

“HER WINNING PERSONALITY”:  
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS  
OF MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF FEMALES IN SPORT

by

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## **Abstract**

At the intersection of fourth-wave feminism and third-wave sports media research, this critical discourse analysis will focus on the ways in which gender hierarchy and gender expectations are manifested in articles on ESPN.com. Through the investigation of sports media framing techniques, the ESPN articles in examination construct an idealized female identity within sports through the language used. This narrow view of female athletes allows for the power and influence that sports media has to construct gender hierarchies in the media landscape.

Using Fairclough’s (1989) method of conducting a critical discourse analysis, the prevalent sports media sentiments about Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Serena Williams will illustrate the sexist, racist, and homophobic language used. Through applying the Televised Sports Manhood Formula (Messner et. al, 2000) as a foundational discourse in sports media to journalism, the hierarchy of sports media results in the use of character framing techniques for sportswomen. When aspects like ambivalence and non-sports related information are emphasized, these strategies uphold the masculine hegemony of sports media.

**Keywords:** Sports media sentiment, gender, gender hierarchy, critical discourse analysis, Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, Serena Williams.

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## **Introduction**

This major research paper (MRP) will investigate what the sports media sentiments are towards successful female athletes and how these sentiments are constructed through language. The research will be done through a critical discourse analysis. This area of research is inspired by the lack of visibility of female athletes in sports media as a result of my professional background. Noting this lack of female representation in sports media and the unnerving observation of male dominated discourse in sports inspire me to write this.

Recent literature surrounding the intersection of sports media and gender has coincided with feminist scholarly research. In first wave sports media research, findings concluded that gender stereotypes of female athletes were legitimized through reproduction and rarely diverted from gender norms (LaVoi, 2013). With constant references to appearance, their family role, and other non-sports related information, this set the foundation for what was appropriate femininity in sports media and built on harmful gender stereotypes. The second wave of sports media research has focussed on digital media empowerment as well as intersectional analysis using variables like gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality (LaVoi, 2013, p. 45). Stated by Williams (1997), “the media do not merely represent; they also recreate the world as desirable, and salable. What they reproduce is chosen, not random, not neutral, and not without consequence” (p. 79). In these examinations of sports media, research indicated that athletes outside a prioritized white, male, heterosexual identity are subjugated in media representations. This informs the foundation for my critical discourse analysis focused on female athletes who are outside of the prioritized norm.

The current state of sports media is greatly informed in the United States by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. This federal civil rights law “ensures legal protection against discrimination for students and employees, which includes protection from sexual

harassment” (Valentin, 1997, p. 124). This opened the door for equal opportunity for women to partake in athletics at education institutions (Morris, 2014). Due to open interpretation of Title IX, equal funding was designated to women in athletic departments across the United States which helped to improve female integration into the cultural arena of sports (Morris, 2014). As a result, sportswomen have been included in sport media, but significantly less so than their male counterparts, being allotted only “10% of print media and a mere 5% of televised news coverage” (Bruce, 2015, p. 362) which solidifies sports media as a site of masculinity.

The Title IX legislature contributed to a perceived change in the sports world (Clasen, 2001; Messner et. al, 1993), away from an absolutist, male hegemony and towards an inclusive and diverse area in culture. Despite this legal ruling, the fact that more participation occurred did not result in sports media obtaining equality or for the gendered hierarchy within it to absolve. Meân & Kassing (2008) take the stance that even in this structure, “actual empowerment of females remains illusive while traditional gendered power status remains intact” (p.142). This reproduced ideology of female inferiority extends and is perpetuated by sports media (Denham, 2004; Bruce, 2015), meaning intersectional feminist empowerment does not actually manifest itself within the current institution of sports media. This has resulted in professional female athletes experiencing a reinforced proverbial glass ceiling in media representation and quality of content.

The first phase of this major research paper is composed of a literature review that will evaluate academic research focused on the separate sphere ideology, the dual role of the female athlete, and the masculinity of sports media. The second phase of this MRP will use data scrapped using Voyant Tools in order to quantify the language used in ESPN.com articles about successful female athletes. This will provide the foundation for the critical discourse analysis

which will be done through the lens of Fairclough's (1989) three dimensions: Description, Interpretation, Explanation.

The following paper will critically analyze specific ESPN.com articles focused on the accomplishments of Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Serena Williams. This will exemplify the preconceived concepts of gender hierarchy and the expectations of female athletes in sports media. My argument is that by adhering and promoting the masculine-orientation (sexist, racist, and homophobic strategies) of sports media, female athletes are susceptible to criticism that is rooted in the gender hierarchy put forth by sports media discourse.

### **Research Questions**

*RQ1: Using the examples of Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Serena Williams, what are the prevalent sports media sentiments towards successful female athletes?*

The first research question centers on understanding the role of the female athlete communicated by sports media (Meân & Kassing, 2008; Clasen 2001). Williams (1997) asserts, "The media, for better and frequently for worse, constitute one of the major forces in the shaping of our nation vision, a chief architect of the American sense of identity" (p. 79). By building on the importance of framing, media representation, and news media as a tool for dissemination of thought (Lewis & Weaver, 2015), the language that is used in sports journalism when focused on female athletes will either negate or confirm the separate sphere ideology (Ganong & Coleman, 2014). These athletes are described through a variety of framing techniques such as ambivalence, sexualization, gender marking, infantilization, and mandatory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity which contribute to character framing for the athlete (Bruce, 2013; Bruce, 2015).

These prevalent sports media sentiments come to inform public reception of such athletes and intensifies whose identities are spotlighted in sports media.

*RQ2: How does sports media illustrate their preconceived concepts of gender hierarchies and gender expectations?*

Cultural commentaries (Morris, 1992; Scott, 1988; Valentin, 1997) about the gender divide can then be extended to my examples. As per works by Bremner (2002), Bruce (2013; 2015), Hardin & Whiteside (2009), and Yeates (1995), sport media creates a hierarchy of quality when consuming sports content based on the division of gender which prioritizes male athletes. In this structure, sportswomen are reduced to being entertainment for White, heterosexual males (Denham, 2004). When female athletes are included in sports media, gender expectations are heightened as a result of character framing techniques. When an identity is outside of the favoured norm, sportswomen are symbolically annihilated from coverage (Tuchman, 1978) through character framing because they do not fit this package of what a “true” sportswoman is.

## **Literature Review**

Themes

1. Separate Sphere Ideology
2. Dual Role of the Female Athlete
3. The Masculinity of Sports Media

### **1. Separate Sphere Ideology**

Ganong & Coleman (2014) explain the cultural belief of a separate sphere that divides women from men professionally, echoed in the breadwinner-homemaker dichotomy (Morris, 1992). This ideology is not a definitive truth but rather provides a narrow guide for establishing

the public sphere as masculine and the private sphere as feminine which is then repeated throughout culture (Davidson & Hatcher, 2002). Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) asserts gender is a performance which operates in flux and is indicated by culture (p. 9). Butler states, "Gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits gender as a multiple interpretation of sex" (1990, p. 10). Lorber (1994) explains gender as: "A process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state, as well as in sexuality, language, and culture" (p. 5). Enforcement of a narrow definition of gender affects the separate sphere ideology because of the variability of gender and the multiple experiences individuals have, such as the influence of socio-economic variables (class, race, ethnicity and more).

Butler's (1990) text destabilizes the idea that women have one centralized experience: Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. (p. 6)

To limit an individual's experience within their gender is to deny them of the complexities and multiple experiences they have. The socioeconomic factors which influence gender and construct immovable categories creates a system of domination and hierarchy in gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987.) As a result of the culturally accepted difference and hierarchy between sexes, the separate sphere ideology placed emphasis on women to remain

devoted to their family life and religion<sup>1</sup>. This established that the private sphere was for women and the public sphere was for men.

Heteronormativity is also reinforced in this ideology, explained by Brenneman (2014): “The traditional image of an American family is that of wives being responsible for the household labor and husbands serving as the primary family breadwinner working in the labor market” (p. 840). Near the conclusion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the separate sphere ideology began to be questioned in society (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 391) and with the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “female sexuality, motherhood, and marriage were redefined” (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 391).

The poststructuralist approach that Scott (1988) takes in examining the equality-versus-difference debate of gender is through the lens of Jacques Derrida (1981). Derrida’s explanation of binaries states: “One of the two terms governs the other...or has the upper hand” (1981, p. 41). In western culture the emphasis on binary oppositions posits the leading terms to have hierarchical value over the secondary term, which culturally extends to the gender debate (Scott, 1988, p. 37). With the first taking priority, the second is always in contrast and is therefore derivative and holds no or limited power (Scott, 1988, p. 37). For Scott (1988) gender difference, “becomes tied to kinds of cultural representations” and “serves to encode or establish meanings that are literally unrelated to gender or the body” (p. 37). Gender then becomes a marker for highlighting difference within culture and is the backbone of the separate sphere ideology.

Valentin (1997) is also a proponent for this perspective of the equality-versus-gender debate. Valentin (1997) credits there must be a “balance acknowledgement of difference with a

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<sup>1</sup> Historically, the division of men and women in profession began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the change from working in fields to working in cities due to industrial capitalism (Pfister, 2013, p. 165). In the preindustrial era, the gendered division of labour remained intact, but women’s and men’s obligations were still home oriented. Women directed attention to child rearing, attending to the sick, and supporting the physical needs of the house while men concentrated on the children’s “religious and moral education and training for work” (Laslett & Brenner, 1989, p. 386). Male offspring were the focus in these practices.

vision for the common goals of gender equality” meaning that the challenge will be to credit gender difference but in the perspective that it will bring about fairness between the terms male and female that are in binary opposition (p. 135).

The work *A Separate Violence: The Politics of Shaming* by Bonnie Morris (1992) describes the conditioning of gender within the public, with woman experiencing historical shame for their existence in this sphere: “Since all women were judged guilty of being fashioned in the image of Eve, the original sinner and temptress, womanhood itself was shameful” (Morris, 1992, p. 203). The shamefulness is rooted in womanhood and establishes a theoretical grounding to analyze how woman are received in the public sphere.

Laslett & Brenner (1989) thematize professionalization as a way that the separate sphere ideology takes shape within culture and is applicable in this research area of what the prominent sports media sentiments are towards female athletes. Laslett & Brenner (1989) explain that “women's exclusion from male fields as they became "professionalized" limited their activities to work that could, in some sense, be claimed as part of women's domain” (p. 397). The separation of what constitutes professionalized work for men and women therefore differs as a result of exclusionary practices. This drives the schism between public and private spheres deeper and contributes to gender bias in professions as a result. Despite great progress, this outdated power structure remains in effect today within all aspects of culture (Blackwood, 2010; Davis & Greenstein, 2009; Hochschild & Machung, 1989) through maintaining and perpetuating that the role of females is to remain in the private spheres by being nurturing mothers and attending to household needs (Ganong & Coleman, 2014).

## **2. Dual Role of the Female Athlete**

The literature surrounding the dual role of the female athlete is impacted by gender stereotyping within sports media by promoting heterosexuality and motherhood for female athletes to embody. When women are featured in sports media, their power and talent are stereotyped in ways that sexualizes (LaVoi, 2013) or fix women within traditional femininity (Kane et al., 2013; Meân & Kassing, 2008). First wave sports media research investigated “how media reproduce, legitimize, and occasionally challenge ideologies of gender” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 39). The second wave of this research area concluded that athletes must balance their role in being *firstly* a female with embedded gender expectations and *secondly* an athlete which challenges traditional femininity. Sports media’s obsession with female athletes embodying heteronormativity results in portraying sportswoman as female athletes *and* in the role of mother and/or “wife, fiancé, or girlfriend” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 42). A professional female athlete is first and foremost a female, and secondly an athlete under this ideology (Gaydon, 1983). The femininity that the sportswoman symbolizes contradicts the masculinity of sport, which is where society forms a strange relation with the female athlete (Clasen, 2001, p. 37). Since women embody this paradox, their existence in the masculine realm of sports “limits woman’s potential” (Clasen, 2001, p. 36).

Women’s introduction to the area of sport was an environment that Messner (1988) calls “contested ideological terrain” (p. 65). A variety of unfounded excuses were cited to bar women from participating in sports; from medical to paternalistic restraints (Ezzell, 2009), women’s reproductive abilities were given priority over being athletes. This indicated that being both an athlete and mother at the same time was impossible by virtue of the structure of sports (Pfister, 2013, p. 169). Pfister states: “Due to the high demands on time and energy, some perceive the

roles of athlete and mother to be incompatible. However, examples show that mothers can quite soon resume their training and continue to be successful in their sports” (2013, p. 179).

This justification perpetuates a “heterosexist frame” (Ezzell, 2009, p. 115) towards female athletes. This frame contributes to labelling female athletes outside of heteronormativity to be masculinized lesbians (LaVoi, 2013) as a means of controlling identity. When a woman does not fall into the idealized heterosexual categorization or isn’t prioritizing physical attractiveness associated with femininity, these athletes are then characterized by aspects of “their non-normative identity” (Hills and Kennedy, 2009, p. 126) and labelled deviant-mutants (Kane, 1995) outside of the preferred norm. This results in an othering process that excludes women from the sports media narrative and prevents them from taking up space within sports culture. This is most extremely seen when athletes become “targets of racist and sexist backlash and commentary” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 42). As a result of these reasons, sportswomen are evaluated as both mother and/or wife *and* athlete (Griffin, 1992).

Additionally, the dual role that sportswomen carry is explained through Pfister’s (2013) and Denham’s (2004) texts. Pfister (2013) indicates that females within the sports world are “positioned as members of the audience” (p. 164) with their main contribution to sports being admiration of hypermasculine male athletes. Denham (2004) shares that visibility for women in sports was traditionally through sideline jobs, reporting, or cheerleaders. This adds to a theme of subservient roles for women. The sidelining tendency within the structure of sports and sports media contributes to the othering of women and promotes passive roles that are deemed adequate for females.

The works of Meân & Kassing (2008) and Clasen (2001) concentrate on the gender hierarchy in sports. This literature emphasizes that “sport is a gender demarcator” (Meân &

Kassing, 2008, p. 127) in an area that is comprised of male hegemony. With sports being a “foundational discourse” (Meân & Kassing, 2008, p. 128), the gender hierarchy in sports is difficult to challenge when it is “normalized and invisible” (Meân & Kassing, 2008, p.128). At times when it is contested, defensive othering and apologetics occur. Ezzell’s (2009) text on women’s rugby and gender defines apologetics to be “when women “apologize” for their gendered transgressions by emphasizing other conventional aspects of gender presentation and performance” (p. 112). When this area of culture is countered through strong and powerful femininity, this contrasts masculine hegemony. Apologetics are then used by the female athlete because they embody something contrary to the structure they occupy. Subsequently, sportswoman opt to embody a “white, middle class femininity and heterosexuality” (Ezzell, 2009, p. 115) in order to fit into this structure which leads to erasure of anyone outside of this narrow scope. This solidifies the framework for who is “allowed to play sports. This is seen in action in the area of sports like cheerleading (Grindstaff and West, 2006), gymnastics (Pfister, 2013), figure skating, and tennis (Kane, 1995) which accentuate hyper femininity.

Bruce (2015) brings to light the dichotomy of pretty *or* powerful in western sports media (Koh, 2010) when highlighting female athletes which contributes to the dual roles of sportswoman theme. The fixation on being either pretty (aligning with hyper femininity) or powerful (aligning with hypermasculinity *or* the deviant-mutant) results in ambivalence for the female athlete (Bruce, 205, p. 361). What Bruce (2015) cites as emerging in third-wave feminism is the shift from athletes being sexualized or emasculated in media representation towards a pretty *and* powerful discourse, which is emphasized within emergent social media, newsletter, and online platforms (p. 362). For Messner et al. (2010), sportswomen are promoted as “mothers, girlfriends or wives” more so than being objectified or sexualized, which shows a shift in how

woman are framed to enact this dual role within sports media (p. 25). Regressively the pretty and powerful discourse, “reinforces and normalizes Whiteness, heterosexuality and an exceptionally narrow range of body types as representing ‘ideal’ femininity” (Bruce, 2015, p. 372) within sports. This discourse indicates that when sports media makes use of describing athletes as both pretty and powerful, it prioritizes sportswomen that are white and hyper feminine, which makes this identity the standard for athletes to achieve.

As a result of the dual roles that female athletes are positioned to fulfill in culture, sports and sports media contribute to gender bias and the oppression of sportswomen that are outside the idealized lens. Athlete’s skills are viewed in relation to their roles as athlete *and* mother with attention paid to white and hyper feminine individuals. This identity then becomes the *only* appropriate identity for sportswoman to embody. Athletes are othered if they do not embody this narrow framework, which takes the form of homophobia, racism, and sexism. This prejudice has come to inform sports media’s representation of female athletes.

### **3. The Masculinity of Sport Media**

Sports journalists operate in two important categories: objectivity and masculinity (Bruce, 2013, p. 130). Scholarly research about sports media in conjunction with the theme of gender reveals that traditional features of hypermasculinity such as extreme strength, heterosexuality, and aggression are perpetuated and promoted in sports because of the “degree of privilege” males hold society (Denham, 2004, p. 379). Therefore, this valorisation of masculinity transfers to promotion of masculine athletes and their images, while traditional femininity is othered through exclusion and repression (Messner, 1992).

Within sports media, Messner et. al’s (2000) content analysis resulted in the construction of the Televised Sports Manhood Formula (TSMF). This formula features ten themes that uphold

the hierarchy of gender in sports media by favouring male authority and presence. These themes include: “White males are the voices of authority; sports are a man’s world; women are sexy props or prizes for men’s successful sports performances or consumption choices; aggressive players get the prize while nice guys finish last” (Denham, 2004, p. 375). When consuming sports media, these themes are then carried with the viewer going forward. Despite changing socioeconomic structures as well as a variety of liberation movements lead by marginalized groups, the TSMF remains embedded within the structure of sports media and promotes a hegemonic view of masculinity in sports and sports media (Denham, 2004, p. 375).

Even though Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 resulted in legislature that promoted equal financial support for women who wanted to participate in post-secondary athletics (Morris, 2014), this legislature did little work in bringing equality to media coverage or competence in analysis of sportswoman (LaVoi, 2013). Currently, it is estimated that 10% of print media and 5% of broadcast media is dedicated to female athletes (Bruce, 2015). In the realm of commercial digital media, sites like “ESPN.com or CBSSports.com... reinforce traditional gender ideologies and marginalize sportswomen” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 48). When women are depicted in media, what occurs is that their "athletic accomplishments and athleticism are minimized and a focus on femininity, hypersexuality, and heterosexuality" (LaVoi, 2013, p. 40) is firmly established as the norm.

These online articles contribute significantly to the sustained masculine hegemony of sports media and make use of media framing in order to do so (Gaydon, 1983; Bremner, 2002; Messner et. al, 1993; Clasen, 2001). Media framing is a negotiation of what information is deemed important by producers, writers, editors, and journalists for their audience to consume (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). Framing techniques in journalism such as agenda setting and priming

constitute how information is received (Bell & Coche, 2018). As a result of the influence that framing holds in sports media, “responses to that content can be affected by the framing choices of the content producer” (Lewis & Weaver, 2015, p. 221). Through shifting journalistic styles which now incorporate traditional and social media-oriented reporting (Lewis & Weaver, 2015), framing in sports has come to not only feature performance framing of athletes but also character framing. Character framing is the incorporation of non-sports related information about athletes that happen outside their field of athletic performance (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). It is through specific content and negation of information which influences how the audience receives the information. This style of framing in sports media then becomes a negotiation of information about “sport, celebrity, and pop-culture” (Lewis & Weaver, 2015, p. 232). As well, the appeal to pathos for the audience by including personal or emotional information may come to inform a bias in the evaluation of sports media in the future (Lewis & Weaver, 2015, p. 235). The rise in framing athletes through the lens of character has come to involve including information about their fashion choices, marital status, sexuality, social media accounts, and product endorsement deals, which appeals to low sports fan’s evaluation of athletes (Lewis & Weaver, 2015). However, this moves away from the objective performance framing that traditional male-dominated sports media focuses on which appeals to high sports fans (Lewis & Weaver, 2015).

Gaydon (1983) relays the significance to which media plays a role in defining the values of society, with considerably less value given towards female sports coverage (Gaydon, 1983, p. 8). With masculine qualities dominating sports media, this becomes a place for “naturalized misogyny and homophobia” (Yeates, 1995, p. 38). When this space is disrupted by the entry of an athlete outside of the male canon, this contradicts this power structure in sports, with female athletes branded as fragile, weak, and the “other” in the language used (Bremner, 2002, p. 3).

Messner et. al (1993) build on the critique of sports media values, offering that the asymmetrical gender marking in sports media verbally and visually results in woman being denoted as “other” (p.124). Through language used and visual elements incorporated into the broadcasts there are a continuation of female stereotypes this adds to the “already negative attitudes or ambivalences about women’s sports and woman athletes” (Messner et. al, 1993, p. 129). For Messner et. al (1993), the “ignoring or underreporting of existing women's events contributes of the invisibility of women athletes in the media” (p. 123), rendering female athletes secondary to male athletes. Meân & Kassing (2008) confront reasonings why woman as a group are never the focus in the sports world, which comes as a result of having to acknowledge and differentiate themselves from masculinity. Their paper contributes that professional female athletes “remained subject to traditional gendered hegemony requiring the negotiation of heterosexuality and femininity” (Meân & Kassing, 2008, p. 141).

When women are featured in sports media, Clasen (2001) designates this to be “commodity fetishism” (p. 38) in action: “In order to move women’s sports into a more highly commercialized format, the media have actually further emphasized the “feminine” aspect of the athletes” (Clasen, 2001, p. 39). This is demonstrated post-Olympic games when American female gymnasts or female figure skaters tour across their country, contributing to the “spectacle of the woman athlete” (Clasen, 2001, p. 40). The commodity fetishism of female athletes in combination with male focused media output makes it difficult for departure from androcentrism. For this reason, sports news values prioritize male sport while female athletes are othered. Additionally, African American athletes are "accommodated" in sports media through childlike references and the use of first names, which reduced their status as adult athletes

(Denham, 2004, p. 381). This lack of respect and promotion of athletes demonstrates covert racism in action (Denham, 2004, p. 382).

The key framing methods used in sports media to frame sportswoman include: gender marking; infantilization; comparison to men's sports; non-sports related aspects; sportswoman don't matter; sexualization; compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity; and ambivalence (Bruce, 2015, pp. 365-366). Gender marking comes to situate a gender modifier to sports language, such as modifying the Professional Golfers' Association to Ladies Professional Golfers' Association whereas the men's association is not gendered in the name (Bruce, 2015). The use of infantilization is a "marginalizing practice of describing adult sportswoman as girls, young ladies or only by their first names" (Bruce, 2015, p. 365).

When comparison to male athletes or men's sports occur in sports media, this framing situates males to be superior and the standard of athletics (Bruce, 2015). Non-sports related information focuses on marital status, family life, appearance, personality, social media presence, etc. which diverts attention away from athletic performance in sports media (Bruce, 2015). The thought that sportswoman don't matter is a framing theme that contributes to "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978), which is a tactic that is prominently used on sports media digital news sites that have a target audience of males (Bruce, 2015, p. 366).

Framing athletes within compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity in sports media results in a bias by giving priority in sports media to athletes that are heterosexual and present a hyper feminine identity (Bruce, 2015). This hyper femininity enters into the realm of sexualization of female athletes and comes across as a negotiation if media will portray sportswoman through athleticism or through the male gaze as objects of sexuality (Bruce, 2015). Still, the most noticeable sports media framing strategy is ambivalence (Bruce, 2015). This is

seen through contrasting athletes who possess “physical skill, strength or competence against traditional femininity, weakness, incapacity and the inferior quality of women’s sport” (Bruce, 2015, p. 366). This is more often than not demonstrated through “incongruent media coverage” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 41). Ambivalence is seen in action when incongruent news article titles use performance framing while the body of the article focuses on character framing of the athlete, demonstrated through “patronizing or infantilizing headlines or text” (Bruce, 2015, p. 366). When *both* framing styles are used in an article this adds confusion for the reader in negotiating the intent of the article. This contradiction can be “one statement/ image that is positive and focused on talent, coupled with another focused on faults or aspects unrelated to sport that are meant to undermine athleticism” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 41).

Bruce (2012) takes into account the achievements and changes that have occurred, but also cites that the representation of woman in this male-dominated area contributes to a sense of self and informs female’s “relationship to sport” (p. 125). The media narrative that no one’s interested in women’s sports is perpetuated by content producers in order to uphold a “continued and systematic lack of interest” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 44). This inequality “is based on invisible, taken-for-granted assumptions and values of dominant social groups, and as such the presentation of the event tends to support corporate, white, and male-dominant ideologies” (Messner, 1994, p. 73).

Despite Title IX legislature, this mandate did little to positively contribute to equality and equity in sports media coverage of female athletes in the United States. It is repeated time and time again that sports media “produces coverage *by* men, *for* men and *about* men” (Bruce, 2013, p. 128). As a result, female athletes have been ignored in sports media and underreported. Scholarly articles posit that when sportswomen are featured in content, femininity is the focus

and athletic accomplishments are minimized. This is demonstrated through the contrast in sports media framing practice: performance framing for male athletes and character framing for female athletes. Outlined in Bruce's (2013) framing techniques, non-sports related information, ambivalence, and incongruent media coverage come to highlight how sportswomen are framed in sports media. Through these factors, sports media's bias and underrepresentation of these female athletes result in the marginalization of sportswoman in this area of culture.

## **Methodology**

Using the examples of professional athletes Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Serena Williams, articles written on ESPN.com about these athletes during peak performances in their careers will be examined in order to find the prevalent sports media sentiments towards successful female athletes. In order to answer the research questions, the collocate count, phrasing, and context adjacent to athlete's names in the article will be of importance in understanding how each athlete is framed in sports media. The frames that are used or withheld for each athlete will be critiqued under the themes of gender hierarchies and gender expectations in sports media outlined by Bruce (2013).

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) will follow Fairclough's (1989) method. For Fairclough, discourse is "ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 176). This socio-cultural approach of analysis is composed of three dimensions:

- **Description** is the dimension connected to formal aspects of the text (Fairclough, 2001).

- **Interpretation** is the dimension where the text and interaction are examined in tandem with observation of ways the language influences how the text is consumed.
- **Explanation** is the dimension where the interaction and social affect are examined.

This method applies to investigating how sports media comes to influence culture because it is a critique of the combination of text, “consumption and distribution of the text”, and socio-cultural implications (Allaghe & Amoussou, 2018, p. 14). When examining the discourse collectively, assumptions are important because they “are never value-free and innocent; rather they are ideologically driven and motivated” (Allaghe & Amoussou, 2018, p. 14). Through repetition of discourse, power dynamics in areas like “social classes, gender groups and ethnic and cultural majorities and minorities” (Allaghe & Amoussou, 2018, p. 14) are reinforced. This becomes the discourse-power-ideology relationship which CDA strives to outline. This method of analysis, stated by Rogers (2004, p. 3), will “uncover power relationships and demonstrate inequalities embedded in society” (as cited by Allaghe & Amoussou, 2018, p. 12).

Through a mixed method approach using quantitative data collection and critical discourse analysis, sports media’s preconceived concepts of gender hierarchies and gender expectations will be exposed. Theories and themes that will be utilized in the analysis will include the separate sphere ideology (Ganong & Coleman, 2014) and the masculinity of sport media (Graydon, 1983; Bremner, 2002; Messner et. al, 1993; and Clasen, 2001). This structure of analysis will highlight that the prevalent sports media sentiments towards female athletes are rooted in gender hierarchy and gender expectations (Allaghe & Amoussou, 2018).

In order to quantify the language of the articles in examination, the data will be collected using Voyant Tools, a “web-based text reading and analysis environment” (Sinclair and Rockwell, 2016). A variety of linguistic elements such as terms, collocates, phrases, and contexts for each athlete mentioned will be textually quantified using this tool. The corpus was selected from the website ESPN.com. Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) is a sports media company that was established in 1972 and is the “self-proclaimed “Worldwide Leader in Sports”” (McGuire et. al, 2015, p. 139). ESPN rose from obscurity to now controlling the standard for the production and promotion of sports media content (McGuire et. al, 2015, p.3). Their website generates extremely high traffic that is unmatched, with “an average viewing audience of 77, 000 each minute” (McGuire et. al, 2015, p. 191). As a result of data mining and CDA analysis, the findings will support the argument that gender hierarchy and gender expectations exude sexism, racism, and ambivalence in the language that is used to report on Biles, Rapinoe, and Williams on ESPN.com.

## **Findings & Analysis**

### **CDA Athlete 1: Simone Biles’ U.S. Gymnastics Championship Title in 2019**

In her professional career timeline, Simone Biles secured the all-around title at the U.S. Gymnastics Championship, hosted in Kansas City, Missouri from August 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The gymnast placed first in vault, balance beam and floor exercise and third in the uneven bars, which secured the all-around gold title for Biles. The U.S. Gymnastics Championship tournament weekend indicated who would represent the U.S. women’s gymnastics team at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games. In addition to earning a 20<sup>th</sup> national championship title, Biles’ finish earned her an automatic position at the selection camp (McDougall, 2019). Sports media

surrounding Biles' gold medal win was selected because this competition frames Biles going into the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and will reveal the gender hierarchy and gender expectations rooted in media sentiment.

### **Text 1: Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles**

**August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

#### ***Description***

This article emphasizes the focus of being a high-performance athlete, citing Simone Biles' level of perfection in her profession to be unmatched. The article by Mechelle Voepel traces the progress and result of Biles' performance at the U.S. Gymnastics Championship held in August of 2019, which would show if she would take the top spot for the U.S. team in their bid for a gold medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games. The author makes note of additional features to Biles' success, such as the audience's level of enjoyment, the affect social media has in positive affirmation for the gymnast, and highlights the youthfulness of Biles through comparison to the performance of Sam Mikulak on the men's side of the tournament.

This text features 1,312 total words and 557 unique word forms with the most frequent words being 'biles' (17); 'gymnastics' (12); 'just' (10); 'said' (10); 'mikulak' (9); 'olympics' (9); 'like' (8); 'u.s' (8); 'championship' (7); and 'it's' (7) (Table 1, Appendix A). Within the top phrasing in the text filtered to the longest phrasing, 'points ahead of second place', 'at the u.s championship' and 'all-around title' (Table 2) orient the article in the theme of nationalism and power. These phrases reveal there is a focus on competition which indicates performance framing is utilized.

Both Biles and Mikulak are given agency in the article about what they said (Table 3), which shows equality. However, this is not congruent with the title of the article as the title

indicates the article is about Biles only, leading to deception as the reader progresses.

Additionally, 'mikulak' appears close to words like 'joked' and 'excelling' (Table 3) which gives him an image of casualness while being great in his sport. On the other hand, 'biles' is close to words like 'championship', 'score', and 'final' (Table 3), which leads readers to position her to be a serious, goal-oriented athlete. When examining the contexts surrounding the words 'biles' and 'mikulak', Biles is painted a genius, but also isolated in her profession (Table 4).

Additionally, non-sports related frames are used to report information about Biles, such as including information on social media celebrities and the focus on faults (LaVoi, 2013) when referencing the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal (Table 4). When Mikulak is named, the context surrounding him shows character framing, but the focus is on his charisma (Table 5).

Near the end of the article, a negative tone is apparent with that focus moving to the USA Gymnastics and Nassar sexual abuse scandal, the organization's bankruptcy, and Biles' coaches not received their bonuses for her wins from her previous world championship run. The ending note to the article concentrates on Biles' time outside of the gymnastics sphere with mentioning that her recent purchase of a house has led her towards a more mature lifestyle and "adulthood" (Voepel, 2019).

This story is written to share the great success that Biles achieved over the tournament weekend, but also sets the tone for the season she is expected to have in the run up to the 2020 Olympic games. The nationalistic undertone is noted throughout the article because of the connection this weekend had to the future Olympic games, demonstrated in Excerpt 1:

*"It's inspiring to everybody," said Tom Forster, high-performance team coordinator for the U.S. women's gymnastics program. "It's really cool. We're super happy she's come back from 2016 and wants to do it again. We're so excited. It's good for the sport."*

The fact that Biles is back again to compete on the national stage for her country outweighs all other factors which contributes to her reasoning to participate. Forster's final sentence notes that Biles' return is not only good because she wears the American flag on her uniform, but it also leads readers to wonder what reasoning exists for why she wouldn't be back in the first place.

### ***Interpretation***

This article makes use of performance framing and character framing. Balancing the two sides to how framing can occur in sports media, Biles is upheld as a high-performance athlete as well as possessing characteristics outside of being a gymnast. This article is important because it frames Biles in a specific way prior to the Olympics, emphasizing the stress that is put on this athlete in order to achieve greatness. However, at times the language used undermines her performance in the tournament, stating her 20<sup>th</sup> title did not really add anything new to her legacy because Biles is so entrenched in gymnastics history, noted in Excerpt 2:

*At this point, all she accomplishes just adds to a historical place in the sport that is already secure.*

This makes the reader associate that her continued success is not really of importance within the sports world because she's already a noted celebrity in and out of the gymnastics scope. This is a form of backhanded complementation and leads to symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) of the athlete. This phrasing does not highlight Biles' athletic abilities in a positive way for readers despite her first place finish that weekend.

References to her age are noted throughout the article by the author, in quotes directly from Biles, quotes from her high-performance team coordinator, and when speaking in relation to Sam Mikulak. The use of language with references to age and the final statements about home

purchases and “adulting” guide the reader to understand that Biles’ gymnastics career is coming to a close at the age of 22. The negative association with age is apparent within the structure of professional gymnastics, even projected by Biles in Excerpt 3:

*“I feel like I don't want to think about it yet,” Biles said, “because that will make me old real quick. So just do what I do.”*

Despite being a young woman, this leads readers to understand that when a female athlete is too old for competition, they become obsolete in the gymnastics world. This anxiety and denial can be countered by maintaining a childlike physique and demeanour in order to have a longer career. An attempt to counter this youthful trend in the language used is in the final few sentences of the article, seen in Excerpt 4:

*Biles sees using her voice as part of what she calls “adulting,” and she is embracing that as well as continuing to redefine excellence in her sport. “I do try to get out so I'm not thinking about gymnastics all the time,” she said, adding she owns a home now. “It's been really exciting; I'm adulting, little by little, and it's really fun.”*

Infantilization is apparent when Biles is quoted, conveying that the mature objective of home ownership is just a parody or a character that she plays. Biles’ retention of youth is sought after by the athlete and upheld through inclusion of this quote. The interesting aspect is that the language used in the article to describe male gymnast Sam Mikulak cites his age as leading to wisdom in his athletic endeavours, highlighted in Excerpt 5:

*Mikulak joked that getting his sixth U.S. all-around title just basically means he's “old.” He will be 27 in October. But with age, he said, has come wisdom and mental toughness. Yet a lengthy senior career -- he competed in the 2012 and '16 Olympics -- hasn't dulled his love for the sport.*

This is an optimistic account towards male gymnasts when competing year after year with no hint at infantilization like in the sentiment about Biles. There is importance placed on youthfulness for female gymnasts, whereas males who are older and still participating in gymnastics possess mental skills above all.

The main theme that comes across in this article is the overabundance of references to gender when speaking about Biles' accomplishments at the tournament. Her accomplishments are largely situated within her gender, noted in Excerpt 6:

*Here at the U.S. championship, Biles shared her genius again, cleanly nailing the triple-double (three twists, two flips) on the floor exercise. That unprecedented-for-women, gravity-defying move was the highlight of the Simone Show, but there was plenty else to see.*

The gender marking that occurs leads readers to situate what Biles does is in relation to her gender firstly which contributes to positioning her accomplishments only in line for woman. The quote in Excerpt 7 shows that her extraordinary abilities have set her apart from all sportswomen, alienating her in the process:

*In Biles, we are seeing a generational-level talent, someone so gifted and driven she has changed the conversation about what's possible in women's gymnastics. At least, what's possible for her.*

Biles' athletic prowess results in her being a standout athlete in her profession but this article indicates that because of her abilities she is isolated in gymnastics. By stating that her abilities keep pushing what is possible for only herself within gymnastics as a female athlete, this is actively othering, and suggests her differences are in fact limiting because her only competition is herself.

## ***Explanation***

The article title, “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles”, moderately supports what the body of the article presents, but other aspects like referencing Sam Mikulak’s performance, the U.S. Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal, and continually gender marking Biles’ accomplishments contribute to framing the athlete through ambivalence. Rather than using performance framing utilized in sports media focused on male athletes, this article presents information about Biles through character framing.

By not using performance framing with her recent success in order to bring objectivity to the article, Biles is evaluated based on non-sports related information. Through the language used and the incorporation of external aspects, the article becomes less about the recent success of Biles and more about highlighting her life and gymnastic scandals outside of what happened when she competed over the tournament weekend. Even social media celebrity is mentioned, seen in Excerpt 8:

*Celebrities from the sports and entertainment worlds also marvel at Biles and take to social media to express it.*

*"It's kind of crazy to think about that," Biles said after winning her sixth U.S. Gymnastics Championships all-around title Sunday before an enthralled crowd at Sprint Center.*

*"Whenever they retweet it or I see they reach out on Instagram, I feel like my heart stops. Because I'm like, 'Wow, they actually notice me.' Because what we do, I feel like, is so much smaller -- gymnastics isn't that widely recognized. So to get that support from everybody else, and they're really excited about it, makes us feel like we're doing something good."*

Inclusion of this quote contributes to character framing of Biles this paints her athletic accomplishment to be insignificant for the reader. The accessory information becomes more important than the objective aspects to Biles' athletic skill which is promoted by sports media when this style of writing is echoed.

This article makes use of comparison to men's sports, non-sports related aspects involved, the symbolic annihilation of her accomplishments, and an infantilization tone that is used in gymnastics articles. Here, Biles is framed in the shadow of male athletes, marginalized when referred to in terms of infancy, and diverted from being the focus of the story when non-sports related information is incorporated into the article. Despite being a Renaissance woman in gymnastics and athletics at large, the image of Biles in this article is rendered down to her being a homeowner and "adulting".

## **Text 2: 4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we've ever seen**

**July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019**

### ***Description***

This article was written in anticipation of Biles' expected standout performance at the U.S. Gymnastic Championship in August of 2019. This article was published ahead of the tournament, on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and was written by D'Arcy Maine, an ESPNW Writer. This article is composed of 834 total words and 404 unique word forms. The most frequent were 'biles' (13); 'all' (7); 'during' (6); 'won' (6); 'around' (5); 'competition' (5); 'olympic' (5); 'world' (5); 'event' (4); and 'rio' (4) (Table 6). The top phrasing for this article are: 'she has won', 'the u.s classic', and 'biles won the' (Table 7). These phrases lead readers to understand that this article frames Biles through objectivity which aligns with performance framing techniques. Biles becomes a machine within the athletic narrative and her ambition is notable

through the collocate words that pair with ‘biles’ (Table 8). As well, the prominence of the word ‘olympic’, ‘world’ and ‘competition’ (Table 8) all indicate there is a nationalistic tone in the article.

The fact that Biles stands out in competition is again reinforced when examining the context around the word ‘biles’ (Table 9). She is labeled to be on another level through her domination of the sport, even garnering signature gymnastic moves that are named after her (Table 9). The bottom line is that Biles is known for winning because does not possess weakness within gymnastic competition.

Key trends that come across in the article are the continual innovation that Biles possesses in her craft, her statistics to indicate she is a fierce competitor, and her commitment to improving her weakest apparatus skill in order to be the best. This is seen in Excerpt 1:

*Biles is known for her gravity-defying floor routines, and even though her skills are leaps and bounds ahead of her competition, she still is constantly trying to add new elements to her already tricky repertoire.*

The inclusion of this sentence contributes to framing Biles in performance framing. Her mastery of gymnastics shows a responsibility in continued improvement with the clear objective of being the best communicated to the reader. With hints of the future for Biles at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, this article leans on her statistics in order to forecasts her greatness, resulting in statements such as Excerpt 2:

*Since Rio, she has teamed up with new coach Laurent Landi, who previously coached 2016 Olympic bars silver medalist Madison Kocian, and trained with former bars national champion Ashton Locklear until her retirement earlier this year. And it has paid off. Biles won the silver medal at nationals last year, and then did the same at worlds. So*

*while everyone was amazed by her five medals during Rio, she realistically could take home six in Tokyo.*

What is conveyed is that her commitment to training and being the best results in quantitative, objective goals being reached in her senior gymnastics career. This article is articulated like a recipe for what makes Biles great, with the ingredients being: innovation, statistics, commitment, and leadership qualities. However, Biles' voice and agency in the gymnastics world are also mentioned near the end of the article, with reference to the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal. Biles is named a survivor, which appeals to pathos for the reader.

### ***Interpretation***

This article falls in line with both performance framing and character framing of athletes in sports media. The aspects of performance framing that are showcased are accurately reporting her competition statistics which adds credibility to prove why she is the best in her profession. These statistics are in comparison to her fellow competitors, and give high praise to the level of competition in the tournament weekend, like in Excerpt 3:

*And not only does Biles win, win, win (no matter what), she dominates her competition and rarely leaves her opponents even an opportunity to win gold. She won the U.S. Classic by more than two points -- nabbing a ridiculous 60.0 compared to a 57.90 for second-place finisher Riley McCusker. And McCusker is no slouch: Her total was, notably, one of the best all-around scores recorded worldwide this year.*

Biles is outlined not only as a great athlete, but factors of her personality are deemed important to report. The character framing means there is a focus on positive personality traits and evaluation of her placed on non-sports related information. Excerpt 4 highlights this:

*Not only is Biles the best gymnast of all time, she also has a winning personality. Known for her hilarious quips, charming social media presence and for speaking up on issues that matter to her, she is a force to be reckoned with outside the gym as well.*

Since these external factors are emphasized at the end of the article, this leaves readers to focus on aspects of personality and charm the athlete possesses. Adding to the non-sports related information about Biles, the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal is cited at the end of the article, with Biles labeled a survivor in this crime, with further adds to the Biles' character trait of being a fighter. The final sentence reiterates Biles to be a leader through being vocal about issues and having agency within the sports sphere, seen in Excerpt 5:

*She has spoken up on several occasions when unhappy with the leadership of USA Gymnastics, and it has resulted in actual change.*

Yet, the article does not actually list what changes have occurred, but instead provides a hyperlinking to another article if the reader wants to learn more. By not including what changes have resulted because of Biles voicing her disappointment in U.S. Gymnastics and holding this organization accountable, the reader is less inclined to believe that she actually possesses agency and leadership abilities.

Lastly, the continued hostility towards Biles' skill in the world of gymnastics is noted in the article and is apparent through the inclusion of a quote from Aly Raisman, a Team U.S.A. Olympian who competed alongside Biles in Rio 2016. Raisman is quoted in the article, illustrated in Excerpt 6:

*As her teammate and friend Aly Raisman, who finished in second at the 2016 Games, famously said: "If you get silver, you're the best because Simone doesn't count."*

This quote indicated Biles is in her own category, further alienating her from the group while downplaying her gold medal status as an athlete. What was meant as a comedic line from Raisman results in readers understanding that Biles' performance is astronomically ahead of others she competes against. This line is significant because it conveys that her accomplishments do not count (Bruce, 2015), which leads readers to understand Biles is outside the limits of gymnastics and that her hard work is not meaningful in the structure of the sport.

### ***Explanation***

Scattered throughout the article are phrases that cite Biles demonstrates leadership, is vocal, and unbeatable in competition. The way in which Simone Biles is framed in the article leads the reader to understand that not only is she a great athlete, but that she has other personal factors which contribute to who she is through the character framing that becomes apparent in the last few sections of the article.

What is noticeable is that this article places less emphasis on gender marking compared to the previous ESPN article. There is only one reference to gender and Biles' gymnastic abilities, but overall the low reference count to female gendered gymnastic abilities is promising in separating gender from an athlete's performance. This is demonstrated in Excerpt 7:

*She has won more world medals (25!) than anyone in history.*

With the elimination of mentioning her gender, a level of equality between her and other great athletes is showcased subtly. Excerpt 8 levels the playing field through the negation of including her gender in her accomplishments:

*She keeps pushing the boundaries of the sport.*

Nonetheless, this progress is negated with other phrasing in the article where gender is utilized to situate Biles' athletic accomplishments. By labelling her wins as ground-breaking *for*

women, this does not add credibility to her accomplishments because of the masculinity engrained in sports media. Excerpt 9 showcases this:

*What makes this so amazing? Aside from it requiring two flips and three twists in a tucked position, no woman has ever done it in competition.*

Despite the equality that is noticed at times when Biles' gender is not mentioned, gender marking still utilized to speak about her accomplishments. Additionally, what is prominent in the article is that a comparison is made between Biles and the 1990 Chicago Bulls, specifically Michael Jordan. Biles is framed in relation to a previous top athlete, which indicates Biles is simply following in the shadows of male athletes. This is exemplified in Excerpt 10:

*In a sport where the average senior elite career often lasts less than one Olympic cycle, Biles' dominance is basically the gymnastics equivalent to what the Chicago Bulls did in the 1990s -- if Michael Jordan hadn't left the team for almost 18 months to play baseball.*

Including this reference to male athletes indicates that in order to consume sports media about Simone Biles there needs to be a comparison to male athletes, especially ones outside of her sport. Although this is a simple contrast in order to make her accomplishment more palpable for readers who are less knowledgeable in gymnastics, this jarring comparison results in gender marking her accomplishments. This contrast distorts her incredible feat by pulling in unnecessary information when referencing Jordan's baseball career and his lapse in playing professional basketball which has nothing to do with Biles. Through the use of mixed messaging when switching between performance and character framing, including non-sports related information, and labelling Biles as a survivor, this makes use of ambivalent media framing throughout the article.

### ***Conclusion***

These articles are important because the style of framing that is showcased begins with performance framing but shifts to character framing as the articles progress. The most prominent examples that result in character framing include Biles' home ownership, U.S. Gymnastics filing for bankruptcy, and the Larry Nassar scandal. This article highlights aspects of traditional womanhood, such as "weakness, incapacity and the inferior quality of women's sport" (Bruce, 2015, p. 366). The patterns of non-sports related aspects, use of infantilization, and attributions of ambivalence are prioritized information in these articles.

In the first article by Voepel (2019), Biles' accomplishments are framed in relation to her gender. This gender marking significantly contributes to focused reporting on her accomplishments situated within her gender which renders these wins to be categorized in the binary of gender. Despite showing some progress when removing gender from the accomplishments, these articles about Biles continue to make use of gender marking through the language used. This leaves the reader to wonder more about how Biles's balances being a professional athlete in combination with owning a home and less on her performance statistics going into the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. The prevalent media sentiments toward Biles are situated in gender marking through character framing which echoes hegemonic masculinity in sports media. The incongruent titles indicate that when writing about Biles, her athletic accomplishments are notable at the introduction for readers. It is when aspects of infantilization, the comparison to male gymnasts, and the significant incorporation of non-sports related information come to dominate the articles that she is rendering insignificant in sports media when coupled with these approaches.

## **CDA Athlete 2: Megan Rapinoe's in the World Cup 2019 Quarterfinal Match**

Articles in this time frame focused on the variety of teams participating in the FIFA Women's World Cup 2019, but with a strong emphasis on tracking the progress and game play of the reigning champions: The United States Women's National Team (USWNT). The USWNT went undefeated during the FIFA Women's World Cup hosted June 7<sup>th</sup> – July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in France. Their key game during the tournament was the quarterfinal match on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 against the host team France. The intensity of the match was because of the home field advantage for France, cited in sports media as the “final before the final” (Borden, 2019).

Two goals during the match came from the U.S. co-captain Megan Rapinoe which allowed the USWNT to move on to the semifinals. Not only did Rapinoe capture a gold medal during the tournament, but she was also voted the Player of the Match through a FIFA online poll, won the Golden Boot award for being the top goal scorer of the tournament, and received the Golden Ball award voted on by media representatives.

Coming off of the World Cup campaign, Rapinoe's celebrity status carried momentum to cultural areas outside of sports, such as activism (Mudrick et. al, 2019) and fashion (Reilly, 2020). Articles at this point in the media cycle set the tone for the visibility of successful players. Rapinoe's notable goal celebrations during this match garnered much press attention, which contributes to why sports media surrounding the quarterfinal match was chosen for analysis.

### **Text 3: Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France**

**June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

#### ***Description***

This article, written by Graham Hayes for ESPN.com, recounts a quarterfinal match of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2019 where the U.S. beat France 2-1. Megan Rapinoe scored two free kicks for the USWNT which results in her headlining the article. The article is composed of

1,733 total words with 688 unique words used. The most frequently used words in the text are 'said' (13); 'world' (12); 'cup' (11); 'game' (11); 'rapinoe' (11); 'u.s' (11); 'just' (8); 'team' (8); 'france' (7); and 'second' (7) (Table 10). Themes of team unity and having a figurehead in Rapinoe are noted through the most frequent phrases, like 'this is the team that', 'rapinoe said after the', and 'goal in the' (Table 11). The sole objective for the team is laid out clearly for the reader: win the tournament.

Words that appear around 'u.s' in the article lead the reader to draw comparison between the team and militaristic action, coupling national pride with military duty in the language used. Words that are located near 'u.s' include 'opponent', 'digs', 'defensive' and 'defender' (Table 12). The theme of nationalism becomes apparent throughout the article because the USWNT is competing for American glory on the national stage by wearing the flag on their uniforms. The conclusion of the article sets up the U.S.A. as victor in the match through displaying qualities of national pride and militaristic duty.

### ***Interpretation***

This article brings to light the theme of watching for pleasure and the spectacle of sports. The theme of theatricality is referenced in quotes from players and from the author. Using words like 'pageantry', 'spectacle', and 'controversy' allow for charged associations to be made. The theatricality and drama of the game is apparent, demonstrated in Excerpt 1:

*On Friday night, even as darkness finally fell over a boisterous Parc des Princes in another quarterfinal for the ages, Rapinoe made sure the sun hasn't set on that era quite yet.*

This second paragraph in the article establishes that this recap is rooted in dramatization of the game. It is of note that a quote from Rapinoe was included in order to back up the setting

of theatricality in the match. A statement about the general spectacle that Rapinoe wanted in the quarterfinal match was included in the article, seen in Excerpt 2:

*Rapinoe said after the previous game that she wanted a spectacle. She helped make Friday's contest the best kind.*

Through the inclusion of these sentences, the theme of theatricality is evident. It is conveyed that Rapinoe wanted the hysteria of the match to occur and for the match be something viewers could not look away from. This relates to Guy Debord's definition of the spectacle with its link to mass media (Debord, 1967). This article demonstrates knowledge in the capabilities for a moment like this to be seen by the world due to media's immediacy in dissemination. Rapinoe plays into the entertainment associated with watching the game, but the author also uses this to advantage by including her thoughts about the spectacle of the match. This draws away from the performance framing of the game and towards character framing.

The article also focuses on Rapinoe opening the quarterfinal pre-game press conference with defending her statements about not going to the White House upon winning the World Cup and the Twitter feud between her and President Donald Trump. These aspects of character framing become the substance of the article. U.S. defender Kelley O'Hara is quoted referencing the off-field factors that plagued the team during the tournament, seen in Excerpt 3:

*"...Regardless of what is happening outside, we always have each other's back inside this team, inside lines, outside the lines. It's not really about all of that. It's more so, when we step on the field, we have each other 100%, 90-plus minutes."*

Inclusion of this quote indicates that response to non-sports related issues are handled as a team and that the USWNT is a cohesive unit. However, the addition of this quote establishes that Rapinoe is framed in regard to factors outside of the 90-minutes of game play which

contributes to ambivalent framing. The balancing between performance framing and character framing swings back and forth throughout a variety of sentences in the article, demonstrated in Excerpt 4:

*Any thought that the week's controversy would distract her or the U.S. team vanished when her free kick went under a leaping Julie Ertz and between the legs of Amandine Henry before sliding into the French net for a 1-0 lead in the fifth minute.*

The beginning of this sentence is anchored in character framing then moves to performance framing. By pulling in these non-sports related aspects such as the Twitter beef between Rapinoe and the President of the United States, these contribute to how she is framed within sports media. Her personal politics outweigh her contribution to sport in this article.

### ***Explanation***

The most significant way that Rapinoe is talked about is through character framing in this article. The importance of Rapinoe's social media and personal politics throughout the article is noted in Excerpt 5:

*It's usually not a sign everything is going smoothly when a player has to open a news conference with a statement before taking questions, as Rapinoe did the day before the match in Paris. But in saying Thursday she stood behind her comments about not wishing to visit the White House, minus some of her language, and then shifting the focus to the game against France, she looked entirely at ease with her place in the spotlight. She always does.*

Here, character framing hinders the potential for sports media to fix female athletes in performance framing which is most often used in sports media about male athletes. By including the pre-game press conference address, this non-sports information suggests the importance of

Rapinoe is about what she posts on Twitter. The incorporation of non-sports related aspects in this ESPN article leads readers to pay attention more to her personal life off the pitch.

References to Rapinoe's good character and role model status on the team, again, leads the article towards character framing. This is showed in a quote from Coach Ellis about Rapinoe, in Excerpt 6:

*"I can't get 2011 ... out of my mind, the ball she played to Abby Wambach," U.S. coach Jill Ellis said after this latest quarterfinal epic. "It just has always sat with me. Even when we had young players come in, I always said, 'Ask Megan about those moments.' Because there's a never-say-die attitude. She loves and lives for those moments."*

Rapinoe is a seasoned professional and the angle that is taken in this quote shows that her age is a positive factor. This is significant because it conveys her knowledge and capabilities helps new players progress in their soccer development, which brings the character framing aspect of age into this article.

Overall, this article contributes to the media framing tactic of ambivalence when writing about female athletes which is apparent with the incongruent media coverage. The title and the body of the article contrast one another with non-sports related information being added to the body text. The theatricality and performance of the match and Rapinoe's abilities are clearly embedded in this article, but with the inclusion of the Twitter matchup between Rapinoe and President Trump, the focus shifts from the success Rapinoe had in game to external sports factors. This results in mixed messaging for the reader.

**Text 4: Why USWNT-France quarterfinal match really did feel like 'final before the final'**

**June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

***Description***

This article is situated in highlighting why the quarterfinal match between France and the U.S. at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2019 was more exhilarating than the gold-medal match. Based on the title this article is an appeal to emotion for the reader. This piece was published on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and was written by ESPN Senior Writer Sam Borden. The article is 975 words in length and used 505 unique word forms. The most frequently used terms include 'french' (10); 'rapinoe' (9); 'fans' (8); 'france' (7); 'final' (6); 'said' (5); 'ball' (4); 'came' (4); 'city' (4); and 'game' (4) (Table 13).

Despite 'rapinoe' taking the spot of second most frequently used word, the language used in this article is focused on the fans, the location, and the two countries that were involved in the match, which is demonstrated in phrases like 'french fans' and 'american fans' (Table 14). Repetition of the phrase 'the final before the final' (Table 14) reiterates the excitement that the title alludes to. The collocate words that surround 'rapinoe' in the article include 'said', 'whipped', 'unmissable', 'took', 'sprinted', and 'looking' (Table 15), emphasizing verbs that illicit athletic connotation for the reader. Lastly, when examining the context around the word 'rapinoe', the co-captain is situated in both performance and character framing. The character framing comes through in relation to her visual appearance and mannerisms, with description of her purple hair, her parody of a French accent, and the look of exhaustion she wore at the end of the match (Table 16). The performance framing side to the context for 'rapinoe' is apparent in the sentences that describe the actions Rapinoe took on the field and the successful plays made in the match (Table 16).

What is of note is that the match highlights are not communicated until halfway through the article. Much of the text supported building a visual for the reader of what the atmosphere caused by the fans was like in Paris, France. Additionally, the article was focused on a variety of

U.S. celebrities tweeting their support of the athletes and team but mention of the game itself did not occur until the latter half of the article. The opening paragraph demonstrates the focus on non-sports related information for the reader, demonstrated in Excerpt 1:

*This city comes alive at night. Its pulse quickens as the museums empty out and the restaurants fill, the people crowding into bistros in the Latin Quarter or the Marais or up on the hill near Sacre Coeur. As evening falls, the 7th Arrondissement becomes the center as the Eiffel Tower begins to glow. It sparkles on the hour and -- on most nights -- shows the city's heartbeat.*

This excerpt emphasizes the atmosphere of the city through descriptive words which leads to interpreting the match and Rapinoe's skill in terms of theatricality, entertainment, and for pleasure. The importance of the atmosphere is again noted, in Excerpt 2:

*This was technically a quarterfinal, but in name only: Fans packed the trains into the city all day, and shouts of "Allez les Bleus!" could be heard by the Ferris wheel in the Tuileries and from the cafes by Bastille. Whatever the round of the competition, this was the tournament showpiece.*

The focus on the atmosphere of the city results in importance given in the article to the fans chanting for the reader. Although this is within the introductory paragraphs of the article, the language used significantly contributes to the reception of the main player Rapinoe. The environment and other descriptive non-sports related information is prioritized over Rapinoe's accomplishments.

### ***Interpretation***

This article makes use of character framing and other peripheral factors when describing the match. This is seen in action through mentions of celebrities and the White House which

anchors the article in character framing techniques in order to relay Rapinoe's contributions to the match. Specific statements about Rapinoe and Trump's social media spat are referenced in the article, seen in Excerpt 3:

*Earlier in the week, Rapinoe, unmissable with her purple hair and a motor that seems to go forever, was in the spotlight for comments she made months ago about not wanting to visit the White House, calmly handling another controversy stacked on top of the lawsuit she and her teammates have filed against U.S. Soccer alleging gender bias. There were Tweets and videos and hot takes, but none of it shook her focus on this game, which she said she hoped would be "a circus, a spectacle."*

When references to her physical looks and non-sports related conflicts are included in the article, character framing is called upon when analyzing Rapinoe. By mentioning the colour of her hair, this draws on the theme of appropriate femininity in sports media. Her hair clearly deviates from western beauty standards. The inclusion of this physical characteristic ostracizes Rapinoe because her hair colour is outside what is designated appropriate femininity within sports media. Despite the positive twist in the concluding paragraph, Rapinoe's performance is overshadowed by her Twitter conflict and her purple hair. These factors divert reader's attention away from her expertise on the field and accomplishments in the tournament.

This article is of importance because it involves both character framing and performance framing surrounding the key player Rapinoe, but significantly favours character framing throughout the article. When Rapinoe is mentioned within the performance framing context, she is seen to be a threat on the field and a leader through the two goals she scored in the match. This can be seen in Excerpt 4:

*United States 2, France 1. Or put another way: Megan Rapinoe 2, France 1.*

This sentence communicates that Rapinoe is the whole team which adds weight and superiority to her name. This is significant because nationalism is outweighed by an individual on the international stage in this sentence.

### ***Explanation***

The language used to describe Rapinoe and the match illicit visuals for the reader through emphasis on the atmosphere of the match in Paris. It calls on history and drama, celebrities watching the match, and other non-sports related information in order to appeal to the reader and provide intrigue behind *who* Rapinoe is. This article is important because, similarly to articles about Simone Biles, there is an incorporation of performance *and* character framing when speaking about successful female athletes. Overall, the tactic of character framing outweighs the performance framing for Rapinoe in this article, demonstrated in Excerpt 5:

*"C'est magnifique ce soir," Rapinoe said, with a lovely French accent, and why not? For her, Friday night surely was beautiful.*

She is portrayed as a worldly individual, but this quote does not significantly back up the performance framing style in sports media. This quote adds to the charm of Rapinoe off the soccer pitch which may sway appeal of the athlete in the general public. The overwhelming emphasis on location and not on the athlete leads framing of Rapinoe to be decidedly ambivalent, with attention payed to events of the day leading up to the match. This is noted in Excerpt 6:

*On this evening, the light, the energy, the blood came from the southwestern part of the city, from the old Parc des Princes stadium, where 10,000 American fans mixed with, and ultimately shouted down, 30,000 French supporters as the Women's World Cup tournament erupted.*

It calls on history and the cult of fandom in French soccer. With the textual attention paid to the stadium and the fans, the emphasis on conveying the feeling of the match is congruent with the title of the article, but at the cost of downplaying Rapinoe's significant contribution to the match. With so many references to non-sports related aspects, from President Donald Trump to Ellen DeGeneres to her purple hair colour, Rapinoe's athletic contribution gets lost in the character framed recount of the quarterfinal match. This journalistic choice results in ambivalence which draws the focus away from Rapinoe's success.

### ***Conclusion***

The articles surrounding the quarterfinal match makes use of character framing throughout the texts in order to bypass the high-level performance from Megan Rapinoe. By incorporating the ambivalent factors like celebrities tweeting and the Eiffel Tower glowing, these situate the accomplishments of Rapinoe to be inferior. By including language that adds to the drama, theatricality, and atmosphere of the match, the women's match is confined to be entertainment for the audience. The media sentiment towards Rapinoe is that her accomplishments alone are not enough for the reader. This is why non-sports related information is utilized in the article. As a result of the prominence of the non-sports related information, these factors are given more emphasis for the reader than Megan Rapinoe.

Nationalism shines through strongly in the first article by Graham Hayes for ESPN.com, adding to the militaristic notion of sports when countries are pitted against each other. What is of note is that when a nation is promoted in these articles, the accomplishments of Rapinoe are framed under the guise of national pride and civic duty, which contributes to the interpretation that Rapinoe is the property of the U.S.A.

### **CDA Athlete 3: Serena Williams at the US Open 2018 Final**

The 131<sup>st</sup> edition of the US Open Women's Singles tournament took place from August 27<sup>th</sup> to September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018. In the final, American tennis player Serena Williams took on Naomi Osaka of Japan. Williams looked to add a 7<sup>th</sup> US Open Championship title to her impressive collection of slam titles. This win would have had Williams tie Margaret Court's all-time Grand Slam record. However, Williams lost in straight sets 6-2 and 6-4 to Osaka who became the first Japanese able-bodied tennis player to win a Grand Slam title. During this match there were numerous disputes on the court between Williams and the chair umpire Carlos Ramos. Williams was given \$17,000 worth of fines (Elliott, 2018) which were cited as a result of receiving coaching from the stands, throwing her racket after she made a mistake in the second set, and directing verbal abuse at the chair umpire (Healy, 2018).

The articles surrounding this final match were selected because media coverage focused on Williams despite Osaka winning the tournament. These articles set the tone for the public's knowledge of female tennis players and constructs the high-tension match to be one that features players with emotions that boiled over. The articles heavily focus on Williams' emotion and less on Osaka's tennis skills. The articles prove that character framing is the prioritized framing tool when writing about Williams.

**Text 5: Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief'**

**September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

*Description*

Following the 2018 US Open, Serena Williams was the focus for sports media despite Osaka winning the Grand Slam title. This article focuses on a gossip-angled recount of the match, the atmosphere of the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center, and the dispute between

Williams and the chair umpire. Additionally, the main themes that come through in this article are tracing the history of sexism and gender bias embedded within women's professional tennis matches.

This article features 1,189 total words with 474 unique word forms. The most frequent words in this article are 'williams' (23); 'coaching' (9); 'saying' (9); 'umpire' (9); 'chair' (8); 'final' (8); 'game' (8); 'open' (8); 'osaka' (8); and 'grand' (7) (Table 17). The top phrasing for this article centres on the chair umpire Carlos Ramos, giving agency to Ramos and making him a main actor in the article through frequent phrasing like 'chair umpire a thief' and 'a chair umpire' (Table 18). As well, agency is given to Women's Tennis Association (WTA) which is seen through the repetition of the phrase 'issued a statement saying the' (Table 18). This phrase was used in regard to the WTA's inquiries about the gender bias Williams experienced in the match. The collocate words that occur in proximity to the keyword 'williams', used 23 times, are mostly verbs which include 'told', 'said', 'played', 'objected', 'fined', and 'clashed' (Table 19). Therefore, the actions that Williams' took and words that were said during the match become the focus of the article.

When looking at the contexts around 'williams' in the article (Table 20), the focus is on the issue between Williams and Ramos, the large fine she received, and the penalizations throughout the match. This focus on the fines as a result of the referee's calls are noted in

Excerpt 1:

*Williams was fined a total of \$17,000 for the three code violations on Saturday. She was fined \$4,000 for receiving coaching, \$3,000 for racket abuse and \$10,000 for verbal abuse.*

This breakdown of the fines magnifies the faults of the athlete in the match (LaVoi, 2013) and directs blame towards Williams. As well, this explanation adds to the concentration on Williams' history of conflicts in matches. Excerpt 2 demonstrates this journalistic focus:

*This was Williams' third high-profile conflict with an official at Flushing Meadows, following her tirade after a foot fault in the 2009 semifinals against Kim Clijsters and a dispute over a hindrance call in the 2011 final against Sam Stosur.*

By saying this was a high-profile issue, this paragraph insinuates that there are other issues that have not been reported in major tournaments or by mainstream sports media. The language used in the article indicates that Williams' outbursts and issues with the refereeing of the match are common and of importance for the reader to know in evaluating her tournament performance. This story is written to communicate what happened in the match but gives emphasis to Williams' past and present actions throughout the article.

### ***Interpretation***

This article contributes to framing Serena Williams in a way that draws on emotional instances to impart information about the athlete to sports media consumers. This article informs reader's assessment of Williams in relation to the charged wording about her reactions to the chair umpire. Mentions of the crowd and atmosphere at the match contribute to this framing, which influences the mindset of readers when the focus is on the animated crowd, noted in Excerpt 3:

*Serena Williams was penalized a game for calling the chair umpire a thief during an extended argument as the US Open women's final descended into chaos, with fans booing and play delayed before Naomi Osaka wrapped up a 6-2, 6-4 victory for her first Grand Slam title.*

By using the phrase ‘descended into chaos’, this suggests that anarchy occurred in the match as a result of Williams’ anger. These heightened moments take away from the actual play during the match and Osaka’s skilled game. This frames the women’s match to be about the overly dramatic Williams in this situation, leaning more towards the entertainment aspect of the game which results in the use of ambivalent framing.

A key takeaway from the article is that Williams’ concern about the call is included in the text which utilized themes of sexism and gender bias to anchor her anger about the way the match was being refereed. This is demonstrated in a quote from Williams, seen in Excerpt 4:

*"To lose a game for saying that is not fair," Williams said. "There's a lot of men out here that have said a lot of things, and because they are men, that doesn't happen."*

By incorporating this quote from Williams, aspects of gender marking are called on in the article as well as the comparison to men’s sports. By incorporating this quote from Williams, this framing strategy solidifies the masculinity of sports media. Although this is masked by assuming that the article is less about losing for Williams and more about gender equality, relying on gender marking and the comparison the men’s matches hinders this progress.

What can also be interpreted is the role of mother/guidance that Williams plays in her profession, not only to her daughter Alexis Olympia, but to Osaka and other up-and-coming tennis stars. In a sentence early on, the guidance and adoration that Osaka has for Williams is noted, seen in Excerpt 5:

*The biggest issue for Williams on the scoreboard Saturday was that she was outplayed by a younger version of herself in Osaka, a 20-year-old who is the first player from Japan to win a major singles tennis title and idolizes the 36-year-old American.*

This godlike status that Williams has in the sports world is compelling because Osaka is compared to a younger Williams which gives a mother and daughter relationship to the two players. With the connection that Osaka is following in Williams' footsteps, this sets the tone for the article going forward and situates it in appropriate femininity. With the focus on Williams being a mother, this aspect of her character fulfills a traditional gender role highlighted by sports media. Again, the role of motherhood that is stressed for Williams is mentioned explicitly, seen in Excerpt 6:

*It was the second Grand Slam final defeat in a row for Williams, after Wimbledon in July, as she seeks her first major title since her return to the tour after having a baby in 2017. She missed the US Open last year because her daughter, Olympia, was born during the tournament.*

The references to motherhood become a reason for Williams having to work back to greatness. Through the structure of the argument, readers conclude that Williams is weaker than her opponents because she is a mother returning from maternity leave which adds to ambivalent framing of Williams. Although Osaka won the US Open, Williams became the point of focus because of the reactions she displayed. The role of motherhood is also evident and is concluded to be a weakness in her professional career.

### ***Explanation***

This article is more about the refereeing decisions made by Carlos Ramos and Williams' reaction than it is about her match play. This means character framing is the main framing tactic used rather than performance framing for the athlete which can be seen in Excerpt 7:

*What the 2018 final will forever be remembered for is the way Williams clashed with chair umpire Carlos Ramos, demanding an apology after he initially issued a warning in*

*the second set's second game for a code violation for receiving coaching, which is not allowed during Grand Slam matches.*

The language used in this paragraph explicitly states the event will solely be remembered through the clash between the referee and Williams, and not about the game play or Osaka's first grand slam victory. The emphasis given to the argument undermines the athleticism of Williams and is condescending in tone which contributes to the sports media technique of ambivalence. By involving Williams' history of fines and past issues with refereeing in addition to the birth of her baby, Williams is framed in line with character framing which leads to evaluating Williams as an angry mother.

The ending note that the article takes is a defensive tone on behalf of the chair umpire Ramos, which can contribute to framing Williams' response to his calls as over-the-top. This leads to negative sentiment towards Williams in sports media, and is seen in Excerpt 8:

*This was umpire Ramos' first women's singles final at the US Open. Ramos chaired the women's singles finals at the French Open in 2005 and at Wimbledon in 2018. He has chaired seven men's singles finals across all four Grand Slams and the men's singles final at the 2012 London Olympics.*

By stating that Ramos' call was made in a women's singles match which he hasn't refereed in a while leads readers to understand that his unfamiliarity with the game was an excuse for the calls, therefore his rookie decisions are permissible because he was just getting used to the game play. The referees' cited inexperience with how the matches are played demonstrates the framing themes of sportswoman don't matter and symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978). This reasoning and defense solidify sports media as a masculine area of culture. By siding with Ramos' calls, this shows sympathy for the chair umpire but also comes

across as a scapegoat for why he made the calls explicitly against Williams. Overall, ambivalence, motherhood, and past refereeing issues become the focus in the article which leads readers to view Williams through non-sports related information that paint Williams in the trope of an angry black woman.

### **Text 6: Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump**

**September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

#### ***Description***

This article focuses on calls made by the chair umpire in the 2018 US Open final between Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka. The main points in this article are the clash between match officiants and Williams, the WTA's issued statements, and Williams as a beacon of hope in the fight against gender inequality in sports.

This article, written by D'Arcy Maine, an ESPNW writer, contains 813 total words with 345 unique word forms. The most frequent words in this article are 'said' (9); 'williams' (8); 'match' (6); 'game' (5); 'like' (5); 'statement' (5); 'coaching' (4); 'serena' (4); 'thief' (4); and 'time' (4) (Figure 21). As noted in the most frequent words list (Figure 21), the article concentrates on what was spoken during the match and at the post-match press conference where Williams stood by her comments about the refereeing. The top phrases for this article include 'continue to fight for', 'for the next person', and 'she continues to' (Figure 22). These phrases prime the reader to understand the future thinking and lasting impact of Williams' questioning the referee. This is demonstrated through Excerpt 1:

*"I just feel like the fact that I have to go through this is just an example for the next person that has emotions and that want to express themselves and want to be a strong*

*woman. They're going to be allowed to do that because of today. Maybe it didn't work out for me, but it's going to work out for the next person."*

This quote from Williams confirms the trailblazing quality she has in the sports world. She assigns herself as a champion for equality in sports by challenging the calls made. The top collocates words in the article in proximity to 'williams' are 'said', 'received', 'explained', 'cites', and 'accused' (Figure 23) which are verbs that demonstrate Williams to be both a martyr and an aggressor in the situation that transpired on the court. Nonetheless, the focus for the article is about Williams calling out the chair umpire for sexist and gender bias calls which is congruent with the article title.

### ***Interpretation***

This article contributes to the character framing of Williams with the focus placed on her response to the umpire and the suggestions that Williams is a mother that are covert throughout the article. By emphasizing her post-match comments, the author makes use of ambivalent framing when including this information. This can be interpreted through the contexts surrounding 'williams' in the article (Figure 24). In a direct quote from USTA chairman and president Katrina Adams, Excerpt 2 leads readers to notice Williams' role of both mother and athlete are both identified:

*"This was Naomi's moment, and Serena wanted her to be able to enjoy it. That was a class move from a true champion. What Serena has accomplished this year in playing her way back onto the tour is truly amazing," Adams said in the statement.*

The mention of Williams climbing back to the top spot in tennis references her new status as a mother. Adams' stated her amazement because Williams was able to get back into top competitive form and play at a grand slam championship match. This quote makes use of sports

media framing techniques of appropriate femininity and non-sports related aspects which lead to overemphasized character framing. With references to her status as mother, information presented in this article lies outside of performance framing. This article is of importance because Williams is not separated from being a mother in this context and places her reproductive capabilities in line with her professional capabilities.

Additionally, the fact that certain aspects of performance framing were left out of the article, such as reporting the score or the plays that Williams or Osaka executed well in the match, results in readers grounding this article in character framing when emphasis is on the gossip and verbal issues throughout the match. Williams is cited to be a 23-time grand slam champion, but by not mentioning the flow of the game through objective sports coverage, withholding this information leads to the prominence of character framing and the sports media tactic of ambivalence when speaking about Williams.

### ***Explanation***

Gender marking and the comparison to men's sports are apparent in the direct quotes taken from Williams after the match. As a means to defend her reasoning for countering the chair umpire throughout the match, Williams notes the calling of men's matches to justify her anger, seen in Excerpt 3:

*"But I've seen other men call other umpires several things. I'm here fighting for women's rights and for women's equality and for all kinds of stuff. For me to say 'thief' and for him to take a game, it made me feel like it was a sexist remark. He's never taken a game from a man because they said 'thief.'"*

The inclusion of this quote is powerful. By including Williams' quote the article uses gender marking when comparison to the verbal abuse and angry responses she has seen in the

men's game. This comparison is important because a gender bias becomes apparent within the sport and in sports media. However, the changing tide of gender bias is mentioned midway through the article, seen in Excerpt 4:

*Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam champion, said she would continue to fight for gender equality in the sport and addressed the first-round penalty given to Alize Cornet for changing her shirt on the court.*

This quote communicates to readers that Williams is calling on the community of women to fight this oppression within sports and specifically acknowledges her support of others who have faced inequality in matches. By naming Alize Cornet's penalty, this adds to the evidence that these penalties and subsequent fines are situated in the masculinity of sports and the gender inequality that female athletes collectively experience. The feminist call to action in the conclusion of the article contrasts much of the masculinity of sports media in this article, such as ambivalent framing, appropriate femininity, and gender marking.

### ***Conclusion***

These two articles that surround a sexist and gender bias issue in the game of tennis are important because Serena Williams' reactions to the calls and the relationship between Williams and the chair umpire become the memorable moments of the match as a result of sports media's focus on them. This leads readers to situate the sports media sentiment towards Williams to be grounded in ambivalence and non-sports related aspects such as motherhood. The emphasis on Williams giving reason for her reactions during the match indicates that high emotions associated with traditional femininity are still echoed in sports media. These articles contribute to the stereotyping of Williams as an angry black woman.

These articles shed light on the gender bias that exists in tennis match calls, but they fail to root these issues in the technique of performance framing. The reliance on character framing brings about ambivalence towards successful female athletes as a result. What becomes apparent in these articles about Williams is that she is trapped in regard to past issues with officials, her motherly qualities are emphasized, and her emotions are prioritized in the articles.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

Some of the limits and considerations with future research into the area of sports media which uphold gender hierarchy and gender expectations would be to analyze a larger corpus from ESPN.com in order to gain a more complex understanding of the language that is used to describe sportswoman throughout their careers. The downfall to sourcing the corpus from ESPN.com is that only 50 of the most popular articles about a given athlete are located in the archive section of the site. Articles that do not gain virality are eliminated from the archival section. This limits the archive of coverage an athlete received and curates the articles based on popularity.

Future research in this topic will consider the emergence of non-traditional sports media that is focused on female athletes facilitated by the Internet. Bruce (2015) states: "Although the bulk of existing research suggests that sportswomen are represented as either pretty or powerful, new forms of representation emerging in some online and social media suggest ways in which sportswomen can be imagined as pretty and powerful within discourses of femininity and sport" (p. 361). This is a jumping-off point into researching how the emerging third wave of sports media research coincides with the goal in fourth-wave feminism of empowerment through the

use of the Internet. The affordances of social media and podcasts have significantly contributed to the volume of sports media content that is produced in recent years.

Social media accounts that would pair well with this area of research include: The Gist, On Her Turf, and Just Women's Sports. The Gist, a Canadian startup, produces biweekly newsletters, runs successful social media accounts, and in January of 2020 launched their podcast "The GIST of It". On Her Turf is owned by the parent company NBC Sports and includes a successful Instagram account and a podcast. Just Women's Sports, which launched in mid-2019, offers newsletters and boast a popular Instagram account.

Then there are podcasts, like "Laughter Permitted" which began in 2019 and is hosted by ESPN's Julie Foudy. "Burn It All Down" podcast is composed of a panel of female sports activists, writers, and professionals within sports media which has been operating since May 2017. Other areas that non-traditional sports media has been aided by the Internet include the advancement of organizations like She's4Sports and SeeWhatSheCanDo which offer an intersection feminist lens to athletic promotion and push for social change through the creation of community. The academic research lab Global Experiential Sport Lab (GXS) at Ryerson University has turned a focus to issues and opportunities for improvement in order to support female athletes in the sports media world. Even the ESPNW's Summit, which launched in 2019, went virtual for the 2020 edition using YouTube's live feature and allowed for more knowledge sharing to occur for emerging and seasoned sports media professionals. Needless to say, the interest in sportswoman and the increased focus on female athletes is growing in sports media. These passionate academic and start-up organizations are committed to improving the amount of sportswomen content that exists which can reach broader audiences thanks to the Internet.

Similarly to what LaVoi (2013) argues, these outlets and groups prove that alternative channels of communication create accessibility for audiences and that the overall “affordances of the medium do not rely on having content produced exclusively by White men” (p. 47) which has come to alter the sports media landscape significantly. In 2018, the Associate Press Sports Editors Racial and Gender Report Card revealed that out of 75 major newspapers and websites assessed, the majority of roles were still occupied by white men (Lapchick, 2018). This study evaluated “the changes in racial and gender hiring practices from the 2014 study” (Lapchick, 2018, p. 3). In the 2018 edition of the report, sports editors were 85% white and 90% male; sports reporters were 82.1% white and 88.5% male; sports columnists were 80.3% white and 83.4% male (Lapchick, 2018, p. 7). Here, Lapchick calls for social justice causes and emergent athletic activism to include those who produce sports media content as a result of the lack of parity that exists in major sports media outlets.

The incorporation of the Internet in the objectives of fourth-wave feminism demonstrates that new discourses can emerge within culture. This extends to sports media online and allows for new patterns of sports media consumption to develop in combination with cost-effective sharing (Bruce, 2015, p. 368). This allows for empowerment for sportswoman and for content to be directly informed by fans response and engagement online (Bruce, 2015, p. 369). Professional female athletes emerging within the fourth-wave of feminism understand the power that non-traditional sports media holds in combatting traditional notions of female athletes, with increased attention to how media representation informs cultural reading of such athletes (Bruce, 2015, p. 372).

## **Conclusion**

This critical discourse analysis of sports media articles about Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Serena Williams prove that a gender hierarchy is still embedded in sports media writing. Additionally, the quality of sports media coverage for sportswomen is anchored in character framing. Sports media illustrates their preconceived concepts of gender hierarchies and gender expectations in ESPN.com articles focussed on sportswomen by emphasizing character framing. What is significant about the style of framing used in sports media when focused on female athletes is that analysis of articles on ESPN.com advance “understanding of how cultural norms, values and ideologies are formed and reproduced and sometimes challenged within power hierarchies” (LaVoi, 2013, p. 43). The character framing tactics are illustrated in sports media through gender marking; infantilization; comparison to men’s sports; non-sports related aspects; sportswoman don’t matter; sexualization; compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity; and ambivalence (Bruce, 2015, pp. 365-366).

The prevalent sports media sentiments for Simone Biles include the emphasis on her age which leads to infantilization, that sport’s women don’t matter resulting in symbolic annihilation, the comparison of her talents to men’s sports, and the inclusion of non-sports related information. For articles focussed on Megan Rapinoe the prevailing sports media sentiments include highlighting her in appropriate femininity, the outcome of ambivalence through emphasis on her social media accounts and celebrities, and the inclusion of other non-sports related aspects. Lastly, the dominant sports media sentiments toward Serena Williams include ambivalence because of the focus on female emotions and traditional femininity, that sportswomen don’t matter which leads to symbolic annihilation in sports media, and appropriate femininity through the attention paid to her role as mother in addition to athlete. Overall, these

three athletes are grounded in themes which result in ambivalence in sports media through the promotion of the style of character framing.

In this analysis and isolation of what framing devices are used in sports media for female athletes, what becomes clear is that character framing is used in order for sports media coverage about female athletes to appeal for the dominant male audience. This choice is also informed by assuming that the reader has a low investment in female athletes which indicates that including personal character information or ambivalent aspects about such sportswomen is engrained in journalistic styles when writing about these athletes.

Through being *the* leader in sports media with millions of viewers (McGuire et. al, 2015, p. 191), the financial capabilities as a \$50 billion business (Badenhausen, 2014), and the cultural influence that it manifests, ESPN.com must set an example for other sports media outlets to follow and to do so with journalistic integrity. Changes in journalistic style must be made in order to respect and promote sportswomen in a way that seeks to remove the sexist, racist and homophobic tone that is embedded within the structure of sports media. Under the entrenched male hegemony of sports media, when articles about sportswoman prioritize non-sports related information like motherhood, obsession with youthfulness, Twitter spats, or hair colour, sportswomen are rendered ambivalent within the media landscape.

## Appendix A - Simone Biles

Table 1 Terms Count in “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles” (August 13st, 2019).

<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
biles	17
gymnastics	12
just	10
said	10
mikulak	9
olympics	9
like	8
u.s	9
championship	7
it's	7

Table 2 Phrases in “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles” (August 13st, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
points ahead of second place	2	5
at the u.s championship	2	4
last year's world championship	2	4
on the floor exercise	2	4
all-around title	3	3
doing it for	2	3
for the sport	2	3
for the u.s	2	3
i feel like	4	3
the 2016 olympics	2	3

Table 3 Collocate in “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles” (August 13st, 2019).

Term	Collocate	Count (Context)
biles	said	3
mikulak	said	3
biles	shared	1
biles	sees	1
biles	score	1
biles	mechelle	1
biles	main	1
biles	final	1
mikulak	joked	1
mikulak	excelling	1

Table 4 Context of ‘biles’ in “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles” (August 13st, 2019).

Left	Term	Right
a new approach for Simone	biles	Mechelle Voepel ESPN.com Aug 13
2019 KANSAS CITY, mo. -- Simone	biles	does things no woman gymnast
entertainment worlds also marvel at	biles	and take to social media
crazy to think about that,"	biles	said after winning her sixth
Here at the U.S. championship,	biles	shared her genius again, cleanly
title dating back six years.	biles	score of 118.500 was almost
year-old native of Minnesota.	biles	, 22, also won the vault
she finished third. That was	biles	final performance of these
bars were my friend." In	biles	championships
the organization faces. Ultimately, though,	biles	, we are seeing a generational
too. Despite the gap between	biles	and men's champion Sam Mikulak
of China, Japan and Germany,	biles	and her teammates, the pool
doing it for different reasons,"	biles	main competition has been herself
is keeping your eyes on	biles	said of preparing for another
to think about it yet,"	biles	. She continues not just to
just do what I do."	biles	said, "because that will make
having filed this past December.	biles	also has not hesitated to
	biles	sees using her voice as

Table 5 Context of ‘mikulak’ in “Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles” (August 13st, 2019).

Left	Term	Right
Biles and men's champion Sam	mikulak	excelling here provided a much
was a wide margin between	mikulak	, who won the men's all
Yul Moldauer of Oklahoma (168.600).	mikulak	also walked away from Kansas
championship or the Tokyo Olympics.	mikulak	was consistently terrific here, with
the U.S. [men] right now,"	mikulak	said. "You could probably make
I'm ready for bigger aspirations."	mikulak	joked that getting his sixth
his love for the sport.	mikulak	said he's considering competing past
try crashing through that door,"	mikulak	said. "And maybe get a
I can get now." while	mikulak	is still attempting to catch

Table 6 Terms Count in “4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we’ve ever seen” (July 31st, 2019).

Terms	Count
biles	13
all	7
during	6
won	6
around	5
competition	5
olympic	5
world	5
event	4
rio	4

Table 7 Phrases in “4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we’ve ever seen” (July 31st, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
gymnast of all time	2	4
the rest of the	2	4
all-around titles	3	3
and it has	2	3
biles won the	2	3
known for her	2	3
she has won	2	3
the u.s classic	3	3
and even	2	2
and then	2	2

Table 8 Collocate in “4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we’ve ever seen” (July 31st, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Collocate</b>	<b>Count (Context)</b>
biles	won	2
biles	winning	1
biles	win	1
biles	goes	1
biles	dominance	1
biles	because	1
world	medals	1
world	doesn't	1
world	championships	1
world	all	1
olympic	medal	1
olympic	gold	1
olympic	cycle	1
olympic	break	1
olympic	bars	1
competition	gets	1
competition	did	1

Table 9 Context of 'biles' in "4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we've ever seen" (July 31st, 2019).

Left	Term	Right
4 reasons Simone	biles	is unlike any gymnast we've
writer Jul 31, 2019 Simone	biles	goes for a record-tying
same. But what exactly makes	biles	so good? Here are some
the boundaries of the sport	biles	is known for her gravity
signature move (known as "The	biles	because she was the first
in sports, and then there's	biles	winning streak. She has won
less than one Olympic cycle,	biles	dominance is basically the gymnastics
baseball. And not only does	biles	win, win, win (no matter
a .75 point deficit between	biles	and the rest of the
fare much better against her --	biles	won the all-around titles
She has no weaknesses if	biles	had a weakness (and we
And it has paid off.	biles	won the silver medal at
vocal leader Not only is	biles	the best gymnast of all

## Appendix B - Megan Rapinoe

Table 10 Terms Count in "Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France" (June 28th, 2019).

Terms	Count
said	13
world	12
cup	11
game	11
rapinoe	11
u.s	11
just	8
team	8
france	7
second	7

Table 11 Phrases in “Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France” (June 28th, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
this is the team that	2	5
a world cup quarterfinal	2	4
and a lot of	2	4
rapinoe said after the	2	4
this is what you	2	4
we take care of	2	4
earned it the	2	3
ellis said i	2	3
for the second	2	3
goal in the	2	3

Table 12 Collocate in “Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France” (June 28th, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Collocate</b>	<b>Count (Context)</b>
rapinoe	said	3
u.s	team	1
u.s	opponent	1
u.s	digs	1
u.s	defensive	1
u.s	defender	1
u.s	coach	1
rapinoe	scores	1
rapinoe	scored	1
rapinoe	propelled	1
rapinoe	played	1
rapinoe	indicated	1
rapinoe	gave	1

Table 13 Terms Count in “Why USWNT-France quarterfinal match really did feel like 'final before the final’” (June 28th, 2019).

<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
french	10
rapinoe	9
fans	8
france	7
final	6
said	5
ball	4
came	4
city	4
game	4

Table 14 Phrases in “Why USWNT-France quarterfinal match really did feel like 'final before the final’” (June 28th, 2019).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
final before the final	2	4
2 france 1	2	3
allez les bleus	2	3
the ball and	2	3
the french fans	2	3
the united states	2	3
up into the	2	3
american fans	2	2
as the	3	2
at the	3	2

Table 15 Collocate in “Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France” (June 28th, 2019).

Term	Collocate	Count (Context)
rapinoe	said	2
rapinoe	whipped	1
rapinoe	unmissable	1
rapinoe	took	1
rapinoe	sprinted	1
rapinoe	looking	1

Table 16 Context of ‘rapinoe’ in “Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France” (June 28th, 2019).

Left	Term	Right
or put another way: Megan	rapinoe	2, France 1. "C'est magnifique
1. "C'est magnifique ce soir,"	rapinoe	said, with a lovely French
team. Earlier in the week,	rapinoe	, unmissable with her purple hair
national anthems and, within minutes,	rapinoe	took hold. First, she took
kick from the left flank,	rapinoe	whipped her right foot through
was past her. Bedlam followed.	rapinoe	sprinted toward the corner, pointing
tantalizing cross that fell for	rapinoe	at the far post. She
never forget here in Paris,"	rapinoe	said. There was a small
ball up into the stands.	rapinoe	, looking exhausted, hugged everyone she

### Appendix C - Serena Williams

Table 17 Terms Count in “Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief'” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Terms	Count
williams	23
coaching	9
saying	9
umpire	9
chair	8
final	8
game	8
open	8
osaka	8
grand	7

Table 18 Phrases in “Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief’” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
issued a statement saying the	2	5
that i was able to	2	5
100 percent of the	2	4
chair umpire a thief	2	4
singles final at the	2	4
a chair umpire	2	3
a game for	2	3
a lot of	2	3
added that he	2	3
after the match	2	3

Table 19 Collocate in “Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief’” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Collocate</b>	<b>Count (Context)</b>
williams	told	2
williams	said	2
williams	played	1
williams	objected	1
williams	fined	1
williams	crowd	1
williams	coach	1
williams	clashed	1
williams	began	1
williams	appeared	1

Table 20 Context of ‘williams’ in “Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief’” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Left	Term	Right
Osaka captures US Open; Serena	williams	fined, penalized game for calling
8, 2018 NEW YORK -- Serena	williams	was penalized a game for
title. The biggest issue for	williams	on the scoreboard Saturday was
both Osaka, the champion, and	williams	, the runner-up in her
24th Grand Slam trophy, cried.	williams	put an arm around Osaka's
Naomi. No more booing." added	williams	, with a laugh: "I really
teary Osaka addressed the pro-	williams	crowd, saying, "I'm sorry. I
play with you. Thank you."	williams	was fined a total of
for verbal abuse. This was	williams	third high-profile conflict with
remembered for is the way	williams	clashed with chair umpire Carlos
the court at that time."	williams	objected right away, saying she
in an interview with ESPN,	williams	coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, acknowledged that
he had tried to signal	williams	but said he didn't think
the records, you'll see." Briefly,	williams	appeared to be working her
in the second set. But	williams	played a poor game right
second code violation,	williams	a point. When she realized
automatically costing	williams	told Ramos he should have
with Osaka ahead 15-love,	williams	said. "You owe me an
never cheated in my life!"	williams	began laughing, saying: "Are you
to explain his ruling, and	williams	told them the whole episode
with a Grand Slam supervisor.	williams	said. "There's a lot of
saying that is not fair,"	williams	for her "great deal of
the final later Saturday,	williams	, after Wimbledon in July, as
congratulating	williams	
defeat in a row for	williams	

Table 21 Terms Count in “Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
said	9
williams	8
match	6
game	5
like	5
statement	5
coaching	4
serena	4
thief	4
time	4

Table 22 Phrases in “Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<b>Term</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Length</b>
continue to fight for	2	4
for the next person	2	4
to cheat to win	2	4
a game from	2	3
be able to	2	3
issued a statement	3	3
she continues to	2	3
the us open	2	3
the wta believes	2	3
a match	2	2

Table 23 Collocate in “Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Term	Collocate	Count (Context)
serena	williams	2
williams	said	1
williams	received	1
williams	explained	1
williams	cites	1
williams	accused	1
time	williams	1
thief	williams	1
serena	wanted	1

Table 24 Context of ‘williams’ in “Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump” (September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Left	Term	Right
Serena	williams	cites sexism following dust-up
by controversy and penalties, Serena	williams	accused umpire Carlos Ramos of
her news conference. Ramos handed	williams	three violations in the second
understood what you are saying,"	williams	explained after the match. "Then
can't go back in time,"	williams	said when asked if she
man because they said 'thief.'"	williams	, a 23-time Grand Slam
out for the next person."	williams	received applause from many in
a statement as well, lauding	williams	for her "great deal of

## Appendix D – ESPN Articles

### Triple-doubles, daring dismounts and a new approach for Simone Biles

Mechelle Voepel  
ESPN.com

Aug 13, 2019

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Simone Biles does things no woman gymnast ever had. And if she doesn't do them perfectly, she's ticked off. That's because she knows she can reach these heights -- literally and figuratively -- and wants everyone watching to enjoy them with her.

People do, and not just in the arena where she's competing. Celebrities from the sports and entertainment worlds also marvel at Biles and take to social media to express it.

"It's kind of crazy to think about that," Biles said after winning her sixth U.S. Gymnastics Championships all-around title Sunday before an enthralled crowd at Sprint Center. "Whenever they retweet it or I see they reach out on Instagram, I feel like my heart stops. Because I'm like, 'Wow, they actually notice me.' Because what we do, I feel like, is so much smaller -- gymnastics isn't that widely recognized. So to get that support from everybody else, and they're really excited about it, makes us feel like we're doing something good."

Here at the U.S. championship, Biles shared her genius again, cleanly nailing the triple-double (three twists, two flips) on the floor exercise. That unprecedented-for-women, gravity-defying move was the highlight of the Simone Show, but there was plenty else to see.

She dominated the all-around, her 20th consecutive such title dating back six years. Biles' score of 118.500 was almost five full points ahead of second-place finisher Sunisa Lee's 113.550. Finishing third at 111.850 was Grace McCallum, like Lee, a 16-year-old native of Minnesota.

Biles, 22, also won the vault, the balance beam and the floor exercise titles. Even in the event she sometimes just rolls her eyes at in irritation, uneven parallel bars, she finished third. That was Biles' final performance of these championships. After sticking her landing, she exited with a big grin and waved her arms as if to say, "OK, tonight, even the bars were my friend."

In Biles, we are seeing a generational-level talent, someone so gifted and driven she has changed the conversation about what's possible in women's gymnastics. At least, what's possible for her.

"It's inspiring to everybody," said Tom Forster, high-performance team coordinator for the U.S. women's gymnastics program. "It's really cool. We're super happy she's come back from 2016 and wants to do it again. We're so excited. It's good for the sport."

The U.S. championship was the first major event new USA Gymnastics CEO and president Li Li Leung presided over. To her credit, she was upfront in a session with the media about the many challenges the organization faces. Ultimately, though, Biles and men's champion Sam Mikulak

excelling here provided a much-needed boost for the United States gymnastics team a year out from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Admittedly, the U.S. women and men are in different places right now as far as global competitiveness. The women are defending Olympic and world champions, and favorites to win both of those upcoming events, too. Despite the gap between Biles and her teammates, the pool of American women's talent is deep. It will be tough narrowing to five (with one alternate) for the world championship, which is Oct. 4-13 in Stuttgart, Germany.

There also was a wide margin between Mikulak, who won the men's all-around title here Saturday, and the other Americans. His score of 174.150 was more than five points ahead of second-place Yul Moldauer of Oklahoma (168.600). Mikulak also walked away from Kansas City with golds in floor exercise, high bar, pommel horse and parallel bars.

But the American men are long shots for a podium finish as a team at the world championship or the Tokyo Olympics. Mikulak was consistently terrific here, with no falls in any of his 12 routines. Yet he was bluntly honest about how circumstances -- including injuries to some other top gymnasts and retirements since the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro -- kept this from being a truly top-level men's competition.

"It is a weird place for the U.S. [men] right now," Mikulak said. "You could probably make the argument that maybe this is the easiest time period for USA Gymnastics for a guy like me. With that being said, I do just see this competition as a steppingstone. Not to really downplay how awesome it is, but I've done this a few times. I'm ready for bigger aspirations."

Mikulak joked that getting his sixth U.S. all-around title just basically means he's "old." He will be 27 in October. But with age, he said, has come wisdom and mental toughness. Yet a lengthy senior career -- he competed in the 2012 and '16 Olympics -- hasn't dulled his love for the sport. Mikulak said he's considering competing past the Tokyo Games and into his 30s. Getting a bronze medal in high bar at last year's world championship was a breakthrough he has continued to build upon.

"I thought that was a good segue to open the door, and now I just want to try crashing through that door," Mikulak said. "And maybe get a couple more [medals], and maybe different colors. I finally got a taste, and I want as much as I can get now."

While Mikulak is still attempting to catch up with top individual competitors from the likes of China, Japan and Germany, Biles' main competition has been herself. She won four gold medals and one bronze at the Rio Olympics but still has unfinished business.

"I feel like this time around I'm doing it for different reasons," Biles said of preparing for another Olympics competition. "The first time around, you do it not just for yourself but you have a lot of people to prove [things to.] This time, I'm just doing it for myself, and I think that's the beauty of it."

The Olympic qualifying system for gymnastics was overhauled after the 2016 Olympics. For Tokyo, there will be four-person teams instead of five but there will be multiple ways for individuals to qualify. The aim of the changes was to allow more opportunities for apparatus specialists to get into the Olympics.

Unfortunately, what it has done more than anything is confuse people -- so much so that it's already been decided to return to five-person teams for the 2024 Olympics.

What's easy, though, is keeping your eyes on Biles (voyeuristic tone). She continues not just to be the gold standard on the women's side but to perform skills no one else has. At the U.S. championship, she did a double-double dismount off the balance beam in preliminaries and a triple-double in her opening pass on the floor exercise both nights. These were all firsts in any women's competition.

At this point, all she accomplishes just adds to a historical place in the sport that is already secure.

"I feel like I don't want to think about it yet," Biles said, "because that will make me old real quick. So just do what I do."

Biles also has not hesitated to talk about her trust issues with USA Gymnastics. She poignantly talked before the event about still struggling in the aftermath of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse case. Then Sunday, she mentioned how her coaches still haven't been paid bonuses they're owed from USA Gymnastics from last year's world championship. That's because USA Gymnastics is in bankruptcy court, having filed this past December.

Biles sees using her voice as part of what she calls "adulting," and she is embracing that as well as continuing to redefine excellence in her sport.

"I do try to get out so I'm not thinking about gymnastics all the time," she said, adding she owns a home now. "It's been really exciting; I'm adulting, little by little, and it's really fun."

#### **4 reasons Simone Biles is unlike any gymnast we've ever seen**

D'Arcy Maine  
ESPNW Writer

Jul 31, 2019

Simone Biles goes for a record-tying sixth U.S. national all-around title when competition gets underway on Thursday in Kansas City, Missouri -- and by now it almost goes without saying that she is the greatest gymnast of all time. The 22-year-old has more titles than we have space to post (and this is the internet!), including four Olympic gold medals and four world all-around titles. She has won more world medals (25!) than anyone in history.

So yeah, she's really, really good.

And following her incredible performance at the nationals qualifier, the U.S. Classic, last month, it looks as if 2019 -- and the lead-up run to the 2020 Olympics -- is shaping up to be more of the same.

But what exactly makes Biles so good? Here are some of the many ways she is so incredibly special:

She keeps pushing the boundaries of the sport

Biles is known for her gravity-defying floor routines, and even though her skills are leaps and bounds ahead of her competition, she still is constantly trying to add new elements to her already tricky repertoire.

During the U.S. Classic, she debuted a front layout in combination with her double layout-half signature move (known as "The Biles" because she was the first to do it) that very few elite gymnasts can even imagine doing. She made it look effortless, but we assure you, it is ... not.

But it was what she didn't do during the competition that really got people talking. During podium training, she teased another new skill that she insisted wasn't quite meet-ready -- a triple-twisting double tuck. What makes this so amazing? Aside from it requiring two flips and three twists in a tucked position, no woman has ever done it in competition. Did we mention that this is ridiculously hard?

She's virtually unbeatable

There are winning streaks in sports, and then there's Biles' winning streak. She has won 19 straight all-around titles, spanning more than six years. In a sport where the average senior elite career often lasts less than one Olympic cycle, Biles' dominance is basically the gymnastics equivalent to what the Chicago Bulls did in the 1990s -- if Michael Jordan hadn't left the team for almost 18 months to play baseball.

And not only does Biles win, win, win (no matter what), she *dominates* her competition and rarely leaves her opponents even an opportunity to win gold. She won the U.S. Classic by more than two points -- nabbing a ridiculous 60.0 compared to a 57.90 for second-place finisher Riley McCusker. And McCusker is no slouch: Her total was, notably, one of the best all-around scores recorded worldwide this year.

There was a .75 point deficit between Biles and the rest of the field on both floor and vault. Her astounding 15.65 score on the latter was the top score of the day on any event.

The rest of the world doesn't fare much better against her -- Biles won the all-around titles at the Rio Olympics and the 2018 world championships (with a kidney stone, no less) both by almost two points. As her teammate and friend Aly Raisman, who finished in second at the 2016 Games, famously said: "If you get silver, you're the best because Simone doesn't count."

She has no weaknesses

If Biles had a weakness (and we say that relatively speaking) heading into Rio, it was on bars. She often talked about how much she struggled and disliked competing in the event, and she had never won a world or Olympic medal on the apparatus. However, she has made a considerable effort to improve on the event during her comeback after her post-Olympic break, and, goodness gracious, now she's an actual medal threat on that event too.

Since Rio, she has teamed up with new coach Laurent Landi, who previously coached 2016 Olympic bars silver medalist Madison Kocian, and trained with former bars national champion Ashton Locklear until her retirement earlier this year. And it has paid off. Biles won the silver medal at nationals last year, and then did the same at worlds. So while everyone was amazed by her five medals during Rio, she realistically could take home six in Tokyo.

She's a vocal leader

Not only is Biles the best gymnast of all time, she also has a winning personality. Known for her hilarious quips, charming social media presence and for speaking up on issues that matter to her, she is a force to be reckoned with outside the gym as well.

A survivor of sexual abuse from former team doctor Larry Nassar, she has been a fierce advocate for her fellow survivors, and even wore a teal leotard in solidarity during nationals in 2018. She has spoken up on several occasions when unhappy with the leadership of USA Gymnastics, and it has resulted in actual change.

### **Megan Rapinoe scores twice to lead USWNT past France**

Graham Hayes

Jun 28, 2019

PARIS -- Megan Rapinoe played a memorable role when a World Cup quarterfinal launched a new golden era for the United States women's national team eight years ago, serving up the pinpoint pass that Abby Wambach headed home in extra time against Brazil.

On Friday night, even as darkness finally fell over a boisterous Parc des Princes in another quarterfinal for the ages, Rapinoe made sure the sun hasn't set on that era quite yet.

Scoring two goals for the second consecutive game, the first player to do that in the World Cup since Marta in 2007, Rapinoe propelled the United States to a 2-1 win against France in front of a crowd of 45,595.

"I can't get 2011 ... out of my mind, the ball she played to Abby Wambach," U.S. coach Jill Ellis said after this latest quarterfinal epic. "It just has always sat with me. Even when we had young

players come in, I always said, 'Ask Megan about those moments.' Because there's a never-say-die attitude. She loves and lives for those moments."

Rapinoe gave the U.S. women the lead with a set-piece goal in the opening minutes, then added to her total in a second half in which the United States was largely under siege from the resilient French. It was that second goal that proved to be the difference after France's Wendie Renard headed in a free kick and brought France to within a goal in the final 10 minutes.

Rapinoe said after the previous game that she wanted a spectacle. She helped make Friday's contest the best kind.

This World Cup hasn't always come off in the best light. From a missing Ballon d'Or winner to goal celebrations to VAR to the all-around chaos of Cameroon against England, controversy has all too often overshadowed soccer. Even on Friday, concerns about excessive heat in Paris cast a proverbial, but unfortunately not literal, shadow over things. But for a night in one of the planet's grandest cities, the spectacle and the soccer were everything.

From a deafening rendition of "Le Marseillaise," the French anthem, and a spirited effort by an enormous contingent of American fans to match the noise from the hosts, the atmosphere was electric with an edge. This wasn't family fun. This was a World Cup quarterfinal.

"This is what you want for a World Cup," U.S. defender Kelley O'Hara said. "You want to have the stands packed and loud and you can't hear a thing, you can't think basically -- you can't even hear yourself speak to somebody else. As a footballer, this is what you live for."

Rapinoe indicated following the contest against Spain that she wanted just that kind of pageantry in Paris. She got it. And as usual, she made the most of it.

What distraction?

It's usually not a sign everything is going smoothly when a player has to open a news conference with a statement before taking questions, as Rapinoe did the day before the match in Paris. But in saying Thursday she stood behind her comments about not wishing to visit the White House, minus some of her language, and then shifting the focus to the game against France, she looked entirely at ease with her place in the spotlight. She always does.

Rapinoe said after the quarterfinal victory that she doesn't thrive off proving people wrong as much as she does rallying people around her. That might be, but she's pretty good as a foil too.

"C'est magnifique, c'est soir," Rapinoe said. "It's everything you want. Obviously, we're not at a home World Cup, so a good healthy, hostile crowd."

Any thought that the week's controversy would distract her or the U.S. team vanished when her free kick went under a leaping Julie Ertz and between the legs of Amandine Henry before sliding into the French net for a 1-0 lead in the fifth minute.

"We take care of ourselves, we take care of each other. We keep a very tight-knit group," O'Hara said. "... Regardless of what is happening outside, we always have each other's back inside this team, inside lines, outside the lines. It's not really about all of that. It's more so, when we step on the field, we have each other 100%, 90-plus minutes."

Early yellow unsettles France

Alex Morgan spent most of the round of 16 game against Spain getting run over, knocked down and generally hassled by opponents intent on being physical with her.

In really the first point of conflict Friday night, she didn't give France's Griedge Mbock Bathy a chance. Morgan's speed gave her a step on Bathy as both chased a ball down the left flank. Bathy didn't do much to hide the firm grip she put on Morgan's arm as a result, drawing a yellow card when the forward finally fell. That sprint, when Morgan certainly looked no worse for wear after the punishment she absorbed against Spain and after earlier injury concerns, created the free kick on which Rapinoe scored.

In addition to the obvious benefit of the goal that followed, the yellow card and the note of caution as to what the United States could do on the counter dulled France's opening salvo.

"[Morgan] worked her tail off," Ellis said. "I thought she tried to hold up play at times, did that well. I thought she looked to penetrate at times. I thought she was strong with the balls that were played into her. ... I think she put her heart and soul into this game."

U.S. digs in to survive

France completed 176 more passes than the United States and had 60% of possession. It doubled up the Americans in attempts, albeit some of that due to the furious late push for an equalizer.

Far from the offensive juggernaut that scored so many goals they created a controversy in its World Cup opener, the U.S. women settled into their own bunker with five players in the back line midway through the second half. They had their lead, the formation switch indicated, and they intended to hold it.

And it worked. The world's deepest attacking team won without any swashbuckling. It won by refusing to buckle, swash or otherwise.

Yes, the second half dissolved into a struggle for survival, but credit the U.S. women for withstanding as tough a test as any they will ever face -- slowing waves of French attacks with a stadium of fans pushing the host forward.

"It's an incredible team, and then you add to that just the surge of momentum from the fans," Ellis said. "At times, it felt like a little bit of tsunami. It was just a lot."

Becky Sauerbrunn's positioning and play throughout shone all the more while sharing the field with Renard. Sauerbrunn made a strong case, quietly as always, as the best defender in the world.

But also give credit to Crystal Dunn and O'Hara. Stretched to the breaking point by France's ability to get wide -- through Kadidiatou Diani on Dunn's side of the field and Amel Majri and Eugenie Le Sommer on O'Hara's side -- the two converted attackers hung in. It was largely composed in the first half and largely frantic in the second half, but they did the job.

"Crystal taking care of Diani, Kelley taking care of Majri and Le Sommer, Abby, JJ [Julie Ertz] and I just taking care of whoever was shooting," Sauerbrunn said. "It was a lot of crosses, we had to absorb a lot. Alyssa [Naeher] came up huge. I'm just extremely proud of the back line and just super proud of the team for gutting this out."

So if O'Hara needed a bit of luck with a near handball in the box in the closing minutes, the ball striking her arm but when it was in a natural position close to her body, she earned it.

The entire U.S. defensive effort earned it.

"The individual effort that combined for an incredible collective effort -- this is the team that I love and know," O'Hara said. "This is the team that the world knows. We play with a lot of heart and a lot of guts and a lot of grittiness."

Lindsey Horan was missed

Rose Lavelle is going to have a decade's worth of good nights in big games. Friday, unfortunately, won't rank highly on that list. The decision not to start Horan for the second game in a row was puzzling before the game started and got no less puzzling as it progressed.

While Horan dealt with multiple injuries this year, missing the SheBelieves Cup game against England, Ellis said the decision Friday was solely coach's discretion to get Sam Mewis in the game.

"Just playing Sam, that was kind of it," Ellis said. "I think Sam can separate. They're both fantastic players. I think Sam is in form, you saw that in the domestic games. And Lindsey is as well. And so the beauty of that is we have legs. You make those decisions every day as a coach."

The United States misses Horan's all-around game when she is not in the midfield, and if getting her back out there means playing her alongside Mewis, then that might need to be the plan.

On to the semifinals

It was a little more difficult than four years ago, when the U.S. women needed only to beat China to advance, but the Americans' streak of reaching the semifinals in every World Cup continues.

And the challenge doesn't get much easier. In winning its quarterfinal against Norway, England finally looked like the chic pick it was before the tournament. The English have played the U.S. women well in recent years, beating them in New Jersey in 2017, and there shouldn't be a fear factor.

It also will be the third consecutive game in which the U.S. opponent has more rest.

France, meanwhile, is out of the World Cup and fails to qualify for the Olympics next summer. The top three European finishers at the World Cup earn Olympic spots. With a new rule allowing it to compete under the Great Britain designation in the Olympics, England already is through to the semifinals and guaranteed a place in Tokyo. And Saturday's quarterfinals pit four more European teams (Italy vs. Netherlands and Sweden vs. Germany).

### **Why USWNT-France quarterfinal match really did feel like 'final before the final'**

Sam Borden  
ESPN Senior Writer

Jun 28, 2019

PARIS -- This city comes alive at night. Its pulse quickens as the museums empty out and the restaurants fill, the people crowding into bistros in the Latin Quarter or the *Marais* or up on the hill near *Sacre Coeur*. As evening falls, the 7th Arrondissement becomes the center as the Eiffel Tower begins to glow. It sparkles on the hour and -- on most nights -- shows the city's heartbeat.

Friday was different. e

United States 2, France 1. Or put another way: Megan Rapinoe 2, France 1.

"*C'est magnifique ce soir*," Rapinoe said, with a lovely French accent, and why not? For her, Friday night surely was beautiful.

The whole day was, really. They called it *la final avant la lettre* here -- in English, it roughly translates to, "the final before the final" -- and it felt that way. This was technically a quarterfinal, but in name only: Fans packed the trains into the city all day, and shouts of "Allez les Bleus!" could be heard by the Ferris wheel in the Tuileries and from the cafes by Bastille. Whatever the round of the competition, this was the tournament showpiece.

Everyone -- everyone -- was ready. The mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, took time out from managing the city through a desperate heatwave to post on social media about the game and invite everyone to a massive watch party. The city's firefighters got involved too, posting a video that celebrated the strength of the modern women and cheering the French national team as inspirations. (Peripheral to the match, notable individuals mentioned support)

There was fun to be had, as well: France's Ministry of Finance released a report that highlighted the friendly economic relationship between France and the United States, while some buses (in

Paris and other cities) had their display boards flashing "Allez les Bleus" instead of their route. Even in the United States, the anticipation built steadily; fans gathered to see the broadcast on a giant screen in Times Square, and supportive Twitter posts for the U.S. team came from personalities as varied as Ellen DeGeneres and LeBron James. (Notable individuals mentioned from the US)

By late afternoon, the area around the stadium crackled through temperatures that soared to 90 degrees. Crowds poured from the subway at Pont de Sevres, and the blocks of fans moved en masse, singing and shouting and choking traffic even more than usual. "If you're not jumping, you're not French," they sang, bouncing in unison.

The wait for the game had been forever. France's assistant coach, Philippe Joly, said what everyone already knew when he noted that, "Since [the tournament draw in] December, everyone is obsessed with this quarterfinal." The stadium filled. The French prime minister, Edouard Philippe, was there. So was the former president, Nicolas Sarkozy. Jose Mourinho too.

"It was the most intense match I've ever been a part of," said U.S. coach Jill Ellis -- no small statement when you consider that she already has coached a World Cup-winning team.

Earlier in the week, Rapinoe, unmissable with her purple hair and a motor that seems to go forever, was in the spotlight for comments she made months ago about not wanting to visit the White House, calmly handling another controversy stacked on top of the lawsuit she and her teammates have filed against U.S. Soccer alleging gender bias. There were Tweets and videos and hot takes, but none of it shook her focus on this game, which she said she hoped would be "a circus, a spectacle."

It was -- in large part because of her. (Rapinoe is a spectacle here). After the French fans unfurled an elegant tifo of Marianne, the symbol of the French Revolution and liberty, the stands rippled through the national anthems and, within minutes, Rapinoe took hold.

First, she took an aggressive throw-in from the near side, sending Alex Morgan scampering down the line where a French defender could do nothing more than foul her.

Then, after standing over the free kick from the left flank, Rapinoe whipped her right foot through the ball and sent it dipping into the crowd in front of the net. It went over and under and through so many legs that the veteran France goalkeeper, Sarah Bouhaddi, only saw the ball once it was past her. Bedlam followed.

Rapinoe sprinted toward the corner, pointing up into the fans before she was plowed under by her teammates. "I'm back!" she seemed to shout to Kelley O'Hara, though it was hard to imagine where she had gone -- as it was her third goal in the past two games. (described here as pointing to the fans, but the celebration was more about Rapinoe than the fans)

The fourth came exactly an hour later, at the end of a gorgeous pass from Morgan to spring Tobin Heath, who ripped down the sideline and sent in a tantalizing cross that fell for Rapinoe at the far post. She barely looked at the goal before cashing her shot beneath Bouhaddi.

"It was a game we'll never forget here in Paris," Rapinoe said.

There was a small twist remaining, as Wendie Renard's thundering header gave France hope, and the final 10 minutes were an appropriate frenzy: O'Hara nearly handed the ball and France shouted in vain for a penalty. Amandine Henry lunged for a cross but couldn't connect. Christen Press came on as a substitute and killed time. The French were bottled up at midfield time after time.

Finally, the referee blew the whistle. Morgan raised her hands. Heath punted the ball up into the stands. Rapinoe, looking exhausted, hugged everyone she could find. (Visual analysis of Rapinoe, but also her appreciation for her team comes across, she is human after all)

It was over. The American fans jumped together. The French fans, finally, stood still.

### **Naomi Osaka captures US Open; Serena Williams fined, penalized game for calling chair umpire 'a thief'**

ESPN News Services

Sep 8, 2018

NEW YORK -- Serena Williams was penalized a game for calling the chair umpire a thief during an extended argument as the US Open women's final descended into chaos, with fans booing and play delayed before Naomi Osaka wrapped up a 6-2, 6-4 victory for her first Grand Slam title.

The biggest issue for Williams on the scoreboard Saturday was that she was outplayed by a younger version of herself in Osaka, a 20-year-old who is the first player from Japan to win a major singles tennis title and idolizes the 36-year-old American.

During the trophy ceremony in Arthur Ashe Stadium, thousands of fans jeered repeatedly, and both Osaka, the champion, and Williams, the runner-up in her bid for a record-tying 24th Grand Slam trophy, cried.

Williams put an arm around Osaka's shoulder and told the crowd: "I know you guys were here rooting, and I was rooting, too, but let's make this the best moment we can. ... We're going to get through this, and let's be positive. So congratulations, Naomi. No more booing."

Added Williams, with a laugh: "I really hope to continue to go and play here again. We'll see."

A teary Osaka addressed the pro-Williams crowd, saying, "I'm sorry. I know that everyone was cheering for her, and I'm sorry that it had to end like this. I just want to say thank you for watching the match. Thank you."

She added: "It was always my dream to play Serena in the US Open finals, so I'm really glad that I was able to do that. I'm really grateful that I was able to play with you. Thank you."

Williams was fined a total of \$17,000 for the three code violations on Saturday. She was fined \$4,000 for receiving coaching, \$3,000 for racket abuse and \$10,000 for verbal abuse.

This was Williams' third high-profile conflict with an official at Flushing Meadows, following her tirade after a foot fault in the 2009 semifinals against Kim Clijsters and a dispute over a hindrance call in the 2011 final against Sam Stosur.

What the 2018 final will forever be remembered for is the way Williams clashed with chair umpire Carlos Ramos, demanding an apology after he initially issued a warning in the second set's second game for a code violation for receiving coaching, which is not allowed during Grand Slam matches.

The WTA released a statement after the match, urging celebration of both players while saying, "There are matters that need to be looked into."

The US Open later issued a statement saying that Ramos' decision was "final and not reviewable by the Tournament Referee or the Grand Slam Supervisor who were called to the court at that time."

Williams objected right away, saying she would "rather lose" than cheat. After the match, in an interview with ESPN, Williams' coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, acknowledged that he had tried to signal Williams but said he didn't think she had seen him. He added that he thinks every player gets coaching during matches.

"Well, I mean, I'm honest, I was coaching. I mean, I don't think she looked at me, so that's why she didn't even think I was. I was like 100 percent of the coaches on 100 percent of the matches, so we have to stop this hypocrite thing," Mouratoglou said. "Sascha [Bajin, Osaka's coach,] was coaching every point, too. This chair umpire was the chair umpire of most of the finals of Rafa [Nadal], and Toni's coaching every single point, and they never gave a warning. I don't really get it. It's strange."

Mouratoglou added that he had never been called for a coaching violation: "Not once in my life, and you can check the records, you'll see."

Briefly, Williams appeared to be working her way back into the match, breaking Osaka for the only time to go up 3-1 in the second set. But Williams played a poor game right after that to get broken immediately, and she smashed her racket on the court, destroying it. That drew a second code violation, automatically costing Williams a point. When she realized that the next game had started with Osaka ahead 15-love, Williams told Ramos he should have retracted the initial warning for coaching.

"I have never cheated in my life!" Williams said. "You owe me an apology."

She resumed arguing with Ramos later, saying, "You stole a point from me. You're a thief, too." (Emphasis on the word of Serena, an outspoken player on the court. Becomes a gossip column)

He responded by issuing a third code violation, which results in a lost game. That made it 5-3 for Osaka.

Ramos called both players over to explain his ruling, and Williams began laughing, saying: "Are you kidding me?" She asked to speak to tournament referee Brian Earley, who walked onto the court along with a Grand Slam supervisor. Williams told them the whole episode "is not fair" and said, "This has happened to me too many times."

"To lose a game for saying that is not fair," Williams said. "There's a lot of men out here that have said a lot of things, and because they are men, that doesn't happen."

Soon thereafter, the match was over.

On Sunday, WTA CEO Steve Simon issued a statement saying the WTA believed that some gender bias and sexism occurred in the game, and that "further review" of the coaching rule is needed.

USTA chairman and president Katrina Adams released a statement on the final later Saturday, congratulating Williams for her "great deal of class and sportsmanship."

"This was Naomi's moment and Serena wanted her to be able to enjoy it. That was a class move from a true champion. What Serena has accomplished this year in playing her way back on to the tour is truly amazing. She continues to inspire, because she continues to strive to be the best. She owns virtually every page of the record book, but she's never been one to rest on her laurels." (Insinuates Williams was away, on maternity leave, credit her ability to work her way back into it)

It was the second Grand Slam final defeat in a row for Williams, after Wimbledon in July, as she seeks her first major title since her return to the tour after having a baby in 2017. She missed the US Open last year because her daughter, Olympia, was born during the tournament. (Referencing motherhood as a reason for her reason for having to work back)

This was umpire Ramos' first women's singles final at the US Open. Ramos chaired the women's singles finals at the French Open in 2005 and at Wimbledon in 2018. He has chaired seven men's singles finals across all four Grand Slams and the men's singles final at the 2012 London Olympics.

Saturday's controversy was not the first involving a chair umpire at this year's Open. Alize Cornet was cited for taking off her shirt, and the United States Tennis Association issued a statement saying the chair umpire was wrong to have cited her. Nick Kyrgios received encouragement from a chair umpire during his match, and the USTA admonished him for doing so. (History of sexist calls in other matches, for women, then also cited in a male match)

*Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.*

**Serena Williams cites sexism following dust-up with chair ump**

D'Arcy Maine  
ESPNW Writer

Sep 8, 2018

NEW YORK -- After losing the US Open final to Naomi Osaka in a match marred by controversy and penalties, Serena Williams accused umpire Carlos Ramos of sexism during her news conference. (Williams had to confront the chair in order to prove her point, verbally explain herself to the umpire)

Ramos handed Williams three violations in the second set: the first a warning regarding coaching; the second a point penalty for breaking her racket; and the third a game penalty for verbal abuse after she called him a "thief."

"He took a point from me after he alleged I was cheating, and I wasn't cheating. I had a good conversation with him: 'You know my character. You know me really well.' I don't even call for an on-court coach. He said, 'I understood what you are saying,'" Williams explained after the match.

"Then when I sat down, I said, 'Just to be clear, I can understand what you saw. It may have looked [like] I was getting coaching, but that's what I do. I'd rather lose than have to cheat to win.' I don't need to cheat to win. He was cool. He was like, 'I get it.' We were on the same page, we understood each other ..."

"You definitely can't go back in time," Williams said when asked if she would change anything about the match. "I can't sit here and say I wouldn't say he's a thief because I thought he took a game from me. (Williams stands by her words, commits to her point of view on the match and the refereeing, unwavering in her reaction)

"But I've seen other men call other umpires several things. I'm here fighting for women's rights and for women's equality and for all kinds of stuff. For me to say 'thief' and for him to take a game, it made me feel like it was a sexist remark. He's never taken a game from a man because they said 'thief.'" (Brings in comparison to the men's match, gender marking in the process for her through the comparison to the verbal abuse and physicality in emotional responses she has seen in the men's game)

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam champion, said she would continue to fight for gender equality in the sport and addressed the first-round penalty given to Alize Cornet for changing her shirt on the court. (Calls on community of women, her support of others who have faces inequality in matches, this issue situated in archaic hegemonic outlook on female players)

"For me, it blows my mind. But I'm going to continue to fight for women and to fight for us to have equal -- like, Cornet should be able to take off her shirt without getting a fine. This is outrageous.

"I just feel like the fact that I have to go through this is just an example for the next person that has emotions and that want to express themselves and want to be a strong woman. They're going to be allowed to do that because of today. Maybe it didn't work out for me, but it's going to work out for the next person." (Trailblazer, and portrayed as a hero for equality in sports for speaking up and challenging the call)

Williams received applause from many in the room, and she didn't take further questions. She previously insisted that she didn't receive any coaching and said she wasn't sure if the umpire played any part in deciding the match's outcome.

In a statement released shortly after, the WTA said, "There are matters that need to be looked into that took place during the match. For tonight, it is time to celebrate these two amazing players, both of whom have great integrity."

Later on Sunday, WTA CEO Steve Simon issued a statement saying the WTA believes the coaching rule should be examined and that "The WTA believes that there should be no difference in the standards of tolerance provided to the emotions expressed by men vs. women and is committed to working with the sport to ensure that all players are treated the same. We do not believe that this was done last night." (WTA has to peddle back, and counter the Ramos call, citing gender bias should not be a part of the calls made, citing emotions expressed can be expressed by any player, and that no gendered response should occur because of this. WTA is given an omnipresent ruling with this remark, and shows the importance of the governing bodies of the sport in the conversation)

The US Open issued a statement summarizing the events that led up to the game violation and said that Ramos' decision "was final and not reviewable by the Tournament Referee or the Grand Slam Supervisor who were called to the court at that time."

USTA chairman and president Katrina Adams issued a statement as well, lauding Williams for her "great deal of class and sportsmanship."

"This was Naomi's moment, and Serena wanted her to be able to enjoy it. That was a class move from a true champion. What Serena has accomplished this year in playing her way back onto the tour is truly amazing," Adams said in the statement. "She continues to inspire because she continues to strive to be the best. She owns virtually every page of the record book, but she's never been one to rest on her laurels. (Playing back from maternity leave referenced, saying she is amazing because she is able to get back into top competitive form and perform at a grand slam championship match. Despite being a mom, she continues to go for gold in all capacities of the game.)

"She's always working to improve, always eager to embrace new challenges and to set new standards. She is an inspiration to me, personally, and a credit to our sport, win or lose. I know that she was frustrated about the way the match played out, but the way she stepped up after the final and gave full credit to Naomi for a match well-played speaks volumes about who she is."

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