

**An Intersectional Colour-Blind Frame Analysis of Sports News Coverage on Athlete
Activism in the WNBA, NBA, and NHL Following the Shooting of Jacob Blake**

By

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Despite Black women leading the way in athlete activism, there is little research and discussion on their experiences doing so. With the rapid progression of athlete activism in sport, it is important to understand the ways it is currently interpreted and disseminated by sport news entities especially since this is a space Black woman, and women in general, are typically underrepresented. This study analyzed how sport news framed the racial justice protests that occurred in the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Hockey League (NHL), and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) after a Black man named Jacob Blake was shot and left partly paralyzed by a White police officer in Kenosha, Wisconsin. A framing analysis, anchored in Critical Race Feminism and the five Colour-blind frames offered by Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Jayakumar & Adamian (2017), was conducted to compare 272 articles and 84 league statements written the two weeks after the shooting (August 24 – September 6). The findings show that both articles and league statements discuss the protest, athlete activism, and racial justice in ways that are rooted in the male experience and Whiteness, thus perpetuating inequalities and limiting social progress. Therefore, this study suggests that there is a need for organizational and cultural change within sport journalism, sport leagues, and sport research to effectively represent, fight for, and protect the rights and human dignity of all athletes, staff, and audiences, no matter their gender and race.

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Dedication

To my nieces, Peyton & Olivia.

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1.0 An Introduction to The Protests That Changed Sports Forever

On May 25th, 2020, a police officer in Minneapolis Minnesota knelt on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds causing him to suffocate. George Floyd, among many other victims of police brutality and anti-black violence, like Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, sparked anti-racism protests around the world despite there being a global pandemic. Protesters' willingness to risk their own lives showcased their sense of urgency for justice and a stop to state-sanctioned violence. As an epidemiologist from the University of Minnesota stated, "the fact that people are out there protesting, despite the risks of COVID-19 tells you that the fear of police brutality and racism is much more terrifying" (Resnick, 2020, para. 10). In fact, Black Americans are said to be approximately "three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people" (Gupta, 2020, para. 10). Similarly, Black Canadians face higher unemployment rates, are twice as likely to face low-income, and are most likely to be victims of hate crimes than any other racial or ethnic groups (Slaughter & Singh, 2020).

Major sports leagues in North America were pulled into the conversation around anti-racism, especially leagues like the National Basketball Association (NBA) where 81% of their players are Black men (Stuart, 2020) and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) where 83% of the players are Black women (Evans, 2020). Players in these leagues used their platforms to fight for racial justice by replacing the names on their jerseys with Black Lives Matter slogans, kneeling before the anthem, speaking out, and much more. Conversely, the National Hockey League (NHL) is a predominantly White league with only 5% of players who are players of colour (Hooper, 2020). The sport of hockey, typically seen as a sport for upper/middle class white males (Ketchson, 2020), has been under scrutiny since many players of colour have discussed the racialized violence and harassment they have faced while playing.

Black players in the NHL, in particular, have been speaking up to bring attention to this issue within the hockey world.

Each sport league offered their support to the Black Lives Matter movement in their own ways, but they have not received the same media coverage. Arguably, the WNBA has done the most for social justice issues and have been the front leaders for years while men's leagues like the NBA and NHL have been following their lead, dominating headlines, and garnering national attention (Ryan, 2020). This inequitable coverage is not surprising as Black women are often overshadowed by men, whether that be as victims or as activists. When news of a Black man named Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back by a police officer in Wisconsin on August 23rd, 2020, all the professional North American sports leagues that were running at the time responded to the incident. This includes the NBA, NHL, WNBA, Major League Baseball (MLB) and Major League Soccer (MLS), which all called off their games and held demonstrations. Additionally, the National Football League (NFL) called off practices as they were in pre-season (Cohen, 2020). However, this research project will only focus on the actions of the NBA, NHL, and WNBA as they represent how Black men, White men, and Black women are treated and framed in the discussion on athlete activism and were all in season during the shooting. All of these leagues were operating within the Covid-19 pandemic, so they all played in a bubble, which means they played, practiced, and lived in an isolated area away from the general public for the 2020 season (QPS, 2020). With the players in a league together all in close proximity, it made it easier to organize and plan their activism than in other seasons where they're all separated.

The NBA had players speaking out about the issue and the players went on strike causing their games to be postponed. Similarly, the WNBA players boycotted their games and held a

demonstration on the court. The NHL held their games but had moment of reflection before the puck drop. The next day, they joined the other leagues in calling off games after receiving backlash. Throughout these different protests, the WNBA's actions were often overshadowed by the men's leagues and were not given adequate coverage.

This erasure of Black women's activism and their struggles have been seen throughout history. For instance, Black women have led the fight against sexual violence against women, were an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement, founded the #MeToo movement, founded the #BlackLivesMatter movement, and are leading the way in the current anti-racism movements, yet they are not seen as the faces of these movements. The anti-racism movements are gaining a lot of traction, as seen with books on anti-racism and race issues at the top of The New York Times and Amazon bestseller lists (Masters, 2021). Further, anti-racism protests of 2020 reached unprecedented heights with the New York Times deeming it the biggest movement in American history (Gottbrath, 2020). With this momentum, it is important to ensure that the voices of Black women are being included alongside the stories of Black men as their experiences have often been silenced and ignored by news media.

Sojourner Truth addresses this in her speech "*Ain't I A Woman?*". This speech centres around the idea Black women are not treated equally to Black men and White women; they experience racism due to their race and they face sexism due to their gender. She also makes the point that she is forced works every day as a slave, while the message society is sending to women is that they are fragile and delicate, but that's not how black women are treated; they are slaves, forced to do manual labour with no help because they are Black. Racial justice activism primarily focused on black men and the women's movement was focused on White women; meaning Black women experienced, and continue to experience, a unique form of

discrimination. This speech was delivered in 1851, showcasing how this issue of erasure and dehumanization is deeply systemic (Sloat, 2019)

Today, a significant part of the issue of erasure is the way Black women are identified in police reports. When Black men experienced police brutality or harassment, they were explicitly identified as Black men while Black women were identified as women. When the women's stories were presented in the news, race was omitted and their story and experience of racism were rendered invisible (Jacobs, 2017, p. 62). Further, Black women who were survivors of police brutality or were killed by police could not be identified in police databases because of the omission of race. Often, their family members, social media, and people's own research are how their stories are circulated and shared (Jacobs, 2017, p. 53).

Negative perceptions of Black men have contributed to why their deaths are overrepresented on the news. They are often villainized and perceived as threats. These perceptions are often used to justify their murders and abuse. A study found that implicit bias, implicit dehumanization- when police officers associate Black people with apes-, stereotype threats -when police officers feel threatened if they are perceived as racist and consequently show more violence-, and masculinity threats fuel a lot of racial violence committed by police. There is no research linking this to Black women, but Jacobs finds that it is possible to envision the same issues for them. On top of it, news media outlets rarely care about missing or killed Black women as they do not prioritize their stories due to their social standing in society (Jacobs, 2017, p. 53). Further, dehumanization shows its face in the healthcare system as research shows that Black folks seeking health care have "had their complaints and symptoms dismissed, their pain undertreated, and are referred less frequently for speciality care" (Zaragovia, 2021). Another example shows how the dehumanization and hyper sexualization of black women have

severe consequences. A practicing OBGYN was taught in medical school that “if a Black woman came to the doctor or hospital with pain in her pelvis, "the assumption was that it was likely to be a sexually transmitted disease ... If the same symptoms were presented by a young white woman, the assumption would not be an STD, but endometriosis" (Zaragovia, 2021). In other words, stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of Black women lead to their lives not being valued as much as White women by people trained to protect and serve them.

The Combahee River Collective (1983), a collective of Black feminists formed in 1974, stated that, “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (p. 270). This quote points to the importance of challenging the dominant White and male voices in sport and activism as the omission of Black women and Indigenous women allows inequalities and injustices to continue on. It also points to the role identity politics plays in the activism seen in sports today.

Identity politics in the contemporary world can be understood to encompass women, the LGBTQ+ community, religious minorities, and racial minorities (Walters, 2018), however, this study will focus on marginalized gender and racial identities. People who do not identify with these identities are often pushed to the margins of society. Racialized women, especially Black and Indigenous women in relation to Canadian and American societies are often the ones whose rights are not fought for. A research study by the American Psychological Association found that this is because “Black women are often less likely to be associated with the concept of a “typical woman” and are viewed as more similar to Black men than to White women, which may lead to some antiracist and feminist movements failing to advocate for the rights of Black women” (Goodman, 2020, para. 1). Further, Carter-Francique & Richardson (2016) find that “Black

women represent the antithesis of White male- heterosexual-protestant imagery that dominates society; and their Othered status renders them invisible and silenced in research, literature, and media” (p.13).

As a Black, queer, woman, I see this ring true in my own experience in sport spaces and discussions around justice issues. I have often felt as if I had to choose between my identities when my rights were being discussed in research, in media, in the classroom, or in everyday conversation. I, like many others with intersectional identities, have found it hard to exist as a whole person since essentialist views on gender and race are pushed on us. Relatedly, when I felt my identity was hypervisible in certain spaces, like being the token minority, I often felt that I had to alter my identity. For instance, in sport spaces, my blackness was always something I felt I needed to tame due to biases and stereotypes about Black bodies in sport. As a female and lesbian, I was very conscious of the hyper femininity pushed onto girls in sport to avoid “looking like a lesbian” or acting too masculine. From a very young age, I was aware of what the acceptable and ideal identity in sports is: White, male, and heterosexual. I believe essentialist viewpoints and biases on identity create many gaps in the wellbeing of those with intersecting identities and I believe this helps maintain many oppressive systems. Looking at a person’s many identities this way takes away a huge part of their lived experience, it makes a whole side of their humanity invisible and takes away their power as they only exist as segments instead of a whole nuanced person.

Activism for these identities encourages society to pay attention to the experiences and diversity of marginalized people so they can be included and considered in important decisions regarding justice and human rights. Athlete activism works to fight for identities pushed to the margins in order to fight for equality in and outside of sport. Athlete activism can be defined as

“engagement in intentional actions that disrupt oppressive hegemonic systems by challenging a clearly defined opposition while simultaneously empowering individuals and groups disadvantaged by inequitable arrangements” (Cooper et al, 2019, p. 154-55). The Women’s National Basketball Players’ Association (WNBPA) played an integral role in fighting for and shedding light on the plight of Black women in the United States. The WNBA is the highest professional basketball league for women in North America and 83% of players are women of colour and 67% are Black women (Evans, 2020). The players of this league have been known to be the leaders in professional sport when it comes to social activism and are known to make some of the most “united, persistent political statements in sports history” (Cauterucci, 2016, para. 1). However, their actions and accomplishments have often been ignored or sidelined in favour of covering the actions of their male counterparts in other professional leagues.

It is important to recognize the women leaders of social justice movements (e.g., WNBA players). Not enough people are fighting for them, despite them fighting for everyone’s rights. Ensuring that Black women and women of colour are given suitable visibility is important for a just and fair future for all. Mowatt et al. (2013) find that “invisibility is a fundamental aspect of being Black in a White-dominated society” and that the main reasons why a Black woman’s body may be visible is if it is being ridiculed or being used as a scapegoat for socio-political purposes (p. 645). Only being visible for these purposes sends the message that Black women’s bodies are only for consumption. It is crucial for Black people, especially Black women to receive adequate and positive visibility in society and media. The activism of WNBA athletes has produced positive results for racialized women as research has confirmed that empowering and standing up for communities that have often been left out of the mainstream or have been misrepresented has a tremendous impact (Caswell et al, 2017, p. 20). Changing what is most

visible in society, specifically in news media, is critical in order to improve the experiences of Black women and other minority groups. Studies have shown that invisibility or inadequate visibility in the media negatively effects how minority groups see themselves. In the study, the more media black children consumed, the lower their self-esteem. On the other hand, the more media consumed by white boys saw an increase in self-esteem (Yuen, 2019).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how mainstream sport news outlets and professional leagues frame athlete activism to see if they maintain or disrupt racial and gender inequalities. While Black athletes in sport experience multiple intersecting identities like class and education, this study will focus on how gender and race intersect. This will add to the scarce collection of studies focused on the experiences of Black women in sports who engage in activism. If an issue is ignored and rendered invisible, then it will be hard to fix it since it does not make it available for discussion. Shedding light on this issue in this way can help people recognize and work too dismantle systemic racism, not just in sport journalism, but in all sectors of media.

For this study, articles and league statements will be analyzed for any frames and themes. Analyzing the pieces of news media that discussed the protests that emerged in the NBA, NHL and WNBA makes it possible to see what dominant frames were used to describe Black Women, Black men, and White men engaging in athlete activism. According to Entman (1993), framing is a selective process that makes a communicating text more salient in order to promote a certain message. An increase in salience is key as it increases the chances that the receivers of the text will “perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory” (p. 53). Further, frames are important for individuals because they are “cognitive structures” that

help audiences understand and make meaning of a certain issue at hand (Fridkin et al, 2017, p. 3396).

Frames have significance because research shows that frames have the power to change or shape the way somebody thinks about an issue by “influencing the importance individuals attach to particular beliefs” (p. 3396). In other words, frames can influence the opinions and beliefs we hold, and this is called a framing effect (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). It is important to note that researchers do not know if framing effects are an “automatic process” or “a process dependent on a set of conditions” (Fridkin et al, 2017, p. 3396). So, when it comes to athlete activism, it is unclear if audiences can develop a negative view of athlete activism due to pejorative frames or due to their preconditioned beliefs. Regardless, a framing analysis can be useful since many “scholars track frames to identify trends in issue definitions, compare coverage across media outlets, and examine variations across types of media” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106).

Frames are determined based on their salience. In other words, the more a subject or topic was mentioned in the article, the higher the salience. In this context, salience means “making a piece more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. An increase in salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and then process it, and store it in memory” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Writers can increase or decrease salience through repetition, placement, and even omission (p. 54). In the context of athlete activism, frames have the potential to hinder or help social justice movements.

Seeing professional athletes engage in activism work to take a stand against systemic racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is very inspiring to me. Black people in sport have often been praised for their athletic ability and sports are a space where Black people are hyper

visible. However, despite their success and accolades, these athletes still endure racism and discrimination outside of sport, while the White owners and sport leaders profit off of them. It is empowering to see Black athletes demand audiences and those in leadership positions to listen to their concerns as it relates to the treatment of racialized and marginalized communities. Athletes involved in politics have often been told to “shut up and dribble” by the media and those in power but more and more athletes are resisting this message. With the prevalence and mainstreaming of athlete activism and the Black Lives Matter movement, I am interested to see how the same news media and leagues that worked to silence and ignore Black athletes in the past are portraying them, especially Black women in the WNBA, in one of the biggest social justice movements in sports since the civil rights era. This research is important as I believe looking into the experiences and treatment of Black activist athletes can reveal new ways sport leagues, news entities, political leaders, and broader society need to change in order to combat systemic racism and work towards racial justice. Making these issues visible and mainstream is a step forward into undoing the damage that erasure and invisibility has done to these communities.

2.0 Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature that looks at the athlete activism focused on fighting racism in sport. However, there is a scarcity of literature that focuses on women in sports and their activism as they are often left out of the main narrative and their actions are often overshadowed by men's sport. In this section, I review literature that discusses the relationship between sports and politics. Next, I discuss the history of racism in sport in North America to shed light on how sport is systemically racist. This section also discusses the Four Waves of Athlete Activism created by sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards. Next, feminism in sport is discussed to highlight the obstacles women in sport have faced. After this, I discuss the intersectional issues Black women in sport face. Lastly, I discuss the activist work seen in the WNBA, NBA, and the NHL. These different parts are included to provide context relating to Black activism in sport in order to supplement this study.

2.1 Co-existence of Sports and Politics

In 2019, the sports media market in the United States expected to earn \$22.42 billion, which made it “the world’s biggest media rights market” (SportsBusiness Media Staff, 2019, para. 1). Specifically, sports news media has tremendous influence on how athlete activism is perceived by sports fans and the general public due to its scope and the power of agenda setting and media framing. Athlete activism has also been shown to influence consumer behaviour as those with opposing views perceived the activism in a negative light which decreased their consumption intentions. Therefore, athlete activism has not been fully embraced in the sports world as athletes, teams, and leagues can end up facing significant repercussions in society or in their sport. In the past, they have feared loss of sponsorship, league fines, loss of fans and support, and loss of opportunities to progress in their sport. For this reason, many big-name

athletes have stayed silent when it comes to social issues (Mudrick et al., 2019). For instance, when Nike sponsored professional football player Colin Kaepernick after his on-field protests against police brutality, the brand received support but also saw people boycott the brand by purposefully damaging and discarding their Nike products (Fortin & Haag, 2018). This backlash shows that brands, athletes, and organizations still run the risk of losing consumers and profit from supporting athlete activism, which makes them less likely to show their support.

With these strategies, mass media tells audiences what to think about it and how to think about it (Dashper, 2018). Sports news media in North America has played a big role in creating and maintaining the idea of sports being an apolitical space. This is due to sport news implementing a socially conservative and white perspectives to their stories (Broussard, 2020). This can be a reason why athlete activism or racial and social inequalities have not previously been given adequate media attention.

Professional sports and politics are often thought of as separate spaces. This separation is due to the idea of sports being understood by some to be an escape from the pressures of one's everyday life and inflicting politics into this space interrupts this escape (Mudrick et al., 2019). In 2019, the president of the major sports news organization, ESPN, said that data shows that the viewers of ESPN do not want them to discuss political issues (Agyemang et al, 2020). After Colin Kaepernick protested to raise awareness of racism and police brutality in 2016, 50% of sports fans believed that sports and politics should not mix, 20% supported activism and 30% did not have an opinion. When looking at support in 2016 for Kaepernick's activism by race, it is revealed that only 29% of White sport fans supported him, while 69% disapproved. While 72% of Black Americans supported him with only 19% who disapproved (Strachan, 2016). When leaders of sport news, like the ESPN president, say that sports fans do not want to discuss social

issues athletes bring up, these statistics show that they are protecting and catering to their White audiences only.

Sport news companies are known to be predominantly White. This lack of diversity is considered a problem because media need to represent society (Lapchick, 2018). In 2018, it was revealed that 85% of sports editors are White and 90% are men, 77% of assistant sport editors are White and 70% are men, 80% of columnists are White and 83% are men, 82% of sport reporters are White and 89% are men, and 78% of copy editors and designers are White, while 80% are men (McCreary, 2018). The typical and long-standing demographics of the people who inhabit sport news jobs means that there is a greater likelihood of sports media upholding perspectives and beliefs typically held by White men above other voices. For example, a Black sports journalist named Cari Champion revealed she quit her job at ESPN after seven years because they refused to let her discuss racial and social issues inside and outside of sport (Thorne & Jackson, 2020, para. 11). These demographics in sports journalism can also be blamed for the inadequate media coverage of minority groups in sport and the centering of Whiteness. I believe, however, that sports are inherently political. Many scholars have argued that sports reflect society and perpetuate many of the dominant hegemonies of oppression and inequality (Lee & Cunningham, 2019). Thus, who has access to sport and who receives fair treatment in sport is determined by who has the most power in society, which has been White heterosexual men. While athletes in sport can use activism to further any cause, this study will focus on the activism done by Black women to advocate for gender and racial equality in and out of sport as it concerns the Black community. The next few sections will outline the history of inequalities, specifically racism and sexism, and the activism undertaken to try to eliminate them. This history has created the foundation for how activism in sports is framed and interpreted today.

2.2 History of Race and Sport & The Four Waves of Athlete Activism

In this subsection, the relationship between race and sport will be explored. Edwards' four waves of athlete activism will be used to guide the discussion. The four waves are: 1- Gaining Legitimacy (1900-1945), 2- Acquiring Political Access and Positional Diversity (1946-early 1960s), 3- Demanding Dignity and Respect (mid 1960s- 1970s), 4- Securing and Transferring Power Via Economic and Technological Capital (2005-Present). There will also be a discussion on the gap between the third gap and the fourth waves.

Sport is an integral part of the culture of the Black community in North America. However, Black people have not always been able to compete in sports to the same degree as White people. Black people in North America were first introduced to Western sport through slavery when slave owners “encouraged a variety of games and sports to dissuade slaves from plotting acts of insurgency against plantation owners” (Moore, 2011, p. 2). Slaves were forced to box each other, usually without a reward as the slave owners were the ones who received awards and money from betting (Jones, 2019). Fredrick Douglass, who became an American abolitionist after he escaped slavery in 1838, said that slave owners would rather see slaves participating in “degrading sports than to see [them] behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings” (Moore, 2011, p. 2). A similar rhetoric is seen today, with Black athletes being told to stick to sports whenever they use their platforms to engage in political conversation and discuss racism (Shea, 2020).

After slavery was contractually abolished in North America, negative views towards Black people were still upheld and this led to heavy segregation and racism in all facets of society. Black men were seen as dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed in society (Moore, 2011, p. 5). When it came to sports, Black people were unable to compete with White

people due to segregation laws, which meant they often had to create their own leagues or endure heavy racism in White leagues. There are several instances of Black people in North America engaging with sport but ultimately being pushed out due to racism. Moses Fleetwood Walker is recognized as being the first professional Black athlete in the United States. He made his debut in Major League Baseball in 1884 and played in the minor league until 1889. He and other Black baseball players were forced out due to the Colour line which excluded Black Americans from playing in Major and Minor League Baseball until 1947 (Harris, 2017).

Further, in 1894, The Colored Hockey League (CHL) was formed. It was a league created by Black men in Nova Scotia, Canada that gave Black men the opportunity to compete against each other. The league saw great success as it had over 400 players across the Maritimes and garnered many spectators (Harding, 2017). However, the league had to disband in 1911 as a result of the Black community in Halifax being forced out of homes in Africville due to railroad expansion. The Black community sought a legal battle in order for Africville to remain intact, but this caused high tensions with White people in the area as they refused to rent out rinks to Black teams or only gave them ice time in March when the rinks would start to melt (Fosty & Fosty, 2018). This made it hard for the league to keep up the success it once had. The Black men in this league helped advance the sport of hockey by creating moves like the slap shot and the butterfly technique of goaltending which are still used today (Harding, 2017). This legacy helped legitimize the CHL, which was significant during this time. Scholar, Harry Edwards, labels the years 1900-1945 as a period of *gaining legitimacy*, which happens to be the first wave of the four waves he created that represents athlete activism (Cooper et al, 2019).

This wave saw Black athletes start to change the landscape of sport by their presence and success in traditionally White sport spaces. For instance, Black boxer Jack Johnson became a

boxing champion and his wins against White boxers resulted in race riots in the United States due to the sport being dominated by White people for years. White Americans often tried to delegitimize Black Americans through racist laws, pushing beliefs about biological superiority, and violence rooted out of racism (Cooper et al, 2019).

The second wave is from 1946 to the early 1960s and was the era of acquiring political access and positional diversity. This era saw Jackie Robinson break the colour barrier of Major League Baseball and other leagues and sporting events became desegregated. While there seemed to be racial progress, ideas about Black subordination heavily remained (Dreier, 2013). For instance, Jackie Robinson often received death threats and racial taunts from White baseball fans (Harner, 2020). This era also saw the National Hockey League break their colour barrier when Asian-Canadian, Larry Kwong, played a shift for the New York Rangers in 1948 (Ward, 2018).

According to Cooper et al. (2019), Edwards' third wave of athlete activism was during 1960s-1970s and centered on demanding dignity and respect. This era was during the height of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Power Movement. Prominent athletes like Muhammad Ali collaborated with activists to fight against racism by protesting, boycotting and fighting for civil rights for Black and other marginalized groups (Agyemang et al, 2020). One of the most well-known instances of athlete activism happened during the 1968 Summer Olympic games in Mexico City. This event holds great social significance due to the Olympics explicitly banning any sort of political, racial, or religious demonstration (Agyemang et al, 2018). The year prior, the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) was formed by Harry Edwards alongside Black Olympic Athletes, which started to uncover how the Olympics are inherently political. This

project's mission was "effecting the liberation of blacks in the United States and elsewhere by using the international platform provided by and in sports" (Peterson, 2009, p. 100).

The OPHR made great strides to raise awareness of the many perils the Black community face in the United States and around the world since many Black athletes felt that they were still treated unequally in their country despite their athletic achievements while representing their country (Peterson, 2009). The 200-metre dash during the 1968 Olympics saw Black American athletes and members of the OPHR, Tommie Smith and John Carlos compete. Tommie Smith broke the record for fastest sprint and took home gold while Carlos won the bronze medal (Blakemore, 2018). During the medal ceremony, Smith and Carlos wore an OPHR button, no shoes and long black socks to symbolize the systemic poverty faced by Black communities. Carlos wore a bead necklace to remember lynching victims, Smith wore a scarf to symbolize Blackness, and each donned one black glove and raised their fists during the star-spangled banner to show their solidarity with Black and oppressed people around the world (Blakemore, 2018). In an interview in 2008, Tommie Smith said that "they had to be seen because [they] could not be heard" (Blakemore, 2018). Their medal ceremony protest caused great upheaval as the arena was filled with booing, racist sneers, and angry insults. In the press conference, John Carlos stated that White people perceive Black people as nothing but animals and that Black people are treated as show horses for White people (The Associated Press, 2020). Black athletes during this time were tired of still getting treated unequally and unfairly while receiving praise as athletes.

In sport news, the Tommie Smith and John Carlos protest at the 1968 Olympics was portrayed through a lens that was one-sided and racist (Peterson, 2009). Smith and Carlos were often framed as "militants" and their salute was described as "Nazi-like" in the Associated Press

that would be praised by other extremists (Peterson, 2009). Some other major newspapers showed their disdain towards the actions of Smith and Carlos by burying their stories under other not-as-pertinent Olympic coverage or only dedicating a few sentences to it, even neglecting the world record Tommie Smith set in his gold medal win. Peterson (2009) finds that this tactic of skipping over the athletic accomplishments of Smith and Carlos could be a punishment for their activism or way to distance them from the image of Team USA. There were numerous stories published about the United States Olympic Committee issuing an apology for Smith and Carlos' actions because they made the country "look like the devil" and issued a warning for other athletes that similar actions will not be tolerated (Peterson, p. 109). A writer of the Los Angeles Times said that Smith and Carlos' perspective on racial issues was shallow and that he was tired of their whining (Peterson, 2009). Some other articles said the protest was at the wrong place and the wrong time. A very prominent New York Times writer, Arthur Daley, portrayed the protest and the two athletes as "disgraceful, insulting, and embarrassing" (Peterson, p. 111). Overall, the protest along with Smith and Carlos was framed in a negative light that perpetuated oppression and discrimination against Blacks in America and all over the world. Sportswriters during this time framed the protest as a blow to sport" (Peterson, p. 113).

There was a sharp decline in Black athlete activism after the third wave that cannot be ignored. Cooper et al. (2019) find that the victories from the Civil Rights movement, various affirmative action policies, and access to predominantly White spaces perpetuated a disillusioned belief that racial equality was achieved. Even though there was significant progress and more opportunities than ever for Black people and other marginalized populations, society was still rooted in White supremacy. Athletes during this time were encouraged to keep politics out of sport or else their careers would be negatively influenced. Due to this, activism was sparse and

quickly shut down in order to maintain an apolitical image of sports. This gap saw some of the most popular Black athletes, like Michael Jordan and Tiger woods reach the top of their sports but refrain from discussing politics and social issues. These athletes prioritized obtaining and securing their economic interests and rewards and activism was a threat to this (Agyemang et al, 2020). Michael Jordan famously said “Republicans buy sneakers, too” in response to why he did not speak out on socio-political issues. Some athletes, such as basketball player Mahmoud Abdul Rauf, tried to raise awareness towards racial injustices but was swiftly disciplined. He did not stand for the American anthem because he believed the flag represented racism and oppression. Due to this protest and its resulting controversy, he was fined \$32,000 by the NBA and his basketball career came to an end soon after (Sohi, 2018).

The fourth wave of athlete activism is considered to be from 2005 to present day. This wave is defined as focusing on “securing and transferring power via economic and technological capital” (Cooper et al, 2019, p. 161). This era saw athletes like Venus Williams win a fight for equal prize money. Serena Williams also became the highest paid woman athlete in this era (Cooper et al., 2019). Black athletes began to have access to lucrative financial opportunities that had always been held by White athletes. Further, securing and transferring technological capital refers to how social media has been used to propel social movements, especially the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). BLM emerged in 2013 after several unjustified killings of Black people that went viral. Social media allowed many athletes to engage in the movement by posting content which is able to be seen by people all over the world (p. 162). Cooper et al (2019) find that technology has been heavily associated with the progression of Black athlete activism in the 21st century (p. 162).

National Football Player, Colin Kaepernick, went viral in 2016 after he kneeled for the national anthem to protest and raise awareness to police brutality and racism. Boycoff and Carrington's (2020) analyzed newspaper articles from the start of Kaepernick's protesting in August 2016 to August 2018, when it was clear he would not be resigned to a NFL team. The most common frame was the *patriotic* frame. This frame appeared in 45% of articles they analyzed and depicted how his actions should be deemed "patriotic expressions of the First Amendment" (Boycoff & Carrington, p. 834). The second most common frame they found was the *traitor* frame which framed him as someone who was disrespecting American values, the military, and most notably the American anthem. This frame appeared in 43% of articles. The third most common frame was the *radioactive* frame which insists that Kaepernick's political views and outspokenness is the reason why a team would not sign him as a free agent.

While there were many positive remarks about Kaepernick expressing his First Amendment right to free speech, his activism ended up negatively affecting his career as a football player as he has not been signed to a team since his on-field protests. However, with the rise of social media, and especially Black Twitter, "an online space of Black people dedicated to creating Black culture, discussing Black issues, and creating a safe place for Black people to share their identities, validate their experiences, and cheer one another on" (Willis, 2019, para. 2), more Black voices were able to be involved in the conversation which creates more public support for these athletes from all over the world. As this era is still considered to be ongoing, the perception of activism in sport can change.

Growing up and being part of the sports world during the fourth wave showed me that although Black people can reach the top of their sport they are still not protected from systemic racism and racial violence. The use of technological capital in the past few years to accelerate

social justice movements has been transformational to this movement. Through mediums like social media, I am able to learn about BIPOC experiences in sport from all around the world and access their stories instantaneously. Stories that were once on the margins can now be in the forefront, which is a key difference between now and the other waves. I feel that the widespread telling of stories and experiences will help create change in relation to human rights and leadership.

2.3 Feminism in Sport

At the end of the 1800's and the beginning of the 1900s, more women, specifically upper-class White women started to participate in competitive sports. Prior to this era, women's physical activities were centered around activities deemed feminine, activities that were recreational and without competition (Bell, 2007). The idea of the fragile women was very prominent during this time. It was believed that participating in physical and intellectual tasks would exert too much energy in women and become hazardous (Bell, 2007). Women were primarily seen as caretakers and mothers during this time, so it was encouraged for them to save their energy for these things (Weiller & Higgs, 1994). When more competitive sports like basketball, baseball, and hockey started to become popular among women, there was much opposition as many believed that if women were to be involved in sports, it should only be in sports considered feminine, such as figure skating, diving, swimming, and tennis. Feminine sports can be defined as sports that allow women to showcase gender attributes like grace and beauty while the mainstream and more popular sports were deemed masculine, like hockey, baseball, and football. Masculine sports can be described as competitive and aggressive (Hardin & Greer, 2009). When women started competing in sports like basketball, the sport was altered

in order to showcase the femininity of players as it was thought that if the game did not enhance their womanliness, they would not be allowed to play (The Undefeated, 2018).

When women won the right to vote in the United States in 1920, it granted more freedom and power for women. However, the progress women made was halted in 1930 due to The Great Depression. This left many out of jobs and women were encouraged to stay home and be housewives while men were the ones in the workforce (Bell, 2007). It was not until the 1940s when women were encouraged to enter the workforce due to many men leaving for the second world war. Since women were now encouraged to work due to labour shortages, many women believed that they could also participate in sports (Weiller & Higgs, 1994). This society of working women during this time saw the start of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) in 1943, which was the first professional women's sports league. Even though this league was ground-breaking for women's sport, it was still very much controlled by patriarchal beliefs and expectations. For instance, a player's beauty was almost as important as their talent. These athletes were promoted as great athletes and "real ladies on and off the field". Their femininity was heavily emphasized in order for women in sports to be digestible in a society that had strict gender expectations. This is seen through the women having to abstain from swearing, chewing tobacco, alcohol, and relationships during the season. The athletes' uniform included short skirts and were made to make them look feminine. Further, the athletes were taught how to put make up on, enunciate correctly, and maintain proper posture (Weiller & Higgs, 1994). When men returned from the war, women were once again encouraged to stay at home and stick to housework and motherhood. This societal shift saw the end of the AAGPBL and progress in women's athletics was halted.

The next prominent event in women's sport history is the creation of Title IX. Title IX is a federal law that made it illegal to discriminate people from federally funded programs based on their gender (Bell, 2007). For women's athletics, this meant that women and girls' school sports programs needed to be in equal standing with men's programs. Title IX was a result of activism springing out of the Civil Rights Movement that helped provide civil rights for many marginalized identities. Spencer (2000) finds that Title IX provided legal means for women to overcome sexism. Title IX did face backlash from major figures in the sport world, such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) who saw this policy change as a threat to their finances and political power (Bell, 2007). However, all programs had from 1972 to 1978 to ensure their programs were compliant with Title IX.

While Title IX provided more opportunities for women to participate in sport in the United States, due to the already politicized identities of women athletes, Elkins (1978) found that many women in sports before the 21st century did not affiliate themselves with feminist movements due to fears of losing their jobs and minimizing opportunities for themselves. Women in sport worked hard to preserve their femininity in order to avoid further scrutiny for not following gender norms by being physically active. Due to sports being heavily dominated and controlled by men, the Women's movement of the 70s did not embrace women's sports either as they prioritized issues like abortion and the right to work. However, progress in the Women's movement of the 1960s and 70s led to more opportunities and rights for women in sport (Elkins, 1978).

There have been many purposeful attempts of activism by women in sports to fight against the gender ideologies present in and outside of sports. This made space for women in sport to speak up against injustices. As Cooky and Antunovic (2020) stated, "women in

professional sports are itself a protest of sexism in our society” (p. 705). A significant women’s sport activist is tennis player, Billie Jean King. Billie Jean King’s experience in tennis as a woman made her realize that she was a second-class citizen (Cochrane, 2013). She was often framed as an outspoken liberal woman who had goals of transforming and legitimizing women’s tennis (Spencer, 2000). In 1973, she competed against one of the best men’s tennis players, Bobby Riggs, in a tennis match called *Battle of the Sexes*, and won (Spencer, 2000). Riggs was a well-known critic of women’s tennis and organized these matches with the perception that he could beat the top women’s players. Spencer (2000) argued that this tennis match held significant cultural value as it is seen to have improved the perception of women in sport in North America and was a feminist victory. This encouraged her, among others, to fight for equality by creating the Women’s Tennis Association, which has become the governing body for Women in tennis, and the Women’s sports foundation with the mission of improving women and girls’ lived experiences through sport and to create leaders (Stieg, 2018).

Without Title IX and athletes like Billie Jean King, women and girls’ sport might look different today. In 1971-1972, the year just before Title IX was created, “1 in 27 high school girls participated in sport” (Sabo & Ward, 2006, para. 3), and in the 2015-16 school year, “44% of girls participated in a sport” (Burtka, 2019, para. 7). While these advancements have drastically given girls and women in sport opportunities to participate in sport, research shows girls drop out of sport at “two times the rate of boys” due to girls’ sport programs being underfunded and underpromoted (MacKenzie, 2019, para. 2).

Further, research shows that women’s sports only receive “4% of sports media coverage” (MacKenzie, 2019, para. 15). This significantly low percentage influences sponsorship, fans, and ultimately the revenue women’s sports can make (Mackenzie, 2019). Scholars find that sport

news and coverage has an effect on sport participation and physical activity, which furthers the false notion that women are inferior when it comes to sports (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016). The representation that women do receive in sport has historically pushed gender ideologies. Dashper (2018) finds that women's sports news coverage pushes gender ideologies through gender marking. This is done by using the word *women's* in sport league and competition titles and leaving men's sports unmarked. For example, the *Women's National Basketball Association* versus the *National Basketball Association*. Further, Dashper (2018) finds that women in sport are often infantilized and sexualized in sport news. Research does show that sexualization is decreasing, but scholars believe that this could be a result of the overall decrease of women's sport coverage. The broadcasting of women's sport is marked by poor production quality and less than enthusiastic announcers. Lastly, Daspher (2018) finds that women in sport are often framed in a heteronormative way and the players who ascribe to heterosexual norms the most are the ones who end up receiving the most media attention.

A current example of women fighting against gender inequality in sports is the United States' Women's National Team (USWNT). In 2016, five players from the team tried to file their own lawsuit to fight for equal pay but initially received much backlash as sport news framed the USWNT as being undeserving of equal pay due to "the lack of interest in women's soccer and the lack of fan base" (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020, p. 703). The players found that they had the same work requirements, however the men's team was paid more and had access to better resources like better coaches and training staff, medical care, and grass fields instead of turf. The women's team also argued that the men's team was not as successful as the women's team who have won two world cups and have advanced further in international competition. This new lawsuit was positively received in mainstream sports news with many articles reporting on how

successful the USWNT has been in comparison to the men's national team. The team was framed as inspirations and the lawsuit became a symbol for feminist struggle around the world (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020).

However, Cooky and Antunovic (2020) found that the type of feminist activism shown by the USWNT and a lot of White women in sport is rooted in neoliberal feminism. This type of feminism is characterized as having the same core tenets of neoliberalism, like a focus on the free market and individualism. Additionally, it is an ideology that suggests that inclusion into the system is seen as a solution instead of addressing systemic issues that may prohibit inclusion. In terms of the USWNT, neoliberal feminism suggests that fighting and winning equal pay will solve the issues of sexism they face within the system. This approach stands in contrast to the intersectional feminism present in the activism done by Black women in sport since they battle both race and gender issues. While the issues that many White women in sport raise are of importance, research shows that issues regarding gender are often seen through the lens of White women. Due to this, issues facing Black women and other racialized women in sport have been systemically ignored in sport and sport research (Bruening, 2005).

2.4 Black Women in Sport: Facing Racialization and Sexism

Similar to Black men, the view of Black women's physicality and their bodies stems from slavery times. This view is due to the physical labour they were forced to do. During this time, White women were seen as delicate, fragile, and feminine while Black women were seen as deviant, hypersexual, and savage. These views on White and Black women still persist to this day and it is heavily seen in the sports world (Kent et al, 2018). Davis (2016), finds that Black women were more accepted and respected playing golf and tennis, however, those sports are inaccessible to low-income Black people. As a result, track and field and basketball became the

sports of choice for many Black athletes due to accessibility (Davis, 2016). 1910 saw the development of Black women's basketball teams in America. Due to segregation, they had limited opportunities for competition and due to their gender, their athletic ability was often undermined while their appearance and femininity was given more attention (Kent et al, 2018).

Basketball Leagues for Black women continued on into the 1930s and 40s however, the women never saw the same opportunities as men, even Black men in terms of national recognition, respect, and financial compensation (AAREG, 2020). Further, in 1929, the all-Black Tuskegee Institute created one of the first women's track teams in the United States. The athletes from the team, such as Louise Stokes and Tidye Pickett, qualified for the 1932 Olympics, but because they were Black, they were barred from participating in the Olympics. They were allowed to compete in the 1936 Olympics and became the first Black women to represent the United States (History.com Editors, 2020). However, track and field and basketball were still seen as a masculine sport which resulted in women's participation being covered in a negative light. Black women's success in these sports was used to masculinize them and frame them as less womanly compared to white women in sports (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016). For instance, in 1936 an Olympic official commented that a "special category of competition should be made for them – the unfairly advantaged hermaphrodite who regularly defeated normal women" (Kent et al, 2018, p. 9), in reference to the Black women competing in the track and field category of the Olympics that year.

When the AAGPBL emerged in 1943, Black women were excluded from playing due to their race. There were three prominent Black women Baseball stars named Connie Morgan, Mamie Johnson, Toni Stone at the time. These racial barriers led them to play in the men's Negro Baseball League (NBL) (Davis, 2016). However, due to their gender, their femininity was

used as a selling point to help ease the financial troubles the league was facing as a result of many of their players joining the newly desegregated MLB (Davis, 2016). Connie Morgan was subjected to this treatment as she had lighter skin, looser curls, and a curvy figure in contrast to Toni Stone who had an athletic frame and darker skin which was seen as less appealing (Davis, 2016). Since much emphasis was put on their femininity, they often faced physical and sexual harassment from teammates and opponents (Davis, 2016). Due to them only being perceived as marketable products to make White men money, Black women in sport were often not protected. For instance, Toni Stone reported that when she was being sexually harassed by her teammates, management did nothing and told her to “take care of it herself” (p. 85). She was an instrumental role model to Black women as she “provided Black women with a symbol of professional autonomy and embodying a modern black womanhood” (p. 85). As there were very few Black women who were given attention by sports news outlets, these baseball stars’ influence was monumental.

After the AAGPBL and the NBL dissolved, women’s issues in sport leagues were once again pushed to the side. Many leagues like the Women’s Football League, and the Women’s Professional Basketball League, among many others were created but eventually folded due to lack of interest from fans and financial support (Bowman, 2012). While many White and Black women in sports saw success in individual sports or in team sports in the Olympics, they did not get adequate sport news coverage to show their accomplishments, especially Black women. In terms of fighting for equal rights for Black athletes during this time, Black women were never approached to participate in protests the OPHR planned and were “systematically excluded from the roles of the OPHR” (Waller et al, 2016, p. 55). Further, an analysis of the magazine Sports Illustrated showed that between 1954 and 1987, Black women received substantially less

coverage than Black men and White women as they only received coverage in a total of “16 of 3723 articles” (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016, p. 21).

It was not until the 90s when women started to see significant growth in team sports. This decade saw women compete in the first ever major international sport tournaments in hockey and soccer. In 1997, the Women’s National Basketball Association was created and became the longest standing sports league for women. The creation of the league was marketed as more than basketball due to the political correctness of women’s sports. It was seen as an extension of the women’s movement (McDonald, 2000). While this league was a huge step for women’s sports, the marketing of the league during this time also put a heavy emphasis on the women’s children, boyfriends/husbands, makeup, and modelling careers in order to make sense of the athletes performing outside of traditional femininity (McDonald, 2000). With time, more and more women began to be in the spotlight for excelling in their sport. Even though Black women may be getting more coverage than they have in the past, a survey conducted in 2013 found that the mainstream media frequently showed negative, stereotypical, or controlling images of Black women. These depictions of Black women included showing them as the “baby momma, modern jezebel, and angry Black women” (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2016, p. 19).

Even with Black women in sport using their platform for activism, the angry black woman trope often comes into play to derail their efforts or to distract from the main issue. This trope frames Black women as “out of control, disagreeable, overly aggressive, physically threatening, loud (even when she speaks softly), and to be feared” (Jones & Norwood, 2016, p. 2049).

One of the most popular women in sport, tennis star Serena Williams, has faced unique obstacles being a Black woman in sport. Black women, like Williams, are often framed as

domineering, aggressive, threatening, and loud (Prasad, 2018). For instance, in 2019, she was accused of cheating during the Grand Slam tennis final by the umpire, which she denied, and she confronted the umpire about it. Williams lost points in her match for her reaction and frustration. A cartoon was published that depicted her body and features similar to the Jim Crow- era caricatures. She was drawn mid-tantrum and stomping on her tennis racket. The umpire is shown asking [her opponent, Naomi Osaka], "Can you just let her win?" (Held, 2019, para. 2). This particular image was accused of perpetuating the harmful stereotype of the *angry black woman*. Her opponent Naomi Osaka, who is of Japanese and Haitian ethnicity, is found to be a victim of colorism, as her features were whitewashed in various illustrations of the incident with Williams and her Blackness was rendered invisible (Razack & Joseph, 2020). Black women are hyper aware of how they are framed and have to carefully craft their public persona since they are critiqued more and have more to lose. Another example is when Crystal Dunn, a member of the United States Women's National Soccer team, said that she did not feel comfortable bringing activism into her sport due to fears of losing her job or facing severe repercussions (Dicheter, 2020). These types of situations send the message that Black women will face consequences if they fight for themselves or show competitive traits, as this type of behaviour is reserved for men's sports. Portrayals like this found in sport journalism work to silence Black women and ensure that they correctly perform White femininity.

As a result of the way that Black women athletes are treated and framed, Black women can be considered *outsiders within* because they cannot find complete membership in their gender identity nor their racial identity (Bruening, 2005). Bruening (2005) finds that "there is no one black female experience that encompasses race, gender, class, and the experience those

social constructs influence” (p. 331). Being an *outsider within* has systemically excluded Black women and other women of colour in sport as their unique experiences have been neglected.

After reading studies and reports on the experiences of Black women in sport, I am not surprised to see the patterns of neglect and discrimination they have faced due to their race and gender that trace back from the beginning of their participation in mainstream sport to present day. It is also frustrating to see a lack of people fighting for justice for Black women. Too often, Black women are the only ones fighting for themselves and are the only ones prioritizing research surrounding their community. I find that there are many gaps in research concerning Black women in sport, especially when discussing access, human rights, and justice in sport. Sport is seen as a vehicle for social change, but if it continues to only prioritize certain hegemonic identities, I do not think much can change. But if diversity, equity, and inclusion are truly embodied by sport news entities and leagues, then sports can be a part in creating a better world.

2.5 Activism in the WNBA

The WNBA has been recognized by many sport journalists and scholars as a league that has led the way in athlete activism and challenging the status quo. WNBA athletes have been at the forefront of activism regarding multiple different causes like the Black Lives Matter movement, the Say Her Name campaign, activism for the LGBTQ+ community, gun control, voting rights, #MeToo, mental health, and much more (Feinberg, 2020). In comparison to the bigger professional leagues in North America, sport historian Victoria Jackson finds that the activism work done by WNBA players tends to be “ahead of everybody else” (Streeter, 2020, para 9). Dr. Amira Rose Davis, an expert in African-American studies, suggests the WNBA has always been outspoken because they have no other option (Perry, 2020). The activism done by

players in the WNBA is reflective of the identity of players in the league as the league is dominated by Black women and members of the LGBTQ+ community (Abrams & Weiner, 2020). She finds that “their very presence on a court, their very insistence that they have the right to play and make a living by playing is a political act in and of itself” (Perry, 2020, para. 10). For instance, in 2005, WNBA player Sheryl Swoopes came out as a lesbian and became the highest profile team sport athlete to come out while still playing. Just by living authentically, Sheryl Swoopes helped make it a little easier for queer athletes to belong in sports and helped shift the narrative of gays in sport (Buzinski, 2005).

In 2016, WNBA athletes changed the course of athlete activism by using their platform to discuss racial injustices and created one of the most “united, persistent political statements in sports history” (Cauterucci, 2016, para. 1). Even when player Kelsey Bone kneeled in 2016 and her teammates did not, the entire team protected her and advocated for her (Perry, 2020). This support involved refusing to answer any questions during press conferences unless they pertained to racism and police brutality. They wore shirts that honoured the Black men and women who lost their lives due to racism and shirts that had relevant messages on them, such as, ‘Change Starts With Us’ and ‘BlackLivesMatter’, and a hashtag with an empty line that followed that suggested that more Black people will die due to racism and police brutality unless action is taken (Healy, 2016). These shirts violated WNBA uniform rules and the league fined the players \$500 each. The WNBA league president at the time stated that she respected their activism but just wanted them to keep it off the court. This did not stop them as some would start wearing official practice uniforms inside out, and social justice leader Rev. Al Sharpton said that he would cover the fines of the WNBA athletes (Feinberg, 2016).

Their activism reached new heights during their 2020 season. Their season was dedicated to Breonna Taylor, a Black woman who was murdered by police in her home in March of that year. They also partnered with the Say Her Name campaign to shed light on Black women who faced racial injustices whose experiences are often rendered invisible. They also continued to sell merchandise with proceeds going to various organizations centered around racial justice.

2.6 Activism in the NBA

The racial justice activism seen in the NBA has been some of the most visible in sports. The murders of Black men have been the most publicized murders in the Black Lives Matter movement, with George Floyd becoming the death that sparked worldwide protests. Relatedly, the NBA is a league that is predominantly Black and the athletes in this league NBA have been instrumental in moving conversations regarding racial injustices and police brutality forward and into the mainstream. Protests in the NBA have often been led by individual players rather than league wide, as seen in the WNBA, but have nonetheless been extremely impactful as they have a bigger audience.

In 2012, some members of the Miami Heat used their social media platform to call attention to the murder of Trayvon Martin by posting the hashtag “WeAreTrayvonMartin” with a picture of team members in hoodies, which is what Martin wore when he was murdered. LeBron James has stated that this post is considered to be one of the things that re-inspired athletes to take on justice work in sports (Gibson et al, 2020).

At the 2016 Excellence in Sport Performance Awards, NBA players Carmelo Anthony, LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and Chris Paul made a powerful speech urging other athletes and spectators to become involved in social justice efforts. They commented how it is important for them to use their platforms in a similar fashion the athletes in the second wave of activism, like

Mohammad Ali, Tommie Smith and John Carlos did (Price, 2016). Though it is critical to point out that even though the protests against racial injustices in the NBA have been powerful, they have been, for the most part, by individual players, not as a collective league, like the WNBA.

Similar to the WNBA 2020 season, it was hard to miss any racial justice activism done by NBA players during their season. Social justice messages were on the courts, on jerseys, on warm-up clothing, on face masks, and the Toronto Raptors started the season by arriving to the arena in a black bus that read “Black Lives Matter.”

Further another standout NBA athlete activist is Kyrie Irving who donated \$1.5 million to WNBA players who sat out of the 2020 season for reasons related to activism and COVID-19 as they would not be paid their already low salary. In addition, the NBPA created a Justice fund where they auctioned off jerseys worn on the first day of the season which has raised more than \$700,000 for various charities (Wimbish, 2020).

Lastly, one of the most recognizable figures in basketball and athlete activism is LeBron James. He is someone that was known for staying away from politics, for example, he avoided signing a letter his teammate drafted that addressed the Darfur genocide in 2017 to stay apolitical. But he has transformed into one of the biggest figures in athlete activism. He has created several campaigns aimed at protecting voting rights for the Black community and has created a school aimed at helping at-risk children (Mansfield, 2018)..

While this outlines only a few examples of activist work in the NBA, athletes have done much more in their personal life, like donating to causes, volunteering, and joining protests. These examples also outline how much of the activist work in this league has been within the last decade.

2.7 Activism in the NHL

Out of the professional sport leagues discussed in this study, the NHL is the league with the least racialized players and fans. According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport only 5.7% of NHL players are racialized (Dichter, 2021). Before 2020, racial justice activism was only heard of if a racialized player was discussing it. The racialized players who have spoken up have often been met with hostility due to the lack of BIPOC visibility and lack of support from the league and their White teammates. In 2017, Tampa Bay Lightning player JT Brown “raised his fist in protest during the national anthem”. His action received mix responses as some supported his choice while others opposed it. Like many Black athletes protesting, he received many death threats, and his message was not understood. In fact, the police force in the city he played for invited him to partake in a “ride along” program in order to educate him on the problems police face instead of educating themselves on the reasons why Black people are protesting (Chance, 2020).

Further, other Black players have voiced their concern over the racism they have faced at games and online and have been outspoken. For instance, in 2019, Evander Kane received racist comments from hockey fans on Instagram that told him “Stick to basketball” and he revealed that he has heard those things said to him at games (NBCSports, 2019). Black players who have experienced racism playing while Black have been vocal about their experiences in order to reveal how is alive in their league, however, there has been little progress due to minimal action by the NHL.

In 2020, they created Black History month commercials that did not feature any Black players. In response to the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, the NHL started using the phrase, “We Skate for Black Lives” and put them on screens in the arena and have been active

on social media in sharing Black history in hockey. Yet these actions have been accused of being performative by NHL players, fans, and activists as there has been minimal action past social media. Their inaction has angered many fans and players as even NHL player, Matt Dumba, said, “the NHL is always late to the party”, while other players in the league like Evander Kane have stated they feel insulted by the league’s inaction (McKenzie, 2020). Hockey fans who felt the league was not doing enough started trending #Kneel4Hockey with pictures of fans in NHL jerseys kneeling in order push the league to fight for racial justice (Bennett, 2020). Further, the Hockey Diversity Alliance (HDA), a group started by current and former NHL players to fight racism in the sport, was partnered with the league but parted ways in October of 2020 due to the lack of action on the NHL’s side (The Canadian Press, 2020). The HDA released the statements: “the NHL focused on performative public relations efforts that seemed aimed at quickly moving past important conversations about race needed in the game” and “it is clear that the NHL is not prepared to make any measurable commitments to end systemic racism in hockey” (The Canadian Press, 2020). The racialized players in the league and those in the HDA are the ones pushing racial justice conversations and have committed to making the sport safe and fair to racialized youth interested in hockey through educations programs, policy changes, and mentorship (The Canadian Press, 2020).

2.8 Theories

2.8.1 Critical Race Feminism

Black women’s experience of taking on the role of athlete activist and the treatment they receive as a result of doing so can be analyzed using Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Racialized women scholars in legal studies created this theory. They were motivated to create a theory that centered their own lived experiences since racialized women, especially Black women, were

pushed to the margins in Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the focus of CRT tends to be on the experience of Black men. Further, Black women's issues were not made a priority in mainstream feminist theory as it mainly centered on issues concerning White women (Few, 2007, p. 456). Hines-Datiri & Andrews (2020) defines CRF as a "theoretical approach that combats racial and gender oppression from multiple standpoints" (p. 1429). Recognizing these multiple standpoints in identity is what makes them anti-essentialist and different from Critical Race Theory (Few, 2007, p. 456).

Critical Race Feminism will be useful in my framing analysis on the experience and treatment of Black women in sports engaging in athlete activism and how the various intersections of oppression they face in society position them in sport news. This theory will be helpful as it is often used in "conducting activist research that has a social justice agenda" (Few, 2007, p. 457). I believe pairing it with the colour-blind frames will be beneficial as the frames discuss racism but do not look into how this may be different for racialized women. When analyzing sport articles pertaining to activism in sport, CRF will be used to help identify the ways race and gender are discussed or are omitted. This will be seen through the codes and themes that are produced in the analysis.

Throughout the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, the Black Women in the WNBA often led the charge in the sports world through activism in the league or choosing not to play in the 2020 season to engage in activism outside of sport. Black women in sports are seen fighting for the rights of women and Black people yet there are not many people fighting for Black women. This theory will help anchor Black women's issues and experiences to the center of the discussion. As previously discussed, Black women's issues, especially in the sports world, have never been prioritized as racial issues are explained through the perspective of Black men and

gender is explained through the perspective of White women. The anti-essentialist notions of CRF recognizes that Black women do not fit into either experience and that Black women all have different experiences due to things like class, nationality, sexual orientation, and allows these to be viewed cumulatively (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007, p. 365).

CRF has been used in many qualitative studies that focus on women of colour in an attempt to view and understand the different intersections they face cumulatively. Sugden et al. (2020) used CRF in a study about the barriers and enablers that affect how Indo-Fijian women in Fiji participate in sport and physical activity. In this study, CRF worked to combine social justice with the intersections of racial, gender, and patriarchal oppression and worked to build an understanding of these intersections and how they may situate the women in sport spaces. Further, Rubinstein-Avila (2007) also used CRF in an article analysis that examined the dominance of white, middle-class, and heterosexual young female protagonists in professional literature. Rubinstein-Avila found that these protagonists were seen as progressive due to their portrayal as independent and strong, however, they still “strive to meet the expectations of a socially conservative and sexist patriarchy” (p. 363). Here, CRF was utilized to help illustrate the many different intersections of oppression that exist for female protagonists and how they are and are not represented in the literature. This theory also helped this study challenge the neoliberal idea that equal gender representation is the solution to sexism.

Similar to these studies, this study will use CRF as a framework to discuss issues concerning women of color, specifically the Black women in sport who often get ignored by mainstream news media due to their race and gender. As mainstream sport news is often told through a White male lens, this theory will be used to counteract this dominant narrative. The main tenets of CRF work well to uplift the purpose of this study as the tenets come together to

“identify ways to empower women” (Wing, 1996, p. 341). Since this theory emerges out of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the tenets of CRF are similar. As Childers-McKee and Hytten (2015) indicate, some of the key tenets of both theories focus on:

“The permanence of racism in our society; the importance of narratives, storytelling, and counternarratives to disrupting taken-for-granted and normative views about the world; the social constructedness of race; the need to critique liberalism for its individualistic and context-independent perspective on the world; the reality of interest convergence, meaning that marginalized cultures have gotten ahead only when those from the dominant culture also benefit; and the importance of critical race praxis, or action to challenge the status quo” (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015, p. 395).

The main difference between the two theories is, of course, the centering of racialized women’s voices and experiences as CRT tends to focus on the experiences of Black men (Wing, 1996).

Further, using this theory will also help challenge the gender and racial essentialist viewpoints spread in sport news about Black athletes engaging in anti-racist activism. Because there is a scarcity of literature on Black women engaging in athlete activism, the use of CRF will help guide my analysis and ensure that the data will represent and prioritize the various identities of Black women in sport.

2.8.2 Colour-Blind Frames

Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) four central frames of colour-blind racism alongside Jayakumar and Adamian’s (2017) additional frame will be the sensitizing frames used to analyze athlete activism demonstrated in the aforementioned leagues. Bonilla-Silva defines colour-blind racism as the “new racism.” The new racism is in comparison to what he refers to as Jim Crow racism, which was overt, based in biological superiority with laws supporting the discrimination of

racialized people, that were popular and accepted throughout American society. Now, with Jim Crow era laws having been abolished and civil rights being granted to racialized people, racism has taken on a new form, referred to as colour-blind racism. It is indirect and discreet, with people claiming they are not racist because they do not see race or because they think racism no longer exists. Even though colour-blind racism is often hard to see, its existence is felt by racialized people and is often just as harmful as Jim Crow racism as it upholds systemic racism and White privilege while hiding the facts about racial oppression and inequality. Colour-blind racism has opened up the doors for White people and institutions to engage in discriminatory practices and not attribute it to racism, like mass incarceration or police brutality that disproportionately affect BIPOC. Further, Bonilla-Silva (2006) finds that colour-blind racism perpetuates victim blaming since it takes the onus off institutions and individuals by insinuating any hardships that racialized people face is their own doing.

The frames of colour-blind racisms are relevant to this study as they unmask the ways racism exists, persists, and is performed in today's society. The frames will help illustrate how sport news and leagues are complicit in racism and how they perpetuate colour-blind ideology. The first frame, *Abstract Liberalism*, is related to "political liberalism" "economic liberalism" and how they are used to explain racial inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 76). Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) find that users of this frame benefit from appearing progressive in their views on race, however, when it comes down to it, are not actually progressive. They give the example of this frame being used to acknowledge that discrimination exists and at the same time rejects taking steps to eradicate or alleviate racial issues such as affirmative action strategies due to them believing they are unfair to White people.

The Abstract-Liberalism frame is very common in the fourth wave of athlete activism as many athletes and leagues do not want to be *cancelled* for not advocating or supporting racial justice. According to Bakhtiari (2020), “cancel culture refers to the practice of withdrawing support for a person or company — often on social media — based on their views or actions” (para. 1). Organizations and brands have often stayed away from politics, but with cancel culture, many of them are now engaging in politics and picking sides in order to maintain a good image (Duarte, 2020). With this, it can be argued that many organizations and brands have adopted an abstract liberal approach to dealing with racism by appearing progressive without actually changing much. We can see this with large sport organizations like the NHL. The NHL players and fanbase are predominantly White and express support for racial justice. However, in October 2020, the league was accused of performative activism by their former partner, the Hockey Diversity Alliance due to them only wanting to commit to public relations efforts to address racism than making substantial changes to end systemic racism in the sport (Bengel, 2020). This happening is a key example of how abstract liberalism can make White people appear progressive and moral on the surface, yet in actuality, they are opposed to fixing the issue. It is common to see support for social movements but when analyzing a team, league, or organization, they often lack diversity among their staff, have little to no support for racialized staff or players, and lack any anti-racist policies. This frame will be extremely relevant to this study due to its common use in the sports world and with many sport organizations and media organizations engaging in performative activism to appeal to consumers.

The second frame is *Naturalization*. This frame suggests that racial issues can be justified by “natural occurrences.” In sports, this can be seen as White commentators using racist stereotypes like natural aggression and physicality to explain why Black people are good at

sports. *Cultural Racism* is the third frame. Users of this frame place blame on a group's culture as to why they may struggle in society instead of looking at the systems in place that make it hard to improve their standing in society. Bonilla-Silva's (2006) fourth frame is the *Minimization of racism*. This frame is centered on the belief that racism and discrimination are a thing of the past as there is nothing holding BIPOC from progressing in society.

The last frame comes from Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) and it is the *Disconnected Power-Analysis* frame. This frame sees White people who engage in "racially progressive theoretical understandings of structural racism, whiteness, and counternarratives that challenge racial hierarchy" but neglect to critically analyze their own lived experiences and how they have benefitted from oppressive racist systems (p. 918). In an athlete activist sense, this can be seen with many White athletes saying they support racial justice activism in sport but not thinking they are culpable of being racist or have benefitted from racism. Using these five frames to analyze how acts of athlete activism in the NBA, WNBA and NHL are framed will help make sense of how athlete activism is presented and what kind of activism is accepted more than others, and how it affects the image of the athletes involved.

When CRF is combined with these five frames, it will expand the scope of traditional colour-blind frame analyses by considering how these frames are used against racialized women who have multiple intersecting identities. Racialized women in sport and activism are extremely under researched and CRF will prioritize their experiences. Further, CRF will analyze colour-blind racism in sport news through an anti-essentialist lens that acknowledges how racialized women experience it differently than racialized men due to their gender and race. As previously discussed, sport news outlets often focus on White women in sports when discussing feminist

issues and primarily focuses on Black men when discussing racism issues. CRF will help deviate from this norm in order to provide a full picture of activism in sports.

2.9 Research Questions

To date, mainstream sports have been catered to best fit the White male athlete through racial and gender segregation and through racist and sexist media practices. Sport news outlets have contributed to this power-imbalance by pushing stereotypical narratives of marginalized groups and controlling what stories are given attention. While there has been progress due to athletes engaging in activist work, there are still many barriers marginalized groups face, especially women of colour. Through the literature review, it is clear that women of colour have been systemically excluded and undervalued in sport and activist spaces. With this in mind, it is important to uncover how sport news outlets are currently operating. Therefore, the research questions that are explored in this study are: (1) What frames are used in the sport news coverage of activism by athletes in the WNBA, NBA, and NHL? (2) How do the frames used in the sport news coverage of activism by athletes in the WNBA, NBA, and NHL differ, if at all, among the three leagues? (3) What frames are used in the statements made by the WNBA, NBA, and NHL and their associated teams? Lastly, (4) how do the frames used in the statements made by the WNBA, NBA, and NHL and their associated teams differ, if at all, among the three leagues? The next section outlines how these research questions were answered and how they were analyzed.

3.0 Methods, Data Collection, & Data Analysis

3.1 Method

A frame analysis of articles by sport journalists and official league statements were conducted to assess the ways colour-blind frames show up in sports news coverage and to see how sports media leaders “set the lines of discussion for the masses” (Carter et al, 2019, p. 506). A frame analysis emerges out of Framing Theory and looks at how multifaceted social issues are framed within society (Creed et al, 2002). Frames in a frame analysis can be compared to a frame of a house in the sense that frames are an “invisible infrastructure that holds together different rooms and supports the cultural building blocks to make up the edifices of meaning” (Creed et al, p. 36-37). A frame analysis is useful because frames maintain the racialized system of oppression (Carter et al, 2019). The maintenance of racism in frames can be linked to how the sport news is dominated by straight, White men. By analyzing articles through the colour-blind frames offered by Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Jayakumar and Adamian (2017), as well as CRF, this study saw how the mainstream sports news outlets participate in systems of racialized and gendered oppression.

3.2 Data Collection

Specifically, this study examined frames of communication. Chong and Druckman (2007) state that a frame in a communication works to “organize everyday reality by providing meaning to an unfolding strip of events and promoting particular definitions and interpretations of political issues” (p. 106). In relation to this study, the strip of events in question were the protests that occurred in professional sport leagues in response to the shooting of Jacob Blake and ongoing police brutality. The frames of communication that were looked at were the frames presented in official league and team statements in addition to content from the four most

popular sport news websites. In 2020, the four most popular websites in order were Yahoo! Sports with 125 million visitors, ESPN with 80 million visitors, BleacherReport with 40 million monthly visitors, and CBSSports with 30 million monthly visitors (eBizMBA, 2020). Articles posted on these platforms between August 24th- September 6th including the words Jacob Blake were analyzed for frames. This period of time was selected as the shooting occurred on August 23 and it represents two weeks of data. Data collection was separated by week to allow for weekly comparisons. Articles and statements for the first week were found by setting the range for results on Google for August 24th- 30th while August 31st- September 6th was the date range used to find articles and statements in the second week. After the appropriate date range was set, I inputted “Jacob Blake site: *site name*” into the search bar. When searching for league and team statements, the date range on Google was set to the same range mentioned previously and “allintext: jacob blake site:www.*sitename.com*” was put into the search bar. This was used for the NBA and NHL and teams that were scheduled to play during the strike or moment of reflections. To search for WNBA statements, I visited www.wnba.com/news and set the time period for August 2020 as this provided all news statements released that month. I looked at what was released between August 24th- September 6th. The reason this was done was because results did not show up on Google when I used the aforementioned method to look for their statements.

3.3 Data Analysis

A framing analysis was employed in this research. The first step involved attribute coding, which involved recording essential information about the data (Saldana, 2016; Hoeber et al., 2017). Specifically, each article and league statement were coded based on:

- date of article/statement, source of the data (publication name, league name),

- the professional sport league of focus (e.g., WNBA, NBA, NHL, or a combination of some or all),
- the race and genders of the authors
- The main focus of the article or statement (e.g., activism or athletics)
- The discussion of intersectional identities. Namely race and gender
- The overt presence of the Colour-blind frames
- The mention and language used for key concepts like systemic racism, police brutality, organizational change and the murders of police brutality victims.
- The salient messages presented

This information was organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The purpose of this step was to allow for a comparison of frames based on attributes and provide the necessary contextual information when presenting findings.

The second step involved assigning initial central frames that represented the main messages communicated in the text. Framing analysis refers to this approach as an identification of the salient frame of a message (Entman, 1993). Two approaches are commonly employed in framing analysis, including a deductive coding approach based on pre-established frames or an inductive approach (e.g., open coding) based on contextually relevant frames that are not forced to fit into previous theory (Burch et al., 2015). As the purpose of the research was not to test whether, or to what degree, previously identified frames were present in the data, an inductive approach (open coding) was employed to allow for the emergence of new insights into the ways in which athlete activism was framed. Open coding was used as it does not preclude the researcher from comparing the initial codes to existing theory to refine codes and develop theory (Saldana, 2016). Therefore, initial frames were compared to each other and to the five frames of

colour-blind racism. The wording was adjusted as appropriate (Saldana, 2016). The last step of data analysis involved comparing the frames across the different contexts to identify any differences exist in order to answer research questions 2 and 4.

4.0 Results & Discussion

The three main leagues in this paper play a pivotal role in pushing athlete activism forward due to their audience reach and societal influence. However, sport news coverage can dictate how far that reach goes, what messages get delivered to their audiences and what these messages are. Therefore, this analysis is intended to explore the ways sports news articles and the league statements frame the protests that occurred in the NBA, NHL, and WNBA after the police shooting of Jacob Blake on August 23rd, 2020. These findings are intended to add to the literature on activism in sport and help guide sport leagues and sport news in better supporting social justice movements and racialized athletes.

To address the research question of what frames are used in the articles and league statements and to show how they differ, the findings are separated into eight key sections. The first section discusses the numerical breakdown of articles and the league statements. The second section examines how many articles frame athlete activism and social justice as the focus. The third section looks at what league is framed as the leader in the discussion of activism. The fourth section looks at if and how intersectionality is considered in the articles and statements. The fifth section outlines what Colour-blind frames are evident in the articles and league statements. The sixth section discusses the overall themes used for framing. These themes are divided into five categories: *Black pain*, *Expressing Moral Values*, *Opposing Ideas*, *Updates*, and *Working Towards Justice*. Within these five themes are 26 total subthemes. The seventh section looks at how language is used as a tool for framing by looking at how *systemic racism*, *police brutality*, *the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd*, and *organization change* are discussed or not discussed. Lastly, the eighth section examines the demographic make-up of the writers of the articles and statements.

4.1 Numerical Breakdown of Articles

A comparison in the quantity of the articles and league statements is hard as the articles and league statements function for different reasons. Sport news outlets can provide multiple perspectives on a league and players while the league statements offer the one perspective of the league and report only on what directly concerns them. Instead, this section will compare the number of articles and statements dedicated to each league.

Table 1

Quantity of Articles

Articles	Week 1	Week 2
NBA	198	23
NHL	22	5
WNBA	20	4
Total	240	32

Table 2

Quantity of Statements

Statements	Week 1	Week 2
NBA	31	14
NHL	17	9
WNBA	9	4
Total	57	27

4.1.1 Articles

In total, there are 272 articles collected from ESPN, Bleacher Report, Yahoo Sports, and CBS Sports. 88% of the articles are written during the first week after the Jacob Blake shooting (August 24th-30th). 83% of articles in the first week are written about the NBA, 9% are about the

NHL, and 8% are about the WNBA. As the NBA is the most popular league and the NBA team the Milwaukee Bucks kicked off the protest, it is expected that they have the most articles written about them. However, there is a 176 article difference between the number of articles written about the NBA and the NHL and a 178 article difference between the NBA and WNBA. Each league is unique in their demographics- NBA athletes are predominantly Black males, the NHL has Black athletes playing in a predominantly White league, and the WNBA is a league predominantly made up of Black women. Putting most of the focus on the NBA means that the perspectives and work of the athletes in the NHL and WNBA are getting buried.

There is a decrease in articles written about the athletes' protest and activism in the second week (August 31st-September 6th) as 32 articles were found, and this makes up 12% of total articles. The NBA experienced the most dramatic decrease in articles as they have 23 articles written about them, but this makes up 72% of the total articles for week 2. The NHL makes up 16% of articles, and the WNBA makes up 12%. These numbers indicate that the act of protesting was more compelling to the online sport news sites than the league initiatives and changes that occurred in the second week due to the protests.

4.1.2 League Statements

In the first week, there are a total of 57 league statements. The NBA accounts for 54%, the NHL accounts for 30%, and the WNBA accounts for 16%. There are a total of 27 league statements made in the second week. The NBA accounts for 52% of statements, the NHL accounts for 33%, and the WNBA accounts for 15%. The low percentage of WNBA league statements can be due to the league being smaller than the others as they only have 12 teams. Interestingly, the NHL has 32 teams in their league and the NBA has 31 but the NBA released far more statements during the two weeks following the shooting of Jacob Blake. This reveals an

area where the NHL and its teams need to improve on- increasing their public support or stance on social justice issues and player protests.

Overall, the number of articles written show the significant amount of space the NBA takes up in discussions on social justice and activism. Sport news needs to ensure adequate coverage is given to other leagues. With Critical Race Feminism, it can be argued that the WNBA needs far more coverage than what was given to them as the league is predominantly made up of Black women and the protest that occurred was rooted in fighting for justice for the Black community. By putting most of the focus on Black men, sport news makes the experiences and perspectives of Black women invisible.

4.2 Are Athlete Activism and Social Justice the Focus?

For the 2020 season, the athletes in the NBA, NHL, and WNBA wanted their activism to be the focus of their games. Athletes specifically in the NBA and WNBA committed their season to racial justice with the goal of using their platform and visibility to raise awareness and bring the issues to the forefront of conversation. Similarly, the Hockey Diversity Alliance and its members strived to raise awareness of police brutality and racial injustice. Sport news has a role to play in this by amplifying their voices. This section of the analysis explores whether athlete activism was framed as the focal point of the articles (Table 3) and league statements (Table 4) during the two weeks after the shooting of Jacob Blake.

Table 3

Are Athlete Activism and Social Justice the Focus in the Articles?

Articles	Week 1		Week 2	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
NBA	88%	12%	70%	30%
NHL	77%	23%	75%	25%
WNBA	79%	21%	50%	50%

Table 4

Are Athlete Activism and Social Justice the Focus in the Statements?

Statements	Week 1		Week 2	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Leagues				
NBA	94%	6%	93%	7%
NHL	100%	0%	100%	0%
WNBA	78%	22%	100%	0%

4.2.1 Week 1

The results in Table 3 show that most articles and league statements made athlete activism the focus. However, the league statements for the NBA and NHL outperformed the articles written about them, as seen in Table 4. Articles about the NBA are the ones that made athlete activism the focus the most while it was the NHL who did for the league statements. Interestingly, the WNBA was the league to make it the focus the least.

4.2.2 Week 2

The second week shows a decline in the number of articles that make athlete activism the focus. Moreover, the league statements for the NBA and NHL remained quite like the first week, while the WNBA league statements increased their mention of athlete activism and social justice in the second week.

4.2.3 Discussion

Overall, these results show the leagues have more freedom to discuss athlete activism than mainstream sport news does. This finding shows the potential leagues have in terms of the content they release on issues pertaining to social justice causes because they do not have to

adhere to the standard journalistic practices. As the leagues commit more to social justice, their platforms can be used to discuss various societal problems that affect their players, the communities they serve, and their audiences. It is also important to remember that even though most articles and league statements made athlete activism the focus, it does not mean that they accurately depicted the issue at hand. The slight decrease in journalistic interest in the topic and more focus on the sport itself in the second week can be interpreted as a sign of agenda-setting. Due to racial injustices and the divisive political landscape in the USA and Canada, research shows that issues that do not resonate with the public will not appear on the public agenda regardless of its importance (Fabregat & Kperogi, 2019, p. 272). Relatedly, a study by Irwin (2020) concludes that Canadian journalists are threatened by how Black activism disrupts and contradicts the image of Canada being an accepting and multicultural safe haven for people of colour. Irwin (2020) finds that Canadian journalists will go to extreme lengths to protect this image. With this research then, it is safe to say that the decision to focus or not focus on social justice is based on the White experience. Further, if Black activism or news related to the Black community is covered, there is a high chance of it not being covered accurately. A study conducted in 2014 shows that only 25% of African Americans say portrayals of their communities in mainline news organizations are accurate (Fabregat & Kpergoi, 2019, p. 273). This will become visible in the next few sections as the frames and language used in the articles and statements will be analyzed.

4.3 League Leader of the Protests

To determine what league is perceived as the leader in the athlete activism space, I also looked at the amount each league appeared in articles and statements when they were not the focus. For example, how many times the NBA was mentioned in articles written about the

WNBA. As stated in the literature review, the WNBA has been a leader in activism in the professional sport sphere like no other. The NBA has become increasingly more political as well. The NHL has historically not been involved in racial justice activism or discussions. This can be due to the racial make-up of the league and race issues being designated a Black problem by sport news outlets and broader society. The data from this section echoes all these sentiments and helps determine what league is the central focus throughout these protests.

For this section, if a league that was not the focus of an article was mentioned only once in less than two sentences, it is labelled as “mentioned in minimal detail”. If it was mentioned more than once in more than two sentences, it is labelled “mentioned in detail”. Tables 5-7 look at who the leader was in the articles, while Tables 8-10 look at who the leader is according to the league statements.

Table 5

How often is the NBA mentioned in articles?

NBA		Week 1			Week 2		
League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	
NHL	32%	45%	23%	25%	0%	75%	
WNBA	42%	26%	32%	25%	25%	50%	

Table 6*How often is the NHL mentioned in articles?*

NHL		Week 1		Week 2		
League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned
NBA	1%	4%	95%	0%	0%	100%
WNBA	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%

Table 7*How often is the WNBA mentioned in articles?*

WNBA		Week 1		Week 2		
League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned
NBA	7%	17%	76%	0%	9%	91%
NHL	0%	77%	23%	0%	25%	75%

Table 8*How often is the NBA mentioned in statements?*

NBA		Week 1		Week 2		
League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned
NHL	6%	65%	29%	0%	11%	89%
WNBA	33%	0%	67%	50%	25%	25%

Table 9*How often is the NHL mentioned in statements?*

NHL	Week 1			Week 2		
	League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail
NBA	0%	6%	94%	0%	0%	100%
WNBA	0%	0%	100%	0%	25%	75%

Table 10**Table 10***How often is the WNBA mentioned in statements?*

WNBA	Week 1			Week 2		
	League	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail	Not Mentioned	Mentioned in Detail	Mentioned in Minimal Detail
NBA	3%	29%	68%	7%	7%	86%
NHL	0%	53%	47%	0%	11%	89%

4.3.1 Week 1

The NBA was the league that was discussed in detail the most in both the articles and league statements focused on the NHL and WNBA. However, there is a significant decrease in the number of times they were mentioned in detail in the articles compared to the league statements. Overall, the articles in the first week discussed the efforts of other leagues more than the statements do. Though, the league statements are more likely to discuss the efforts of other leagues in minimal detail more. In the first week, the articles and league statements both

mentioned the NBA the most, which helps promote the image that they are the leaders of the protest in sport. The NHL was mentioned the least in the articles and statements for the NBA and WNBA for both weeks. Interestingly, the articles on the NHL discussed the WNBA the most, though they were mentioned using minimal detail. This is interesting as the WNBA is associated with the NBA, so it is expected that they mention them more.

4.3.2 Week 2

There was an overall decrease in the mention of other leagues in the second week, but the NBA remained the most discussed league in both the articles and statements and was the league discussed in detail the most. The NHL remained the least discussed. Overall, the articles still discussed the efforts of other leagues more than the statements did, except when it came to discussing the NHL in the league statements.

4.3.3 Discussion

These results show that the NBA is seen as the leader in the activist space. The work of WNBA players and what they have contributed to the conversation were minimized or not discussed. The WNBA were minimally framed as followers, but they were not discussed in detail or were just not mentioned. This also shows that sport news outlets are not objective in their retelling of the events but push an agenda that sends the message that women's sports and athletes are secondary when in fact, the WNBA athletes have been a leader in the athlete activist space since the creation of the league- championing LGBT rights, women's rights, and racial justice. They were one of the first leagues to return to action in 2020 after covid shut down sports and made activism the focal point of their season. However, as they are not as popular as the NHL or NBA, their activism is often undermined, forgotten, and left out of activist discourse despite being leaders.

Further, the lack of discussion of the NHL shows that they are not considered to play a major role when it comes to leagues joining the fight for social justice. Based on their actions, this is true, however, including them more can work to hold them accountable and highlight any areas they need to work on as league that other leagues have experience in. Leaving the NHL out of the main discussion perpetuates the false idea that they are not a political league which allows them to do the bare minimum when it comes to social justice since they are not expected to do more. This also works to put all the work on the Black players' shoulders to fight for justice.

4.4 Are Intersectional Identities Mentioned?

Intersectionality is a concept created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 that outlines “the crossing of multiple forms of oppression... hence producing distinct sets of perspectives and consequences among individuals” (Walker & Melton, 2015, p. 258). Articles that mentioned other identities such as those related to class, gender, sex, sexuality, and more and how they are relevant to racial justice were tracked to see how the media and the leagues frame the issues of race. CRF theorists find that traditional forms of racial justice ignore the ways multiple identities affect how a person is treated in society. By tracking intersectionality, it can show if the mainstream sport news outlets are perpetuating these black and white views of race. Table 11 shows how often intersectionality was mentioned in the articles, while Table 12 shows how often it was mentioned in the league statements.

Table 11

Intersectionality mentioned in articles

Articles	Week 1		Week 2	
	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Mentioned	Not Mentioned
NBA	5%	95%	9%	91%
NHL	0%	100%	0%	100%

WNBA	53%	47%	0%	100%
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Table 12

Intersectionality mentioned in statements

Statements	Week 1		Week 2	
League	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Mentioned	Not Mentioned
NBA	3%	97%	29%	71%
NHL	6%	94%	11%	89%
WNBA	33%	67%	50%	50%

4.4.1 Week 1

Most of the articles for the NBA and NHL do not discuss intersectionality. On the other hand, most of the articles for the WNBA do discuss it. This can be due to the WNBA intentionally making their activism intersectional since they have multiple identities represented in their league, not just by race but with sexuality, and, of course, gender. Additionally, the WNBA articles are the league that had the most articles written by people who identify as women or non-binary who may be more aware of how multiple identities influence how a person experiences racism.

Like the NBA and NHL articles, most of their league statements do not discuss intersectionality, however, the NHL statements mention it more than the articles. Moreover, the articles for the NBA and WNBA mention it more than their league statements. Overall, the articles for the first week discussed intersectionality more than the statements.

4.4.2 Week 2

Inversely, the results of the second week show that the statements discuss intersectionality more than the articles do, however, most of them still do not discuss it. The WNBA is still the

league with the highest percentage of statements discussing it, but none of the articles about them discuss it. Similarly, none of the articles on the NHL discuss it either. Yet, their league statements do. It is interesting to see that the articles discuss it more in the first week, but the statements discuss it more in the second week. This can show that the articles are focused on releasing content related to the protest and athlete activism immediately while the leagues took longer to respond to the protest and implement changes. These results also reveal an area where sport news and men's leagues need to improve on. Working towards justice requires discussion of multiple lived experiences

4.4.3 Discussion

Overall, the results show that Blackness and racism are framed using the experiences of Black men, with little regard of how Blackness is different across genders, sexualities, abilities, and more. The NBA and NHL have a larger audience than the WNBA and the way they present racial injustices can be very influential. By ignoring intersectional identities, sport news outlets and leagues perpetuate systemic oppression and maintain White supremacy. The athletes' protest focuses on police brutality and systemic racism faced by members of the Black community. By only looking at the experiences and voices of Black men, it runs the risk of "reproducing structures that reinforce oppression through different means" (Roland, 2018, p. 13). No sustainable progress can happen when diverse voices and perspectives are not included in the conversation. We can already see the effects of this by looking at *The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women* movement and the *Say Her Name* movement, both call attention to the disproportionate violence Indigenous and Black women faces and how they are often forgotten or left out of mainstream conversation.

4.5 Colour-blind Frames

For this analysis, the Colour-blind frames by Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Jayakumar and Adamian's (2017) were looked for in the articles and statements describing the protest, players, and leagues. If an article or statement mentioned a situation that matched with the definition of one of those frames, then they were recorded.

4.5.1 Week 1

Table 13

Colour-Blind frames in the articles during week 1

League	Abstract Liberalism	Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Racism	Disconnected Power-Analysis	Not Mentioned
NBA	3%	0%	0%	1%	5%	91%
NHL	14%	0%	0%	9%	18%	59%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	95%

Table 14

Colour-Blind frames in the statements during week 1

League	Abstract Liberalism	Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Racism	Disconnected Power-Analysis	Not Mentioned
NBA	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	94%
NHL	12%	0%	0%	0%	23%	65%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

The results from Table 13 show that most articles did not use any Colour-blind frames.

When they did appear in the writing, the frames *Minimization of Racism*, *Abstract Liberalism*, and *Disconnected Power-Analysis* were the ones used as *Cultural Racism* and *Naturalization* did not appear in any of the articles or league statements in both weeks. The articles and statements for the NHL contained the most Colour-blind frames while the WNBA articles and statements

contained the least. *Disconnected Power-Analysis* was the most used frame in the articles for the NBA and NHL while the only frame that appears in the WNBA articles is *Minimization of Racism*.

Like the articles, Table 14 shows how most of the league statements did not mention any Colour-blind frames. The only frames found in the league statements for the NBA and NHL are *Abstract Liberalism* and *Disconnected Power-Analysis* while the WNBA statements did not contain any frames. The NHL still had the highest percentage of Colour-blind with *Disconnected Power-Analysis* being the frame used the most.

4.5.2 Week 2

Table 15

Colour-Blind frames in the articles during week 2

League	Abstract Liberalism	Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Racism	Disconnected Power-Analysis	Not Mentioned
NBA	9%	0%	0%	9%	0%	82%
NHL	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Table 16*Colour-Blind frames in the statements during week 2*

League	Abstract Liberalism	Naturalization	Cultural Racism	Minimization of Racism	Disconnected Power-Analysis	Not Mentioned
NBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
NHL	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

The results for week two shown in Tables 15 and 16 show a decrease in the use of frames. This may be due to the decrease in the total amount of articles and statements written. Still, most articles did not contain a Colour-blind frame. The NBA is the only league whose articles contained a Colour-blind frame and the only frame found is *Abstract Liberalism*. None of the statements for any of the leagues contained a Colour-blind frame.

4.5.3 Discussion

Overall, the articles contained more Colour-blind frames than the league statements. However, this does not equate to the league statements describing the protest and their actions in a manner that is more progressive than sport news outlets. The objective lens that sport journalists or league writers attempt to use masks many of the Colour-blind frames. It is rare for overt racism, such as naturalization, and cultural racism to be seen since cancel culture has made it harder for people to openly hold these types of views without facing consequences, like losing their jobs, losing money, partnerships, and more. Minimization of racism was not as common to see but it was the popular avenue those opposing the protests took. Instead, racism is seen through microaggressions, coded language and a refusal to acknowledge systemic racism. The way that Disconnection of power and Abstract Liberalism were the most common frames shows how racism is adapting to the times. This translates to sport news and sport leagues putting the

effort into appearing progressive but still perpetuate systemic racism within their organization, either consciously or unconsciously. Even though these two frames are not spewing overt racist ideas, they are still harmful to society as they work to keep the remaining issues intact by separating themselves or their organization from the issues at hand, foregoing any accountability and preventing any real progress from being made. The absence of these frames does not mean there was an absence of systemic racism or discrimination. There were still signs of systemic racism within the language used and not used, which will be highlighted in the next few sections.

4.6 Overall Themes Used for Framing

The overall themes were determined based on what I interpreted the focus to be. To determine this, I looked at the salience of a topic in the article and what the headline focused on. I limited the themes to three per article. There were twenty-six reoccurring subthemes in total, and they were sorted into five overarching themes. The subtheme results can be seen in Tables 36-47 located in Appendix A. The first overarching theme is *Working Towards Justice*. This theme represents athletes who are working towards justice through doing something actionable. The second theme is *Black Pain*, which represents the suffering the Black community faces due to systemic racism and consistently seeing police brutality. Society tries to deprive our community from self-worth, rights, and dignity- black pain captures the suffering this causes (Louw, 2017, p. 4). The third theme is *Expressing Their Moral values* which represents the articles and statements that draw special attention to the moral and human values that arise due to athletes' activism and the importance they bring to sports and society. The fourth theme is *opposing ideas* which represents the articles that might have critiqued the protest or focused on political division. The fifth theme discusses *Updates* which includes game changes, athlete

performances, game statistics, updates regarding Jacob Blake’s condition, and any other updates related to the sport.

4.6.1 Week 1

Table 17

Article themes in week 1

League	Working Towards Justice	Black Pain	Expressing Their Moral Values	Opposing Ideas	Sport Updates
NBA	46%	31%	14%	5%	4%
NHL	50%	29%	11%	5%	5%
WNBA	49%	11%	35%	0%	5%

For the articles in week 1, the theme that was most mentioned was *Working Towards Justice*. Table 36 (Appendix A) shows that the subtheme *Players Acting Against Injustice* was the most prevalent theme in the articles for the NBA and WNBA. This signals an overall frustration from the athletes toward the unjust treatment of Black people. The athletes recognize the power they hold in society and are pushing for change. Their actions were able to dominate the headlines and stories after the Jacob Blake shooting and they were able to directly show their audiences how politics and sport go hand in hand. As the NBA and WNBA are predominantly Black, more players are going to be aware about racial injustices and will be more inspired to act as these issues hit close to home and they know the pain first-hand. Their actions were for issues primarily outside of the league and sport, such as voter suppression, police brutality and racial bias and this differed from the actions of the NHL and their players. The NHL’s top theme was *Frustration with The Lack of Progress*. This revealed that the NHL articles focused heavily on the inaction of the league, with BIPOC players and fans demanding more from the league and leaders in the sport. These themes work to frame the NBA and WNBA as progressive leagues

while the NHL is framed as ill-informed and apathetic. These frames are important in raising the bar that dictates how sport organizations should respond to societal issues. However, it is important to note how this frame can work against the NBA and WNBA as they are not being held as accountable as the NHL are by sport news entities. If left unchecked, this can increase the prominence of the abstract liberalism frame in sport organizations and consequently minimize progress towards racial justice.

The NBA and NHL articles had *Black Pain* as their second top theme and the WNBA articles had *Black pain* as their third. This is because the WNBA was framed as one voice, which made them appear more unified than the other leagues, and they were. But this erases their unique experiences and perspectives - making their pain invisible. This also is a prime example of how gender comes to play in the conversation on racial justice in sport spaces. Women are already given little interest by sport news entities; combine that with race and racism, which has been an issue that has historically been ignored to push an apolitical image of sports, and you get a whole group of people who are kept at the bottom. Discussion on *Black Pain* in mainstream sport articles is important as it really brings into focus how these athletes, especially Black athletes, are personally affected by the racial injustices that keep occurring. I think this theme helps to shift the perspective of the athlete being a consumable product for entertainment to a human being. In the past, Black athletes have infamously been told to “shut up and dribble” by sport news personnel, but now with the proliferation of the Black Lives Matter movement, their humanity is being recognized. The visibility of this theme in sport news articles and statements is extremely important as a lot of discrimination and oppression stems from the dehumanization of the BIPOC community.

While recognizing the Black pain these issues proliferate, it is also important to recognize how news companies profit off Black pain and how consistently seeing anti-Black violence can lead to poor mental health even if they are not the ones directly experiencing it. This then leads to increased rates of morbidity and earlier mortality for Black people when compared to White people (Newsome, 2021). For institutions that have largely profited off Black talent and Black pain, it is key that sport news organizations report and engage with racial injustices in a way that keeps the wellbeing of the Black community front and central. This can look like providing mental health and other relevant resources in the articles and reporting in ways that affirm their experiences.

The least common themes seen in the articles in the first week were *opposing ideas* and *game updates*. Interestingly, *opposing ideas* was not mentioned at all in WNBA articles- which further cements their unified framing. The NBA and NHL had players who did not agree with the method of protesting, and because of their popularity, more public figures discussed these leagues more than the WNBA. The former 45th president of the United States, his family, and his Vice President outwardly disapproved of the athletes who were kneeling for the anthem and making sports political, stating that their actions ruin sport (Gringlas, 2020). These voices created more political and societal division.

Table 18

Statement themes in week 1

League	Working Towards Justice	Black Pain	Expressing Their Moral Values	Opposing Ideas	Sport Updates
NBA	55%	17%	23%	2%	3%
NHL	71%	3%	26%	0%	0%
WNBA	72%	0%	14%	0%	14%

While Table 18 shows that the league statements also had *Working Towards Justice* as their top theme, the top subthemes framed the issue differently than the articles did as seen in Table 37 (Appendix A); the NBA had *Holding Sport and Political Leaders Accountable* as their top subtheme, the NHL had *Listening and Learning* as their top subtheme, and the WNBA had a tie between *League and Owners Acting Against Injustice* and *Players and League Working Together to Act Against Injustice* as their top subthemes. In other words, the articles wrote more about the athletes collective and individual actions compared to league initiatives. The articles provided a great platform to spread the news about the athletes' actions, feelings, and perspectives on the protest, systemic racism, and police brutality. On the other hand, the league statements worked as a way for the league to respond to calls about justice. The league statements did not focus on the experiences of the athletes. Instead, they focused on how the leagues and owners can play a role in the social justice movement and work together with the athletes. The subthemes also show how each league took a different angle in responding to the protests. The NBA looked outwardly into doing more political work by working with state officials and committing to do more outside the league. Further, one of the NHL's main messages in their statements was becoming a better ally through education on social issues. Moreover, the WNBA's league statements worked to outline what the league, owners, and players are doing to combat social injustices.

4.6.2 Week 2

Table 19

Article themes in week 2

League	Working Towards Justice	Black Pain	Expressing Their Moral Values	Opposing Ideas	Sport Updates
NBA	36%	31%	8%	11%	14%
NHL	62%	0%	38%	0%	0%
WNBA	33%	0%	17%	0%	50%

For the second week, Table 19 shows there was a bit more variety in the top themes in the articles. However, *Working Towards Justice* was still the top theme for the league statements. The articles for the NBA and NHL had *Working Towards Justice* as their top theme but had different top subthemes. Table 36 shows that the NBA's top subtheme was a tie between *Emotional Vulnerability of Players* and *Players Acting Against Injustice* while the NHL's top subtheme was a tie between *Players and Leagues Working Together to Act Against Injustice* and *Leadership of Players*. In the NBA articles, there is still a strong focus on the actions of the athletes and less on the league. The activism of NBA athletes overshadows the league's efforts and makes it easier for the league to put forth minimal effort and they benefit from appearing as progressive. In fact, hundreds of NBA staff joined the protest for this reason and state:

We acknowledge and credit all the work the NBA has already done ... But we have the power to have a greater impact. The NBA has not done enough proactively, and rather has relied too heavily on our players. ... We understand that we are a business, but fears of losing revenue and advertisers should not numb us to the cries of Black men, women and children that continue to be oppressed in the same communities in which we play (Andrews, 2020).

The news media has the power to hold all leagues accountable to their communities. When they use this power, they can help push change forward. It was easy for sport news entities to do this with the NHL as they have historically been strategic about addressing racial justice causes but due to sport news accountability, fan accountability, and player accountability in the

first week, they were pressured into doing more for racial justice and it shows through their top subthemes in the second week. These themes also helped improve the negative image the NHL garnered in the first week due to their inaction.

The top theme for the WNBA articles is *Updates* and their top subtheme is *Athlete/Game Updates*. These results show a decrease from the first week in interest on the actions of the WNBA players and league despite their continued activism efforts. Analyzing this through a Critical Race Feminist lens, it should be argued that a league that mostly consists of Black women should receive equal and adequate news coverage to men’s leagues. It is understandable that the NBA receives the most articles due to their popularity, however, when it comes to discussing systemic racism, it is a disservice to all the athletes fighting for racial justice to mainly focus on Black men’s experiences.

These results of the second week of articles are a perfect representation of silencing women’s voices in activism through omission. The WNBA athletes were doing the same amount of activism, if not more, than the other leagues but sport news chooses not to report it in the same way they do men’s leagues. Not reporting on the actions or perspectives of the WNBA athletes cements their status as less-than and perpetuates the inequalities they face.

Table 20

Statement themes in week 2

League	Working Towards Justice	Black Pain	Expressing Their Moral Values	Opposing Ideas	Athlete/Game Updates
NBA	75%	9%	16%	0%	0%
NHL	80%	0%	20%	0%	0%
WNBA	87%	0%	13%	0%	0%

In term of the league statements for the second week, Table 20 shows that *Working Towards Justice* is again the most common theme across each league. However, each league was unique in how that work looked like, as seen through their different top subthemes in Table 37. The top NBA subtheme for the second week is *Being Active in Their Community*, the top NHL subtheme is *League and Owners Acting Against Injustice*, and the top WNBA subtheme is *Raising Awareness*. The league statements for the NBA, NHL and WNBA focused on creating or committing to create positive change for BIPOC communities as a league. Like the first week, the league statements differ from the articles as they focus more on the actions of the league as a whole and less on the actions of the players.

4.6.3 Discussion

The articles prove useful as they give ample attention to the ways the athletes used their platforms to fight for justice for the Black community and the league statements focused less on the players and more on the league. This creates a balance of the two, but I argue that it will be useful that the two intertwine in order to deliver a full story. By the articles not including the roles leagues play in perpetuating systemic racism or their efforts in becoming better, it minimizes the effects the athletes' protest had on reshaping sport through forcing leagues to respond to societal issues and dismantle their apolitical image. By the articles not discussing the leagues in detail, they also fail to hold them accountable. This was seen mostly in the NBA and WNBA articles as the articles worked to hold the NHL accountable as their inaction was more visible. When the leagues are included in the narrative, it provides readers with a fuller picture of systemic racism in sport and works to hold the leagues accountable in creating a safe space for athletes and the communities they serve.

The effects of the athletes' protest are also minimized when the league statements hardly mentioning the specific activism of the athletes. The league statements also end up missing many of the main points the protest calls to. Through their statements, leagues should give their players more credit, directly address their concerns, support BIPOC players, and affirm their experiences with racism.

Overall, the themes showcase how activism in sport is shifting. In the past, it was common to see only a handful of players use their platform as professional athletes to raise awareness for racial injustices and they would often get punished for it. Now, those who do not join the movement, including organizations, risk facing societal consequences and having their decisions politicized no matter where they stand. Further, it is interesting to see how the league statements were used as a tool to bolster the leagues' public image and to showcase how they are taking up space in the activist space. Another shift that was evident from the themes is how leagues are expected to directly talk about political and social issues and be a part of dismantling oppressive systems, when before this was unheard of. This protest was a result of the work done in the fourth wave and it showed a transfer of power; the league needs the athletes more than the athletes need the leagues. So, if the athletes want to protest, the leagues are the ones who will suffer if they try to stop them. The themes showcase the power the athletes now have in fighting systemic racism in and out of sport and show how common place discussions on social justice and sport are becoming. With this, an argument can be made that this was the start of the fifth wave of athlete activism. I believe these protests are different from other waves as they sprouted out of collective and purposeful action and had global visibility due to social media and the internet. Players have gained the power and leadership needed to pressure leagues into acknowledging and responding to racism in society and have collectively started working

towards creating political change. All of the leagues in this study held Voter Registration campaigns to encourage spectators and players to vote in the 2020 United States presidential election. The WNBPA even endorsed a political candidate, Raphael Warnock, whose campaign aligned with their activism. Warnock was running against Kelly Loeffler, US Senator and a WNBA team owner who was not supportive of the racial justice protests (Radnofsky & Bachman, 2020). Warnock won the political race and research out of Yale shows that the WNBPA's played a Pivotal role in his win as they "helped generate momentum" (Gregory, 2021). The players working towards justice in this unprecedented way shows a radical shift in activism in sport.

4.7 Wording and Omission as A Tool for Framing

For this analysis, the use of specific words or the omission of words or topics can help uncover the frames used by sport news entities and how they choose to represent the stories. Specifically, I looked at how *systemic racism*, *police brutality*, *how the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd*, and *organizational change* were described. These concepts were chosen because I believe they are the key concepts raised by athletes during the two weeks that were analyzed. Further, Kilgo (2021) finds that using these words or concepts directly in journalism can be an obstacle because they go against the journalistic norms of objectivity and introduce liability (p. 189). By looking at how sport news deals with these topics are a clear indication of how they frame and define racial injustices. It also sheds light on who and what objectivity really serves when in relation to racial justice.

4.7.1 Systemic Racism

Systemic racism refers to the "processes and outcomes of racial inequality and inequity in life opportunities and treatment" (Banaji et al, 2021). Systemic racism is a crucial concept to

acknowledge as it recognizes how societal structures, like sport, policing, and organizations can reproduce racial biases and White privilege without consciously doing it. If articles mentioned the words “systemic racism” or anything equivalent like institutional racism, it was recorded. If the concept is discussed but uses other words to describe it - for example “broken system” or “racist truths”- then it is recorded as *Alternative Phrasing*.

Table 21

Mention of Systemic Racism in articles

Articles		Week 1			Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	
NBA	21%	77%	2%	22%	78%	0%	
NHL	27%	73%	0%	0%	100%	0%	
WNBA	26%	74%	0%	0%	100%	0%	

Table 22

Mention of Systemic Racism in statements

Statements		Week 1			Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	
NBA	6%	71%	23%	14%	86%	0%	
NHL	71%	23%	6%	11%	89%	0%	
WNBA	11%	67%	22%	0%	100%	0%	

4.7.1.1 Week 1.

The results in Table 21 show that *systemic racism* is not discussed in most of the articles. The articles on the NHL mention it the most and the articles on the NBA mention it the least out of the leagues. The articles on the NBA are the only ones that used alternative phrasing. Table 22 shows that the results are similar in the league statements with most of the NBA and WNBA

statements not mentioning it. Interestingly, the NHL used *systemic racism* in most of their statements and used alternative phrasing the least. The NBA and WNBA statements mentioned *systemic racism* less than their articles do but they use alternative phrasing more.

4.7.1.2 Week 2.

There was less mention of *systemic racism* in the second week than the first week for both the articles and the league statements. Again, most of the articles and league statements do not mention it at all. The articles on the NBA were the only ones to mention it while the NHL and WNBA had no mention of it directly or with alternative phrasing. The results from the league statements also show the NBA mentioning it the most out of the leagues while the WNBA did not mention it directly or using alternative phrasing.

4.7.1.3 Discussion.

Overall, the results reveal that the articles mention *systemic racism* more than the league statements do, while the league statements use alternative phrasing more. This highlights an area of improvement for the NBA and WNBA as they are considered the league leaders in social justice. Using *systemic racism* in their league statements is important as this concept underlines the protests and the frustration of the athletes. Mentioning it directly also helps their audience learn about it and affirms its existence as many right-leaning politicians in America perpetuate the idea that systemic racism is not real (Marcus, 2020). With most of the articles and league statements not mentioning systemic racism, it becomes a way of appearing progressive but not addressing the root problem.

It is interesting to see the NHL be the league that mentions it the most in the articles and the league statements in the first week as they were the ones to join the protest last and have a history of not responding to racial issues well. These results show that there is progress being

made in the NHL with them taking space to discuss a significant issue in society and naming it correctly.

4.7.2 *Jacob Blake and Police Brutality*

As the Jacob Blake shooting is what triggered the protests and subsequent actions by leagues and athletes, examining how police brutality is discussed in the articles and statements is key in seeing how athlete activism is framed and understood. All the articles that mentioned the Jacob Blake situation referred to it as a shooting, which is accurate, but the incident should not just be limited to that description. If an article mentioned *Police Brutality* or any equivalent or relevant phrases or word such as *police reform* or *police violence*, it was recorded. As language is an important aspect to framing, if the author used other words that did not represent the magnitude of the issue, that was also recorded.

Table 23

Police Brutality mentioned in articles

Articles		Week 1			Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	
NBA	51%	46%	3%	39%	39%	22%	
NHL	23%	73%	4%	25%	75%	0%	
WNBA	32%	58%	10%	25%	75%	0%	

Table 24

Police Brutality mentioned in statements

Statements		Week 1			Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	
NBA	42%	52%	6%	21%	57%	21%	
NHL	65%	29%	6%	11%	89%	0%	
WNBA	22%	78%	0%	25%	75%	0%	

4.7.2.1 Week 1.

Table 23 shows that the articles on the NBA and the WNBA mentioned *police brutality* more than their league statements and the NBA articles mentioned it the most with the NHL mentioning it the least. While Table 24 shows that the league statements tell a different story with the NHL statements mentioning the most. The NHL league statements mention it the most out of all the weeks for both the statements and articles. All the leagues labelled it *police brutality* more than they used alternative phrasing. The articles on the WNBA used alternative phrasing the most, however, the WNBA league statements used alternative phrasing the least.

The WNBA articles league statements mention it the least. This is an interesting find as the WNBA players' protest called attention to police brutality the most as they showed up in t-shirts that had 7 symbolic bullet holes to call attention to the police brutality Jacob Blake faced.

4.7.2.2 Week 2.

The second week saw a drop in the number of times it was mentioned in both the articles and the statements. Again, the articles on the NBA had a larger percentage of articles mention it, but the WNBA had the highest percentage of their statements mention it. Even though the NHL league statements mentioned it the most in the first week, they mentioned it the least in the second week.

4.7.2.3 Discussion.

Overall, the language around police brutality needs to improve, especially in the league statements for the NBA and WNBA as they are presenting a progressive image to the public. However, if they cannot name police brutality, they are sending a false message to their athletes and audiences. The standout league is again the NHL as most of their statements mentioned it,

however, they indicate a massive drop of interest in the second week. This shows that the NHL is presenting more of a progressive image when there is an expectation to respond but when time passes and the stories die down, they are less inclined to comment on the issue.

4.7.3 Murders of Breonna Taylor & George Floyd

The murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd are extremely significant to the activism of the athletes in these leagues as their deaths are what sparked the activism surrounding their season in 2020. The WNBA dedicated their entire season to Breonna Taylor and had her name on the back of their jerseys for the season. Likewise, players in the NBA and WNBA used their media availability to bring attention to the injustices surrounding both of their murders. Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were murdered by police officials in 2020 and it can be argued that the injustices they, and other Black victims of police brutality faced is what lead to such a strong reaction from society after the Jacob Blake shooting. The way sport news outlets and leagues discuss their murders can frame the severity of the incidents. By omitting the word “murder” it takes away the severity of their cases and lessens the actions of the police officers. It is important to make this distinction because it humanizes the victims of police brutality and calls attention to the wrongdoing of the police officers.

Table 25

Murder of George Floyd mentioned in articles

Floyd		Week 1		Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing
NBA	3%	69%	28%	22%	70%	9%
NHL	0%	68%	32%	0%	75%	25%
WNBA	5%	79%	16%	0%	100%	0%

Table 26*Murder of Breonna Taylor mentioned in articles*

Taylor		Week 1		Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing
NBA	0%	79%	21%	17%	78%	4%
NHL	0%	86%	14%	0%	100%	0%
WNBA	5%	37%	58%	0%	100%	0%

Table 27*Murder of George Floyd mentioned in statements*

Floyd		Week 1		Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing
NBA	3%	81%	16%	7%	86%	7%
NHL	0%	47%	53%	11%	67%	22%
WNBA	0%	100%	0%	0%	75%	25%

Table 28*Murder of Breonna Taylor mentioned in statements*

Taylor		Week 1		Week 2		
Leagues	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing	Mentioned	Not Mentioned	Alternative Phrasing
NBA	3%	87%	14%	0%	86%	14%
NHL	0%	71%	29%	0%	100%	0%
WNBA	0%	100%	0%	0%	75%	25%

4.7.3.1 Week 1.

Tables 25 and 26 show that most of the articles do not mention Breonna Taylor or George Floyd. George Floyd was mentioned more in the NBA and NHL articles while the articles on the

WNBA mentioned Breonna Taylor more but George Floyd the least. The NHL mentioned Breonna Taylor the least. Further, it is interesting to note that Tables 27 and 28 show how the NHL had a higher percentage of their statements mention George Floyd and Breonna Taylor than the other leagues, but they only used alternative phrasing. In fact, the results show that articles and statements for each league used alternative phrasing more than directly referring to their murders. The WNBA league statements did not mention either George Floyd or Breonna Taylor, which is interesting as the league dedicated their season to Breonna Taylor. This shows a gap between the public image the WNBA puts forward as a league and their actions.

4.7.3.2 Week 2.

There was a decrease in the mention of either George Floyd or Breonna Taylor in the second week. The articles for the NBA are the only ones to mention George Floyd or Breonna Taylor. The league statements for the NBA and NHL show similar results as the articles but the WNBA statements differed as they mentioned George Floyd and Breonna Taylor using alternative phrasing while there was no mention of them in the first week.

4.7.3.3 Discussion.

Overall, alternate phrasing was used more than the word “murder” or other similar terms that hold the same weight. Looking at the frequency of how often they are used and the language that is chosen are relevant to the overall framing of athlete activism as their murders helped set the tone for when sports returned after they were stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that leagues need to support their players’ messages more and stand by them instead of using language that hinders their fight towards justice for the Black community, especially since they benefit from the positive image the players create and since they have publicly claimed to support them.

In regard to the articles, the words used to describe the murders maintain the credibility status of many news outlets, including the mainstream sport news outlets. So, there is a lot of thought that goes behind what is written. For instance, NPR says the reason they are regarded as a highly credible source is because they are “very, very careful about how [they] do this kind of work” (Beaujon, 2020). Some examples of things they were allowed to say about George Floyd’s murder include: “Floyd died after Officer Chauvin was seen on video with his knee on Floyd’s neck”; “Chauvin is accused of murder”; “Chauvin is accused of causing Floyd’s death”, “Chauvin is accused of, or charger with, killing Floyd”, and “Chauvin allegedly killed or allegedly murdered” (Beaujon, 2020). A lot of the language found in the sport news articles are like the guidelines of NPR, meaning that sport news, for the most part, tried to use an objective perspective on the matter and avoided absolute statements. However, this way of reporting these murders signals that the murders are debatable, which takes the onus off the author. It is this debatability of the subject matter that minimizes the situation and perpetuates the idea that violence against Black people is a debatable topic. The refusal to call it a murder only serves to protect the police officers while also dehumanizing the Black victims of police brutality. It is important to note that the authors published these works before the official conviction of the officers involved in the murders, but it still stands that the language used shows how the legal system protects the image and reputation of the officers rather than the victims.

These results show the dire need for sport news to restructure their journalistic practices. An important question that needs to be addressed is if journalists can be objective when discussing racism and police brutality. For BIPOC communities, systemic racism, and systemic abuse by police is a reality. The historical treatment of Black people in North America shows that Black people have been treated as disposable and inferior. Today’s institutions are still

shaped by history. So, reporting a story on race through an unraced and “objective” lens in a society where race holds a lot of weight, does not work since that unraced lens masks a White perspective.

4.7.3 Organizational Change

The athlete activists of the NBA, NHL, and WNBA season advocated for racial justice in broader society and their actions also shed light on how their sport leagues are rooted in systemic racism. There have been calls from the athletes, staff, fans, and other activists for the leagues to undergo radical organizational change, meaning that they need to change their working structure and take into consideration hiring practices, how owners conduct themselves, support for athletes and league staff, and more. This shows the commitment of change and how serious the organizations might be taking the racial issues. For this framing analysis, discussion around organizational change was tracked. If an article or league statement mentioned that a league needs to change or how they intend to change to make the leagues an anti-racist space, they are recorded as making organizational change.

Table 29

Organizational change mentioned in articles

Leagues	Week 1		Week 2	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
NBA	40%	60%	22%	78%
NHL	82%	18%	50%	50%
WNBA	21%	79%	0%	100%

Table 30*Organizational change mentioned in statements*

Leagues	Week 1		Week 2	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
NBA	58%	42%	79%	21%
NHL	53%	47%	56%	44%
WNBA	56%	44%	50%	50%

4.7.4.1 Week 1.

Table 29 shows that most of the articles did not mention organizational change, with the exception of the NHL. Conversely, Table 30 shows that most of the league statements mentioned it. Most articles on the NHL mentioned organizational change while the NBA league statements mentioned it the most. Further, the articles on the WNBA had the least mention of organizational change by a large margin. The statements for each league mentioned organizational change more than the articles, with the NBA mentioning it the most and the NHL mentioning it the least. However, the numbers are close together. The articles indicate that the NHL needs the most change out of the leagues by mentioning them more. This is largely due to the NHL being the last to join the protest which created a negative public image of them. These results also show that the articles think the WNBA needs the least change as it was hardly mentioned in their articles.

4.7.4.2 Week 2.

There is a decrease from the first week in the percentage of articles that mention organizational change for each league. Alternatively, the league statements for the NBA and NHL increased their mention of organizational change. The WNBA league statements slightly decreased.

4.7.4.3 Discussion.

Overall, the league statements mention organizational change more than the articles do for both weeks. By doing this, the leagues put forth the notion that they care for the public to know they recognize change is needed. The articles should help to reiterate this message by mentioning how leagues are changing or need to change as it sends a message to readers that the current state of things is harmful for BIPOC and other vulnerable communities. It is interesting to see how the articles were less inclined to write about the leagues' actions in the second week. It shows how sport news is primarily interested in producing content that will get the most clicks- like the players protesting. By mainly focusing on the controversy around the protest and not addressing organizational change, they frame the protest as a spectacle. This distracts from the good work that came out of the athletes' protests, which limits progress toward justice.

4.8 Analysis of Authors

For this analysis, I tracked the race and gender of the writer based on the name, picture, and pronouns of the writers as a writer's identity can influence the way articles or statements are framed. I was unable to find definitive information on the writers and if they identify with their sex assigned at birth. Race was categorized by White, Black/Mixed, and POC. For this analysis, POC refers to any race outside of White and Black. No Author indicates that there was no person given credit for writing the article or statement. As this paper seeks to prioritize the Black voice, specifics on POC data were limited. Information on the writers was tracked to see if this research lines up with what previous research state about sport journalism being a space dominated by White Men. The results seen in Tables 31-34 show that this is still true.

Table 31*Breakdown of article authors in week 1*

League	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Black Women	POC Men	POC Women	Black Gender Non-Conforming	No Author
NBA	63%	6%	5%	5%	11%	0%	0%	11%
NHL	61%	22%	4%	0%	4%	0%	0%	9%
WNBA	24%	28%	0%	14%	5%	0%	10%	19%

Note. There were only Black Gender Non-Conforming authors.**Table 32***Breakdown of article authors during week 2*

Week 2 Articles	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Black Women	POC Men	POC Women	Gender Non-Conforming	No Author
NBA	52%	9%	17%	0%	17%	0%	0%	4%
NHL	40%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%
WNBA	25%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%

Table 33*Breakdown of statement authors during week 1*

Week 1 Statements	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Black Women	POC Men	POC Women	Gender Non-Conforming	No Author
NBA	16%	6%	19%	3%	3%	0%	0%	53%
NHL	76%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Table 34*Breakdown of statement authors during week 2*

Week 2 Statements	White Men	White Women	Black Men	Black Women	POC Men	POC Women	Gender Non-Conforming	No Author
NBA	36%	0%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	43%
NHL	50%	20%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%
WNBA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

4.8.1 Week 1

White men wrote most of the articles about the NBA and NHL in the first week while White women were the demographic that had the highest percentage of articles written for the WNBA. Moreover, the NBA articles had the highest percentage of POC male writers out of the three leagues in both the articles and statements. Further, the NHL had a higher percentage of women as writers than the NBA, but they were all White women while Black women were slightly represented in the NBA writer pool. The WNBA showed the most representation for women writers but most of the women represented were White, though the WNBA does have the highest percentage of articles written by Black women out of the three leagues. The WNBA also had the most articles written by someone who does not conform to the Gender binary.

On the other hand, the league statements show that Black men were the demographic to hold the highest percentage of statements written for the NBA. However, most of the league statements in Week 1 for the NBA did not credit anybody for writing it. The league statements for the NHL showed more White men as writers than the articles did. White men writing the NHL league statements also had the highest percentage of White men as writers across all weeks and leagues. Further, out of all the known writers for the NHL statements, all of them were

White. Lastly, none of the WNBA league statements credited a writer so no comparison can be made.

4.8.2 Week 2

There was a decrease in the percentage of White men writing the articles for the NBA and NHL while it was relatively the same as week 1 for the WNBA articles. The NBA also saw an increase in the number of articles written by Black men, POC men and White women, however, no Black women wrote any of the articles. Further, White men and White women write an equal number of articles about the NHL, but no other race was represented. White women writers are the demographic most represented in the articles written about the WNBA and the only other race demographic recorded is White men.

For the NBA league statements, there are less White male writers represented than the articles and the most writers who are Black men represented across the league statements and articles for both weeks. However, no women, POC, or gender non-conforming people are represented. So, the writer pool for week 2 articles is more diverse than the league statements. However, it is important to note that many of the articles for the NBA league statements are labelled as *No Author*. Further, the NHL league statements show a larger percentage of White men writing their statements compared to the articles and less White women. However, there are more Black men as writers for their statements than the articles about the NHL. Like the week two articles, Black women, POC men, POC women, and gender non-conforming people are still underrepresented. Lastly, the WNBA does not credit any writer for their league statements so no comparison can be made.

4.8.3 Discussion

Overall, the data shows that the writer pool for the top sport news outlets are less diverse than the leagues' writer pool for the NBA and NHL. An interesting observation from the data is that there are no POC women writers represented in any of the articles or league statements for any of the leagues for both weeks. From the data, it is obvious that the top sport news outlets are still dominated by White men and need to implement stronger diversity hiring strategies that consider various identities.

It is important to highlight who is writing these articles as these articles are discussing the racial issues present in society and the racial justice activism the athletes have undertaken. Established news outlets are often regarded as objective in their reporting of stories, and it is important to recognize that journalists lean heavily into objective reporting to avoid claims of bias and to avoid lawsuits (Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2020, p. 77). But it is also important to recognize that:

Removing subjectivity from professional journalism, while simultaneously ignoring the persistently narrow demographic makeup of newsroom staff, objective journalism has long managed to both marginalize journalists of color and reify the perspectives and experiences of white reporters as a form of disembodied neutral knowledge (p.77).

For BIPOC athletes, audiences, and journalists, racism is not debatable; it is a fact, and it deserves to be treated as such. These results showcase that even though the sports news outlets may be reporting stories on racial justice, the newsroom and companies are still perpetuating racism through their hiring practices and journalistic practices that cater to White audiences and perspectives. Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes (2020) find that this makes itself seen through what is deemed newsworthy, what is considered a good source, and what markets they target for advertising, which all maintain white supremacy and privilege. Even with minimal Black writers, they are still limited to these journalistic practices and if they waiver, they can face

consequences, like lawsuits. Table 35 shows that articles written by Black or POC writers show a slight difference in including social justice concepts compared to White writers. When it comes to focusing on athlete activism, intersectionality, and organizational change, Black writers are leading the way.

Table 35

Differences in writing based on race

Race	Focus on Athlete Activism	Mention Intersectionality	Mention Systemic Racism	Mention Police Brutality	Mention Organizational Change
Black	93%	20%	20%	48%	53%
White	88%	8%	25%	49%	43%
POC	93%	3%	32%	39%	36%

When comparing White dominated newsrooms to Black dominated newsrooms, the differences are stark. Fabregat & Kperogi (2019) find that a newsroom of Black people “who recognize and consciously resent the dominant professional norms of journalism, tries to offset the White perspective of the media” (p. 278). This is done by “putting forth empowering narratives and counter arguments against the frames that stereotype Black people” (p. 278) and by doing this, they focus on topics that affect the Black community. The main issue here is that there is a limited reach. Another issue I believe can happen is that many of the messages surrounding systemic racism and other key issues are delivered to the people who are already aware of the issue, meanwhile, the people who are not, are getting news from mainstream news outlets that do not adequately cover the issues or perpetuate them.

With these results, it can be argued that sport news entities take an abstract liberal approach to racial justice issues. They report racial justice issue, profit off the views their articles

get, but make little effort to restructure their organization to be more diverse and representative of society. Instead, they perpetuate White male perspectives, even if it is unconsciously.

5.0 Recommendations and Knowledge Mobilization

Through the findings in this study, three recommendations tied to the improvement of sport and society emerge. First, mainstream journalism should consider adapting their current practices. Secondly, sport leagues should provide more support for racialized players and the communities they serve. The third recommendation is for researchers and academic institutions to give more attention and funding to research that prioritizes intersectional identities and experiences. Through knowledge mobilization, these findings have the potential to turn into action and help sport professionals get aligned with the activist goals of athletes.

5.1 Recommendations and Knowledge Mobilization for Sport Journalism

This analysis shows a dire need to restructure journalistic practices to better report stories that affect and reflect the experiences of women and BIPOC communities. As previously stated in the previous section, Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes (2020) find that objectivity marginalizes people of colour and makes the White perspective neutral and the only valid perspective. The results of this study echoes this as key racial justice concepts were either omitted or inaccurately represented. Further, the same can be said about the male perspective being the neutral perspective, especially in sports. It is important for sport journalists and other journalism institutions to use research like this study to recognize the systemic racism and sexism present in their field of work and ways of reporting. This study, among others, shows that racism and other social issues cannot be objectively approached as it still promotes the dominant White and male perspective. Instead, this research helps show that it is necessary for journalists to approach issues of racism and discrimination as “a condition of life” (Allsop, 2020). Ways this can happen includes building new research-based policies and practices to properly reflect and support the experiences of racialized and other marginalized people and to. Further, these

findings are useful as it shows the importance of being anti-racist. Being anti-racist “requires an understanding of history — an understanding that racial disparities in America have their roots, not in some failing by people of color but in policies that serve to prop up white supremacy” (North 2020). Therefore, a recommendation that emerges out of this includes putting journalists through trainings on the history of racism and other forms of discrimination in their country and in the news. This is similar to how they have mandatory diversity training. Unless people go looking for it on their own, they often do not learn accurate and detailed information about the racism in their country, how it currently operates in society, and how institutions are complicit in the perpetuation of it. By understanding the history and reality of racism, it removes the debatability of the topic. It is only when there is an acknowledgement of being complicit in systemic racism, whether consciously or subconsciously, can progress really start to take place.

This research also finds that there is a significant lack of diversity within the writing room, and it is safe to assume this lack of diversity is present in higher-up positions too. If journalism is saturated with White men, that means they are the ones dictating what stories are told, how they are told, what words are allowed, what tone is used, and more. Using this research, hiring teams can adjust their hiring strategies and understand the importance of having a representational staff. This is a process that won't just happen overnight but with commitment and true intentions, these recommendations will help journalists report stories that accurately reflect reality and respect the human dignity of BIPOC communities, no matter the gender. It is important to recognize that simply hiring writers of colour is not an effective solution if the organization does not address and actively root out systemic racism. If an organization is only hiring writers of colour for the diversity they bring, it can cause more harm than good. For this reason, sport news organizations need to become anti-racist in order to create structural change.

Meaning they need to truly understand how racism affects every aspect of their organization and they need to actively work on addressing these problems. This helps to create and maintain a space where marginalized identities can thrive.

5.2 Recommendations and Knowledge Mobilization for Sport Leagues

The results in this study point to how sport leagues at all levels should work to defend the rights of their athletes and the people in the community they serve. Of course, private organizations like the NBA, WNBA, and NHL are not required to do these things but this research shows how they already made the choice to be a part of the movement through utilizing social justice phrases into their branding, which helped bolster their public image. Since they already decided to play a part in the movement, there is an expectation of them to do more than sport news outlets. Otherwise, they are just profiting off a movement, which would be detrimental to their image in the long run and hurtful for their athletes, staff, and audiences. The Jacob Blake protests really highlighted how professional sport leagues were not prepared to do more and this research shows that a priority for leagues is maintaining a positive image. So, a recommendation for leagues based off this research is to be advocates for social justice issues that directly affect the athletes in their league, not just when a tragedy occurs.

The results from this study are useful as they reveal the ways leagues fell short in supporting the racialized people involved in their organization. Using these results, leagues should look to working with players to plan more community specific initiatives and find ways to incorporate social justice into the framework of the league. This will be helpful not just for the league but for the athletes and the communities they play in. It will also give more space to the athletes to stand up for their human rights and the rights of others without having to worry about jeopardizing their careers or income. In the 2020 season, Black athletes were forced to choose

between their career or being an activist when their community needed them most. This had detrimental effects on the athletes as seen through the prevalence of the *Black Pain* theme in the articles. Athletes, like NBA player George Hill, shared how he had regrets of playing in the 2020 season because it “took all the focal points off what the issues are” (ESPN, 2020).

Further, the results of this study are useful in showing the importance of using affirming and direct language in their league statements when discussing social issues. Like the recommendations for journalists, leagues can do this by recognizing that racism and social issues should not be discussed in a neutral way. Therefore, sport leagues should rework their policies and standards for press releases in order to frame social issues in a way that represents reality and supports the activists. Another recommendation based on the findings of this study is for leagues to hire staff teams that are representational of the team. Further, the themes in this study showed that Black athletes were bearing the brunt of activism work and it affected them mentally and emotionally. So, this finding can be used to show the need to hire staff and mental health professionals that are representative of the athletes. Mental health professionals should be trained in racialized trauma so that players have people they can comfortably discuss how systemic racism affects them. A last recommendation based on the findings is for leagues to utilize their league statements more to release social justice relevant resource, messages, and information to their audiences. The findings showed that league statements discussed the actions of the league in a general sense, so it is recommended that league statements should also highlight the activism work of specific athletes.

5.3 Recommendations and Knowledge Mobilization for Athletes

This research provides practical knowledge for athletes interested in taking up activism. It shows the impact collective action can have on not only sport, but on society as a whole. Players

unions like the WNBPA can use the results of this study as a reference point for interacting with the news media as it relates to activism. This study can help provide direction for developing calls to action that hold themselves, sport leaders, and political leaders accountable. It also confirms a common suspicion around activism getting watered down for easy consumption and having this knowledge is useful as it can help them format stronger, direct, and purposeful messages.

5.4 Recommendations and Knowledge Mobilization for Researchers

When conducting the literature review, I found research on the experiences of Black women engaging in athlete activism to be scarce. Whether by academia or private research institutions, research on Black women's activism in sport should be given adequate attention, funding, and resources to gain an understanding of these often-overlooked communities. The findings of this research point to the lack of intersectional analysis of social issues in sport research and mainstream discussions. Using this finding, research institutions should look to provide further recommendation is for researchers to also ensure that women's sports leagues ample scholarship and mentorship opportunities so BIPOC researchers can successfully conduct research and encourage current researchers to explore social issues in sport in an intersectional way to ensure marginalized groups are not being overlooked as research tends to focus on the experience of men in sport. Doing this, in addition to analyzing social justice movements taken up by women's leagues, is necessary as it can help reveal new ways to make sports safer, representative, and equitable for women, especially BIPOC women.

6.0 Future Research

The answers to the research questions have reshaped my perspective on not only athlete activism but also how racism and discrimination are conducted and framed in the modern age. Through the lack of Colour-blind frames present in the text and the avoidance of important terms related to the protests shows how racism is hard to categorize using established frameworks since racism continuously adapts alongside society.

This research set out to speak to the gaps present in the existing literature and to explore the how the most united political protest in professional sport is framed. As the current literature is saturated with research on male professional athletes and their actions towards racial justice, this research aimed to explore and compare the framing of athlete activism through a Critical Race Feminist lens to see if sport news outlets and leagues maintain or disrupt racial and gender inequalities. Through this, this research adds to what is known about how athlete activism and racial discrimination are understood and processed by big sport institutions. It also highlights the intersections of gender and race as it concerns Black women in sport and activism and compares it to Black and White males. What resulted is evidence that sport news upholds white male supremacy and perpetuates systemic racism mainly by omission, abstract liberalism, and disconnection of power-analysis.

There are areas that need to be examined in further detail to recognize how sport systems inherently benefit from systemic racism. This type of research will help to create supportive and safe recreation environments for communities that prioritize the human and civil rights of all minority populations.

As this analysis focused on the Black Lives Matter movement in professional sport, other racialized voices were missed from the conversation. It is important to see how social

movements focusing on different races, like Latin, Indigenous, and Asian are represented in sport. Latin and Indigenous communities also face high amounts of police brutality. 2020 also saw a disproportionate increase in hate crimes directed at Asian-Americans due to ignorance and misinformation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to this, Asian-American athletes used their platform to address Asian hate crimes and racism and this needs to be examined as well.

Further, this study primarily looked at how the framing of athlete activism is affected by the intersections of gender and race. Future studies should look at how various intersections, such as sexuality and gender identity are discussed or ignored in discussions of athlete activism in sport news as the WNBA is seen as a safe and affirming space for the queer community because there are many queer players in the league and the players have included them in their activism since the formation of the league. Moreover, this community has largely been ignored in the activism seen from the NBA and other men's sports in North America. Since both the NBA and WNBA have made police brutality a core pillar of their activism, future studies should explore how the centering of Black heterosexual men in the discussion of activism affects the intersection of queerness and Blackness since queer people, are six times more likely to get stopped by police compared to cis, straight counterparts (Lang, 2021).

Lastly, a limitation of this research is that it only looks at the four most popular online sport news sources. Future research should look at different types of media and how they frame the events. Television coverage, blog posts, social media posts, athlete interviews, and non-sport news outlets have the potential to showcase different perspectives and frames. They can also better contextualize the issues to provide in-depth and media specific advice to reporting athlete activism.

7.0 Conclusion

Overall, this research paper explores how racial justice activism is conducted within sport institutions and how it is then represented by sports news entities and leagues. Previous literature found that sport journalism is saturated with White males, and this study echoes this finding as most of the articles, even though they focused on racial justice, was through a White man's voice. This is seen in the articles more than the league statements as many of the statements did not have a writer credited. The male dominance is also seen through the framing of the NBA as the leaders in the protest and the erasure of the WNBA. The articles and league statements both perpetuated this message through the lack of focus put on the WNBA.

Through the results, it is recognizable how steeped in white supremacy journalism and sport institutions are. The results help show how this affects the way racial justice activism conducted by athletes is framed. Most of the articles and league statements do not mention key concepts like systemic racism and police brutality, with the only exception being the NHL as they are the league to directly and accurately name police brutality and systemic racism the most in their statements. However, despite being known as the progressive leagues, the NBA and WNBA statements used alternative phrasing more when discussing the systemic racism and police brutality than the articles. The results show that the articles and the statements present more similar ways of framing athlete activism than they do differences. The main difference seen between the articles and statements is that the articles are more focused on the actions of athletes while the leagues focus on themselves. However, their agenda seems to be the same since both show that they work to preserve the existing structure of sports by framing the protest in ways that do not capture the full picture of the tragedies that occur or the full scope of the issues. They mostly did this through omission and indirect language.

Another major finding of this study is the dismissal of Black women's unique experiences with racism and as athlete activists since both the articles and league statements ignore how gender discrimination plays a role in the racism Black women experience. Though, the articles are more likely to discuss intersectionality than the league statements. The WNBA was the league to have intersectionality a focal point of both the articles written about them and their statements.

Further, the Colour-blind frames by Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Jaykumar & Adamian (2017) are scarcely found in the sport news articles or the league statements. This shows a need to update the tools we use to measure and categorize racism. While they are minimally discussed, the articles do mention them more than the statements.

The general themes showed there was ample attention given to the players' and leagues efforts of activism as *Working Towards Justice* was the most common theme in both the articles and league statements. The other main themes recorded were *Black Pain*, *Emphasizing Their Moral Values*, *Opposing Ideas* and *Athlete/Game Updates*. Lastly, the overall general frames identified in the articles and league statements had *Players Acting Against Injustice* as the main theme across league statements and articles for both weeks, except for the second week of WNBA articles, which had game updates as the top theme. This shows how the activism done by WNBA players is not taken as seriously as other leagues.

This research was a reminder of how systemic racism is inescapable in our capitalist society. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the institutions that we participate in are complicit in perpetuating inequities. This study has helped me become aware of how racism and discrimination functions below the surface showed me how radical change requires radical action and commitment.

Seeing how athletes, especially WNBA athletes who do not have a salary comparable to men's, decided that standing up for the rights and dignity of the Black community is more important than their career and their income was inspiring to me. Police brutality against the Black community has been pushed under the rug time and time again by those in power, but these athletes refused to play, bringing attention to the issue, and threatening the revenue leagues and owners make off them. It moved me to see the power dynamic shift; instead of leagues threatening athletes into silence through fines and punishments as what has previously been done, the athletes came together and demanding leagues, owners, and state officials do more to combat anti-black racism.

Despite the results showing how journalism is complicit in structural racism, it was reassuring to see that for two weeks, sport journalism was forced to talk about racial discrimination and police brutality against the Black community. Even if the language used in the articles and league statements were not representative of the full issue, nevertheless, it is a step toward progress. This analysis has taught me the importance of language and will shape the way I write and discuss social justice issues going forward. Words have power and using the right ones affects the way issues are understood, and more importantly, how they are dealt with. I hope this framing analysis inspires sport institutions to start making the necessary changes to make their leagues anti-racist and, in the process, become true allies to their racialized and marginalized players by affirming their experiences and creating safer leagues and spaces for all.

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Appendix A

Table 36

Total Subthemes in Articles

Subthemes in Articles	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Athlete Or Game Update	15	5	2	0	3	3
Being Active in Their Community	1	0	0	0	0	0
Calling Out the Lack of Action from Sport and Political Leaders	0	0	0	0	2	0
Coaches and League Supporting Athlete Activism	10	1	8	0	0	0
Critiquing The Protest	4	1	0	0	0	0
Division Among Players	11	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Vulnerability of Players	53	6	0	0	0	0
Frustration With Lack of Progress	67	5	13	0	1	0
Holding Sport and Political Leaders Accountable	57	2	8	1	2	0
Hopeful For Change in Society and League	2	0	0	0	0	0
Jacob Blake Update	1	0	0	0	0	0
Leadership of Players	3	0	0	2	4	1
League & Owners Acting Against Injustice	4	3	1	1	0	0
Learning From and Honouring History	4	0	0	0	0	0
Listening And Learning	2	0	0	0	0	0
NBA Staff Protesting	1	0	0	0	0	0
Players Acting Against Injustice	85	6	5	1	15	2
Players And League Working Together to Act Against Injustice	20	2	0	2	1	0
Political Division	2	2	2	0	0	0
Racial Discrimination Faced by Players and Coaches	2	2	0	0	0	0
Raising Awareness of Issues Relevant to Protest	1	0	0	0	0	0
Resilience of Black Players	0	0	0	0	1	0
Right Thing to Do	3	1	2	0	1	0
Societal Issues Are Bigger Than Sports	11	1	0	0	0	0
Solidarity Among Athletes	22	0	1	1	7	0
Sport Analysts Protesting	2	0	0	0	0	0

Table 37*Total Subthemes in Statements*

Subthemes in Statements	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Athlete Or Game Update	2	0	0	0	2	0
Being Active in Their Community	3	9	0	1	0	1
Calling Out the Lack of Action from Sport and Political Leaders	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coaches and League Supporting Athlete Activism	5	0	1	0	1	0
Critiquing The Protest	1	0	0	0	0	0
Division Among Players	0	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Vulnerability of Players	5	0	0	0	0	0
Frustration With Lack of Progress	6	3	1	0	0	0
Holding Sport and Political Leaders Accountable	11	5	1	3	2	0
Hopeful For Change in Society and League	1	0	0	0	0	0
Jacob Blake Update	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leadership of Players	0	0	0	0	0	0
League & Owners Acting Against Injustice	4	5	1	4	3	0
Learning From and Honouring History	0	0	1	0	0	0
Listening And Learning	2	0	10	1	0	0
NBA Staff Protesting	0	0	0	0	0	0
Players Acting Against Injustice	7	0	8	2	0	1
Players And League Working Together to Act Against Injustice	8	5	0	1	3	2
Political Division	0	0	0	0	0	0
Racial Discrimination Faced by Players and Coaches	0	0	0	0	0	0
Raising Awareness of Issues Relevant to Protest	2	0	1	0	2	3
Resilience of Black Players	0	0	0	0	0	0
Right Thing to Do	1	1	0	1	0	0
Societal Issues Are Bigger Than Sports	3	2	2	0	0	0
Solidarity Among Athletes	5	2	5	2	1	1
Sport Analysts Protesting	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 38*Black Pain in articles*

	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Emotional Vulnerability of Players	44%	55%	0%	0%	50%	0%
Frustration With Lack of Progress	56%	45%	100%	0%	25%	0%
Resilience of Black Players	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%

Table 39*Black Pain in statements*

	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Emotional Vulnerability of Players	45%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Frustration With Lack of Progress	55%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Resilience of Black Players	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 40*Expressing Moral Values in articles*

Expressing Moral Values	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Coaches and Leagues Supporting Athlete Activism	20%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Hopeful For Change in Society and Leagues	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Leadership of Players	6%	0%	0%	67%	33%	100%
Right Thing to Do	6%	33%	67%	0%	8%	0%
Societal Issues Are Bigger Than Sports	22%	33%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Solidarity Among Athletes	43%	0%	33%	33%	58%	0%

Table 41*Expressing Moral Values in statements*

Expressing Moral Values	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Coaches and Leagues Supporting Athlete Activism	33%	0%	12%	0%	50%	0%
Hopeful For Change in Society and Leagues	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Leadership of Players	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Right Thing to Do	7%	20%	0%	33%	0%	0%
Societal Issues Are Bigger Than Sports	20%	40%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Solidarity Among Athletes	33%	40%	63%	67%	50%	100%

Table 42*Opposing Ideas in articles*

Opposing Ideas	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Critiquing The Protest	21%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Division Among Players	58%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Political Division	11%	40%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Racial Discrimination Faced by Players and Coaches	11%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 43*Opposing Ideas in statements*

Opposing Ideas	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Critiquing The Protest	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Division Among Players	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Political Division	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Racial Discrimination Faced by Players and Coaches	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 44*Updates in articles*

Update	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Athlete Or Game Update	94%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%
Jacob Blake Update	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 45*Updates in statements*

Updates	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Athlete Or Game Update	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
Jacob Blake Update	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 46*Working Towards Justice in articles*

Working Towards Justice	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Being Active in Their Community	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Calling Out the Lack of Action from Sport and Political Leaders	0%	0%	36%	0%	0%	0%
Holding Sport and Political Leaders Accountable	32%	15%	36%	20%	11%	0%
League and Owners Acting Against Injustice	2%	23%	5%	20%	0%	0%
Learning From and Honouring History	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Listening and Learning	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
NBA Staff Protesting	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Players Acting Against Injustice	48%	46%	23%	20%	83%	100%
Players And League Working Together to Act Against Injustice	11%	15%	0%	40%	6%	0%
Raising Awareness of Issues Relevant to Protest	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Sport Analysts Protesting	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 47*Working Towards Justice in Statements*

Working Towards Justice	NBA Week 1	NBA Week 2	NHL Week 1	NHL Week 2	WNBA Week 1	WNBA Week 2
Being Active in Their Community	8%	38%	0%	8%	0%	14%
Calling Out the Lack of Action from Sport and Political Leaders	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Holding Sport and Political Leaders Accountable	30%	21%	5%	25%	20%	0%
League and Owners Acting Against Injustice	11%	21%	5%	33%	30%	0%
Learning From and Honouring History	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Listening and Learning	5%	0%	45%	8%	0%	0%
NBA Staff Protesting	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Players Acting Against Injustice	19%	0%	36%	17%	0%	14%
Players And League Working Together to Act Against Injustice	22%	21%	0%	8%	30%	29%
Raising Awareness of Issues Relevant to Protest	5%	0%	4%	0%	20%	43%
Sport Analysts Protesting	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%