

**Online Harassment of Women in Sports Media: Is the Glass Ceiling Merely Cracked?**

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## DEDICATION

This research pays tribute to the women in the media industry who have faced challenges, particularly harassment in the workplace and online. Throughout this study, observing comments about skilled female journalists has reinforced the commitment to fostering a safe work and online environment for women, especially those in sports. This industry is known for its embedded hurdles, and I extend my appreciation and extra applause to every woman navigating this field.

This research hopes to point out issues within the sports media industry and present them in a way that aids in safeguarding women from online harassment within online spaces, allowing for a healthy working environment for women.

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## ABSTRACT

This empirical content analysis investigates the challenges encountered by women in the sports media industry as they strive to overcome the barriers to advancement known as the glass ceiling. As social media has become an essential aspect of the journalistic career path, online harassment has followed suit. Notably, female sports personalities have been attacked within online internet spaces. Social media content about these women is overwhelmingly focused on their physical appearance and their capability and knowledge of reporting within sports. This research builds on existing knowledge by investigating the online harassment faced by women. This study is analyzed through a postfeministic lens, where manifestations of hegemonic masculinity are evident. Additionally, second-level agenda-setting is examined to observe how sports personalities are portrayed within sports media. It reveals explicit comments directed at sports figures and analyzes how these comments differ between male and female professionals in the industry, highlighting that women are at the forefront of this ongoing issue. Given the persistent adverse environment, it appears that the glass ceiling for women remains merely cracked.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The sports media industry has experienced steady growth over the years, with women playing an influential role. However, research shows the representation of women within the industry is “dismal” (Lapchick, 2021). In 2021, the percentage of women reporters working in sports was 14.4%, as opposed to 85.6% of the men reporting within the industry (Lapchick, 2021). This disproportion sheds light on the imbalance of gender equality within sports media. In the study, Lapchick (2021) quotes Associated Press Sports Editors president Lisa Wilson as saying, “We need more women in this industry. ... We need those voices. We need that perspective. We need them making coverage and hiring decisions” (para. 7).

Despite the numbers, some women have made it to the top of the sports industry, especially the women on the air covering live sports; female sportscasters such as Erin Andrews, a lead sideline reporter for Fox Sports broadcasting the National Football League (NFL), Holly Rowe, who works with ESPN as a sideline reporter for various sporting events, and Maria Taylor, who works with NBC Sports as a television host and producer. Such success perpetuates the ideology that working women in the United States have broken through the metaphorical glass ceiling (Schaap & Shockley, 2020) that limits the potential for women and minorities in white male-dominated fields.

Further, technological advancements such as social media, have created a pathway for toxic environments for female journalists on and off the job (Carlson & Witt, 2020). Online harassment of women working within the media has become “an informal part of the job” (Carlson & Witt, 2020). These women who have made it to what could be considered the top of the sports industry must manage the emotional stress every day that comes with online

harassment (Johnson et al., 2023). Such online harassment can be seen through various social media platforms with comments on physical appearance, age, race, and their knowledge of sports. This has the potential to hinder the success of many women working in the industry now and in the future by creating a working environment that becomes increasingly hostile and difficult to manage.

A post-feminist approach is useful in understanding the contemporary ideologies of women working in sports (Antunovic, 2019). Women are facing online harassment within many male-dominated workplaces, and that has become somewhat normalized (Carlson & Witt, 2020). Women are now seen within the sports industry but face more daily challenges. The post-feminist approach suggests that “women are expected to reinvent themselves to adapt to the contemporary sexist environment, including discrimination in the workplace” (Antunovic, 2019, para. 13). While using the post-feminist approach to analyze women within the sports industry ideologies of hegemonic masculinities can be used to research gender biases further. These biases and the discrimination against female journalists can connect to online harassment.

Such analysis will also begin to examine the glass ceiling, a term used for women within several industries, and how women are obstructed from moving forward in their careers (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). Women experience adversity within many industries, thus creating the glass ceiling. “The barriers usually include salary inequality for the same work, discrimination in promotions, sexual harassment in the workplace, and lack of policies to maintain work-life balance” (Schaap & Shockley, 2020, p. 4).

This empirical content analysis of social media posts aims to understand the type of negative comments aimed at women in sports broadcasting compared to their male counterparts. Exploring this content will aid in understanding online harassment faced by women working in

the sports media industry. The results provide a framework for the connection between social media content and the potential negative impact on women in the industry. This impact affects the success of women in sports journalism and the chipping away of the glass ceiling. Further, Brisbane et al. (2023) suggests that updated research on gender in sports media “may help to move forward the conversation about women’s acceptance in sports media” (p. 129).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Postfeminism

As of 2018, the term glass ceiling, representing a barrier between women and the workforce, reached its 40th year of existence (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). After more than four decades of progress, the concept is still in question. Women in sports must work effectively in the conditions of the masculine atmosphere of the job (Antunovic, 2019). A post-feministic perspective supports exploration of hegemonic masculinity and its challenges, such as online harassment, that women in the industry encounter. Postfeminism is an “active process” that impeded feminist efforts during the 1970s and 80s (McRobbie, 2004). Postfeminism proposes that contemporary popular culture, particularly social media, has played a significant role in undoing feminism (McRobbie, 2004). While acknowledging the achievements of women within the workforce, postfeminism recognizes the persistent challenges they continue to encounter.

Gender dynamics within the industry are often challenged and examining these inequalities through postfeminism assists in further research for contemporary media (Thorpe et al., 2017). “A postfeminist sensibility encourages scholars to examine those instances where postfeminist sentiments, attitudes, and discourses are expressed by sportswomen in the media for what they can tell us about gender dynamics of power in our current cultural moment” (Thorpe et al., 2017, p. 368). Media representation of women in sports can be analyzed with postfeminism as a sensibility to expose sexism in the industry (Thorpe et al., 2017). Not only can this form of sexism appear within the industry itself, but also as the women open up their lives to the public on social media. While examining the culture around social media, female sports journalists often find themselves targeted by online harassment (Antunovic, 2019).

The application of postfeminism in gender studies, especially regarding stereotypes, can provide insight into how popular culture, such as social media, shapes the societal representation of gender. Exposed sexism in the sports media industry often arises from issues like gender stereotyping. Women within different types of media are often perceived as “more attractive, thinner, and younger than men” (Dixon, 2019, p. 244). As well as stereotypes that often target younger women to focus on their “appearance, pleasing men, being hot...” (Yousman et al., 2020 p. 102). These gender stereotypes are upheld through society and the pressure of hegemonic masculinity. (Willis, 2022 p. 1). Gender stereotypes can be seen not only through physical appearance but through their accountability within their job position and most “often, women are not as highly coveted as experts” (Harris, 2013, p. 5). Masculine and feminine stereotypes are deeply embedded in the culture of sports media, resulting in women frequently being evaluated based on their attire, the manner in which they are depicted on screen, and, moreover, often being perceived as less intelligent than their male counterparts. As these stereotypes become increasingly evident in gender studies, the challenges confronting women continue to escalate.

### **Postfeminism within Social Media**

To effectively examine the aspects of a woman’s job while working in sports media, online harassment has become a significantly important research topic. Postfeminism assists in showing that the glass ceiling has only been cracked for these individuals. This approach takes into account the ideals of feminism while altering the understanding that women have succeeded in many different aspects of the business world (McRobbie, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity has

been a dominant prospect for the reasoning behind why this occurred and why it could be continuing through online harassment of female sports journalists.

Social media has brought a new wave of popular culture to study, and aspects of contemporary culture have progressed, with the ousting of feminism (McRobbie, 2004). Social media has been integrated into society and has become an imperative tool for social means, which has also become "...a space for unfiltered abuse" (Antunovic, 2019, p. 431). This abuse has targeted many women working within sports media and has had a significant effect on these individuals (Antunovic, 2019). The contemporary culture of social media has seemingly normalized the acts of cyber abuse, but the use of social media has become an aspect of many job descriptions for sports journalism, including women (Carlson & Witt, 2020).

While looking into this normalized culture, the feminist approach limits the reach into what modern-day media has become (McRobbie, 2004). McRobbie (2004) describes how the efforts of feminism have become outdated concerning the current state of media. The ongoing challenges faced by women within sports media, such as online harassment, would counteract the underlying premise of feminism (Thorpe et al., 2017). The idea that women who have achieved the goals sought by generations of feminists could be dismissed due to the continued masculine domination within the sports industry (Thorpe et al., 2017). Looking at the industry through a post-feministic lens allows the researcher to show the challenges women face, such as disproportionate online harassment and gender inequality within the industry that could be overlooked (Thorpe et al., 2017). While online harassment persists within the industry, gender stereotypes become increasingly apparent.

## **Hegemonic Masculinity**

For twenty years, the idea of hegemonic masculinity has been studied, offering insights into "men, gender, and social hierarchy" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 829). Hegemonic masculinity is recognized as the set of behaviors that facilitates the dominance of men over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While gender equality appears to be increasingly proportional across various areas of the media industry, previous research indicates that sports have seen minimal changes (Dorer et al., 2020).

Sports continue to be deeply embedded in masculine attributes (Dorer et al., 2020). As sports journalism can be seen as the "last bastion of men," forming a system of hegemonic masculinities (Dorer et al., 2020, p. 2). As characteristics of hegemonic masculinity permeate the sports media industry, women encounter more significant obstacles in their careers; "Women sports journalists in turn report that the macho culture in the sports departments negatively affects their work, but they do not stand up to the macho habitus, sexist jokes, and high alcohol consumption of their male colleagues so as to not be excluded (Dorer et al., 2020, p. 4). The ongoing dominance of masculine culture in the industry has normalized these challenges in the public eye. Women face online harassment, and many ultimately leave the industry (Dorer et al., 2020). Hegemonic masculinity has undermined the efficacy of female journalists, particularly those operating within the sports industry. This inability to function effectively within the workplace further exacerbates the persistence of the adversities women journalists face.

## **Second Level Agenda Setting**

As social media's relevance has become a part of many journalists' careers, it is imperative to understand how these individuals are presented within each different media platform. In news and various broadcast industries, audiences gauge the significance of specific

issues based on the amount of coverage they receive, as the media skillfully establishes an agenda (M. E. McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As the sports industry has given its audience a specific presentation, it is essential to know how individuals such as sports personalities are presented and what attributes are being placed in public view (McCombs, 2005), the second-level agenda-setting model allows for an explanation of the presentation of female sportscasters and a possible connection to the effects of online harassment. Research has shown that media corporations are influential in shaping the public's perception; sports broadcasting is equally as successful (Fortunato, 2008). "The media not only can be successful in telling us what to think about, they also can be successful in telling us how *to think about it*" (McCombs, 2005, p. 546). In media, audiences not only uncover specific issues but also assess their importance by the extent of coverage these issues receive, as the media can effectively set an "agenda."

As television personalities are at the forefront of the media, it is critical to understand how they connect their presentation and physical attributes. When analyzing sports personalities, they can be seen as agenda objects within the media with or by their own attributes, such as a "sports journalist." Media could also present sports personalities through offensive attributes, such as "dumb" or "fat." As a result, media audiences exposed to such content could be influenced to perceive each individual in that way, such as "she is fat" instead of focusing on a female sportscaster's knowledge or analysis. As men and masculine traits continue to dominate sports journalism, physical attributes persist in the portrayal of women. Dorer et al., 2020, assert:

The responses of the male journalists are also ambivalent with regard to interactions in the professional environment and their own identity work: they like to use women for interviews with male athletes, as they often arrive at interesting information; at the same time, however, they devalue their journalistic success and dismiss the expertise of the journalists. They also think that high TV ratings are due only to the appearance of the female sports reporters, which at the same time harms professional sports reporting (p. 4)

Second-level agenda setting helps uncover how influential the public's view could be for a sportscasters' public image. This study analyzing online harassment explores whether offensive attributes aren't always present in social media content about women or are more present than their equivalent attributes about men. "The first level of agenda setting is, of course, the transmission of object salience. The second level of agenda setting is the transmission of attribute salience" (McCombs et al., 1997, p. 704). Therefore, if an attribute continues to be reinforced by social media posts, it may then become more important, or the most important attribute by which a person is identified.

## **Social Media**

Social media is a multipurpose tool used for "collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 59). In the sports media industry, social media plays a critical role in viewership and marketing, significantly impacting sports journalism by enabling daily content sharing with audiences (Greenfly, 2022). As a result, sports journalists are now tasked with creating "instant content" for social media platforms (Perreault & Bell, 2022). As content creation for online platforms becomes a vital part of many sports journalism job descriptions, it is essential to explore this shift's implications for these professionals.

Earlier studies in media industries shed light on the influence of popular culture including social media on sports, particularly regarding women. Elements of social media can be connected to adversities that many women encounter in sports media, like representation, maintaining work-life balance, and dealing with online harassment. As female sports personalities confront ongoing challenges in the industry, examining how the concept of a glass

ceiling—once a source of inspiration for women—has gradually reverted to its initial form, can aid in understanding how postfeminism and elements of hegemonic masculinities permit these challenges to persist. Additionally, second-level agenda-setting can link the representation of sports figures within the public eye, especially women, and the issue of online harassment.

### **The Glass Ceiling**

The concept of the glass ceiling remains prevalent as an obstacle for women's workplace equality (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). The term has emerged across various industries, examining not only women's progression within their careers but also their success (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). Schaap & Shockley (2020) demonstrates how women have made advancements within many industries to reach places like the top of boardroom meetings, but “they still do not have equality to men” (p. 5). This inequality has put women within a minority category in high levels of management in many industries. (Schaap & Shockley, 2020).

Schaap and Shockley's (2020) research encompasses two studies highlighting key themes regarding the glass ceiling. It starts by examining women's progress over time. The overall research spans from 1994 to 2019, illustrating this progression, though the initial data section focuses specifically on 1994 to 2013. In 1994, Brownwell reported, “Women remain poorly represented at senior-level leadership.” In 1995, the U.S. Department of Labor noted, “Glass ceiling, in all industries, remains intact because of institutionalized organizational characteristics and practices.” In 2005, Kephart & Schumacher found, “While women have made some strides in breaking through the glass ceiling, they still have a long way to go to reach equality with men”, and in 2013, Groysberg & Bell explained, “These researchers found that while boards claim they strive for diversity, female directors remain low” (Schaap & Shockley, 2020, p. 9,10).

This analysis's second information set shows how the glass ceiling cracked from 2017 to 2019 (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). In 2017, Fernandez & Campero found that “bias-remediation policies designed to reduce gender discrimination in screening are likely to be of limited help in addressing the problem of the glass ceiling.” In 2018, it found the “New York Times reported that nearly half of the 201 powerful men were replaced by women but also in 2018 it was reported by Murrell that “while women are reaching top positions in organizations, their experience in their organization often exposes them to worse experiences” (Schaap & Shockley, 2020, p. 12). The recognized success and progression could be hindered by challenges that women encounter, including online harassment. The term ‘glass’ is used because the ‘ceiling’ is not always apparent” (Schaap & Shockley, 2020, p. 4). As the glass ceiling provides women an outlet to see a ceiling that one day can be broken, it also comes with ineffective conditions in the workplace.

This lends a connection between online harassment and women within the workplace. As this online abuse is also outside of the workplace, for sportswomen, it is another break within the glass ceiling that is being filled back in for them. Zumoff and Negin (2015) assert:

There have been advancements in both the hiring and equal treatment of women sportscasters. The advent of Title IX, the proliferation of national and regional sports networks, and the advent of women’s professional leagues in sports such as basketball and soccer have all helped.

But many of the stigmas against women working in a predominantly man’s world remain. Simply put, the vast majority of sport covered electronically are men’s sports and the vast majority who cover and watch those sports are also men (p. 138). Zumoff and Negin (2015) list numerous cases of sexism in the coverage of sports. They also note the development of the

stereotype of the sideline: the attractive blond They argue that women must present themselves as knowledgeable but also with a pleasant appearance.

### **Effects of Covid-19**

The global Covid-19 pandemic created some of society's most significant challenges in recent years (Alizadeh et al., 2023). During this time, journalists were at the forefront of adversity, with an increased responsibility to their audiences (Hoak, 2023). Hoak (2023) highlights the emotional strain experienced while reporting during a global pandemic. This study surveyed journalists across the United States in April 2020, at the height of the pandemic, to explore the various stress levels they experienced. (Hoak, 2023). Reoccurring themes within the study showed high levels of stress from “the repetitive nature,” “emotional nature of covering sickness and death,” and public backlash” (Hoak, 2023, p. 355). Journalists describe their experiences:

“The most stressful part is keeping up with this story that is ever-changing ... I feel like I'm working 12-14 hours a day, 6-7 days a week just to keep up.”

“Constantly hearing the number of sick and dead ... it's like when we reported the daily casualties of Vietnam. Very hard to hear day in and day out.”

“Being constantly bashed adds stress to an already stressful situation.”

According to Hoak (2023), the pandemic significantly heightened stress levels for journalists, particularly affecting young reporters and women. Young reporters with less

experience were assigned to cover the pandemic while working in the field. (Hoak, 2023). Additionally, female journalists explained they “felt their supervisors were less emotionally supportive and less supportive of their attempts to balance home and work” (Hoak, 2023. p. 347). Many individuals were forced to work from home during the pandemic, so a lack of work-life balance was created, especially for women (Hoak, 2023). Due to the effects of Covid-19, many women faced potential setbacks within their careers (Jarosz & Scommegna, 2021.). Many women during this time had to reduce their working hours or leave the workforce to take care of family needs (Jarosz & Scommegna, 2021). Such time away from the industry negatively impacts “women’s pay raises, advancement, and retirement saving” (Jarosz & Scommegna, 2021).

Women journalists faced increased stress from balancing family and work responsibilities, they also encountered backlash, especially on social media. Hoak (2023) shows how journalists during the pandemic “... expressed feelings of being accused of exaggeration, negativity, or dishonesty. They believed they were jeopardizing their health to report on news that the public did not value” (Hoak, 2023, p. 355). Women, especially those in the media, faced setbacks during the pandemic due to reduced working hours, job losses, heightened emotional stress, and adverse media reactions. Such setbacks pushed women further down the ladder of hierarchy and hindered breaking the glass ceiling.

### **Job Satisfaction**

The representation of women in sports media has grown throughout the years. Even though women are seen on television or in sports boardroom meetings, they are often invisible within these spaces (Miller & Miller, 1995). A study from Miller & Miller (1995) analyzes the experiences of sportswomen while using a survey to collect data from women within the sector

on personal accounts from their experience while working within sports. (Miller & Miller, 1995). The study used two data sets to differentiate between women working in a mainstream newsroom and those working in locker rooms in sports (Miller & Miller, 1995). As an amount of the information could be found outdated to the experience of women now, it can help assist in connection to the glass ceiling and how it has changed over the years for these individuals.

Survey results found that women in sports said, “they received more sexist language from their colleagues than did women who worked in the news and did not receive better beats” (Miller & Miller, 1995, p. 884). While the working conditions were expressed as unequal between the two groups, the number of work opportunities was also not equal (Miller & Miller, 1995). The women in the study were asked a series of questions within the survey. When asked about job satisfaction, a large portion responded they were satisfied with their work, “However, respondents also tended to say that their news organizations had a glass ceiling in place for women in sports.” (Miller & Miller, 1995, p. 886).

Job satisfaction in the industry reflects progress and challenges, underscoring the obstacles journalists face (Smucker et al., 2003). Smucker et al. (2003) investigate the job satisfaction of female sports journalists through six employment-related factors such as “pay, promotional opportunities, supervision, people and coworkers, work, and job in general (JIG).” (Smucker et al., 2003, p. 403). As this study surveyed full-time female sports journalists, results showed job satisfaction within five of six criteria. Dissatisfaction was reported within the category of promotional opportunities. “This suggests that female sports journalists (similar to all journalists) are somewhat transient, moving from job to job and organization to organization.

Because the level of satisfaction with promotional opportunities is very low, these women may be moving to advance their careers and to achieve greater status and rank.” (Smucker et al., 2003, p. 407). This investigation into women's job satisfaction in sports relates to the glass ceiling, emphasizing that equality in advancement opportunities remains difficult to achieve during this period.

### **Gender Bias: Credibility and Knowledge**

In the media industry, especially in sports, the public's view of journalists goes beyond just the content they deliver. While audiences have increasingly accepted female reporters at sporting events (Brisbane et al., 2023). Gender has become a key focus in sports media research, with women in this field facing ongoing challenges. The ratio between male and female reporters has risen throughout the years, but the barriers women are behind are still in question (Brisbane et al., 2023). These challenges focus on the journalist's gender and its perception rather than the content shared. Brisbane et al. (2023) conducts a study examining the differing perceptions of male and female sports reporters on television.

The study tested public perceptions of two male and female sportscasters, as both reporters recorded a “standup” to be later evaluated by survey participants or *the public*. The study's results assessed the public's opinion based on their knowledge and credibility of sports and attractiveness. (Brisbane et al., 2023). Other factors of sportscasters were evaluated during the survey, such as their stereotyping, sports media use, and others concerning credibility and knowledge. (Brisbane et al., 2023). The study's results indicate that one out of five hypotheses was supported for gender and credibility. The analysis revealed no significant differences in credibility between male and female journalists (Brisbane et al., 2023). It also found no

meaningful interaction effect regarding credibility in opinion-based reporting (Brisbane et al., 2023). Furthermore, gender was found to be an unpredictable predictor of credibility when evaluating both male and female participants with the same and opposing gender viewpoints (Brisbane et al., 2023). The supported hypothesis regarded fact-based reporting as “both the male and female sports journalists were deemed more knowledgeable and credible when reporting on facts versus opinions” (Brisbane et al., 2023, p. 126).

As progress is made with minimal differences in perception between male and female sports personalities, a crack within the glass ceiling could be filled as attractiveness played a part in the survey. Research shows that reporters’ credibility is directly linked to the attractiveness of the individuals (Brisbane et al., 2023). As there were no significant gender differences within the study, the reporter’s physical appearance was related to their credibility; “People are used to attractive journalists on TV and when they do not see that, they immediately find the person less credible and knowledgeable” (Brisbane et al., 2023, p. 129). This study allows for a connection between physical appearance and the presentation of sports journalists. Presentation is crucial for establishing credibility in reporting. The second-level agenda models support its link to the portrayal of sports personalities, particularly on social media platforms. For instance, when sports personalities engage with the media, their comment sections reflect varying levels of credibility. Consequently, the credibility issue is being scrutinized in online spaces among sports personalities. With Brisbane et al. (2023) updated research, a correlation between the glass ceiling and online harassment of female journalists could be made in terms of credibility – how and if comments of this nature arise throughout online spaces.

## **Social Media Influence**

Social media has been integrated into news and sports media, thus bringing new challenges within media industries- one of the challenges being how media personalities' lives are more publicized. As journalists are now tasked with the responsibilities of social media platforms, women journalists, more specifically, can find themselves in a more stressful work environment (Snyder et al., 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and 'X', previously known as Twitter, have been integrated into news and sports organizations; using these platforms prompts revenue and traction to their websites (Paulussen & Harder, 2014). On an individual level, journalists can use these platforms to build their personal brand while also communicating with their audiences. (Lee, 2015). As this could be a personal choice for some journalists, many employers also encourage them to grow their organization's audience. (Lee, 2015). Tandoc & Vos (2016) explain that news corporations have always depended on consistent viewership and advertising, but now this responsibility has been placed upon the journalists working within these companies. "The individual journalist is feeling the pressure of participating in this market for audience clicks." (Tandoc & Vos, 2016 p. 960).

As many Americans turn to social media platforms like TikTok for news and even sports, many journalists are following suit in ideas on self-content creation. (Benton et al., 2024). These journalists not only share news content online but also give glimpses into their personal lives through posts like "a day in the life" and "get ready with me for my job as a journalist" (Benton et al., 2024). Research indicates that this type of content often outperforms traditional news. (Benton et al., 2024). As more journalists have moved towards posting content pertaining to their personal lives, self-branding has become a crucial part of the job in and out of the newsrooms. (Hurcombe, 2024). As self-branding has proven to be successful for some journalist influencers,

“self-branding often involves promoting an “authenticity” that openly blends the personal with the professional.” (Hurcombe, 2024, p. 6). As journalists and influencers converge, they connect more deeply with their audiences, fostering parasocial relationships between the two.

(Hurcombe, 2024). The emergence of an influencer culture has led to private lives being increasingly public, normalizing online harassment as a result. Furthermore, research indicates that 84 % of social media influencers are women (Tindall, 2024), highlighting the prevalence of online harassment they can face in these environments.

### **Social Media Effects on Work-Life Balance**

The digital transformation in journalism may influence the general perception of women in the field and the expectations placed on them. Research indicates that women often experience heightened feelings of obligation toward their personal lives and families (Lobo et al., 2017).

Consequently, women tend to encounter more significant challenges in balancing their work and personal life than their male colleagues (Snyder et al., 2021). Work-life balance can be described by factors of “work hours, overtime, work from home after office hours, work on holidays, traveling away from home, and miss quality time with family” (Chaudhary & Dr. Ashok Kumar, 2022, p. 3). Chaudhary & Dr. Ashok Kumar (2022) explore the concepts of women journalists balancing their personal and work lives and their issues. Women within the industry are facing adversity within this balance, “Research has shown that the work of female journalists is as difficult as that of nurses. Because they are working hard to balance personal and professional matters” (Chaudhary & Dr. Ashok Kumar, 2022, p. 2). As social media increasingly influences journalism, particularly sports journalism, the dividing line between the professional and personal lives of women journalists may diminish even more.

Social platforms are a primary source for much of society's news and sports consumption. Individuals are blurring the lines of their work, particularly because they are working from home while sticking to the “hustle culture” of the online atmosphere. (Munro, 2022). While social media holds expectations for posting, likes, and views, it does not stop for those working full-time jobs. Many individuals working in the news and sports media industry are keeping up with social media standards while still working full-time in the media. A continued trend of individuals working within media such as news and sports are using apps like TikTok even in their off time; this could cause a less distinguished line of the ability to balance work and personal life between work-life balance. Now more than ever, journalists, specifically female journalists, are being placed under a microscope, as their lives are entirely within the public due to social media. Many of these journalists experience long-lasting emotional distress due to social media (Stahel & Schoen, 2020). Female journalists are more likely than men to be harassed on social internet platforms “because women in journalism can be perceived, at least by some sections of society, as violating their gender status” (Stahel & Schoen, 2020, p. 1855).

Comment sections produced for engagement and discussion have been turned into space for “selective participation, discrimination, and verbal abuse” (Küchler et al., 2023, p. 728). Such spaces, once known for social discussion, leave a lasting impression. Research has shown that women are more likely than men to stress about comments made on internet platforms (Stahel & Schoen, 2020). This social media factor adds another aspect to the imbalance between work and personal life. Comments, threats, and harassment do not leave after the workday. Thus, many female journalists carry this baggage with them daily (Stahel & Schoen, 2020). A 2020 study by the University of Texas collected data from 75 female journalists nationwide regarding the impact of online harassment throughout their careers. “Many of the women report that if they

aim to engage with their audience online - which is a job requirement for many of them - they frequently face sexist comments that criticize, attack, marginalize, stereotype, or threaten them based on their gender or sexuality" (University of Texas, 2020, n.d.).

### **Online Harassment of Women**

Digitalization within work and personal life has also increased the risk of journalists leaving their field due to online harassment, this being received in the form of “messages, sexually explicit images or even physical harassment involving law enforcement” (Jones, 2024, p. 7). During live broadcasts, comment sections often overflow with remarks that do not focus on the presented content. Instead, they are centered around the journalist and their “attire, physical appearance, and sexuality” (Jones, 2024, p.23). In Jones’ research, female journalists—including anchors, reporters, multi-media journalists, sports anchors and reporters, metrologists, and other on-air talent—share personal accounts of the comments they encounter on online platforms. Participants in the study evaluated their received comments by factors of “Harmless/Appropriate,” “Sexually Explicit,” “Sexual Harassment,” “Content,” “Character,” or “Other” (Jones, 2024). With results showing “61% of harmless comments seem somewhat innocuous, but sexual comments total 51%. 58 individuals said they receive harmless messages while a close 48 also noted sexual messages.” (Jones, 2024, p. 24). Sexualized comments are being made about women’s appearance that appear *harmless*; however, they would not be made about a male within the industry such as “You look scrumptious,” “Perfect hourglass,” and “I really like your huge blossoms this AM. I would like to take a full deep breath” (Jones, 2024, p. 24).

The virtual environment social media created has furthered the challenges for women working within journalism as individuals have access to messages and leave journalist comments

on their work and personal lives. Comments and messages that are being received intensify the job stress, increasing mental health and safety concerns. (Jones, 2024). Jones' study showed that 41% of participants involved police due to comments they had received. The study shows comments being made as such:

“Participant 3: Prisoner Mail from man accused of bludgeoning woman to death because she would not date him”

“Participant 13: Rape threats after getting a forecast wrong”

“Participant 5: Sexual assault threats “if he ever found me” (p. 31)

As online comments like the ones presented are being made, a layer of fear has increased the stress of the job. Stress from the safety of their well-being and, as mentioned previously, their mental health. Many adversities are being faced by women within the industry, and women only. With these components added to a female journalist's time in the industry, boundaries can be pushed beyond breaking points that force women to ultimately leave their industry (Jones, 2024). In contrast, male journalists “are expected to have decades-long, fruitful careers.” (Jones, 2024, p. 23). Thus, broken boundaries create a barrier between the equal treatment of male and female journalists. Social media continues to play a significant role in journalists' success; however, for women, this could be a double-edged sword. While they work to break the glass ceiling, social media's impact could hinder any progress that has been made.

## **#MoreThanMean Campaign**

With the rise of social media, online abuse, and harassment that women have endured have been brought to the media's attention. A moment within social media where this was shown around the world by millions of people was through the #MoreThanMean Campaign. Dunja Antunovic (2019) studies the widely reached #MoreThanMean campaign that began a conversation about online harassment and, more specifically, the women in sports media facing the abuse. A video that was created by Sarah Spain and Julie DiCaro showed a variety of clips presenting “mean” tweets that have been posted about sportswomen (Antunovic, 2019). Each of these tweets was read by a male while showing their reaction: “The video starts with “mean Tweets” but gradually moves into vulgar and sexually violent threats—all of which are real Tweets from the journalists’ feed” (Antunovic, 2019, n.d.). The viral video would catch the attention of mainstream media outlets and start a conversation about online abuse (Antunovic, 2019).

The study looks at different aspects of the campaign that present how mainstream media outlets approach the topic of online abuse. Dunja Antunovic (2019) used Google searches to locate different media released following the campaign and speak to professionals within the sports industry. Three dominant themes emerged from the collected research: “centralizing men and their emotions; establishing online trolling as harassment; and bringing visibility to women’s experiences to construct a collective” (Antunovic, 2019, n.d.). As these themes arose throughout the study, a postfeminist perspective was also used to evaluate the responses of mainstream media and the men who were a part of this campaign. While using postfeminism as a starting point to examine this culture, the emerging themes could further clarify how the glass ceiling affects women.

## The Male-Dominated Industry

“The male-dominated sports field has largely managed to keep its dirty little secret” (Gershberg, 2021, 6.35). The atmosphere of sports media has become one that is talked about in several tones, whether in an exciting manner of sports or the grueling truth behind the cameras. As many workplaces have prospered in the acts of equality and positivity within the workplace, the sports industry is said to be lacking (Gershberg, 2021). “Everywhere you turn these days, women are craving out prominent and impressive roles as leading voices in sports media, but privately, these women say they’re still subject to a constant wave of harassment and sexualization in their male-dominated workplace, many are reluctant to share those stories fearful that blowing the whistle could come at the expense of their careers...” (Gershberg, 2021, 0.45). Andrea Kremer reveals insights about women in the sports media industry on the Real Sports Podcast hosted by Max Gershberg (2021). Andrea Kremer is an American journalist in the National Football League (NFL). She has led a successful journalistic career and served as the Chief Correspondent for Player Health and Safety for the NFL. In these positions, she concentrates on detailed reporting regarding challenges in professional sports (NFL.com).

The acts not seen on camera connect directly with the hidden truth of the glass ceiling for women working in sports media. *Fear* is shown throughout each segment of this podcast— fear of not being taken seriously, losing connections, not being able to contact sources, and fear of sexual harassment in their workplace (Gershberg, 2021). Sexual harassment within the workplace and forms of online comments layer onto levels of diminished success for these women. Within the podcast, Kremer reveals that after several months of investigation, “two dozen female sports reporters who say that from the NFL to the NBA to Major League Baseball

(MLB) they are routinely objectified or propositional for sex or dates by the very men they cover” (Gershberg, 2021, 6.40). Women describe their experiences:

Rhiannon Walker says: “The really bold ones will be hanging on you the entire night. They’ll proposition you. They’ll tell you their room number is in which hotel.” (4.08).

“He told me I have a wagon for an ass and that he finds me really attractive.” (4.53)

“I had a player ask me if I’d give him a massage one time in text message no less” (7.00)

Jessica Kleinschmidt says, “He was sending pictures of his dick basically and both inside of his underwear and outside. The second one he sent, I was ballsy, and I said look, dude, not into it, not a fan. And then it must have went over his head because he sent me a third one.” (8.12)

Nora Princiotti says, “... after being harassed by an NFL executive who worked for the team she covered. She says he asked her if she would date him, and a cat-called her multiple times in the team parking lot. Once, he rolled down the window of the car and said that he liked my dress and that he hadn’t noticed that I had a great ass for a little white girl” (11.49).

Women in the sports media industry are faced with sexual harassment in the workplace and now on digital platforms. With social media integration, women face yet another hurdle, especially those willing to speak up about their experiences: " They are expecting to get torched

on social media” (Gershberg, 2021, 22.08). Each of these hurdles for women working in or trying to get into the industry could lead to dissatisfaction in the workplace and diminish one's character (Gershberg, 2021). “One of the women we spoke with said that if her interview is in the story, she expects to have to just shut down her Twitter account for a good couple of weeks for her own mental health because she doesn't want to have to know what's being said out there” (Gershberg, 2021, 22.12). This podcast reveals numerous secrets hidden within the sports industry, highlighting the influence of social media on career trajectories. Many individuals face anxiety over sharing professional contact information due to the risk of receiving unsolicited images, facing insults online, and dreading the potential repercussions of their next post or message. Consequently, these women are increasingly exposed to both workplace and online comments that undermine their self-esteem and could obstruct their success in the industry.

### **Research Questions**

Social media has changed the news coverage industry, especially sports coverage. Journalists are now more attached to social media and their audiences than ever before, and this has created a one-way path to harassment on the internet. The literature review suggests the following research questions:

RQ1: Do social media comments differ between male and female sports personalities?

RQ2: Do female attributes get more attention on social media than male attributes?

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the social media abuse of female sports personalities and the potential effects it has on the concept of breaking the glass ceiling. Current research has expanded upon the generalized effects of multimedia platforms, such as social media, and how this media affects individuals in many ways. Studies have provided valuable information and are the beginning steps to further a survey of women in sports journalism. While looking into the effects of social media on these individuals, a closer examination of women who have been targeted by online harassment will add to the body of knowledge of the topic and understanding of the issue.

As social media has become ubiquitous, a study of its content is essential for research, “...just as the content of professionally produced media is likely to be influenced by the gender of those who create it, content created by users in interactive environments, whether videos, blogs, or comments on such, is likely to be influenced by gender. Thus, it is important to track this content and the gender of participants in these media platforms and content types.” (Collins, 2011, n.d.). Using content from popular media outlets can provide details on how women in sports journalism have been affected. Examples of the #MoreThenMean campaign provide insight into the online harassment of these individuals. Using an empirical content analysis of online media will further discuss areas around this topic. Many previous studies have focused on the implications of popular television, music, and news media, so it is imperative to look closely at the “new media” of today (Collins, 2011). This study uses an empirical content analysis of

social media to explore if and how engagement in social media differs for men and women sports personalities.

### **Brandwatch**

Research on sports journalism has become more prominent over the years, and expanding on this will allow for deeper information on how this has affected women in sports and their climb to the top of the ceiling. Exploring social media posts from the public allows for a closer examination of how women working in sports media are targeted by offensive comments. To understand more about online harassment, a closer look into social media content targeted at men and women in sports broadcasting was explored using Brandwatch software.

Brandwatch is a social media listening platform that can retrieve Twitter, Reddit, Facebook public page, YouTube, and Tumblr posts that include specified keywords posted during a given period of time within the past two years. The capture includes not only the full text of the post but also information about the date the post was shared, the post's author, the number of likes, shares, etc. Available information can vary by platform and time period. Behind television personalities are social media posts, comments, likes, and shares. Whether these aspects of online platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Reddit, etc., are deemed negative or positive, the numbers behind them allow research to continue, especially for those working within the sports industry. With over four billion people across the globe using social media websites, it has proven to be influential within today's society (McGuirk, 2021). As daily social media use increases, social media analytics (SMA) can be collected behind each post by using Brandwatch (McGuirk, 2021). Such analytics are essential in evaluating online content directed towards male and female sports journalists.

Social media analytics (SMA) can be separated into four stages: *data, discovery, collection, and preparation* (Stieglitz et al., 2018). Each stage allows for research to be collected from social media platforms. Within the *discovery*, “identification of content and corresponding keywords, hashtags, images, etc. used when discussing specific topic(s) that will provide input into framing the analysis objectives and the primary hypotheses to be tested” (McGuirk, 2021, p. 365). Each of these stages will assist in using the Brandwatch software (McGuirk, 2021).

A categorization of SMA is imperative to the interpretation process. Brandwatch has built-in categories within the software for collected data: “These include categories such as consumer sentiment (negative, neutral, and positive), consumer emotions (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise), content sources (blogs, forums, news, reviews, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, etc.), images (logos, objects, scenes, actions), and several other demographics and interest categories” (McGuirk, 2021, p. 368).

Brandwatch’s features allow analysts to illuminate key aspects and provide statistical data for research. With the use of this software, comments, social media posts, and online content related to sports journalists can be identified and interpreted with SMA’s, such as keywords, topics of discussion, hashtags, etc. (McGuirk, 2021). Content could appear unequal between male and female sports personalities, thus providing essential information on the connection between online harassment of women in the industry and how that could affect the glass ceiling.

This study consists of an empirical content analysis of 24 prominent sports personalities, 12 women and 12 men. The contexts considered are during a set period: National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and National Football League (NFL) American football broadcasts

from September 1-24, 2024. Social media posts that mention the person but don't necessarily reply to something the reporter shared are included in the analysis. Those comments could be a reply or just a random post about the person. All the on-air sports talent included in the study are involved in the NCAA or NFL sportscasts, but some have different roles in the broadcasts; some talent are play-by-play, some are sidelines reporters, and some are studio hosts or analysts. The sample of talent was selected by gender and active involvement in football broadcasts. Analysis during the U.S. football season.

Sports events have created traction throughout the years; in 2024, the NCAA football championship exceeded 25 million viewers nationwide (Gough, 2024). With the use of digital platforms, live sports are more accessible with "41% of global sports fans stream live sports through digital platforms" (Greenfly, 2022, n.d.). As social media has proven influential in many aspects, it is now essential to sports, with "31% of sports fans – and more specifically, 43% of Gen Z fans – use social media platforms while watching live sports" (Greenfly, 2022, n.d.). As sporting events gain traction worldwide, it is now creating content for live broadcasts and social media channels. Online users are now receiving sports-related content through social media, with "51% of fans getting sports content on Facebook", "46% on YouTube", "31% on Instagram", and "25% on Twitter" (Greenfly, 2022, n.d.). With the use of social media, sports content is circulating on broadcast television stations and across social media channels, thus providing an avenue for users to watch and comment.

Empirical quantitative analyses were conducted using open-source data tools and packages from the R Project for Statistical Computing (R Core Team, 2021). Appendix A includes the R code used. Empirical techniques were used to classify posts based on the presence

or absence of key words or phrases in their content from the posts gathered using Brandwatch. A chi-squared test is commonly used to draw conclusions about a random sample of a population. Since this study examines the entire population rather than a sample of such, a chi-squared test was not used.

### **Sample Profiles**

SMA were gathered for twelve male and twelve female sports personalities for the purpose of analysis. There are nine white women, three black women, with an age range of 30 to 63. The sample also includes ten white men, two black men, with an age range of 36 to 65.

### ***Women***

**Erin Andrews (46):** Erin Andrews is a white sportscaster and television personality. She has been a sideline reporter for significant sports networks such as ESPN and FOX Sports, covering several major sports events within the NFL, MLB, and NCAA. In 2004, she debuted as an ESPN reporter, and since 2012, she has worked for FOX Sports in various positions, including as a sideline reporter for the weekly top game for FOX NFL and as a play-by-play announcer (FOXSports.com).

**Holly Rowe (58).** Holly Rower is a white sports reporter, American sports play-by-play commentator, and journalist. Rowe has been working within ESPN's network for over 20 years, covering a wide range of sporting events. Since the start of her career in 1995-96 on ABC Sports, Rowe has reported on events on ESPN networks such as "ABC *Saturday Night Football*, *Big Monday* men's college basketball, NCAA Women's Final Four, NCAA Women's College World Series, NCAA indoor and beach volleyball national championships and the WNBA." (ESPNPressroom.com).

**Laura Rutledge (35):** Laura Rutledge is a White American sportscaster and journalist working for ESPN and SEC Network. Since starting at ESPN as a reporter in 2014, Rutledge is now the host of ESPN's *NFL Live* and hosting SEC Network's *SEC Nation*. As a sideline reporter, Rutledge reports on various sports events, such as the NFL Draft and NFL Pro Bowl Games. (ESPNPressroom.com).

**Charissa Thompson (42):** Charissa Thompson is a White American sportscaster and television host currently working for FOX Sports. She hosts FOX NFL KICKOFF, FOX NFL SUNDAY, Prime Video Thursday Night Football pregame show, and NFL Film Presents on FS1. She has worked on various sports networks, such as ESPN, and has reported on sporting events, including the Winter Olympics, FICA World Cup, and Super Bowl XLV. (FOXSports.com).

**Katie George (30):** Katie George is a White sportscaster who works as a sideline reporter, volleyball analyst, and Formula 1 (F1) commentator. George has worked for the ACC Network since its launch in 2019. As an ESPN reporter, George works during ESPN/ABC Saturday college football games, the UFL, Premier Lacrosse, and the NBA. She is also a reporter and host for ESPN's coverage of Formula 1 races. (ESPNPressroom.com).

**Molly McGrath (35):** Molly McGrath is a White American sports journalist who works as a female college football reporter with ESPN Network. She has worked with ESPN since 2016 and is now a sideline reporter on ESPN/ABC Saturday college game days. She has been a reporter for XFL on ABC, hosted *College Football Live* and *College Basketball Live*, and worked as a sideline reporter for ESPN's Thursday night football package. (ESPNPressroom.com).

**Jenny Taft: (37):** Jenny Taft is a White sports journalist and personality, currently working for FOX Sports. Taft is now a lead reporter for college football games that air FOX and FS1. She is a reporter for several sporting events the network covers, “including this summer’s CONMEBOL Copa America 2024™, FIFA Women’s World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023™ and FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™, as well as the host for the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show” (FOXSports.com).

**Maria Taylor (37):** Maria Taylor is an African American female television host and sports journalist with the NBC Sports network. She hosts *Football Night in America* and the *Big Ten College Countdown*. Taylor is the first full-time female within the network to host the show *Football Night*. She has hosted several significant events in football from the network broadcast, such as “the NFL Draft, the NBA Finals, the Super Bowl, and the Winter Olympics in Beijing.” Since 2022, She has hosted the finals coverage of Roland-Garros tennis matches. Taylor is the first full-time female within the network to host the show *Football Night* (NBCSports.com).

**Tracy Wolfson (49):** Tracy Wolfson is a White sports personality and an American journalist. Wolfson has worked for ten years as the lead football reporter for the network’s coverage of the Southeastern Conference. Wolfson has worked on the sidelines as a lead reporter for “Super Bowl LVIII (2024), Super Bowl LV (2021), Super Bowl LIII (2019), Super Bowl 50 (2016)”. She has worked in various sporting events covered by the network, including the NCAA Men’s Division 1 Basketball Championship, The U.S. Open Tennis Championship, Auto Racing, and more (ParamountPressExpress.com) (CBSSports.com).

**Jen Lada (43):** Jen Lada is a White sportscaster working for ESPN. As a feature reporter and host, she is on the network shows College GameDay Built by the Home and College Football Live. She joined College GameDay as a feature reporter and also hosted College Football Live for the network in 2016. Lada's crafted sports features are showcased in network shows such as SC Featured, Outside the Lines, and E60. Such stories led her to work on Sunday NFL Countdown and Special Olympics World Games (ESPNPressRoom.com).

**Tiffany Greene (42):** Tiffany Greene works for ESPN as an African American sports personality. Greene is the first African American woman to serve on a major network for college football as a play-by-play commentator. She has covered a variety of college sports and events such as "the WNBA and NBA G-League, along with several postseason contests including the Celebration Bowl, FCS Playoffs, Division II Football National Championship, and the NCAA Women's Division I Basketball Tournament." During her career, Greene has also worked as a sideline reporter for ESPN (ESPNPressRoom.com).

**Pam Oliver (63):** Pam Oliver is an African American sports journalist and sideline reporter working for FOX Sports. Oliver has been involved in the sports industry since 1993 when she debuted as a sideline reporter for ESPN, and in 1995, she joined FOX Sports. Working over 500 NFL games, Oliver is the longest-tenured sideline reporter in the NFL. Along with covering Super Bowls and being a lead reporter for FOX NFL Sunday games, Oliver worked for ESPN prior to FOX Sport, covering several sporting events with the NFL, NFC Championship, the NBA, and college basketball (FOXSports.com).

**Men**

**Kirk Herbstreit (55):** Kirk Herbstreit is a White American sportscaster working for ESPN as an analyst and color commentator. He has been a part of the network's college football coverage for almost 30 years. Since 1996, Herbstreit has been an analyst on *College GameDay Built by the Home Depot* and the lead game analyst for ESPN and ABC since 2006. Along with *College GameDay*, he travels to the network game of the week for *ABC Saturday Night Football* (ESPNPressRoom.com).

**Pat McAfee (37):** Pat McAfee is a White American college football analyst and color commentator who works with ESPN. *McAfee* has worked on Thursday Night primetime games and shows, including *Get Up and College GameDay Built by The Home Depot*. He is also the host of the "Pat McAfee Show" and the podcast "The Pat McAfee Show 2.0" (ESPNPressRoom.com).

**Jesse Palmer (45):** Jesse Palmer is a White Canadian sports commentator and television personality. He joined the ESPN network in 2007 as a college football analyst, working on Thursday Night Football, ESPN/ABC Saturday games, and as the lead analyst on SEC Network. Palmer previously worked on ESPN2, the BCS Countdown, and on an ESPNU show, *Palmer & Pollack*. Throughout his career in sports broadcasting, he also worked for FOX on NFL games in 2005 and as an analyst on the NFL Network in 2006.

**Joe Tessitore (53):** Joe Tessitore is a White American sportscaster and play-by-play commentator working for ESPN. Since 2002, Tessitore has broadcasted for ESPN and ABC's

college football coverage, including being the voice of Monday Night Football, ESPN Saturday Night primetime, and selected regular season games. He has also called numerous college football playoff and bowl games, such as the 2016 Peach Bowl and 2017 Sugar Bowl. (ESPNPressRoom.com).

**Tom Rinaldi (estimated 55-57):** Tom Rinaldi is a White American sports reporter and feature contributor for FOX Sports. Since 2021, he has worked for the network as a play-by-play announcer and the lead reporter for “FOX NFL’s top game of each week.” Before working with FOX Sports, Rinaldi worked at ESPN in various positions for sporting events such as the College Football Playoff National Semifinals, Championship games, the Super Bowl, the U.S. Open, the World Series, and the Olympics. (FOXSports.com).

**Cris Collingsworth (65):** Cris Collingsworth is a White American sportscaster and game-day analyst who works for NBC Sports. He has been broadcasting sports since 1990. As the game day analyst for *NBC’s Sunday Night Football*, Collingsworth will work his 16<sup>th</sup> season as of September 2024. Throughout his career, he has called numerous sporting events such as college bowl games, Super Bowl games, and the Olympic Games. (NBCSports.com)

**Mike Tirico (57):** Mike Tirico is a Black American sportscaster and play-by-play commentator working for NBC Sports. Since joining the network in 2016, Tirico has been a part of several sporting events covered on NBC. As of 2024, he has worked with the network as a play-by-play commentator for *Sunday Night Football*, became the first announcer to call two NFL Playoff games in one weekend, and has called 19 consecutive seasons of NFL games.

Tricio also hosts major sporting events for the network, such as the Olympics, the Kentucky Derby, golf's U.S. Open, and Open Championship. (NBCSports.com)

**Chris Fowler (62):** Chris Fowler is a White American sportscaster and college football and tennis host who has worked for the ESPN network since 1986. Fowler primarily covers college football and Grand Slam Tennis and is a play-by-play commentator for ABC Saturday Night Football and a host for *College GameDay*. While broadcasting, he has worked in several professional tennis championships, including the US Open, Wimbledon, and Australian Open. As well as other sporting events such as men's college basketball, horse racing, and the X games. (ESPNPressRoom.com)

**Bob Wischusen (52):** Bob Wischusen is a White American sportscaster and play-by-play commentator. Since 2005, he has been a play-by-play host for ESPN and ABC's college basketball and football games. Wischusen also worked in the network's coverage for Arena Football (AFL) from 2006-2008. His broadcast career has included coverage over the US and British Open for golf, the PGA Championship, college basketball, and, as of 2021, commentary for the NHL. (ESPNPressRoom.com)

**Greg McElroy (36):** Greg McElroy is a White American sports commentator and analyst working for ESPN. He is an analyst on ABC/ESPN Saturday games and works on programming such as "College Football Live, SportsCenter, and more." Elroy has worked within ESPN since 2014 as an analyst on SEC Network. Throughout his time on the network, he has been a part of

coverage for the XFL and is also the host of the Always College Football podcast.

(ESPNPressRoom.com)

**Sam Acho (36):** Sam Acho is an African American sports analyst working for ESPN. As he joined the network in 2021, he became a part of ESPN's college football coverage. During select football games, Acho was a "lead studio voice on college football Saturdays on ESPN2". Throughout his broadcast career, he has worked throughout the network, making appearances on "*SportsCenter, GetUp, and College Football Live,*" as well as being an analyst for ESPN UFL games. (ESPNPressRoom.com)

**Quint Kessenich (56):** Quint Kessenich is a White American sportscaster and college sports analyst. He began his career at ESPN in 1993, covering men's lacrosse. Kessenich has covered several sporting events, including college football, lacrosse, and the NCAA Division 1 wrestling championship. Since 1995, he has covered the Premier League Lacrosse games throughout the network's platforms. (ESPNPressRoom.com)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Brandwatch was used to identify social media posts. Posts from users identified as “news organizations,” either by Brandwatch or by X/Twitter were filtered out. Using a date range of September 1-24, 27,886 full text comments were captured. Data was collected throughout three weeks, and 27, 507 social media posts were collected. 4,635 of those posts were about women, and 22,872 were about men.

Research Question 1 is initially answered through quantitative data that reflects the numbers based on the difference between male and female comments made on social media, thus showing that women experience online abuse at a higher rate than men overall. The data also address Research Question 2 and illustrate the difference in physical attributes mentioned between male and female sports personalities comments, as both qualitative and quantitative data also shown the difference at a much higher rate for women.

#### **Crude versus Not Crude**

Various categories were established to organize the data in analyzing the disparities in online harassment in sports journalism between men and women. To determine an overall consensus of how comments differ between the two, comments from the specified timeline were categorized as crude or not – crude, being defined as vulgar, rude, and offensive. This analysis begins to answer RQ 1, which explores if there is a difference between male and female comment sections. Results using R code flagged each post in the dataset as either crude (“Yes”) or not crude (“No”) based on the presence or absence of the words included in the code. The results indicate that the levels of crudeness in social media posts for men and women are almost

equal; however, the difference becomes statistically significant when considering the volume of posts.

**Table 1**

*Crude versus not Crude Social Media Posts*

|           | <b>Female</b> | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Total</b>   |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Crude     | 142 (3.1%)    | 662 (2.9%)    | 804 (2.9%)     |
| Not Crude | 4,493 (97%)   | 22,210 (97%)  | 26,703 (97%)   |
| Total     | 4,635 (100%)  | 22,872 (100%) | 27, 507 (100%) |

### **Physical Appearance**

Male and female sports personalities are now not only on live broadcasts, but they are also presented on social platforms across the internet. Thus, much information about their personal and professional lives are exposed to millions of viewers across various digital platforms. Within this study, social media posts made during the selected time varied; however, physical attributes were consistent throughout, especially for women. This begins to explain RQ 2, which asks if female attributes gain more attention than men. An R code was run to determine the difference between comments made about physical appearance between male and female comment sections. Flagged words involved physical appearance (“Yes”) or physical appearance (“No”) based on the presence or absence of the words included in the code.

**Table 2***Physical Appearance Social Media Posts*

|                        | <b>Female</b> | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Total</b>   |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Physical Appearance    | 234 (5.0%)    | 446 (1.9%)    | 680 (2.5%)     |
| No Physical Appearance | 4,401 (95%)   | 22,426 (98%)  | 26, 827 (98%)  |
| Total                  | 4,635 (100%)  | 22,872 (100%) | 27, 507 (100%) |

5.0 % of posts about women were focused on their physical appearance, as opposed to only 1.9 % of posts about men were related to their physical appearance. This represents a significant difference in posts about women. Social media posts from the data that were flagged included words such as “gorgeous,” “handsome,” “cute,” and “sexy.” Although the number of posts is slightly higher for men, the difference is statistically significant, indicating comments made about women are more related to their physical appearance. The percentage between male and female comments show a definite difference in how women are perceived based upon their physical appearance. Ideals of beauty in the United States based upon attractiveness and physical features are often consistent with attributes described by Avery et al. (2021) who note, “A Eurocentric aesthetic is prized in popular culture in the United States; value is placed on fair skin, light colored eyes, hair that is long, straight, and light in color, and smaller facial features and thinner bodies” (p. 181).

Comments from this data included:

“WOW WOW WOW!!! Maria Taylor looks absolutely incredible and so sexy in this

short skirt outfit!! Showing off her incredible legs!!!!

“Sexy Charissa Thompson in Black Business Dress Legs & Black High Heel Sandals.”

“Beautiful, brown bunny, gorgeous, long legs, very sexy.”

“I’ve always thought Kirk Herbstreit and Nick Saban were wise and handsome.”

“The Pat McAfee is just greatness! He’s so insightful and just dam cute and funny! Love him on College Game Day.”

“Laura Rutledge is cute.”

“Cute white toes”

## Weight

As some of the social media posts were about the individual’s physical appearance, themes emerged from this analysis based on physical attributes such as body image and weight. To further examine the physical appearance as an emerging theme in the data, R coding was used to explore weight. While analyzing data from the social media posts, physical body appearance was searched using words such as “skinny,” “fat,” “overweight,” and “underweight.”

Results using R code flagged each post in the dataset as either physical appearance (“Yes”) or physical appearance (“No”) based on the presence or absence of the words included in the code. An R code was produced to examine individual attributes related to physical appearance using selected terms involving weight attributes.

**Table 3**

*Physical Appearance About Weight Social Media Posts*

|                     | Female    | Male      | Total      |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Physical Appearance | 56 (1.2%) | 96 (0.4%) | 152 (0.6%) |

|                        |              |               |               |
|------------------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| No Physical Appearance | 4,579 (99%)  | 22,776 (100%) | 27,355 (99%)  |
| Total                  | 4,635 (100%) | 22,872 (100%) | 27,507 (100%) |

1.2 % of comments about female sports personalities were focused on their weight as opposed to 0.4 % of their male counterparts. As the percentage between male and female comments show a definite difference in how women are perceived based upon their weight, such comments further the narrative set by Western societal stereotypes based upon an individual's weight. Brown et al. (2021) assert, “A vast majority of media images present one idealized type of woman: she is thin, sexualized, and White...Because this stereotypical portrayal of women is so ubiquitous, women experience a tremendous amount of pressure to be thin” (p. 287). While fat shaming was the emphasis of most comments about weight directed at women, a few posts were critical of women seen as too thin. While much less, men were also the target of some of the fat shaming. It appears that some posting to social media about weight were searching for anything to use as a verbal assault. Comments included:

“ @greenyc whole really give a s\*\*\* about Pat McAfee?? The guy is a fat overweight f\*\*\*\*\* douchebag, that likes to take his shirt off for some reason? He’s a tool and a half.”

“Greg McElroy is fat”

“I found your post by google “Kirk Herbstreit face”, lol. Something is different, looks like he lost weight. Maybe Ozempic Face.”

“... It would be best if guys told Erin Andrews to put a shirt on; it's not very flattering to see armpit fat. @NFL”

“Charissa Thompson needs to eat a sandwich or two.... way too skinny.”

“Holly Rowe is so fat and ugly they gotta replace her.”

“... I just like porky blondes”

## Hair

A further examination of the physical attributes revealed that the theme "hair" prominently emerged from the data. This data lends another answer to RQ 2, involving physical attributes being talked about in online spaces about sports personalities. Several physical attributes were mentioned within the data, with hair being one that applies to women with a much higher ratio than their male counterparts. Online posts related to hair that was flagged used terms such as “hair,” “wig,” “toupe,” “buzz cut,” “curls,” “blond,” and “brunette. Flagged words involved hair (“Yes”) or other (“No”) based on the presence or absence of the words included in the code.

**Table 4**

*Physical Appearance About Hair Social Media Posts*

|       | Female       | Male          | Total          |
|-------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Hair  | 114 (2.5%)   | 66 (0.4%)     | 180 (0.7%)     |
| Other | 4,521 (98%)  | 22,776 (100%) | 27,321 (99%)   |
| Total | 4,635 (100%) | 22,872 (100%) | 27, 507 (100%) |

Data showed that 2.5 % of comments were about women’s hair and 0.3 % about their male counterparts. Media stereotypes over the years have explicitly defined hair for both men

and women, particularly for women of color. Data collected further this narrative as well as connects to each research question in explaining the difference between male and female comments made on social media. The number of comments shows significance within the set of data, and the number of posts for females was overall higher than for males. Some of the comments include:

“do you think Mike Tricio dips his bald head in coconut oil and forces makeup artists to buff it before the game.”

“do yall think jesse pamler dyes his hair”

“When did Greg McElroy lose all his hair”

“@LauraRutledge Congratulations to the most gorgeous sexiest finest beautiful woman at ESPN Laura Rutledge in your 5 year anniversary of NFL live. You look incredible in your pink outfit today, and your hair was beautiful as always. Here to 5 more years of seeing your gorgeous perfect smile!💎”

“@NFLonFOX Pam Oliver needs a twitter account because bullying works her hair I’m so 🙄 tired of dead animals on her head them wigs are an embarrassment to black hair styles: get a part in them wigs or better yet get a new hair stylist because babyyyy you need help desperately”

Notably, over 100 comments were directed at Black female sports journalist Pam Oliver and her hair.

### **Accountability**

In response to RQ 1, this study seeks to reveal the differences between male and female sports personalities in the comment section. This has been analyzed through various positions, where accountability and knowledge emerged as significant aspects of the data. The theme of accountability consistently surfaced throughout the analysis. To thoroughly assess the accountability ratio, two R Codes were executed to classify entries as either "Accountable" (YES) or "Other" (NO). Words and phrases such as “smart”, “intelligent”, “good at her job”, and “good at his job” were used to capture comments relating to accountability.

**Table 5**

*Accountability Social Media Posts*

|                | <b>Female</b> | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Total</b>   |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Accountability | 17 (1.2%)     | 123 (0.4%)    | 140 (0.6%)     |
| Other          | 4,6128 (99%)  | 22,749 (100%) | 27,367 (99%)   |
| Total          | 4,635 (100%)  | 22,872 (100%) | 27, 507 (100%) |

The data indicates that 1.2 % of female comments reflected accountability in their sports coverage, while male comments were at 0.4 %. Gender stereotypes have persisted, and online harassment has further fueled many negative narratives about women. Women have often been viewed as inferior and less intelligent than their male counterparts. However, in these results, we observe a slight positive change for female sportscasters, as their accountability ranks higher than that of men. Comments about accountability include:

“I’ve always thought Kirk Herstreit was an incredibly smart man”

“I truly HATE and love that Tom Rinaldi is so damn good at his job. That dude has made me cry more often than not.”

”Maria Taylor is so good at her job”

“Holly Rowe is awesome. Post game 🐻,”

Additionally, accountability was envaulted on the opposite scale: not accountable. The second R code used within accountability included “Not accountable” (YES) or “Other” (NO). Words and phrases such as “dumb”, “the worst”, “not good at her job”, and “not good at his job” were used to capture comments relating to accountability, with results shown in table 6.

**Table 6**

*Not Accountability Social Media Posts*

|                    | <b>Female</b> | <b>Male</b>   | <b>Total</b>   |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Not Accountability | 28 (0.6%)     | 349 (1.5%)    | 377 (1.4%)     |
| Other              | 4,623 (99%)   | 22,735 (100%) | 27,367 (99%)   |
| Total              | 4,635 (100%)  | 22,872 (100%) | 27, 507 (100%) |

Data indicated a significantly higher ratio of words flagged for men as not accountable, with 1.5 % for men and 0.6 % for females. Some comments presenting not being accountable were:

“Why is Chris Collingsworth so bad at his job”

“Joe Tessitore is the worst commentator”

“@ESPNCFB For the love of God, please get Pat McAfee OFF GameDay Live. I can’t. He’s terrible”

“@CBSSports Maria Taylor is downright awful...seriously, she is terrible...”

“Holly Rowe is terrible. Why is she keep asking the dumbest questions after they just won a game”

“Pam Oliver is a terrible sideline reporter. She used to be good but she’s flat and monotone talker.”

Overall, the share of comments addressing accountability for sports figures was higher for women than for men, with men facing more negative remarks about their accountability. The comments above illustrate this form of accountability; however, there are few instances in which women's remarks were solely related to their performance within the industry. While the numbers reflect a positive view of the abilities of female sportscasters, gender stereotypes continue to affect women. Women are often viewed through the hegemonic lens of what is stereotypically attractive, which influences how accountable they are in the industry. This further assists in addressing RQ 1 and RQ 2 regarding gender differences. The comments within this section showed how they were accountable to the job; however, they also highlighted their physical appearance. Furthermore, in the non-accountable category, many comments primarily target men, reinforcing gender norms by emphasizing women’s physical appearance rather than their expertise in the sport they cover or their accountability in the field.

The comments highlight their accountability while also focusing on aspects of physical appearance, for example:

“Maria Taylor? Smart, beautiful, got swag, educated on sports... 🐾”

“Who dressed Charrissa Thompson today? Looks like a shower curtain was used!

You can be smart and beautiful at the same time”

“@nflwork who dressed Maria Taylor? Stunning women, smart, professional and dressed like a bouncer at a nightclub. WTF??”

“... beautiful smart, intelligent irresistible ladies”

### **Qualitative Analysis of Offensive Posts**

The most offensive posts, for a male or female, were selected in order to demonstrate the level of offensive online harassment on social media. Some of this data is explicit. R codes generated for different characteristics in this study did not flag every explicit comment. Some remarks, considered non-crude, also lacked any language within the code but are considered crude. Comments were extracted from the overall dataset, facilitating responses to both Research Questions 1 and 2, while also emphasizing the negative nature of some remarks directed toward female sports personalities during live broadcasts.

Examples from the female results include “Laura Rutledge's legs and feet are sexy” to the much more disturbing “I want Holly Rowe to strap me to a sanitarium bed and bathe me with her period blood while she spans my bare asscheeks (sic) with a paddle.”

“So happy that Maria Taylor and her after-baby tits are on TV. It warrants repeating on how those things got bigger after having one and it makes me want to eat a four-course meal out of her ass even more.”

“I want to have sexual intercourse (doggy-style) with Charissa Thompson”

“Son of a gun Erin Andrew you are one smoking hot white women 🔥”

You cannot convince me that Big Pam Oliver’s mother didn’t have sex with a gorilla 🦍”

“I want mama Laura’s toes in my mouth”

“Patriots at Jets 3-14. For halftime I’ll be using Charissa Thompson’s mouth as a flashlight while Kaylee Hartung kisses her cunt from the back Final Score: 17-14 Patriots.”

“Every time Erin Andrews comes on screen I start dry rubbing to completion”

“@LegionHoops @sam\_amick I have dreams of licking Maria Taylor’s asshole”

“1. Like Holly Rowe sat on my face. 2. This entire staff has to go. Hey anyone under 55 looks good to me. Holly Rowe, I wanna pork that piggy”

“Laura Rutledge is no pull out 100”

““Social media is loving Charissa Thompson’s spicy short skirt outfit that showed off her legs for days during week 2 #Skirt #Americanfootball.”

The men were not completely spared, with lewd comments including, “Herbstreit drinks his semen after it has been bottled and aged. Collinsworth drinks straight from the tap,” “Jesse Palmer is jacking off,” “What if instead of Joe Tessitore, it was Joe Tittytore and he sucked Otis’ tits #goonnight.”

This data is sometimes shocking, but represents the vile comments made on social media.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### **Discussion**

This study builds upon previous research in gender studies within the sports media industry, emphasizing an ongoing issue within the digital age. Sporting events nationwide gain a large amount of traction, thus placing sports personalities into the direct spotlight during these events. With the growth of social media, an unfiltered avenue has been created for public conversation. The anonymity behind screens and keyboards has led to an influx of content that is considered as inappropriate, vile, and violent. Many of the posts made during sporting events were not even related to sports but were about some personal attribute of the sportscaster.

As individuals can post in real-time during sports events, comments and posts vary. However, a portion of the content produced on the internet is not about the games themselves but rather about the sports personalities themselves and their performance and/or appearance during the events. This has created a public space for online harassment affecting individuals in the public eye, but more significantly for females. Many women are experiencing targeted, and often offensive, social media comments at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Throughout the collected data, social media posts about women in the sports media industry may illustrate why the glass ceiling is merely cracked. Online harassment is a hurdle that many individuals face

while working within the industry and evaluating the data from this study through a postfeminist lens suggests these types of public attacks may be a reason the glass ceiling has not yet been broken.

As women made their way into the sports media industry, a second wave of challenges has emerged because of the digital era. Not only are their professional lives being broadcast on television, but aspects of their personal lives are also on social media platforms. Online harassment has become a part of the job for women within the industry. As their personal and professional lives are now intertwined through social media, attacks on individual character, physical attributes, and professional accountability are being made. As this study evaluated both male and female sports personalities, it was shown that both experience online harassment; however, women are seeing this at a much higher rate, especially with social media posts being made about their physical appearance.

As such, several themes emerged from collected data, many of which can be based upon society – stereotypes of both men and women. Comments related to physical appearance had the highest percentages. Five percent of posts about women were focused on their physical appearance, as opposed to less than two percent of posts about men's physical appearance. When a male's appearance was noted, it was often about a sportscaster looking fat, old, or getting bald. For women, comments about appearance more often referred to beauty and sexual appeal. Posts frequently included references to what the women were wearing and that they looked gorgeous or sexy. While approaching these results through postfeminism, stereotypes are shown by that have been presented within society are shown for both men and women. As Research Question 1 asks how comments differ between genders, results show this through percentages as well as the content between sports personalities' comments. Women experience more comments based upon

their appearance and at a more explicit rate. Comments about physical appearance also further Research Question 2 by showing how they are different in terms of physical attributes. Women are often seen through the hegemonic lens of stereotypes of what it concerns to be attractive. Stereotypical thinness and beauty was a prominent theme within results for women within online space.

Some crude sexual comments were made about men, but for women, many of the sexual comments involved sexual acts or desires on the part of the commenter. This was not present for the men. How humiliating it would be to constantly read on social media that some in your audience want to “lick your toes” or other fetish, vile, and potentially violent acts.

Within the theme of physical appearance was the subject of hair. Men and women were both targets of hair comments, however, while 2.5% of comments were about women’s hair, only 0.3% of comments were men’s hair. For men, comments frequently centered on balding. The nastiest and most numerous comments about hair were directed at Black sportscaster Pam Oliver, with comments such as “Pam Oliver and her collection of horrible wigs, an annual NFL tradition.” The majority of comments about White women’s hair were about their hair being sexy, beautiful, or perfect. This suggests another layer of harassment faced specifically by Black women not only in sports but on all types of broadcasting. African American women are increasingly recognized in sports media, yet they face heightened struggles due to online harassment stemming from societal stereotypes. Comments targeting their hair and other physical attributes are prevalent. The combination of racism and sexism within the industry online harassment of these individuals have further such narrative and allow for its continuation. Avery et al. (2021) observe, “it has been found that Black women are judged more favorably

when their appearance closely approximates Whiteness (i.e., having lighter skin) and aligns with hegemonic beauty ideals” (p. 182).

These results suggest that women in broadcast sports journalism are targeted by vile comments on social media more often than their male counterparts. Online harassment of these journalists has become part of the unofficial job description. Women have climbed the ladders of success within the workforce. However, they are now facing adversity in the workplace due to social media. As this unspoken new aspect of the job can be evaluated through the means of postfeminism, there is a rise in women working within the industry. However, comments made on social media diminish their success. Women journalists, particularly those in sports, are blending their personal and professional lives through online platforms, where harassment has become increasingly prevalent in their work. While not all women sportscasters read social media comments, these types of comments can be distressing or frightening. Continued personal attacks may drive some women away from the industry. Women who remain may experience personal distress by attacks on their physical appearance; “Women who internalize hegemonic notions of feminine appearance may judge themselves harshly against societal standards of beauty as a measure of their own self-worth” (Avery et al., 2021, p. 182).

Further, as suggested by the second-level agenda setting theory, these social media comments feature some attributes more frequently than others. As a result, media audiences exposed to this content will tend to think of these particular sportscasters in terms of the attributes being emphasized at the time. People like Erin Andrews or Kirk Herbstreit can be treated as agenda objects, with his or her own set of attributes. Their attributes are perhaps things like “sexy,” or “professional.” The data in this study suggests female attributes seem to get more attention on social media than male attributes. The female attributes are also more offensive. As

an agenda object who is seen as someone who is evaluated primarily on their beauty or sexual desirability, it undermines their professional value. The data in this study shows a significant difference in how male and female attributes are discussed by the audience on social media. Constant devaluation for women can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction.

The postfeminist approach assists in analyzing the new wave of popular culture and its relationship with the rise of online harassment driven by dominant masculinities. This perspective raises further research questions, particularly distinguishing between content posted about male and female sportscasters. Journalists' lives are now visible to the public through social media platforms, making parasocial relationships more likely to form and increasing harassment. Additionally, the concept of second-level agenda setting establishes a basis for examining how sports personalities are portrayed in the media, linking it to the social media interactions they experienced during the study.

Online harassment continues to pose a wave of challenges for women in the industry. It also perpetuates ideals of racism and sexism through the use of stereotypes. As media has set a precedent for what is expected on social platforms, sports personalities are often expected to meet many of the criteria set by modern-day gender stereotypes, such as being thin and attractive and women being seen as inferior to men. Postfeminism exemplifies this ideal, as we see successful women torn down within online spaces. Stereotypes affect both men and women are affected by societal ideals; however, women often face more frequent and harsh stereotypes regarding physical appearance and credibility, particularly through comments on social platforms.

While there have been successes in the sports media industry, challenges resembling the glass ceiling continue to exist, particularly with the rise of social media as a societal tool. The glass ceiling for women remains an ongoing issue with many aspects involved in the supposed breaking of this barrier. Various challenges, including personal and online harassment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and work-life balance difficulties, have impeded the strides made in overcoming the glass ceiling in the industry, impacting women's job satisfaction as well.

Using Brandwatch, data was gathered from social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, and forums. The data collected during the first three weeks of the 2024 football season was analyzed concerning male and female sports personalities on air during the selected period. Over twenty thousand posts related to male and female sports personalities were collected from various online media. Social media posts were analyzed using different R codes to distinguish between genders and topics like physical attributes, accountability, and the difference between crude and non-crude comments. This study on content within online media spaces begins to answer how content differed as well as if physical attributes were present more between genders.

Throughout the study, comments made during the live broadcast of sporting events did not focus on the sports themselves, but the individuals featured on air. Social media posts deemed crude or offensive during this period were observed for both men and women; however, women encountered these remarks at a significantly higher rate. The study revealed that women in sports media were frequently judged based on their attire, appearance, and how viewers perceived them on screen rather than their journalistic work.

Women occupy various roles in the sports media industry and often face social media comments regarding their knowledge of the game. While some remarks related to sports, most focused on their physical appearance. Comments directed at women tend to be the opposite of those for men, as the field is often viewed through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. Women in sports journalism are typically presented in specific attire, which can lead to perceptions of inferiority, reflecting a second-level agenda setting. This certain attire and physical appearance has been engraved within societal stereotypes. Throughout the data, it is evident that comments regarding the accountability of sports personalities, regardless of whether they are negative or positive, often tend to reflect a judgment of women primarily based on their physical appearance. As women have followed suit with much of what is considered to be the social norm or the stereotypical way to present themselves within the public view, they are still scrutinized based on their physical appearance.

Journalists now showcase not just their professional lives but also their personal aspects on social media. This trend creates a more accessible pathway for online harassment to take place, particularly affecting women. The growing blend between professional and personal lives fosters a sense of normalcy in society's comments about these individuals. Further research into online harassment could lead to solutions for these persistent issues. The harassment faced by women journalists, particularly in sports, is unacceptable and highlights significant disparities in the industry. Although all journalists encounter difficulties, the aggression targeted at women is often uniquely brutal—it's personal, unrelenting, and considerably more harmful. This issue extends beyond mere harsh remarks; it's a persistent barrage of abuse that deters women from fully engaging and expressing their opinions. The landscape is not level when women's participation is constrained by the fear of harassment and threats that their male peers seldom

face. Change is imperative. Platforms can enforce stricter policies, and corporations must support their employees in these situations. By reporting online harassment and acknowledging that this is an ongoing challenge, we can collaboratively strive to create safer, more respectful, and equitable social environments for everyone addressed.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A limitation of the study was the timing of data collection, which focused only on the initial three weeks of the football season. As the season advanced, a deeper understanding of how social media comments reflected the content could have evolved. Collecting data over an extended period and involving fewer sports personalities would allow for a more thorough examination of social media comments and posts being made.

Another limitation could be the lack of study on male sports personalities. As data was collected, percentages related to men were included; however, the research focused on women's experience within the industry. Additional research on men within the sports industry could be the subject of future research.

A future limitation of having only women as on-air talent in football leagues. Further research on women's roles in various sports areas could enhance our understanding of the glass ceiling's overall impact on women in the sports industry.

During the research process, certain omissions became apparent in the analysis of R codes used to identify words on online platforms. Some words and phrases were not properly categorized by the coding system as either crude or non-crude, resulting in potentially valuable terms being overlooked or not fully included in the study.

Lastly, Brandwatch doesn't scrape platforms like TikTok or Instagram directly due to strict data privacy policies and platform regulations. Thus limiting the online spaces that were

sampled within the collection of data. With the addition of other online platforms, results could produce other results.

Further study on women in the sports industry and online harassment can help protect those facing these challenges. Online harassment impacts more than just on-air individuals; further studies on women in the industry could provide deeper insights into the scope of online harassment in sports. By highlighting the barriers encountered by women in sports media, this research may foster support amidst the changing social media landscape. Changes could arise within upper management of sports organizations or through government legislation aimed at preventing online harassment of women in the future. As this research is ongoing and dynamic, additional studies will contribute not only to future successes but also to improving the social media environment.

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## Appendix A

Below is the R script used to format, filter, and organize the raw data from Brandwatch. The raw data files are quite large: 29 mb for the females and 87 mb for the males.

("Erin Andrews" OR

"Holly Rowe" OR

"Laura Rutledge" OR

"Charissa Thompson" OR

"Katie George" OR

"Molly McGrath" OR

"Tiffany Green" OR

"Tracy Wolfson" OR

"Jenny Taft" OR

"Jen Lada" OR

"Maria Taylor" OR

"Pam Oliver") NOT "RT @"

The following was the query used for the men:

("Kirk Herbstreit" OR

"Pat McAfee" OR

"Jesse Palmer" OR

"Joe Tessitore" OR

"Tom Rinaldi" OR

"Cris Collingsworth" OR

"Mike Tirico" OR

"Chris Fowler" OR

"Bob Wischusen" OR

"Greg McElroy" OR

"Sam Acho" OR

"Quint Kessenich") NOT "RT @"

The "NOT "RT @" is a way of excluding retweets. Retweets are not considered to be insightful for this study.

R was used to format, filter and organize the raw data from Brandwatch. The data is housed in a Google sheet with five tabs:

AllData: Data for both women and men, sorted by date.

Women: Data for women only, sorted by date.

Term Frequencies Women: All words in the posts about women, plus the number of times each word appeared.

Men: Data for men only, sorted by date.

Term Frequencies Men: All words in the posts about men, plus the number of times each word appeared.

```
# Packages and libraries
```

```
if (!require(tidyverse))
  install.packages("tidyverse")
library(tidyverse)
```

```
if (!require("tidytext"))
  install.packages("tidytext")
library(tidytext)
```

```
#### Post about female sportscasters ####
```

```

# Read data

Women <- read.csv("Female sportscasters.csv", skip = 6)

# Add gender indicator

Women$Gender = "Female"

# Selection variables of interest

Women <- Women %>%
  select(Gender, Date, Author, Full.Text, Url, Page.Type, Account.Type)

# Format time variable

Women$Date <- as.POSIXct(Women$Date, tz = "America/Chicago")

# Filter out news organization posts

BySource <- Women %>%
  group_by(Page.Type, Account.Type) %>%
  summarize(Posts = n())

Women <- Women %>%
  filter(!(Page.Type == "news")) %>%
  filter(!(Account.Type == "organisational"))

BySource2 <- Women %>%
  group_by(Page.Type, Account.Type) %>%
  summarize(Posts = n())

Women <- Women %>%
  select(Gender, Date, Author, Full.Text, Url, Page.Type)

write.csv(Women,"Women.csv",
  row.names = FALSE)

#### Post about male sportscasters ####

# Read data

Men <- read.csv("Male sportscasters.csv", skip = 6)

# Add gender indicator

Men$Gender = "Male"

```

```

# Selection variables of interest

Men <- Men %>%
  select(Gender, Date, Author, Full.Text, Url, Page.Type, Account.Type)

# Format time variable

Men$Date <- as.POSIXct(Men$Date, tz = "America/Chicago")

# Filter out news organization posts

BySource <- Men %>%
  group_by(Page.Type, Account.Type) %>%
  summarize(Posts = n())

Men <- Men %>%
  filter(!(Page.Type == "news")) %>%
  filter(!(Account.Type == "organisational"))

BySource2 <- Men %>%
  group_by(Page.Type, Account.Type) %>%
  summarize(Posts = n())

Men <- Men %>%
  select(Gender, Date, Author, Full.Text, Url, Page.Type)

write.csv(Women,"Men.csv",
  row.names = FALSE)
# Cleanup

rm(BySource, BySource2)

#### Word frequency ####

# Females

tidy_text <- Women %>%
  unnest_tokens(word, Full.Text) %>%
  count(word, sort = TRUE)
data("stop_words")
tidy_text <- tidy_text %>%
  anti_join(stop_words)

write.csv(tidy_text, "WordFrequencyFemales.csv",
  row.names = FALSE)

```

```

# Males

tidy_text <- Men %>%
  unnest_tokens(word, Full.Text) %>%
  count(word, sort = TRUE)
data("stop_words")
tidy_text <- tidy_text %>%
  anti_join(stop_words)

write.csv(tidy_text, "WordFrequencyMales.csv",
  row.names = FALSE)

# Combine files

AllData <- bind_rows(Women, Men)

write.csv(AllData, "AllData.csv",
  row.names = FALSE)

# Cleanup

rm(stop_words, tidy_text)

```

### Crude vs not crude:

```

#####
#Post coding
if (!require(tidyverse))
  install.packages("tidyverse")
if (!require("gtsummary"))
  install.packages("gtsummary")
library(gtsummary)
library(tidyverse)
AllData <- AllData %>%
  mutate(CrudeTerms = case_when(
    grepl(" cock ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" pussy ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" ass ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" boob ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" boobs ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" boobie ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" tit ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" tits ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
    grepl(" cunt ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",

```

```

grepl("fuck", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" butt ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" bitch ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" slut ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" whore ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" nude ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" nudes ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" naked ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" porn ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
grepl(" sex tape ", Full.Text) ~ "Crude",
TRUE ~ "Not crude"
))
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
  tbl_cross(row = CrudeTerms,
            col = Gender,
            % = "column")
Crosstab

```

**The following code was used in R for the analysis on overall physical appearance:**

```

AllData <- AllData %>%
  mutate(PhysicalAppearance = case_when
    grepl(" leg ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" legs ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" ass ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" boob ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" boobs ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" boobie ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" tit ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" tits ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" feet and legs ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl("legs and feet", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" butt ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" cute face ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" she's gorgeous ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" he's handsome ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" he's old ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" she's old ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" she's fat ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" he's fat ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" sexy ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" hot ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" she's ugly ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" he's ugly", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl("buff ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
    grepl(" muscles", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",

```

```

grepl(" hair ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl("fit ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",

grepl("bald ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",

grepl(" wig' ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" toupe' ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
TRUE ~ "No Physical Appearance"
))
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
tbl_cross(row = PhysicalAppearance,
col = Gender
% = "column")
Crosstab

```

### **R Code Used for Physical Appearance such as body image and weight:**

```

AllData <- AllData %>%

mutate(PhysicalAppearance = case_when(

grepl(" she's fat ", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" he's fat", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" gain weight", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" weight", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" she's large", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" he's large", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" fat", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" overweight", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" skinny", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" she's skinny", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" he's skinny", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" she's thin", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" he's thin", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" underweight", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" he's scrawny", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",
grepl(" she's scrawny", Full.Text) ~ "Physical Appearance",

TRUE ~ "No Physical Appearance"

))
Crosstab <- AllData %>%

tbl_cross(row = PhysicalAppearance,

col = Gender,

```

```
    % = "column")
```

Crosstab

### Hair

```
AllData <- AllData %>%
```

```
  mutate(Hair = case_when(
    grepl("hair ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("wig ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("bald ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("toupe ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("curls ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("blond ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("brunette ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("grey hair ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("buzz cut ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
    grepl("comb over ", Full.Text) ~ "Hair",
```

```
    TRUE ~ "Other"
```

```
  ))
```

```
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
```

```
  tbl_cross(row = Hair,
```

```
    col = Gender,
```

```
    % = "column")
```

Crosstab

### Accountable

```
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
```

```
tbl_cross(row = NotAccountable,
          col = Gender,
          % = "column")
```

Crosstab

```
AllData <- AllData %>%
  mutate(Accountability = case_when(
    grepl(" smart ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" awesome ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" she's smart' ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" he's smart' ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" knows his stuff ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" knows her stuff ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" good at her job ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" good at his job ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" awesome ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" intelligent ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" good at her job ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" good at his job ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    grepl(" knowledgeable ", Full.Text) ~ "Accountability",
    TRUE ~ "Other"
  ))
```

```
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
```

```
tbl_cross(row = Accountability,
          col = Gender,
          % = "column")
```

```
Crosstab
```

### **Not accountable**

```
AllData <- AllData %>%
```

```
mutate(NotAccountable = case_when(
  grepl(" bad at her job ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" bad at his job ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" she is terrible' ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" he is terrible' ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" dumb ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" stupid ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" annoying ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  grepl(" the worst ", Full.Text) ~ "Not Accountable",
  TRUE ~ "Other"
))
```

```
Crosstab <- AllData %>%
```

```
tbl_cross(row = NotAccountable,
          col = Gender,
          % = "column")
```

```
Crosstab
```