

AN EXAMINATION OF THE COVERAGE OF OREGON22

by

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The World Athletics Championships Oregon22 marked the first World Championships held in the United States. Track and field officials hoped this event would help increase the support of track and field in the United States. These officials created marketing plans and expected American media covering Oregon22 to frontline this growth movement.

This researcher set out to explore the coverage of Oregon22 to test if the coverage provided by American publications was equal for female and male athletes. Oregon22 was an “equal-participation event¹” that had 24 events featuring female athletes and 24 events featuring male athletes. This researcher conducted an intensive descriptive analysis of 17 articles published by four prominent American publications — *The New York Times*, *ESPN*, *NBC Sports*, and *The Los Angeles Times* — as well as 11 articles published by the governing body’s website, *World Athletics*. The researcher chose to examine events featuring top American athletes, so that included the 100 meters, 400-meter hurdles, shot put, javelin, and pole vault. The researcher also set out to test if these four major U.S. publications and *World Athletics* employed a similar number of female and male journalists at Oregon22.

¹ An equal-participation event features the same amount of athletes, events, or competitors on both the men’s and women’s side.

In addition to examining the gender equity of the competitors and journalists at Oregon22, this researcher wanted to see if Oregon22 did help to increase the support of track and field in the United States. These findings could help to indicate that the quantity of coverage of female and male athletes on these four major American publications and *World Athletics* was equal. This research also found that American publications did not employ an equal number of female journalists, although *World Athletics* did. However, each of these findings are far from concrete as the researcher struggled to find articles covering these five events on the four major American publications. The researcher also found articles published by *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* discussing that lack of coverage of Oregon22, as well as track and field officials' dismay with the support of casual sports fans. These findings led the researcher to believe that Oregon22 might not have increased the following of track and field in the United States.

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Introduction

The World Athletics Championships Oregon22 were held in Eugene, Oregon, over the summer of 2022. It marked the first time the United States had hosted the World Championships. Track and field officials hoped that awarding the competition to an American city — one with a depth of track and field history — would help improve support of track and field in the United States. One way to judge would be by determining how major American publications covered the event.

The researcher was a credentialed media member at Oregon22 and was interested in studying Oregon22 as a way to test gender equity in the coverage of track and field. The World Championships are an equal-participation event, with 24 events featuring women and 24 featuring men. The researcher was interested to see if this equal participation was reflected by the coverage on four major US publications: *The New York Times*, *ESPN*, *NBC Sports*, and *The Los Angeles Times*.

In addition, the researcher had observed that female journalists were vastly outnumbered by male journalists. The researcher tested if this observation was reflected by comparing the number of male and female journalists who published coverage on these platforms across these five events.

Being a credentialed journalist, the researcher wanted to understand how coverage affects the growth of a sport. This research looks at the disparities in the coverage of female athletes across all sports, the underemployment and unfair treatment of female journalists, and why Oregon22 seems to have been unable to increase the support of track and field in America.

Literature Review

Overview

As part of the Education Amendments of 1972, Title IX banned sex discrimination in federally funded education programs. While it opened doors for women in education, its most notable contribution was the lifting up of women in sports. Universities were forced to increase the funds allocated toward women's sports and increase the number of women's sports they had. In 1972, just 15% of Division I athletes were women, whereas, according to a 2022 NCAA study, 47% of Division I athletes are women. Another study conducted by the Women's Sports Foundation in May 2022 determined that 44% of all collegiate athletes are women. Title IX was meant to grant equal opportunity to both men and women in sports. Since its passing, the inclusion of women in sports has continuously grown, but media coverage of women's sports has not grown proportionally. Women's sports lack coverage and resources, and that may be one reason they struggle to grow.

Not only does this thesis examine the lack of coverage of women's sports, but it also addresses the treatment of women that participate in both sports and newsrooms. Women in sports and sports newsrooms can feel like they are the outsiders in a male-dominated field. Women can also be treated in a way that dissuades them from having a voice and ascending the totem pole in these industries. These inequities have led female athletes to have to grow their own brand and the sports they participate in; it's put the onus on female reporters to help this movement. This research can help to explain that there is a disconnect in the dichotomy of this relationship. Female athletes and journalists can help one another grow, but need to be provided with the resources for this process to be a successful one.

The United States track and field team has been atop the sport of track and field since the World Athletics Championships started in 1976. It's won 414 total medals. For context, Kenya is second with 161, and Russia is third with 142. Team USA has more gold medals — 183 — than any country has medals. At Oregon22, Team USA won 28 medals, including 10 gold medals. Kenya and Jamaica each finished with 10 total medals, tying for second place. Sebastian Coe, the president of the International Association of Athletics Federation, called Team USA the sport's "powerhouse" in a Los Angeles Times article (Greif, 2022). However, the support of track and field by casual sports fans in the United States does not reflect this continued success. Coe said the U.S. is "not punching its weight" as a market for growing the sport's popularity (Greif, 2022). The World Athletics Championships Oregon22, which was the first World Championships ever held in the United States, was supposed to headline World Athletics' movement to increase support of track and field in the United States.

Lack of coverage

Despite the increased participation of girls and women in sport as a result of Title IX, the increase of professional leagues for women, and the growing popularity of women's sports among sports fans, there are consistent patterns related to the lack of news media coverage of women's sport that persist over time (Cooky, Messner, and Hextrum, 2013). People believe they have free will to choose which sports they want to consume, but it is actually affected by media outlets (Cooky, et. al., 2013). The inclusion and participation of women in sports has risen since 1972 with the passing of Title IX. Not only are 44% of collegiate athletes women, but there are currently over 3.5 million girls competing in high school sports, whereas in 1972 just 1 in 27 high school athletes were women. However, in 2019 a Purdue University study found that women's sports and female athletes receive just 5.4% of sports media coverage. In 2012, Claire

Baldin, a women's sports presenter, explained how "women's sports don't get the coverage so they also don't gain commercial support and are thus unable to build an audience" (O'Neill and Mulready, 2012).

Over a 20-year period between 1989-2009, ESPN's *SportsCenter* airtime consisted of 96.4% male sports and 2.7% female sports, and news and sports affiliates in the Los Angeles area such as KABC, KNBC, and KCBS had a similar disparity (Cooky, et. al., 2013). With such a high quantity of coverage of male-dominated fields, viewers can be led to believe sports are a male-dominated entity (Cooky, et. al., 2013).

Not only are women sports largely excluded from ESPN's *SportsCenter*, *KABC*, *KNBC*, and *KCBS*, but they are shown far less on highlight shows and social media accounts, which have become a convenient way to stay up to date on sports (Cooky, et. al., 2013). Both the amount of coverage of women's sports and the quality of that coverage illustrate the ways in which televised news media build audiences for men's sport while silencing and marginalizing women's sport (Cooky, et. al., 2015). *SportsCenter*, *House of Highlights*, *Bleacher Report*, etc., don't market themselves to exclusively show clips of men's sports, yet the highlights of women's sports are secluded on female-centric accounts such as *HighlightHer*, *Just Women s Sports*, *ESPNW*, and more. *SportsCenter*'s coverage of women's sports declined in 2009 to 1.3% (Cooky, et. al., 2013). *SportsCenter* has a ticker on the bottom of the screen that's meant to keep viewers updated on live sports. In 2013, *SportsCenter* dedicated 2% of its ticker to women's sports (Cooky, et. al., 2013).

The lack of coverage of female athletes can be seen when looking at equal-participation events such as the Olympics, the World Cup, and the World Athletics

Championships, which have a similar number of women and men competing, however, the media's coverage of these events may not reflect that equal-participation (O'Neill, et. al., 2012). In the 10-year period between the Salt Lake 2002 Winter Olympics and the London 2012 Summer Olympics, the coverage of women's sports peaked at 5% of the total coverage of sports in the UK print media (O'Neill, et. al., 2012). If you extract the Olympics from that, then the number drops below 4%, at times down to 1% (O'Neill, et. al., 2012). In 2002, there was an average of 5% for the coverage of female athletes out of the 2,531 articles analyzed. In 2012, the overall coverage went down to 3% out of the 2,321 articles analyzed. The media failed to shift its agenda to build up women's profiles. The 2012 Olympics were promoted to inspire the next generation of British athletes, as well as widening sports participation (O'Neill, et. al., 2012). With the lack of coverage of female athletes, this cycle could continue as it is helpful for girls to see representations of themselves to pursue sports (O'Neill, et. al., 2015).

Lack of resources and the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on coverage

Convergences around money, visibility, and perceived relevance historically separate men's and women's sports. (Staurowsky, Koch, Dury, and Hayes, 2020). In 2020, female athletes received 1% of sponsorship dollars spent by global brands (Staurowsky, et. al, 2020). The allocation of financial resources pushed toward a sport can help it grow (Staurowsky, et. al., 2020). In a 2015 interview, *EspnW* columnist Kate Fagan said, "People care and are invested in sports at any level if they know the storylines and understand the stakes. You can apply this to a youth tee ball game. You become invested in the moment because you know the storyline of your daughter and her team and you know the stakes are that it is important to her" (Walker and Melton, 2015).

Since the sports journalism industry doesn't prioritize the expansion of women's sports, much of its growth depends on the athletes' drive to market themselves and the sport they play (Cooky, et. al., 2013). This isn't the job of male athletes, although they take it on as well. In addition, female athletes are compensated poorly, making it all the more difficult to promote themselves and grow their sports as they don't have the funds to do so (Staurowsky, et. al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic halted positive progress in the growth of women's sports as sports were postponed and athletes were left without work (Staurowsky, et. al., 2020). Shortly before the worldwide shutdown of every major sporting league — both men and women — many women's sports and female athletes were on a rise (Staurowsky, et. al., 2020). Examples include the success the U.S. Women's National soccer team experienced and the increased roles of women in the FIFA federation; as well as the first woman, Carol Kallan, being named as the USWNT basketball team director.

As the pandemic began to wreak havoc, *The Atlantic's* Joe Pinsker predicted that those with greater financial resources would weather the moment and emerge relatively stable, whereas those without it, were negatively affected (Pinsker, 2020; Staurowsky, et. al., 2020). Despite the aforementioned progress, women in sports were far from part of that well-off group. During the pandemic, many pleaded with their sponsors to aid their hardships as it wasn't their choice to not play. What ensued was the halting of the triumphant progress that had caught momentum prior to the pandemic. For example, former Harvard women's soccer player and documentarian Susie Petrucelli offered a prediction that women's sports would be placed last in terms of priorities for allocations of resources and support. This was exemplified by the

Canadian government's willingness to support the Canadian Football League (CFL). The CFL requested \$1 million to resume its league — it was granted. That was after the same Canadian sporting federation denied a \$250,000 request from the Canadian Women's Hockey League to restart (Petrucci, 2020; Staurowsky, et. al., 2020).

It's important to understand the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on women in sports. It's also important to understand there was a disparity in resources prior to the pandemic. For example, even after a new collective bargaining agreement was passed in the WNBA, which Staurowsky, et al pointed out as an increase in resources, the average salary of a WNBA player is \$102,000, while the average salary of an NBA player is over \$9 million (Staurowsky, et. al.,2020).

Framing

Critical feminist theory can explain how one of the most powerful institutions in U.S. culture — sport media — reproduce gendered relations of power, values, and ideologies in the coverage and promotion of women's sports (Kane and Maxwell, 2011). It also tells us that sportswomen are routinely presented in ways that emphasize their femininity and heterosexuality versus their athletic competence (Daniels, 2009; Douglas & Jamieson, 2006; Kim, Walkosz, & Iverson, 2006; Roedl, 2007; Kane, et. al., 2011). Newspaper and TV coverage around the globe routinely focuses on the athletic exploits of males versus the physical — and sexualized — appearance of females (Bissell & Duke, 2007; Donohoe, 2003; Stone & Horne, 2008; Kane, et. al., 2011). Audiences can infer an idea of female athletes because of media portrayals that are spewed into society rather than with free will. The detriment of feminized media images is reflected in research that consistently shows how unrealistic beauty and body standards negatively impact

young girls' mental states and body perceptions (Krane, Ross, Miller, Ganoë, Lucas-Carr, & Barak, 2011). In addition, the athletes and competitors themselves are affected by the way the media frames them because a dominant theme communicated through the media to girls and women in sport is the importance of maintaining a feminine appearance (Krane, 2001; Krane, et. al., 2011).

The history of sports has been framed to celebrate masculinity going back to when the most popular sports were predicated on brute strength and helped to define gender roles in society (Krane, et. al., 2011). Men yielded shot puts and jostled with one another as women watched from the side. Depictions like this example create the idea that sports are a male-dominated field.

Regardless of gender, society has been taught that "sex sells" (Kane, et. al., 2011). This idea doesn't transcend sports. Some sports journalists sexualize female athletes because sport is another form of entertainment and this is a way to sell the product. As the inclusion of women in sports has risen since the passing of Title IX in 1972, so has the sexualization of women in sports (Kane, et. al., 2011). The way in which photographs frame female athletes has an effect on consumers as one makes a judgment regarding an athlete's dedication to their sport based on how they are framed in a photo (Kane, et. al., 2011).

While the idea that "sex sells" is a popular one, Kane, et. al.'s study counteracts this belief when analyzing sports. This study uses focus groups of men (18-34) & (35-55) as well as women of the same age groups with minimal sports backgrounds to determine "athletic competence" based on the way an athlete's framed in a photo (Kane, et. al., 2011). A "soft pornography" photo of Danica Patrick generated the least interest from any of the focus groups,

while a photo of Chamique Holdsclaw playing basketball generated the greatest interest (Kane, et. al., 2011). When female athletes are depicted with an “aggressive game face,” they are taken more seriously and generate more interest from consumers (Krane, et. al., 2011). This was also validated in Krane et. al.’s study which had a group of young female soccer players look at photos of professional soccer players to see which photos generated positive responses of “athletic competence.” The ones with the “aggressive game face” fit that bill. (Krane, et. al., 2011). This can help to show how coverage that sexualizes female athletes can be detrimental to the growth of women’s sports.

Not only is the sexualization of women in sports a negative framing technique, but audiences believe that females can be fully engaged in sports but still remain the “real thing,” meaning not too masculine or threatening to conventional gender norms (Boyle et. al., 2006; Kane, et. al., 2011). When the photos depicted a professional athlete smiling while holding a ball or walking in their sporting attire, it incited a reaction where the young women didn't perceive the professionals as “serious athletes.” On the other hand, the photos where the athletes sported an “aggressive game face” incited a reaction of admiration toward a “role model” who is “passionate” about their sport (Krane, et. al., 2011).

After viewing photographs of women from health, fitness, and sport magazines (that highlighted beauty over athletic ability), young volleyball players negatively described their own body image compared to the magazine images (Thomas, Bower, & Barnes, 2004; Krane, et. al., 2011). These findings are especially disconcerting, as girls may look up to female athletes as role models. Role models can be empowering, so this can stunt the inclusion of women and girls in

sports as they're not exposed to representations of fellow females that would entice them to compete (Krane, et. al., 2011).

Bias against reporters

Gender biases attached to female athletes also pertain to stereotypes that female journalists in the sports journalism industry face. While equality, in terms of the numbers of women in the field, might be moving in the right direction, prior research has shown that viewers do not think of male and female sports journalists in the same way, finding male sports journalists more credible (i.e., Mitrook & Dorr, 2001; Etling & Young, 2005, 2007; Davis & Krawczyk, 2010; Etling et. al., 2011; Schmidt, 2015). A 2021 study conducted by Richard Lapchick found that only 14.4% of sports media journalists are women (Lapchick, 2021). It's an increase from 11.5% in 2018 (Lapchick, 2021). Liberal feminists have argued that the antidote to the marginalization of women's sports is in the hiring of more women willing to cover women's sports (Skwar, 1999; Hardin and Shain, 2007). Yet the professional socialization of women in sports journalism may be even more pronounced than in other parts of the newsroom; the nature of sports is such that an authoritarian power structure (that demands unquestioning obedience) is idealized.

Thus, women involved in sports generally may resist taking a political stance on women's issues (Hall, 1996; Hardin and Shain, 2007). For women to get ahead in sports media, they must dress provocatively, ultimately this negatively affects their credibility with the audience (Harrison, 2019; Brisbane, Ferruci, and Tandoc, 2021).

In the United States, the growth of women in sports journalism has stagnated (Sherman, 2015; Brisbane, et. al., 2021). Not only is the mere quantity of female reporters in

newsrooms important for growing women's sports, but it's empowering those reporters with positions that allow them to voice their opinion and make an impact (Hardin, et. al., 2007). A 1998 mail survey of 89 female sports journalists found similar results — that is — frustration at being passed over for promotions (Hoshino, 1998; Hardin, et. al., 2007). In 2021, 83.3% of sports editors were men (Lapchick, 2021). Getting in the door, perhaps as a “token hire,” is easier than it has ever been. Once hired, women are socialized into a newsroom that emphasizes their inferiority, in relation to journalism, and into a department that emphasizes their inferiority, in relation to sports (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

U.S. newsrooms operate with a rigidly hierarchical structure that perpetuates male hegemony through norms such as independence, detachment, and “objectivity”; most newsroom cultures are “aggressive/defensive,” so they value independence, competitiveness, and confrontation (Cunningham, 2000; Hardin, et. al., 2007). While female journalists can help grow women's sports, it's an undermanned movement because 14.4% of sports journalists are women, but 40% of professional athletes are women (Lapchick, 2021). The percentage of women estimated to work in U.S. newspaper sports departments is far lower (around 11% for those papers in the top 200 for circulation) than in the entire newsroom (about 39%); very few women are sports editors (Hardin & Whiteside, 2006; Hardin, et. al., 2007). These numbers were reported 15 years ago. Recent findings from Lapchick's study included in this thesis highlight this as a remaining issue. Although sports departments at papers with a circulation above 250,000 include more women, about 13% of papers in the United States have few or no women (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Most participants in Hardin et. al.'s study said their status in the industry had improved during the past decade because of efforts by many newsrooms during that time to diversify. Almost all participants expressed frustration at the burden of chasing male-defined

standards. They characterized their struggle in terms of having to “prove” themselves repeatedly and to gain respect from colleagues and from fans (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Younger participants were more inclined to resent women they considered as playing up their sexuality in professional journalism, women who weren’t “real” journalists but were instead “pretty faces” (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

Unfair Treatment

Female athletes are verbally and sexually harassed in their facilities and by comments on social media (Antunovic, et. al., 2018). In 1990, New England Patriots football team players sexually harassed *Boston Herald s* sports reporter Lisa Olson in the locker room. It ultimately drove Olson out of sports journalism and out of the country (Disch and Kane, 1996; Antunovic, et. al., 2018). Female reporters have also downplayed these situations and tend to accept such behavior as “par for the course ”and have resisted characterizing it as sexual harassment (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

Female reporters are scrutinized as being too “mannish ”(i.e., lesbian) or, alternatively, for using their sexual attractiveness to get an edge with male sources (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Participants in Hardin et. al.’s study almost unanimously expressed frustration with their consistent “second-class ”status in the newsroom. They talked at length about the flip side of tokenism: failure to be taken seriously and to be promoted after getting the job. The women also acknowledged being treated as “different ”within the sports department; they reported being simultaneously patronized and treated with “kid gloves” (Hardin, et. al., 2007). One participant accused male editors “who feel threatened by smart, athletic, talented female writers ”of discrimination (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

Female reporters also struggle to feel comfortable in male locker rooms (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Women have been unfairly accused of “peeking” at men in locker rooms, when in fact, almost half (48%) of the participants reported being sexually harassed, most often by sources, and usually in locker rooms (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Several women mentioned locker-room incidents that took place early in their careers. But others downplayed potentially offensive behavior by colleagues or athletes, deciding that much of it wasn’t harassment. “They’re guys. Guys all in the same room, they’re going to do things like that,” one copy editor commented (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

Lack of coverage of World Athletics Championships Oregon22

Sebastian Coe, the president of World Athletics, which governs track and field globally, has said, “it’s important for track and field to grow in the United States and we have a stake in that, as well, and we want to do everything we can to make that happen” (Greif, 2022). This is important as Coe believes Team USA is the “powerhouse” of track and field. It’s supported by the fact that the United States have won the most medals of any country — 414 — since the inaugural 1976 World Championships. Oregon22 marked the first World Championships held in the United States. As stated in an Oregonian article from July 2022, Coe felt it was the right time for the United States to host the event as “Team USA has experienced historical track and field success and the upcoming 2028 Los Angeles Olympics” (Daschel, 2022). In addition, the event was hosted in Eugene, Oregon, which is known as TrackTown USA, and Coe called the population of Eugene “an obsessive track and field community.” In preparation for hosting the World Championships, the University of Oregon administered a \$270-million renovation of Hayward Field, according to the Oregonian. Choosing Eugene came

with risks, Coe acknowledged, as the fans that would attend a World Championships in Eugene would not be the casual sports fans that World Athletics 'hoped to attract (Greif, 2022).

To improve the following of any sport it is important for the audiences to know the stakes and storylines prior to the event (Fagan, 2015). Fagan said in an interview in 2015 that “if you pass by a women’s sport on television, it just looks like two teams and you do not understand the storylines or stakes. You have no context for it and you have no investment in it.” It is the job of the media to create these storylines and inform audiences of them. This process increases support and interest in any sport seeking growth (Walker and Melton, 2015; Fagan, 2015).

To increase the following of track and field in the United States, World Athletics — under the tenure of Coe — and USA Track & Field introduced a joint plan with the goal that track and field be the fifth most-popular sport in the U.S. by the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics (Greif, 2022). Oregon22 was supposed to frontline this movement through a marketing plan known as “Project USA” as well as media coverage of the event on American publications. However, athletics officials, who were not authorized to speak publicly about the sensitive topic, expressed strong disappointment with the crowds in Eugene (Greif, 2022). Jacqueline Brock-Doyle, World Athletics 'executive director for communication, said there have been “three or four sellouts” during the first nine days of competition (Daschel, 2022). That isn't accurate according to numbers released by Oregon22. Hayward Field can hold nearly 15,000. Attendance for evening sessions ranged from 10,881 to 12,132 (Daschel, 2022).

NBC Sports held the broadcasting rights for Oregon22, and it broadcasted 12.5 hours of track and field on its main network as well as featuring the sport on its streaming service, Peacock. However, Paul Swangard, an instructor of advertising and sport brand strategy at the

University of Oregon who has called track meets for 30 years, and who was calling the events at the World Championships for NBC sports, said “The media landscape for the sport is quite fragmented, and creates a challenge for people to find and view some of this stuff. And yet if you look at the grassroots level of high school, if you feel as though road racing and participatory running is a litmus test for people’s interest in the activity, there are some healthy measures to the barometer” (Greif, 2022). Swangard went on to comment on the lack of fan attendance in the United States. He said, “It’s the code that’s never been cracked, that the No. 1 participatory sport in high school just doesn’t mean that you’re going to have full stadiums and relevant athletes walking down every main street in the USA.” The lack of following of track and field in the United States is intersected with the lack of coverage (Greif, 2022)

Research Questions

RQ1: What was the gender makeup of coverage of Oregon22 on U.S. publications?

RQ2: Were there differences in the quality of coverage of female and male athletes on U.S. publications?

RQ3: What was the gender makeup of the coverage of Oregon22 on *World Athletics* compared to U.S. publications?

RQ4: What was the gender makeup of the reporters covering Oregon22?

Methods

The World Athletics Championships Oregon22 was an equal participation event that featured 24 events on the men's side and 24 events on the women's side. This offered an adequate sample size to analyze if there was a disparity between the coverage of men and women competing in Oregon22. Track and field has a worldwide media footprint. Within the United States, it's trying to grow as a sport, and track officials, such as World Athletics' president Sebastian Coe, hoped Oregon22 would jump start this process with the help of the media (Greif, 2022). Track and field is covered with the use of human interest stories, breaking news, event coverages, and other forms of journalism that have no gender-based agenda.

Oregon22 took place between July 15, 2022, and July 24, 2022. When researching and conducting the intensive analysis, the researcher set search parameters to incorporate these dates as well as the three days leading up to the event and the three days after the event: July 12 through July 27. The researcher believed these dates would satisfy the sample size as it was close enough to the start of the event for each of the competitors to have qualified, for the start lists to be released, and for outlets to release relevant, timely content.

The researcher chose to analyze events that were headlined by American athletes, both female and male, and that were primarily covered by U.S. media both because the event was held in the United States and because of World Athletics' and USA Track and Field's stated desire to focus on coverage of the event. The 100 meters, 400-meter hurdles, javelin, shot put, and pole vault were headlined by American athletes and thus became adequate samples for the research. I focused on the U.S. athletes in each event: Fred Kerley, Marvin Bracy, and Trayvon Brommell in the men's 100 meters; Aleia Hobbs and Melissa Jefferson in the women's 100 meters; Rai Benjamin and Trevor Bassitt in the men's 400-meter hurdles; Sydney McLaughlin, Dalilah Muhammad, Shamier Little, and Britton Wilson in the women's 400-meter hurdles; Curtis Thompson in men's javelin; Kara Winger in women's javelin; Armand "Mondo" Duplantis and Christopher Nilsen in the men's pole vault, and Sandi Morris and Katie Nageotte in the women's pole vault. Duplantis competes for Sweden, but he has dual citizenship, grew up in the United States, competed at Louisiana State University and lives part-time in the United States; he is often covered by U.S. media.

For specific U.S. media outlets, the researcher chose print and online publications with the greatest volume of audience and worldwide reach that were credentialed for Oregon22: *ESPN*, *NBC*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*. The researcher also chose to exclude smaller outlets such as *The Register Guard* and *The Oregonian*. *ESPN* is known for its human interest stories and bigger picture pieces, as well as keeping its readers up to date on current sporting events. *NBC Sports* holds the broadcast rights for track and field and also provides written content on its website; it covers a greater volume of non-mainstream sports such as track and field, soccer, tennis, etc. *The Los Angeles Times* is one of few print and online newspapers in America that has a nationwide footprint and prioritizes coverage of American

sports inside and outside of its home coverage area: Los Angeles. It sent writer Andrew Greif and used Associated Press coverage from writer Eddie Pells. Greif wrote human interest stories as well as news and issue-oriented pieces regarding the impact of Oregon²². Pells provided coverage on the results of events. *The New York Times* does a similar job to *the Los Angeles Times* but with a greater national and international circulation. The *New York Times* sent writers Kris Rhim, Scott Cacciola, Matthew Futterman, Kevin Draper, and Talya Minsberg to do event coverage, recaps, and human interest stories. As a point of comparison, the researcher also analyzed the website for the international governing body of the sport, *World Athletics*. It reported on each and every track and field event and also published previews, results, and recaps, as well as human interest stories.

Intensive Descriptive Analysis

The research for this thesis was conducted through an intensive descriptive analysis that helped to examine the articles that satisfied the researcher's necessary parameters. When searching articles for this research, the researcher chose the American finishers or winners in the 100 meters, 400-meter hurdles, javelin, shot put and pole vault, and typed each of their names into the Google search bar. For example: "Kara Winger articles" or "Kara Winger New York Times articles."

As part of the intensive descriptive analysis, the researcher counted the number of articles written on U.S. publications: *ESPN*, *NBC Sports*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*, as well as the governing body's website *World Athletics* from July 12 to July 27 about the female competitors in the selected events and compared that number to the volume of male competitors for each outlet. The researcher counted the number of articles published by

each individual American publication as well as *World Athletics*. The researcher received the media list for Oregon22, which requires journalists to submit a visa; and noted if the name of each journalist, author, and photographer appeared to be a male or female name.

As part of the intensive descriptive analysis, the researcher analyzed the comprehensiveness of each article, splitting it up into three different categories. The first category calculated the number of quotes each article included as well as noting who delivered the quote. The researcher chose to analyze the number of quotes rather than the substance of each individual quote as these quotes were taken from press conferences and may not convey the emotion the athlete was feeling in that moment, while some may have reduced the length to help an article flow. The second category counted the number of words each article included. The researcher suggested that the more words would relate to an article being a feature story with a greater depth of detail. The third category accounted the type of article that was published. The two categories of articles were feature stories and event coverages. Event coverages are on-deadline stories that share the result of the event with some context on how the result was earned. Feature stories can be published before or after an event and provide a personal story about an athlete or team that helps to humanize them. Feature stories are the ones that can help casual fans learn about an athlete.

Journalistic interviews

The researcher has a journalism background and conducted interviews with three female athletes who competed in the World Athletics Championships: Melissa Jefferson (eighth place in the 100-meter final); Kara Winger (silver medalist in the Javelin); Raevyn Rogers (sixth place in the 800-meter final). These journalistic interviews were meant to add personal

experiences and context to the research included in this thesis. The athletes were asked a series of 12 questions regarding the coverage of track and field. The questions challenged the subjects to comment on any disparities in the coverage of male and female athletes in track and field, the media experience at the World Athletics Championships, the relationships these subjects and their peers have with journalists, how the overall coverage of track and field as a sport can be improved, the media's effect on the growth of track and field, as well as any personal experiences and opinions — both positive and negative — the subjects have had with individual journalists or the coverage of track and field. Along with the structured questions, the researcher asked the subjects follow-up questions to gain additional detail and incite experiences the subjects have had interacting with media members and observing the coverage of track and field.

Not only were the interviews meant to add substance to this thesis 'results, but the researcher created a journalistic piece compiled of findings and quotes from the journalistic interviews. The researcher has a background in sports journalism and used those skills to write a journalistic-style composition that amplifies the subjects 'experiences. This piece of writing also includes the researcher's observations from having been a credentialed media member at Oregon²²; observational reporting is a hallmark of narrative journalistic work. This narrative is meant to add context to the research by giving readers a digestible understand of what the media experience at the World Championships was and what the coverage of track and field is through the eyes of three female athletes.

Results

Intensive Descriptive Analysis

The researcher could find a total of 28 articles, 17 from four American online publications and 11 articles from one international website, all of which were written by credentialed media at the World Athletics Championships Oregon22.

The breakdown by publication:

- *World Athletics* (the governing body's website): 39.3% (11) of stories
- *New York Times*: 21.4% (6)
- *NBC Sports*: 17.9% (5)
- *ESPN*: 14.2 % (4)
- *Los Angeles Times*: 7.1% (2)

The study compared the coverage of male and female athletes between *World Athletics* and the four major US publications. If this is indicative of a greater trend, then the findings can suggest that there wasn't a disparity in the coverage of male and female athletes who competed in Oregon22 by major US publications. This study also inferred that *World Athletics* provided equitable coverage of female and male athletes. *World Athletics* published 11 articles across the five events this thesis examined. 54.5% (6) of the articles covered female athletes or events, while 45.5% (5) covered male athletes or events. Here's a breakdown that also shows a comparison of the publications' coverage of male and female athletes:

- *World Athletics*: 54.5% (6) covered female athletes; 45.5% (5) covered male athletes

- American publications: 52.9% (9) covered female athletes; 47.1% (8) covered male athletes
 - *New York Times*: 50% (3) covered female athletes; 50% (3) covered male athletes
 - *NBC Sports*: 40% (2) covered female athletes; 60% (3) covered male athletes
 - *ESPN*: 50% (2) covered female athletes; 50% (2) covered male athletes
 - *Los Angeles Times*: 50% (1) covered female athletes; 50% (1) covered male athletes

The breakdown of articles written about each event:

- 100 meters: 27.5% (8).
- 400-meter hurdles: 24.1% (7)
- Shot put: 20.7% (6)
- Pole vault: 13.8% (4)
- Javelin: 10.3% (3)

This research was meant to analyze the employment of female and male journalists at Oregon22. It's possible that these findings imply that there was a disparity in the employment of male and female journalists on American publications at the World Championships. 90.9% (10) of the articles on American publications that included an author's byline had male names, whereas 9.1% (1) had female's names. However, this study's findings had an equitable number of male and female journalists names on the *World Athletics* bylines.

Here's a breakdown of the comparison in the gender of the journalists:

- *World Athletics*: 45.5% (5) of bylines had women's names; 54.5% (6) of bylines had men's names
- American publications (6 of the 17 articles did not have an author's name attached): 9.1% (1) of bylines had women's names; 90.9% (10) of bylines had men's names
 - *New York Times*: 100% (6) of bylines had men's names
 - *ESPN*: 100% (3) of bylines had men's names
 - *Los Angeles Times*: 100% (2) of bylines had men's names
 - *NBC Sports*: 100% (1) of bylines had women's names

Comparing the intersection of genders of journalists and athletes they covered:

- *World Athletics*: 66.7% (4) of articles that covered female athletes had bylines with women's names; 33.3% (2) of articles that covered male athletes had bylines with women's names. 80% (4) of articles that covered male athletes had bylines with men's names; 20% (1) of articles that covered male athletes had bylines with female's names
 - *New York Times*: 100% (6) of bylines had men's names
 - *ESPN*: 100% (3) of bylines had men's names
 - *Los Angeles Times*: 100% (2) of bylines had men's names
 - *NBC Sports*: 100% (1) of bylines had women's names

The researcher predicted that there would be a disparity in the comprehensiveness of the coverage of female and male athletes at Oregon22. This research suggested that there were only slight disparities in the comprehensiveness of the coverage of female and male athletes on

these four major American publications at Oregon²². The researcher tried to determine this by examining the number of quotes, words, and type of story each article was.

Sports journalism articles covering athletes tend to contain quotes from the athletes, their coaches, opponents, and others. Quotes help amplify an athletes 'voice. They can add perspective and detail to the coverage of their events and add validity to a journalist's article. In this particular research, there was a minimal disparity in the number of quotes included in articles covering female athletes in the American publications compared to those that covered male athletes. Only 37.5% (3) of the articles covering female athletes included more than the median number of 4.5 quotes. It's possible that *World Athletics* provided more comprehensive coverage of all athletes. For example, the median number of quotes in *World Athletics* articles was 6, whereas the median number of quotes in the American publications was 4.5. This study also found that 83.3% of *World Athletics* articles that covered female athletes had more than the median number of 6 quotes, but only 37.5% of articles that the four prominent American publications published on female athletes had more than the median number of 4.5 quotes.

Here's a breakdown in the number of quotes in articles that covered female athletes compared to male athletes:

(*World Athletics* articles included a median of 6 quotes).

- *World Athletics*: 83.3% (5) of the articles covering female athletes had 6 or more quotes; 16.7% (1) of articles covering female athletes had less than 6 quotes. 60% (3) of the articles covering male athletes had 6 or more quotes; 40% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 6 quotes; 60% (3) articles covering male athletes had less than 6 quotes.

(Articles in American publications had a median number of 4.5 quotes).

- *New York Times*: 33.3% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering female athletes had less than 4.5 quotes; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had less than 4.5 quotes
- *NBC Sports*: 100% (2) of the articles covering female athletes had less than 4.5 quotes; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had less than 4.5 quotes
- *ESPN*: 50% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 50% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had less than 4.5 quotes; 50% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 50% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had less than 4.5 quotes.
- *Los Angeles Times*: 100% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 4.5 quotes; 100% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 4.5 quotes.

The researcher split the articles into two different categories. There were feature stories (articles that offered a non-event based narrative about an athlete); event coverages (articles that just covered an event); and pieces that satisfied both categories — articles that covered an event, but did so in a feature-like manner and tone.

Here's a breakdown that compares the number of articles across genders that were features with those that were event coverages:

(As the governing body's publication *World Athletics* provides event coverage for each event at the World Championships).

- *World Athletics*: 66.7% (4) of the articles covering female athletes were event coverages; 16.7% (1) of the articles covering female athletes were feature stories; 16.7% (1) of the articles covering female athletes were feature + event. 100% (5) of the articles covering male athletes were event coverages
- *New York Times*: 66.7% (2) of the articles covering female athletes were event coverages; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering female athletes were features; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were features; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were event coverages; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were feature + event
- *NBC Sports*: 100% (2) of the articles covering female athletes were event coverages; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were features; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were event coverages; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were feature + event
- *ESPN*: 100% (4) of the articles were event coverages
- *Los Angeles Times*: 100% (1) of the articles covering female athletes were event coverages; 100% (1) of the articles covering male athletes were feature + event

The researcher analyzed each of the 28 articles for word count. Longer stories lend themselves to greater detail, perspective, and sources. This research found that 75% (6) of the articles American publications published that cover female athletes had more than the median of

815 words. This finding is another reason why this study can imply that there was little to no disparity in the comprehension of articles that covered male and female athletes.

Here's a breakdown that compares the number of articles that surpassed the median number of words across genders:

(Articles published by *World Athletics* included a median of 815 words.)

- *World Athletics*: 33.3% (3) of the articles covering female athletes included more than 815 words; 16.7% (1) of the articles covering female athletes included exactly 815 words 50% (3) of the articles covering female athletes included less than 815 words. 60% (3) of the articles covering male athletes included more than 815 words; 40% (2) of the articles covering male included less than 815 words.

(Articles published by American publications included a median of 770 words).

- *New York Times*: 33.3% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 770 words; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering female athletes had less than 770 words; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 770 words; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had exactly 770 words
- *NBC Sports*: 100% of the articles covering female athletes had less than 770 words; 66.7% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had more than 770 words; 33.3% (1) of the articles covering male athletes had less than 770 words
- *ESPN*: 50% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 770 words; 50% (1) of the articles covering female athletes had more than 770 words; 100% (2) of the articles covering male athletes had less than 770 words

- *Los Angeles Times*: 100% (2) of the articles this publication published had more than 770 words

Photography can help add color, context, and excitement to an article. Photographs are meant to give the reader an avenue into the athlete experiencing their event. They're meant to match the writing of the author and offer a preview of the story. 100% of the articles published by *World Athletics* included photographs but only one photograph included a photo credit — male photographer Jay Bendin. 76.5% (13) of the articles published on American publications included photographs, only one of which didn't include a photo credit.

Here's a breakdown that compares the genders of the photographers:

- *New York Times*: 80% (4) of the articles featured photos with a man's names on the byline; 60% (3) of the articles had photos with a woman's name on the byline; 40% (2) of the articles featured both women and men's names on the bylines of photographs
- *NBC Sports*: (NBC Sports uses videos as its visuals). Just one article contained the byline of the photographer — male photographer Ezra Shaw
- *ESPN*: 75% (3) of the articles featured photos with men's names on the byline; 25% (1) of the articles did not contain the byline of the photographer
- *Los Angeles Times*: 50% (1) of the articles featured photos with a man's name on the byline; 50% (1) of the articles featured photos with a woman's name on the byline;

Journalistic Interviews

As a journalism student and an aspiring sports journalist with experience covering track and field, the researcher conducted interviews with three female athletes to add a human aspect and perspective to this research. The subjects were Team USA athletes Melissa Jefferson, Kara Winger, and Raevyn Rogers. Jefferson, a senior at Coastal Carolina, was the only collegiate athlete who qualified for the 100-meter final at Oregon22. After finishing eighth at the NCAA Championships, Jefferson returned to Hayward Field two weeks later and won the 100-meter final at the U.S. Trials, finishing in a wind-aided 10.69 seconds, to qualify for Team USA for Oregon22. Winger's professional career began in 2004 and she competed at a high level for 18 years. Winger won silver at Oregon22, throwing 64.05 meters on her final attempt to climb into second. She retired after the 2022 season, winning her final event at Diamond League Zurich. Rogers was a four-time NCAA Champion while at the University of Oregon and has made a name for herself as an Olympic-level athlete known for her strong kick at the end of a race. Rogers graduated from Oregon in 2018 and is the only female athlete whose silhouette is pictured on Hayward Tower. Rogers finished sixth in the 800-meter final at Oregon22.

Jefferson was the youngest of the three subjects the researcher interviewed. At 22, she's part of a generation that consumes a large volume of track and field and non-track and field content through social media. Social media is widely responsible for the growth of track and field because it gives audiences a way to attach themselves to athletes. Jefferson follows her peers on social media and feels her following grew throughout her collegiate career because of social media. Jefferson does not observe a disparity in the coverage of male and female track and field athletes. However, she feels this is a result of the lack of volume of coverage of track and field. She offered a personal experience of how her own "surprise story" is a negative of track

and field coverage. Due to the lack of coverage, athletes such as Jefferson who are young or haven't achieved much prior success gain coverage and a following after their positive results, rather than before. This phenomenon is understandable as there aren't adequate resources or number of journalists covering track and field, leaving its up-and-coming performers undercovered. Jefferson felt it was tough for her and undercovered athletes alike to grow their individual brand and following because of some of the media's shortcomings. She felt the onus was largely on her to create her own stardom.

Winger offered multiple decades of perspective on the coverage of track and field, as well as her own experience as a part-time announcer for track and field. As a javelin thrower, Winger has experienced an underlying issue of the coverage of track and field. Not only is track and field an undercovered sport, but athletes who compete in the field events are given less airtime than track athletes. This results in the top field athletes receiving inadequate recognition, while those who don't reach the podium receive close to no airtime at all. Winger feels there needs to be a greater volume of personal interest and feature stories written about competitors at the top of the sport, but also upcoming athletes and competitors toward the end of the career. Along with a lack of features, she feels those features that are written are marketed poorly, making it tough for casual fans to attach themselves to athletes. Similar to Jefferson, she feels there are too many "surprises" when in fact those winners are just undercovered. She feels even with the field athletes who are covered, the coverage lacks information and personal stories. She offered a personal experience of how she won silver at the World Championships on her final throw after overcoming two torn ACLs, but the only extra detail added from the broadcast was that it was a "personal record throw." She believes the way track and field can grow as a sport is through a symbiotic relationship where the athletes cooperate with and embrace the journalists

and the sports journalism industry allocates resources to its coverage of track and field, in particular the personal interests stories.

Rogers believes television broadcasts can help bolster the following of track and field more than any form of sports media. Whether it's television broadcasts, or print and online media, Rogers enjoys consuming personal interest stories on her peers and feels audiences can attach themselves to athletes and learn about their personal lives through these stories. She feels many people believe that track and field athletes only compete every four years at the Summer Olympics and this is an issue because of the lack of coverage of Diamond League events and National and World Championships. As a former Oregon athlete, she enjoyed competing at Oregon22. However, she heard backlash from audiences and peers because of the accessibility of Eugene and its expensive hospitality, which could have dissuaded people from attending Oregon22. She says she struggles to toe the line between remaining authentic and acting professionally when in media settings or on social media. Therefore, Rogers appreciates the social media that amplifies athletes' personalities, rather than just their results.

Discussion

This researcher set out to determine if the coverage of female and male athletes at the World Athletics Championships Oregon22 was equitable across four major American publications as well as the governing body's database *World Athletics*.

A study of the coverage from US publications, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *NBC Sports*, and *ESPN*, suggested that it's possible there wasn't a disparity in the quantity of coverage of male and female athletes who competed in the event. This makes sense as the World Championships were an equal-participation event. Equal-participation events include a similar number of female and male athletes. O'Neill, et. al.'s study laid out the importance of equal-participation events as their equitability offer an adequate sample size.

The researcher analyzed 17 articles from from four American publications. In those outlets, 52.9% (9) of the articles covered female athletes and the other 47.1% (8) covered male athletes.

The research focused on events with top American athletes of both genders: the 100 meters, 400-meter hurdles, shot put, javelin, and pole vault as the researcher assumed major American publications would cover Team USA's most accomplished athletes.

Looking deeper into this, the fair coverage of male and female athletes can be partly explained by the fact that 29.4% (5) of all the articles published by American publications and 44.4% (4) of the articles that featured female athletes covered the 400-meter hurdles final, in particular, gold medalist Sydney McLaughlin. This is understandable because McLaughlin won the world championship, running 50.68 seconds and breaking the world record for the fourth time in a two-year span. This also shows how track and field is covered because the volume of coverage of McLaughlin correlates with her results. McLaughlin has been at the top of the 400-

meter hurdles for three years, so there is ample coverage of her races. In an interview conducted by this researcher, javelin thrower Kara Winger described how the coverage of track and field tends to follow the results. This might be one reason why athletes who experience sustained success, like McLaughlin, receive the greatest amount of coverage and those that don't seemingly "come out of nowhere." For example, the coverage of an athlete such as Melissa Jefferson, who finished eighth in the 100-meter final at the World Championships, only came after her results. Jefferson had just broken onto the scene — she won the 100-meter final at the U.S. trials in June 2022 — when the World Championships began, and that is reflected by the fact that one article in this study covers her even though she is the fastest female sprinter in the country.

Looking at the 17 articles published by American publications, 23.5% covered the male 100-meter competitors, Fred Kerley, Trayvon Brommell, and Marvin Bracy. It's possible these findings determined a greater issue with the coverage of track and field. This study only saw minimal disparities in the coverage of female and male athletes in these five events, and it also showed that it's possible there's a disparity in the coverage of field athletes compared to track athletes. Of the five events this study analyzed, two — the 100 meters and 400-meter hurdles — were track events, whereas three — pole vault, shot put, and javelin — were field events. However, 70.6% (12) of the 17 articles published by American publications that this thesis studied covered track athletes and events.

The researcher predicted that research regarding RQ2 would suggest a disparity in the comprehensiveness of coverage of female and male athletes on American media publications. The researcher broke down the comprehensiveness of articles into these three categories: Number of quotes, number of words, and type of story. This study's findings showed there was a

disparity in the number of quotes included in the articles published by American publications that covered female athletes compared to the articles that covered male athletes. This was determined by finding the median number of quotes in each article — 4.5 — and discovering that just 37.5% (3) articles had more than 4.5 quotes.

This study's findings entail a disparity in the comprehensiveness of articles — when looking at the number of quotes in particular — that covered field events compared with track events. These four American publications published just four articles on the shot put, javelin, and pole vault. In addition, 25% (1) included more than the median number of 4.5 quotes. It was a feature story on Kara Winger and the overall state of track and field in the United States. It amplified Winger's perspective but was not intended to cover the javelin event, meaning none of the articles that fit the event coverage category published by American publications included any quotes. *The New York Times* story with Winger included nine quotes, four of which were from her. This is understandable as she has a wealth of knowledge on the history of the World Championships and its American following.

This study also found a disparity in the word count between articles that covered field events compared to track events. This study determined that just 25% (1) of the articles that covered field athletes had more than the median of 770 words, while the other three had far less. The next closest was an event coverage of the women's shot put final that had just 430 words. This research also helped explain the disparity in comprehensiveness of the coverage of field athletes through the journalistic interview with Winger. Winger explained how field events are jammed into broadcasts, while the majority of track events, regardless of distance, are shown in their entirety. This is understandable as it has always been this way, she said. Most field events consist of two series of three attempts each, but this broadcasting strategy leaves many casual

fans unaware of this process. This can take away from audiences understanding the overall progression of a field event.

The *NBC Sports* articles included in this study lacked comprehensiveness based on the criteria. This is interesting, as *NBC Sports* held the broadcasting rights for the World Championships, but the articles it published on these events weren't very substantive. 100% (2) of the articles on *NBC Sports* covering female athletes had less than 4.5 quotes and less than 770 words. In addition, one of the negatives of articles featured on *NBC Sports* was that only 25% (1) of them had any photographs of the athletes. Instead their visuals were videos, but those require audiences to take the extra step of clicking on the link, and can possibly distract from reading the article. A World Championships announcer for *NBC Sports* commented on the issues with the platform's media coverage, telling the *Los Angeles Times*, "The media landscape for the sport is quite fragmented, and creates a challenge for people to find and view some of this stuff." As the rights holder, *NBC Sports* provided coverage that was accessible and recognizable for casual fans, yet it failed to provide those fans, who could attach themselves to the sport or an individual athlete, with comprehensive coverage (Greif, 2022).

RQ3 focused on whether *World Athletics* provided more equitable coverage than the four American publications. The researcher believed that it would provide more equitable coverage because *World Athletics* is the governing body's website, rather than a journalistic entity. It was expected to provide event coverage and results on every single event at Oregon22, so it would have been surprising had there been a disparity in the coverage of male and female athletes.

Not only was there a similar number of articles published covering female and male athletes, but the comprehensiveness of the articles on *World Athletics* exceeded the researcher's

expectations, while also being equitable. The median number of quotes on *World Athletics* articles was 6, and 83.3% (5) of the articles covering female athletes included more than the median number of quotes.

Looking deeper into the comprehension of *World Athletics* articles and comparing it to the four prominent American publications, *World Athletics* did actually provide more comprehensive coverage of female athletes. For example, 83.3% (5) of *World Athletics* articles that covered female athletes had more than the median number of 6 quotes, but only 37.5% (3) of articles that the four prominent American publications published on female athletes had more than the median number of 4.5 quotes.

Stepping away from gender equity, in this particular research, *World Athletics* provided more equitable coverage of field events and track events than the American publications did. In fact, 72.7% (8) of the *World Athletics* articles this research covered covered field events. This is justifiable as this thesis examined three field events and two track events because *World Athletics* provided event coverage for all of the events at Oregon22, which is reflected in the numbers included in this study. In addition, *World Athletics'* writers cover track and field year round for the most part and had prepared to cover Oregon22, whereas many of the American journalists covering the World Championships are parachuting in on track and field with less experience. In addition, *World Athletics* is appealing to hard core fans who have accessed this publication for results of track and field meets outside of the World Championships. *World Athletics'* job is to provide event coverage. However, that coverage sometimes doesn't allow readers to attach themselves to the personality or backstory of a competitor, thus it may not attract casual fans to the sport.

RQ4 was meant to determine if there was a disparity in the coverage provided from female journalists compared to that of male journalists. To determine this, the researcher grouped together *World Athletics* and the four prominent American publications to determine if the byline on each article was a woman's name or a man's name. The researcher predicted there would be a disparity as only 14.4% of sports journalists are women (Lapchick, 2021). This hypothesis was accurate as 26.1% (6) of the articles that included an author's byline had a woman's name.

Looking deeper into this, the researcher found that 83.3% (5) of those six articles published with a woman's name on the byline came from *World Athletics*. The only woman's name on the four prominent American publications was Alex Azzi on *NBC Sports*. This research found that 66.7% (4) of the articles featuring a woman's name on the byline for *World Athletics* and 100% (1) on the four prominent American publications — the only one written by Azzi for *NBC Sports* — covered female athletes. There's a difference in the way audiences react to female journalists than male journalists (Brisbane, et. al., 2021). This is also a real-world example of the numbers Lapchick's study provides, which shows, while progress has been made, women are still vastly outnumbered in the sports journalism industry. This is an important finding because female journalists can be tasked with growing women's sports, but they tend to be looked at as less credible than male journalists (Hardin, et. al., 2007). Not only is this explained by the fewer number of female journalists in the sports journalism industry but it's also because they are less empowered than male journalists (Hardin, et. al., 2007).

This research also found that this disparity between female and male journalists includes the photographers who were employed at Oregon22. The photographs featured on *World Athletics* did not include photo credits, so the researcher could not determine the gender of the photographers. 33% (4) of the articles published by American publications had photographs

with a woman's name on its byline. 75% (3) of those four were on articles published by the *New York Times*.

Throughout this research process, the researcher noticed that there wasn't as much coverage of Oregon22 as perceived. This is important as Oregon22 was the first World Championships held in America with the intention of increasing the support of track and field in America (Greif, 2022; Daschel, 2022).

For any sport to grow, it requires the coverage of storylines from media platforms that can provide context and create stakes for audiences to attach themselves to (Fagan, 2015). The growth movement of track and field in America was supposed to be bolstered by the coverage of Oregon22 in American media publications, according to World Athletics president Sebastian Coe. Coe wanted Oregon22 to help attract "casual American sports fans" to track and field. The researcher could only find 17 articles covering the 100 meters, 400-meter hurdles, shot put, javelin, and pole vault in *The New York Times*, *NBC Sports*, *ESPN*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. This low number made it difficult to create any concrete conclusions for RQ1 and RQ2. In a *Los Angeles Times* article, Coe said he wanted track and field to be the fifth most popular sport in America following Oregon22, in preparation for the United States to host the Summer Olympics in 2028 in Los Angeles (Greif, 2022). A December 2022 study published by Statista showed that track and field isn't even a top-10 sport in terms of viewership in the United States. Sports such as Golf, Tennis, and Motorsports received more viewership than track and field. Even WWE — a pro wrestling league that features scripted matches — which some don't consider a sport — received more viewership than track and field. Minimal coverage of track and field probably won't help to increase popularity. The majority of coverage of this event was on *World Athletics*, which makes sense as its job is to cover every event. However, *World Athletics* has more

coverage, but appeals to hard core fans who have experience accessing it for results and stories. It does not help execute Coe's mission of increasing the number of casual American sports fans interested in track and field.

With such a small, non-random sample size, larger conclusions about the state of track and field coverage in the U.S. are tenuous at best. However, if the limited findings here are indicative of wider trends then the coverage of equal-participation events tend to reflect the population of athletes. In addition, it could possibly infer that the progress of including female journalists in the newsrooms is lacking.

Conclusion

This researcher set out to examine the coverage of female and male athletes at the World Athletics Championships Oregon22 in order to test the gender equity in the coverage of this event. This study's findings suggested there weren't many disparities in the coverage of female and male athletes. However, it discovered underlying issues with the coverage of track and field.

This research touches on American media publications' coverage of women's sports and female athletes. This study's findings can help to shed a light on the treatment of female journalists in the sports journalism industry because the Outdoor World Championships happen every non-Olympic year, and it is possible that publications send their most prestigious journalists. Therefore, the lack of female journalists included in this thesis may reflect Lapchick's study that claimed just 14.4% of sports journalists are women. The inclusion of women in the sports journalism industry has grown since Title IX was passed in 1972. This thesis analyzed less articles with bylines that contained a woman's name which can exemplify the lack of employment and empowerment of women in sports newsrooms.

The sample size of this study was Oregon22 — an equal participation event that was thought to yield concrete results. Instead, this thesis' findings were held back by the lack of coverage of track and field.

Appendix

Figure 1

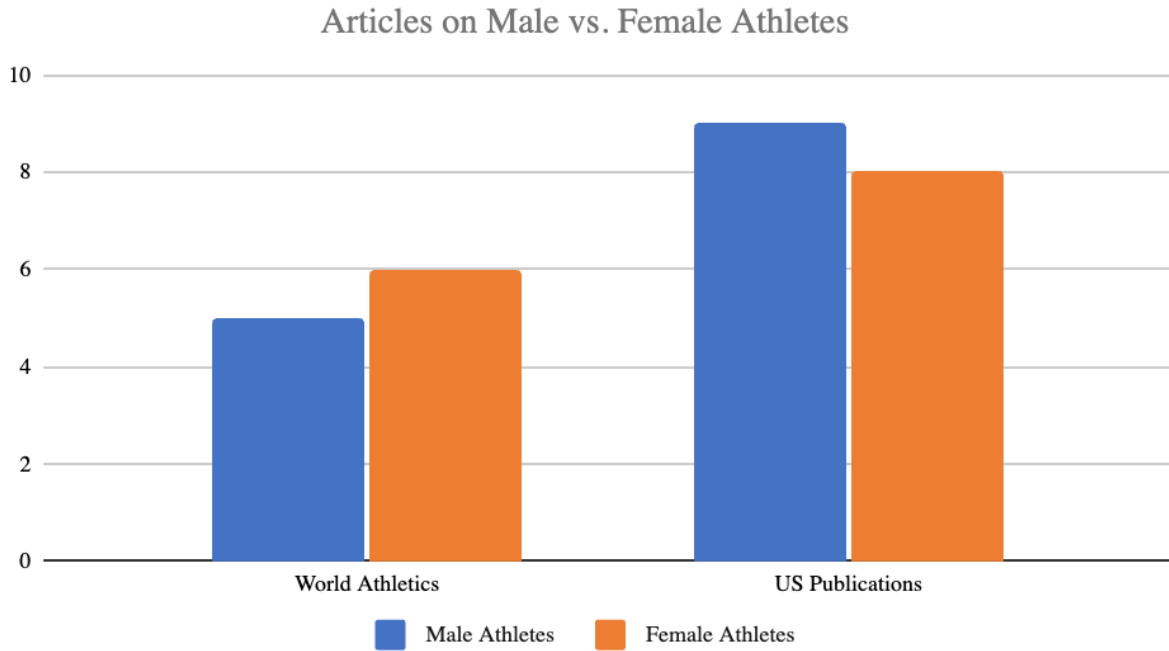
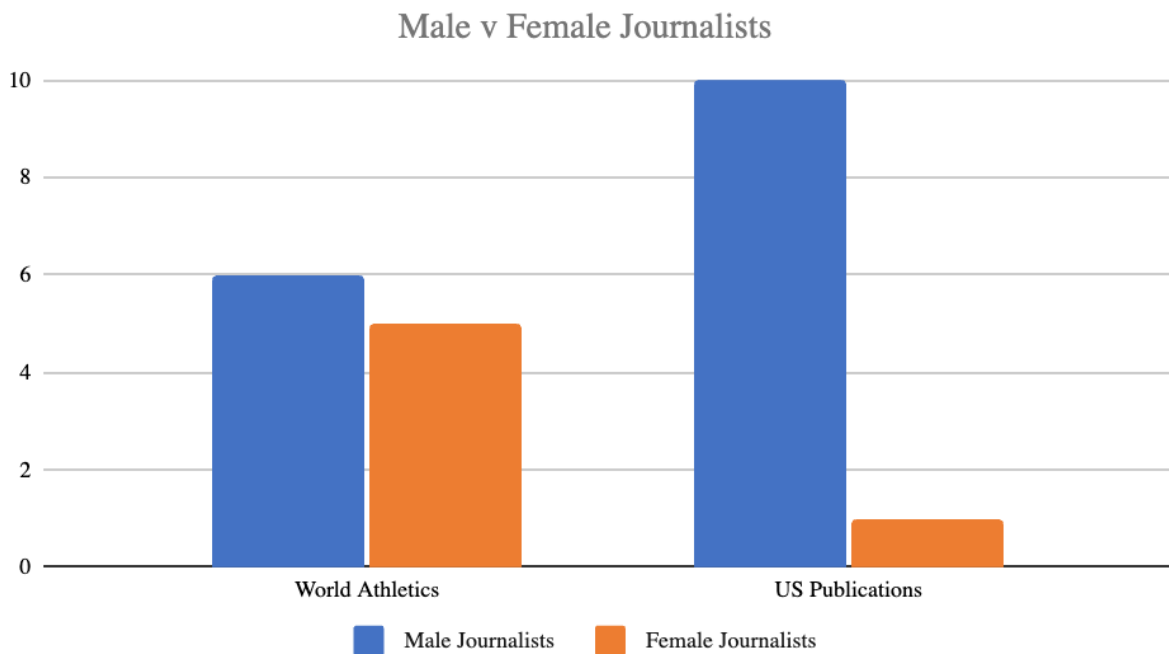


Figure 2



Journalistic Interview Questions

Interview Questions for athletes

1. What do you think of the media coverage of track and field
 1. Do you think there are differences in how men and women are covered
 2. Do you feel like the sport is undercovered
 1. How could that change? Why is that bad?
2. How did you feel about the overall coverage of the World Athletics Championships?
3. How do you follow track and field? What media coverage of the sport do you consume?
4. What is your perception of the print/online media produced to cover track and field
5. What types of interactions have you had with the media?
6. Do you read about yourself in online and print media?
 1. If so, in what way do you feel like the media frames you?
7. Do you feel like that affects your performance in any way?
 1. If so, how?
8. Does your interactions with the media affect your sponsorship deals?
9. In what other ways are you affected by your interactions with the media?
10. Does the platform that the media gives you help you in any way
 1. If so, how?
11. What are your experiences with media mixed zones?
 1. Do you think it could be improved
 2. How does it affect you physically & mentally
12. Has your media coverage come up as an aspect of your sponsorship deals?

Journalistic Narrative Piece

When she lined up for the women's javelin competition at the 2022 World Athletics Championships, Kara Winger had not breached 64 meters in a dozen years. Before Kara Patterson married Russell Winger and accepted his last name. Before she garnered two decades of experience in the javelin throw. Before the stadium she threw it in — Hayward Field — would receive a \$270 million overhaul. And certainly, before any high ranking track and field official would even have proposed that the United States host its first World Athletics Championships in the new Hayward Field.

During that 12-year span, Winger tore her anterior cruciate ligament twice, injuries that taught her the importance of managing her body and personal health. The injuries didn't stop her from competing in three Olympic Games: London, Rio, and Tokyo. She won a silver medal at the 2019 Pan American Games in Lima, Peru.

Then, at the first world championships held in her home country, in Hayward Field nonetheless, Winger threw 64.05 meters on her sixth throw and earned the silver medal.

"And it's a 'P.R.' for Kara Winger," she heard the announcer bellow.

"I was so proud of it," Winger said. "But all I heard the announcers say was, 'it's a PR.' The end."

What the announcer neglected to share was the low points Winger had to overcome, and the high points she enjoyed. It wasn't just a personal record, but the culmination of 12 years of hard work, two year-long rehabs from the same injury, and 12 years of not knowing if she'd ever return to the same level.

Stories like Winger's are what bring sports to life. They allow a fan to understand the bigger picture and develop a rooting interest. This lack of coverage of Winger's situation is just one example of a greater issue with the coverage of track and field.

When World Athletics awarded the World Championships to the United States, World Athletics president Sebastian Coe hoped it would improve the support of track and field in the country home to the sport's "powerhouse." Team USA has won 414 total World Championships medals, more than the next two countries combined. Yet, track and field isn't even a top-10 sport in the country, according to Statista.

However, Oregon22 didn't carry out Coe's vision because American media publications failed to supply fans with a large breadth of background information as well as what was on the line for each athlete and event. They didn't produce a large volume of human interest stories, which can help fans attach themselves to an athlete by relating with their personality or understanding their story. And the stories that they did write failed to reach fans as track and field is heavily followed on social media, but goes underutilized by major US publications covering the sport.

Sporting events have a story baked into them. In javelin, there's a series of three attempts, half the field is cut down, and then there's a final three attempts to decide the winner. There's a natural arc. The job of the sports media is to provide its audiences with the stories of sports. This is what drives sports forward. Developing storylines — showing the adversity an athlete has conquered, or a rival that has defeated them time and again — it creates stakes and gives fans ideas to attach themselves to, and topics to debate.

Take LeBron James and Michael Jordan, the basketball GOAT argument. It's a discussion that will never have a clear winner. Those supporting Jordan have stuck their foot in

the sand and will not remove it; same can be said for those who believe James clears Jordan. Even if a 38-year-old James, in year 20, playing with a foot injury, had won the NBA Finals, Jordan fans would have found a way to downplay it. Back and forths like this are what make sports entertaining.

“People care and are invested in sports at any level if they know the storylines and understand the stakes,” ESPNW columnist Kate Fagan said in an interview (Walker and Melton, 2015). “You can apply this to a youth tee ball game. You become invested in the moment because you know the storyline of your daughter and her team and you know the stakes are that it is important to her.”

One way track and field could have gained a following in the U.S. was through coverage of Oregon22 in American media publications. I was a credentialed media member at Oregon22 and wanted to compare the coverage of female and male athletes at Oregon22 for my honors college thesis. I examined coverage on The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, NBC Sports, and ESPN and found just 17 articles published on the 100 meters, the 400-meter hurdles, pole vault, javelin, and the shot put — five events headlined by top American athletes. While the research found little disparities in the gender equity of the coverage, this lack of coverage shows how coverage of Oregon22 failed to attract casual American sports fans to track and field.

“I don’t feel like track and field is covered widely, the same way in the United States as it is in other countries,” said Melissa Jefferson, who finished eighth in the 100-meter final at Oregon22.

But Jefferson didn’t just finish eighth at Oregon22. There’s more to her story.

The only reason why she was able to qualify for Oregon22 was because she won the 100-meter final in the U.S. Championships at Hayward Field just two weeks earlier. In sports, upsets

happen, underdogs are revered. In track and field, what's even more prominent is "surprise" winners, Jefferson said. That's what it felt like when Jefferson was in the U.S. Championships, when in fact it was just the lack of media coverage of her story that made it seem like she "came out of nowhere."

Jefferson attended a lesser-known college in Coastal Carolina and had finished eighth in the 100-meter finals at the NCAA Championships in June 2022, two weeks before the U.S. Championships.

Jefferson hadn't performed up to standard at the NCAAs because Coastal Carolina spread her thin and she competed in the 4 x 100-meter relay, the 100 meters and the 200 meters. At the U.S. Championships, she had the opportunity to focus solely on the 100.

In fact, focusing on herself has always been a struggle for Jefferson, who, at her core, strives to help others. In 2018, her father, Melvin, was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome and Jefferson was the only one of his three daughters whose blood cells could be used in a transplant. She was 17, but didn't blink twice when called upon to be a donor.

"I do what I gotta do, especially for the people that I love," Jefferson said. "I have a great support system. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here right now."

And if it weren't for her, neither would her father.

These are the stories that can make a casual fan root for an athlete they wouldn't otherwise have known. It's the media's job to provide them. Instead of focusing on Jefferson, who along with Aleia Hobbs and Twanisha Terry, represented Team USA for Oregon22, the story behind the 100-meter event was Sha'Carri Richardson.

Richardson is a polarizing figure in track and field. After qualifying for the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, she tested positive for marijuana and was suspended. In addition, it's

commonplace to see Richardson snap back at media members or avoid addressing them entirely. Therefore, when she was unable to even qualify for the finals at the U.S. Championships — taking her out of Oregon22 contention — it became the dominating headline.

This is another issue with the coverage of track and field. The coverage follows the results because there's a lack of introducing the stakes. This was apparent in my thesis when 35.7% of the articles written on female athletes/events covered Sydney McLaughlin in the 400-meter hurdles. McLaughlin broke her own world record in the event four times in the last two years. Everyone watching her races knows what's on the line, they know the exact time she has to beat to break that world-record. Her results lead to her being heavily covered. However, when Tobi Amusan upset Brittany Anderson in the 110-meter hurdles, it went undercovered because there was a lack of knowledge and coverage of Amusan before the event.

Athletes are always striving to achieve something. Therefore, stakes in sports are natural. It's the job of the sports media to explain them to fans, which gives fans a rooting interest. In addition to U.S. media publications undercovering track and field, Winger felt there was an underlying issue that field athletes and events receive less coverage and airtime than track athletes and events.

This was supported by my thesis because just 23.5% (4) of the 17 articles written by American media publications covered field athletes and events — two on shot put, one on javelin and one on pole vault.

“What tends to happen is on the main broadcast, they're showing primarily track and then they cut to good performances on the field,” Winger said. “If you're following the sixth-place person in the javelin, you don't get to see them because they're never going to show that event or that particular attempt.”

Winger believes that producing more human interest stories can help to solve the problem of results-based coverage. If a casual fan can relate to an athlete's personality, hobby, or life story, then they'll root for that athlete regardless of what event they compete in, or what result they achieve.

"The diversity of humans that participate in track and field should lend itself to more human interest stories," Winger said. "There's just so much information because there are so many individuals competing, that I don't think the format of how they're covered does all of those athletes justice."

Raevyn Rogers, who finished sixth in the 800-meter final at Oregon22, finds herself intrigued by these human interest stories more than any other. Not only can they appeal to fans, but they give athletes a way to connect with one another. Rogers enjoyed reading a feature story on Hobbs' life off the track as a mother.

"You're reaching a bigger audience through telling an athlete's story," Rogers said. "You're not going to see much personality, unless an athlete is being talked about by the commentators. By telling these stories, you're allowing for more growth for the athlete."

It's not that these stories aren't out there. In Rogers' opinion, those who do write human interest stories fail to market them to casual fans. In track and field, the way to do this is through social media. Social media is a digestible and convenient way for fans to follow track and field athletes and events.

Most track and field social media accounts post videos of athletes after their events. They'll feature an athlete doing a celebratory dance move, answering a personal question, or interacting with a fellow competitor. In fact, this form of media was embraced by Richardson, while she avoided talking major U.S. publications.

Social media accounts help connect fans and athletes. In addition, the lack of coverage of track and field has forced athletes to market themselves and many do so on their personal social media accounts.

Rogers, herself, feels like she's "usually behind on social media trends."
"I think there's a certain professionalism of how to carry yourself on Instagram," Rogers said.
"I'm also a huge advocate for being authentic."

Rogers has seen peers such as Dina Asher-Smith and Noah Lyles increase their own brand as fashion icons via social media. It can be an avenue for a fan to connect with an athlete's off-the-track hobbies.

An athlete has the opportunity to shape their image with the use of social media. That being said, it's not the job of an athlete to promote their own brand and create their story. Regardless of the sport, fans desire a connection to athletes because athletes are able to do things that fans can only dream of accomplishing. It's a relationship driven by praise, envy and critique, but one that has an inherent bridge because fans are separated from athletes. That's where the sports media comes into play. A credential gives one the power to shape the image of an athlete with credibility attached to their words. The media is the voice of the fan: asking questions of athletes that a fan doesn't have the access to. It's also the voice of the athlete: telling the story, with the help of quotes, but through the writer's perspective.

Devaluing the media diminishes the growth of the sport they are covering because athletes can't tell their stories and fans can't connect to the athlete. The media helps to add context and background to an event; it develops the storyline and explains what's at stake for the athletes; it tells the intimate stories that show fans the mortal side of an athlete. Most

importantly, it bridges the gap between the athlete and the fan. That's why the lack of coverage of Oregon22 didn't help track and field gain the support of casual sports fans.

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