For decades, feminist scholars have highlighted the troubled relationship between the media and women’s athletics. In an attempt to mitigate the threat that female athletes pose to the gender binary system, and by extension, patriarchy, the media frequently ignore or trivialize women’s sports (e.g., Mosher, Duncan, & Jensen, 1995). Presently, while egregiously disempowering portrayals of female athletes are common in the media, the means to trivialize or normalize these effects has been more subtle and nuanced means (Carty, 2005; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002). One strategy includes for decades, feminist scholars have highlighted the troubled relationship between the media and women’s athletics. In an attempt to mitigate the threat that female athletes pose to the gender binary system, and by extension, patriarchy, the media frequently ignore or trivialize women’s sports (e.g., Mosher, Duncan, & Jensen, 1995). Presently, while egregiously disempowering portrayals of female athletes are common in the media, the means to trivialize or normalize these effects has been more subtle and nuanced means (Carty, 2005; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002). One strategy includes

The purpose of this pilot study is to explore how female athletes are represented on the popular video sharing site, YouTube. The questions guiding this study include:

1. Originality of Content Uploaded By Individuals

Most videos had a corporate title:
- 43% completely unoriginal/generated professionally produced (e.g., ESPN segment)
- 40% professionally produced content altered/mashup (e.g., compilation of clips from network televised games)
- 4% generated/added to non-sports-related video (e.g., compilation of clips from network televised games)
- 15% completely original, user made content (e.g., compilation of home videos)

2. Representations of Solo and Wambach

A. Content of Videos

- 60% of the videos were primarily focused on her action (e.g., visual representations of her athleticism being the main focus of the video)
- 20% of the videos did not show her in action (e.g., interview on talk show, song made about her, etc.)
- 20% of the videos visualized her in some way (e.g., one of the original videos was a vlog of a man inviting her to his military ball)

Wambach:
- 60% of the videos were primarily focused on her action (e.g., visual representations of her athleticism being the main focus of the video)
- 20% of the videos did not show her in action (e.g., MagicJack commercial)

These results suggest that, while female athletes are portrayed in a (fairly) positive light, possibly challenging hegemonic understanding of female athletes and women’s sports. Many commenters, for example, noted that they are more likely to watch women’s sports after seeing a video of Wambach in action (“But was so fucking gangsta! I gotta start watching more women’s soccer”). Many commenters positioned in response to her videos, however, worked to denigrate women’s sports by 1) employing sexist rhetoric; 2) bringing other soccer players into the discussion and proceeding to sexualize or feminize other players; and to a much lesser extent 1) feminizing or sexualizing Wambach. The different strategies used to trivialize or denigrate the athletic skills of Solo and Wambach may be a result of the degree to which they conform to traditional standards of femininity. As Shugart (2003) noted, athletes who cannot be easily (hetero)sexualized due to the way in which their appearance does not meet society’s narrow prescriptions of female (hetero)sex appeal, are treated differently than athletes who are more easily sexualized or feminized. The fact that Solo was overtly sexualized, while the trivialization of female athletes took in more subtle ways in the comment section of Wambach’s videos, suggests that strategies used to denigrate women’s sports continue to be dependent upon social constructions—in this case, gender presentation.

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