritized, and given 'second-class' status", (p. 202). Much like Lumpkin's study, the key factors identified when looking into the media when comparing the coverage of women's sports versus men's sports was a second-class status of female athletes, and sporting event coverage were identified. In Schmidt's discovery, there was a continued reference to Lumpkin's research. "Female athletes are more frequently referenced by first name than men are, and the subordinate status of women's sports is reinforced by the practice of attaching gender markings of women's sports (e.g. "Women's final four") but not men's sports", (Lumpkin, 2009).

Schmidt used this information from Lumpkin's research to show that women are called by their first name, rather than last name. The title of a large sporting event is titled with the gender first for women's sports but not in men's sports. Further, Schmidt found that women are called girls when discussing their athleticism, but men are not called boys when discussing their athleticism. Overall, Schmidt's research portrays the lack of media engagement with women's sports about men's sports. The terms used by the media to describe women's sports are not terms of endearment, they showcase the lack of respect for women's athleticism.

A study by Merryn Sherwood published in 2016, discussed the leading factors that cause the media to give a low priority to women's sports, the three institutional forces that regulate the coverage of women's sports, and lastly, the reader's interest regarding the topic. "Media content analysis has offered crucial perspectives regarding how women's sports are represented; however, content analysis alone offers little insight into the institutional structures that govern the process of news production from the view of those who produce it: journalists and editors," (Sherwood 2016, p. 649).

In Sherwood's discovery, she cited three institutional forces that regulated the coverage of women's sports: the heavily populated newsrooms which include the majority of men, the mirror and smoke surrounding an assumption on reader's interest, and lastly, the first two factors coming into play in a sports newsroom or during the production of a sports-focused media outlet. Sherwood then expressed that for women to be accepted into the sports media profession they must adapt to the "patriarchal environment" (p. 649) to be accepted or have a long-lasting career in the field.

"Sports newsrooms are run by men, and men decide that men's sports have the most news value. Most often this is justified by stating the sports news audience wants to hear about men's sports," (p. 649). In 2005, a study of U.S. sports editors was published regarding the thought process behind coverage of women's sports. Sherwood discovered that readers' considerations of the sports industry were driven by "personal beliefs and a hegemonic ideology regarding women's sports," (p. 649). This discovery is the primary factor that "determines key elements of sports news work," (p. 649). Sherwood's research described the current structure underpinning women's sports coverage which is shown through the production, or lack thereof,

by sports media outlets. Since sports news is governed by specific values and structures, it causes concern that women's sports are not being equally covered as men's sports.

In a study that investigated the Dutch print media's coverage of women's sports, Knoppers and Elling (2004) found that journalists used strategies of interest and objectivity to stay neutral. "This is why a men's tournament can be more important than a woman's event. The women's world championships in basketball just aren't as important as the men's championships. When you have to choose who gets seven minutes of airtime and who gets four, then naturally the choice falls on the men," (p. 65).

Sherwood left Knoppers and Elling's study by concluding that "assigning a beat to a particular sport immediately prioritizes its coverage and legitimizes the sport, code, or team it covers. Journalism work is therefore organized by a system that is defined by news values but also readership considerations, and in the case of sports, both of these factors prioritize the coverage of men's sports", (Knoppers, A., & Elling, A. 2004). Thus, sports networks make women's sports a low priority based on the combination of research, personal beliefs, and what they believe attracts reader interest. Hardin (2005) explained this phenomenon as the result of a "hegemonic worldview" that only allows men to properly grow in the industry, which leaves women in the industry at a disadvantage.

Hardin's study also connects with Knoppers and Elling, who concluded that an equal amount of coverage, and framing of Women's sports that showcase the sport as exciting or interesting can increase the sport (Hardin 2005, p. 65). Hardin then expressed that in her deep dive into why women are excluded in the sports industry is because of the objectivity, interest, or tradition that is lacking in women's sports.

In Hardin's study, there was a citation of surveys from U.S. sports editors. In the cited survey, Hardin found that there is a concentration on *ethics* and *professionalism*. The surveys that were conducted show a commitment to professionalism. However, some responses showed differences in attitudes and ethical issues in sports departments (p.66). In the 1980s, out of the 175 surveyed editors, there was an awareness of women's sports within that specific group of editors. However, that same group of individuals showed resistance to maintaining or providing the necessary coverage that women's sports need (p. 66). In 1998, a second survey was introduced to 200 or more editors and the results showed that few of the editors surveyed thought there were diversity issues in the sports industry.

This data led Hardin to conclude that "among newspapers in the Southeastern United States, (1) sports section gatekeepers determine content based more on their sense about audience interests than on the audience itself; and (2) their sense about audience interest is driven, at least in part, by personal beliefs and hegemonic ideology about women's sports," (p. 72). Hardin added that going off pure interest of your audience can be a flawed belief which leads the editor or sports industry into more of a hegemonic decision on what the reader's interests are based on their own beliefs, values, interests, or opinions.

In Guy Harrison's text, 'On the Sidelines' Harrison discussed some of the qualities American media prefers when seeing a female reporter for an athletic event on their television screen. According to Harrison, to gain interest in a women's sport you have to be appealing to the majority of heterosexual men who take interest and have control of the sports industry. "Neoliberalism, another term with multiple recognized meanings, is a political and economic structure that governs women in sportscasting, among other folk, hovering over the industry as a specter, shaping and informing the female sportscaster subject," (p. 13).

Harrison (2021) further concluded that “while industry statistics showing gendered disparities may appear to be a natural consequence of the way women, men, girls, and boys have been taught to engage in sports socially, it is that the sports media industry has played an equal role in the perpetuation of the status quo,” (p. 24). It’s subjective for a broader audience to engage with men’s sports more than women’s based on their engagement with sports socially growing up and how men treat or engage with female athletes in the industry today. It calls into question how men view women in a place outside of a stereotypical role in today’s society, a place of power and strength.

Harrison (2021) also brings Neoliberal Feminism into the discussion. Neoliberal Feminism places women under labels such as “entrepreneurial subjects” and “individual enterprises” (p. 13), while women still carry on the stereotypical roles that society expects of women, such as the care work of a family being distinctively on their shoulders. This idealism leaves women in a balancing act between not having it all and they must stick to the status quote of what they may or may not have been brought up to believe, or a new idea of wanting to have it all and being a reliable professional, and mom. (Harrison 2021, P. 13).

Similarly, Wensing and Bruce (2003) pulled past references to what happened when women did receive the coverage they deserved, but maybe in a light that was less than deserving. In instances where women do receive coverage, research has entailed that the media has used five techniques to represent women in cultural ideas about femineity. The five techniques are gender marking, compulsory heterosexuality, appropriate femineity, Infantilization, and downplaying sports (Bruce 2008, p. 60).

In a comparison between the two, “gender marketing” was identified when men’s sporting events were called ‘the’ event. Then, when it came down to a female event it was

labeled as a “women’s event,” (p. 60). “Compulsory heterosexuality” a term used by heterosexual men who put women into a place of sexual objectivity or in “heterosexuality-prescribed roles,” helps portray past and present-day labeling of sporting events (Bruce 2008, p. 60). These are the stereotypical roles that society has pressured women with. This includes but is not limited to “wives, mothers, an appropriate femineity that emphasizes stereotypical female characteristics,” (Bruce 2008, p. 60). The stereotypical female characteristics related to the mindset of compulsory heterosexuality include “physical or emotional weakness, tears, and concern for others,” (Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

To downplay the success or rightful media interest there could be an “Infantilization,” which is a term that uses someone’s childlike label in a way that is not endearing to the success or respect of oneself (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). For example, the sports industry has a habit of calling “adult females, ‘girls’ while males are more often called ‘men’,” (Wensing & Bruce, 2003)”, This has a common attribute in the industry, such as downplaying the sport or focusing primarily on the female athlete’s appearance, relationship status, sexual orientations, and bringing in their outside lives to devalue their sporting identities(Wensing & Bruce, 2003). This paints a clear picture of what occurs when the media portrays female athletes in a negative light versus how they portray male athletes in a more positive direction. Research shows the gender ideologies of the sports industry and where we see continued patterns of inequality in the industry. Bruce argued that eliminating gender marking, compulsory heterosexuality, appropriate femineity, and infantilization, would improve coverage of women’s sports.

Women’s World Cup Coverage

Petty and Pope conducted a quantitative analysis that found an increase in the coverage comparison between the 2015 and 2019 FIFA Women’s World Cup Tournament (Pope et al.,

2023). The number of articles in 2015 was 124, in 2019 there were 642. Of the 642, 462(72%) were from broadsheets and 180(28%) of that 642 number were from tabloids. The above numbers show an increase in women's football. From the broadsheets, there's a 56% increase from 2015. From those numbers, the research shows that there is more concern for serious coverage of women's football over popular tabloids (Pope et al., 2023).

The increase in media coverage is a step in the right direction, however, it does not answer the concerns about the tone of the content produced from 2015 to 2019. In 2015, the research showed a string of positive coverage across both tabloid and broadcasting platforms. The overall focus of the articles produced was to focus on the athletic success of a player or a team (Pope et al., 2023). Further, Pope et al. (2023) found a shift in sexual objectification in 2015 and 2019, in that there was no mention of a player's "sexual appeal" found in the media content produced in both 2015 and 2019 again.

Beissel (2021) conducted a content analysis that showed how women were labeled during a social media strategy for the FIFA Women's World Cup. With a bid social analysis for the 2021 FIFA Women's World Cup Beissel identified the gendered marking or labels throughout social media in the social media campaigns or 'bids' they used. According to Beissel (2021), the terms women and girls revealed the role gender played in the social media strategy. Out of the 812 tweets, the term women was used 230 times, and the term girl was used a total of 33 times.

According to Beissel (2021), 33 times "girl" was used on a social media app concerning the FIFA Women's World Cup for 2023 in connection or "conjunction" with the term "growth" for a total of 12 times. With this perception in mind, it gives a sense of positive projection of women in the sport, not in a perspective of belittlement or condescending nature.

Research Questions

Previous research on feminist theory and the coverage of female athletes in Spain and the U.S. leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What differences exist in the terminology used to describe female soccer players between U.S. and Spanish media?

RQ2: Were there differences in coverage by male and female reporters?

RQ3: What topics were covered by U.S. and Spanish media during the Women's World Cup?

RQ4: To what extent does the data suggest coverage has changed about previous research?

Methodology

Thematic analysis is a “foundational method for qualitative analysis, (Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2006). “Qualitative analytic methods can be roughly divided into two camps. Within the first, there are those tied to, or stemming from, a particular theoretical or epistemological position,” (Braun& Clarke,2006). Within this study, the theoretical position from the beginning of the analysis has been surrounding the cross-comparison of media from the United States and Spain covering the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The overall goal of the thematic analysis is to utilize this research tool to provide discovered themes or patterns from the complex and enhanced set of data, also known as the Data Corpus.

There is not one ideal framework for conducting a qualitative analysis. “Thematic analysis can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’,” (Braun, & Clarke,2006). To utilize this method for the Data Corpus, the researcher identifies themes that relate to the research question, these themes are patterns solidified by the entire Data Corpus. The determination of what a theme is falls on the researcher's discretion based on what the data portrays.

The study conducted is a deductive or a ‘theoretical’ thematic analysis. To help solidify this, “an inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions,” (Braun,& Clarke,2006).

The researcher began with a few codes based on the literature review; these codes served as an entry point. The researcher then revised those codes after analyzing the initial 10 test articles. Additionally, the researcher generated the themes to synthesize and contextualize what was found during the coding process. Codes and themes were not used as the same term during this process. Codes are used to help organize the Data Corpus; the data then informs the themes. This study is not an inductive approach but a theoretical thematic analysis, also known as a deductive analysis. “This study is driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytical interest in the area and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven,” (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006).

To help solidify the qualitative guide to this research study, the researcher used the narrowed research questions listed above to answer the overall cross-comparison question stated in the beginning. Additionally, the researcher used the overall cross-comparison question to answer or drive the project. For a more in-depth methodology for this thematic analysis, the researcher has recorded a step-by-step guide.

Before beginning the analysis, the researcher concluded that the codebook (see Appendix A) was sufficient for the coding process of both sources chosen. The researcher set the timeframe of articles chosen from two weeks before the Women’s World Cup and two weeks after the Women’s World Cup. The official dates for this coding process were July 6 - July 20, 2023, and Aug. 20 – Sept. 3, 2023.

The researcher took articles from two different websites, including The Goal, which represents the United States’ interpretation of the Women’s World Cup and the coverage surrounding the tournament. The second website is Diario AS (AS), a Spanish press outlet. Every article from both websites during the timeframes was coded and organized based on the structure of the codebook.

A total of 266 articles were manually analyzed, with equal attention to each article. During the coding process, the researcher took note of repetitive patterns or themes across the Data Corpus. The articles were coded in an Excel spreadsheet (see Appendix B) for efficiency and organization. ‘AS’ the Spain-represented source covered 126 articles and the United States-represented source covered 140 articles within the chosen timeframe. At the top of the Excel spreadsheet, there were portions of the codebook incorporated for readability.

Those portions of the codebook include the link to the article, the open coding portion, the framing, or interpretation of the topic, and lastly, the categorization of the sources in the article. In the framing or interpretation of the codebook, there were specific definitions and keywords taken as an entry point from the literature review. Those keywords or themes included Infantilization, Feminist Theory, Hegemonic Worldview, and Neoliberal Feminism.

To add qualitative depth, quotes from each article provided additional insight into how it related to that code. Lastly, there was a rating from zero to one, zero meaning there were no negative interpretations of the topic at hand, or the piece didn’t involve an interpretation of the topic. One meaning the article did have an interpretation of the literary controversy listed. The articles that did not meet a frame or an interpretation were roster overviews, game previews, or anything else broadly related to the tournament.

In addition, the researcher collected repetitive patterns and noted if they were themes or not in the findings portion, essentially creating theme piles. The researcher identified which themes were data-supported patterns and which themes had little to no data from the Data Corpus to support those themes, making them essentially still codes. The researcher then reviewed the Data Corpus in its entirety and confirmed that those themes were aligned with the data gathered, if any themes were missed the researcher identified them and corrected them.

From this, the researcher confirmed and moved forward with a top list of repetitive themes throughout the Data Corpus in the discussion section.

Findings

The first research question stated, “What is the frequency of articles regarding female athletes in the United States versus Spain? Specifically highlighting the Women’s World Cup.” Both sources chosen for the coding process had similar patterns of topics that were discussed during the desired timeline. Within that timeframe, each piece covered some section or topic related to the Women’s World Cup. The topics discussed in the 126 articles published affected the tournament before, during, or after the Women’s World Cup. The researcher discovered that from this source alone, two articles were published surrounding the mass shooting that took place in the host countries before the start of the tournament. On an overall look at the findings, 17 out of 126 articles, 13.49 percent of the articles published covered the Rubiales and Hermoso kiss during the Women’s World Cup ceremony. In 13.49 percent of the articles, the coverage was not directly on a female athlete, but on a male figure within the Women’s World Cup Tournament.

Utilizing the first research question above, ‘The Goal’, the United States-represented source covered 140 articles within the chosen timeframe. Within that timeframe out of the 140 articles published a total of 50 articles, 35.71 percent did not surround a female athlete in the Women’s World Cup. A more detailed breakdown of this number shows us that one article covered the mass shooting that took place the day before the opening ceremony in the host country. The other 49 articles covered another topic surrounding the Women’s World Cup. Of the other 49 articles, one discussed the improvement of technology in preparation for the tournament, two articles had Megan Rapinoe discussing former President Donald Trump’s reaction to the USWNT, and the last 46 covered Rubiales and Hermoso’s kiss during the

Women's World Cup ceremony, or Vilda's controversial actions post-tournament. Of the total number of articles, 32.86 percent focused primarily on the kiss between Rubiales and Hermoso at the Women's World Cup, rather than Spain winning the Women's World Cup for the first time. With the above into consideration, the researcher can see that the United States published a substantial number of articles surrounding a male figure, rather than the outcome of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

The second research question stated, "Can we determine the gender of the writer regarding the articles surrounding the chosen topic?" Both sources had known writers, a writer not listed, or the name of a writer that could not determine gender. AS, the Spain-represented source found that out of the 126 articles, 19 articles were unknown or not listed authors. There were 10 articles written by a female, taking the 19 unknown authors out of the 126 total articles published the researcher was left with 107. From that 107 number, of known authors, the researcher can concur that 9.35 percent of the articles published were written by a female author, and 90.65 percent were written by a male author.

Out of the 10 articles written by a female, three of them surrounded the behaviors of Rubiales or Vilda after the Women's World Cup Tournament. There were 17 articles published regarding the behaviors by Rubiales and Hermoso which means a female author only covered three articles, 17.65 percent of the total. However, there were six collaborations by both males and females. Of the 17 articles published regarding the actions at the Women's World Cup, four articles had a collaborative effort by both males and females. This leaves a total of 10 out of the 17 controversial act articles, were written by a male author, for a total of 58.82 percent.

Utilizing the second research question above, The Goal, the United States represented source covered 140 articles. Out of the 140 articles published, 36 were written by an unknown author,

36 were written by a female, and 72 were written by a male. Taking the unknown author amount of the total articles published, 46 out of the 104 articles surrounding the controversial act between Rubiales and Hermoso, only two articles, 4.35 percent were written by a female author. From the numbers and percentages above, we can conclude that 44 of the controversial articles were written by a male author, with an overall 95.66 percent male author presence. Comparing the Spain source to the United States source a similarity here, male authors are more common on both sides. However, the United States represented source has a substantial markup compared to Spain.

The third research question stated, “In the articles are the authors discussing the female athlete’s sexual orientation? Is this common in Spain or more in the United States?” We can concur that out of both sources, there was no coverage of the sexual orientation of a female athlete. However, an article from the Spain-represented source, AS, discusses an offer for German midfielder, Giulia Gwinn, to model for Playboy magazine. She declined that offer to focus on sports. “I respect Playboy as a journalistic product but I’d rather people knew me for being a soccer player out on the field. In general, I think- and hope- we’ll have much more exciting and important topics to discuss with the World Cup coming up” (Fra & Cons, 2023).

With the above information in mind, a response to research question number three regarding Jenni Hermoso’s sexual orientation is based on the kiss between the female athlete and Rubiales. From this, we can concur that a total of 16 articles were published by the Spain-represented source, AS. For a quick comparison, the United States-represented source published 43 articles, The Goal. From a percentage viewpoint, 12.7% of Spain-based articles published discussed the controversial actions by Rubiales, hinting at Hermoso’s sexual orientation, 30.7% of the 140 total by the United States discussed the same topic. This quick comparison shows a substantial

increase in publications regarding this matter from the United States' source as opposed to Spain's represented published source.

Lastly, one final response to research question number three with another article published by Spain's represented source, 'AS,' regarding a claim that Zambia's head coach, Bruce Mwape was sexually abusing players. This article concluded that this is an ongoing investigation regarding the multiple complaints of sexual abuse by Mwape. This was the only article published on this specific topic.

To conclude, the findings portion articulated particular themes or patterns in past research and what they mean now. The final research question asked, 'What topics are discussed within the articles surrounding female athletes in the United States versus Spain? Are they discussing the sport itself or personal matters?' To answer this question, the researcher looked at the frames and interpretation section of each article coded.

From the 126 AS articles, Feminist theory was the frame or interpretation that appeared most frequently throughout the coding process. Articles were coded to reflect concepts proposed by Cuklanz (2016) such as power imbalances based on race, sexuality, class, religion, or ethnicity. The articles showed an unhealthy amount of power when it came to the gender of one or more individuals. The total number of articles that showed a Feminist Theory interpretation or frame was 23 published articles. Out of those 23 articles, 22 were surrounding the Rubiales and Hermoso kissing controversy during the Women's World Cup ceremony.

From this, the gender imbalance between the RFEF president and a successful female athlete during a vulnerable moment. Instead of a discussion regarding the success of Spain's Women's team, there became a discussion of the actions of one man and the proceedings of that one man. The other article surrounded the sexual abuse complaints regarding Zambia's head coach, Bruce

Mwape. This was another instance where a power imbalance was discussed on a level that played a disadvantage to the other gender.

Additionally, the United States-represented source published 140 articles, and out of the materials published 54 articles, 38.6% showed an interpretation or frame from the codebook. The highest interpretation found was the feminist theory. Out of the 54 articles total that recorded a frame, 48, 34.3% of them were the feminist theory interpretation. As mentioned above, this is an article that shows a power imbalance of genders. This included topics like the Rubiales kiss with Hermoso, but another topic happened to be an overview of the missing Barcelona players from World Cup selection due to protesting the team on reports of requesting coaching change.

One reporter described the turmoil: “The RFEF responded to the player revolt with a statement that rejected the idea of players pressuring the association into making changes to the coaching team, claiming that the behavior was “far from exemplary and outside the values of football and sport”. The association stated that it would “only have committed footballers” and made it clear that those who had taken the action of emailing the association would only be considered for selection again if they were to apologize, (Ruszkai, 2023).

Lastly, the second highest interpretation or frame was Neoliberal Feminism with three articles that mentioned traditional stereotypes. Neoliberal Feminism places women in a stereotypical light to carry all the traditional roles of a woman that society expects.

One example included a discussion regarding USWNT’s Julie Ertz’s decision to retire and how she had a historic comeback after having a baby and becoming a mom. “Most of her club career came for Chicago Red Stars, where she played from 2014 to 2021 before making the move to Angel City FC, in Los Angeles. A committed athlete, Ertz made headlines when she returned to

play football just 241 days after giving birth to her child,” (Brennan, 2023). From this, an example of how a female athlete was portrayed when she gave up her career for more time with her family.

The last six articles that showed an interpretation or frame from the codebook was the Hegemonic Worldview. The Hegemonic Worldview “only allows men to properly grow in the industry if course leaves women in the industry at a disadvantage,” (Hardin 2005, p. 65). An article that showed this perfectly was surrounding the FIFA rule change regarding the set bonus according to performance in the Women’s World Cup. With the rule change England’s Lionesses discussed separate performance-related bonuses regarding the squad’s summer’s Women’s World Cup.

“Someone like [former England captain] Steph Houghton previously is someone who did a lot of work behind the scenes that probably wasn’t reported on and people didn’t know as much about. I think we’re in a similar situation now, and I think the point of the players, and everyone involved in women’s football is about taking it to the next level and pushing the ceiling, not wanting to have a ceiling put on our game and making sure we leave the game in a better place than what we found it “(Mills, 2023).

Discussion

The research solidifies work from previous studies that revealed how women have been identified as sexual objects and additional stereotypical biases in mainstream media, (Cuklanz 2016, Bruce 2008, Hardin 2005, Harrison 2021, & Sherwood 2016). The primary contribution of this study is that it demonstrates that present-day mainstream media continues to sexualize or otherwise stereotype female athletes. From the Data Corpus collected the top three themes found were Feminist Theory, Neoliberal Feminism, and Hegemonic Worldview.

From the literature review, Cuklanz (2016), identifies patterns in a feminist theory view in mainstream media such as “sexualized photos of female athletes (and not of male athletes) are similarly due to the treatment of women as ancillary sexual objects and an accompanying bias against the importance of their contribution in the public sphere,” (p. 4). From the findings, the researcher was able to locate numerous accounts where the writer discussed Hermoso and Rubiales’ non-consented kiss over the success of Spain’s Women’s team.

However, there was a reported shift of sexual objectification from 2015 to 2019 by Pope et al. (2023) regarding the respectful tone and nature of mainstream media concerning female athletes. Regarding the findings from the study conducted most recently from the 2023 Women’s World Cup that’s shown not to necessarily be the case any further. Both country-represented sources discussed the sexual orientation of one female athlete in heavy regard, this is shown to be more of a published topic and broadcasting in the United States, versus Spain.

Additionally, Hardin’s (2005) study, referenced from the literature review, discussed a Hegemonic Worldview that would only allow men to continue to grow in the sports industry and leave not only female athletes but also female journalists at a disadvantage. Sherwood (2016) referenced something similar as well, a content analysis was conducted, and it offered little insight into the process by which the editors or journalists choose their stories. Sherwood (2016) also concluded that a majority of newsrooms are integrated by men with the assumption of the reader’s interest.

In the findings, this becomes a solidified trait of mainstream media, the majority of the articles published by the Spanish-based source were written by a male author, and very little according to the findings, were written by a female author. The researcher found that the US-based source had similar results. Male journalists and editors still have a heavy voice in every

newsroom, the studies from 2016 by Sherwood and from Hardin in 2005 still become relevant pieces of material.

Lastly, the other theme that was the most present throughout the findings was Neoliberal Feminism, a concept Harrison (2021) discussed in his study. Neoliberal Feminism holds women to traditional stereotypes from a societal point of view. This stereotypical view includes, women being the head caretaker of the family and the balancing act of wanting to be both a professional and a mom. The researcher identified this in the article surrounding USWNT Julie Ertz's decision to retire to have a baby, become a mom, and then make an incredible comeback. The article could not just talk about the female athlete's success, the writer had to discuss everything she let go of or left behind to be successful, insinuating that Ertz cannot be a professional athlete and mom.

The main takeaways from this study and how it can contribute to the knowledge of media coverage surrounding women's sports follows, that knowledge starts with awareness. The majority of the articles published by both sources were written by men. There was no equality among journalists and editors before the public could even grasp or get a perspective on the topics being discussed. They were topics written predominantly by men, in a newsroom surrounded by primarily men. When it comes to the sexualization and objectification of female athletes it comes down to the publication of mainstream media surrounding female athletes and the public has no choice but to listen to men. The equality of female athletes starts in the writing process before the public's awareness. This is what this study can contribute to the media surrounding female athletes: if you surround women's sports with men all you'll end up getting is a male perspective. When mainstream media covers women's sports you get a broader viewpoint of a female athlete, because the author herself knows the stereotypes, the Hegemonic

Worldview, Infantilization, and what Neoliberal Feminism feels like and looks like. With the research in mind, the researcher has concurred that a positive direction moving forward would be to have more of a diverse gender in the newsrooms.

Recommendations & Limitations

Recommendations for broadcasting and journalist platforms include incorporating more female writers, journalists, editors, etc. into the newsroom, with this the research could concur that the data and published materials would have been different. Additionally, recommendations for the study include looking at media from the 2023 Women's World Cup on a broader scale, utilizing multiple platforms, and not just sticking to two sources representing their respective counties. Limitations of this study include the lack of multi-checking of the data. The data gathered in this study is just the researcher's interpretation. In the future, it would be best to have multiple individuals interpret and code the articles gathered. Additionally, the researcher's limited knowledge of research methods also affected the study.

Appendix A: Codebook

Stage 1: Open Coding

Headline

- Definition: The title of the article.
- Examples: *Spain wins Women's World Cup for the first time, deservedly beating England in Sydney*, *The Kissing Scandal After Spain's Women's World Cup Win*

Newspaper Title

- Definition: The Title of the Newspaper that produced that article.
- Examples: CNN, The New Yorker

Publication Date

- Definition: The date that the article was published.
- Examples: 08, 20, 2023; 08, 28, 2023

Topic

- Definition: The overall topic of the article.
- Examples: The success of Spain's women's World Cup Team in the finals and the controversy surrounding the inappropriate actions of Luis Rubiales.

Frames

- Definition: Interpretation of the topic in the article
- Examples: the success of the women's team, Luis Rubiales taking a successful moment for the women's team away with inappropriate actions.

Sources

- Definition: A player, coach, RFEF, or any sport's related role linked to a statement, opinion, or fact.
- Examples: Luis Rubiales, Irene Paredes, FIFA and RFEF officials

Gender of the Author

- Definition: The gender of the author who wrote the article.
- Example: The New Yorker's article was written by a woman.

Stage 2: Framing/ Interpretation of the topic

Infantilization

- Definition: a term that uses someone's childlike label in a way that does not endear to that athlete's success.
- Examples: Calling the women's team a girls' team. "To downplay the success or rightful media interest there could be an "infantilization," which is a term that uses someone's childlike label in a way that is not endearing to the success or respect of oneself," (Wensing & Bruce, 2003)", (Bruce 2008, P. 60).

Feminist Theory

- Definition: The interplay of gender and power, this term is used to showcase the gender imbalance in a way that one gender objectifies the other.
- Examples: Luis Rubiales uses his power as RFEF president to take advantage of his athletes. “Feminist theory in communication should account for not only the interplay of gender and power but also the relevance of other textual elements including race, sexuality, and class, sexuality, and other categories including religion and ethnicity,” (Cuklanz 2016).

Hegemonic Worldview

- Definition: In the sports industry this would be about only one gender group growing in a way that shows an unfair advantage to the other.
- Examples: An unfair media advantage between the men’s team and the women’s, or showcasing the success of only one gender group. “Hegemonic worldview only allows men to properly grow in the industry if course leaves women in the industry at a disadvantage,” (Hardin 2005, P. 65).

Neoliberal Feminism

- Definition: Neoliberalism is essentially an idea that favors/promotes free market enterprises with minimal government regulation.
- Examples: A successful female athlete giving up her career in sports to raise her family, and then receiving backlash from the media. “Neoliberal Feminism places women under labels such as “entrepreneurial subjects” and “individual enterprises”, while women still carry on the stereotypical roles that society expects of women,” (Harrison 2021, P. 13).

Stage 3: Categorization of Sources

The Leagues

- Definition: Professional sports leagues, schools, or teams.
- Examples: FIFA, RFEF, Spain’s Women’s National Football Team, and current or professional athletes. This could also include the United States of America Women’s National Soccer Team, NWSLPA, USWNT, and England Women’s National Football Team.

Players

- Definition: Present-day athletes in the league.
- Examples: Alex Morgan, etc.

Political/Royal Officials

- Definition: A political or royal official, this could include a present president or the current King or Queen of the royal family.
- Examples: Queen Letizia of Spain

Coaches

- Definition: Present-day coaches in the league.
- Examples: Spain’s previous head coach of Spain’s Women’s World Cup team, Jorge Vilda.

Independent Analysis

- Definition: Experts from individuals or groups that report factual information in their analysis of a particular topic.
- Examples: Professors, journalists, or media outlets that first reported the story, as well as doctors, policy experts, lawyers, etc.

Disgraced Public Officials

- Definition: Previous public officials with a controversial background.
- Examples: Jorge Vilda post-firing, Spain's soccer president Luis Rubiales post-kiss.

Appendix B: See Excel Spreadsheets in Packet

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