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Women Play Football Too: Feminist Theory and UK Football

I. Introduction

How feminist theory is defined is constantly changing as women adapt to the world around them. The history of feminism is often defined by waves and Trier-Bieniek compares the constant change as “Just like a literal wave, as one wave moves out another comes in but still retains much of the structure of the original wave” (xv). The foundation of feminism, equality for women, stays intact, but as improvements are made and the environment changes the specifics of feminism adapt. There are currently four waves of feminism, with the fourth wave being the current one.

The first wave of feminism began back in the 1790s with issues such as a woman’s place in society, voting rights, and freedom for the enslaved leading the way (Trier-Bieniek, xv-xvi). Feminist theory and the feminist movement, although not the same thing goes hand in hand. This wave began the movement by women realizing that they had different rights from men, simply because they were women. This wave created a foundation for the next waves that women only wanted to be treated equally to men. The second wave of feminism happened in the 1960s and ’70s with a focus on Women’s careers, reproductive rights, and violence against them (Trier-Bieniek, xvi). Once women succeeded with some of their rights they moved on to equality in the workplace, a fight still happening today. Women are getting paid less than men for the same job, another right that was taken away simply because they are women. Reproductive rights are also

rights that are being fought for today. Although this wave is only the second, it has battles that are still being fought in the so-called fourth wave. Feminism can move on, but that does not mean all the battles are won and things can go back to how they were. The third wave of feminism began in the early 1990s and introduced feminism into popular culture (Trier-Bieniek, xx). This, like the second movement, deals with things that are still being fought today.

Feminism and women's rights were introduced to popular culture due to how women were being represented in the media. The mistreatment of women by the media was brought to attention and became a new battle for feminists. Today, most women are made fun of, or not taken seriously when they express the popular culture, they partake in. Feminists became concerned with the depiction of women in the media because they often encouraged negative stereotypes. Although there is no official fourth wave, there is an argument that the fourth wave is defined by advancements in technology (Trier-Bieniek, xxii). The invention of social media has changed not only feminism but the way women are seen and treated. Many women photoshop pictures they post online and are harshly judged by strangers. This also puts a vision in women's minds of what they should look like. They do not realize that the body they see on social media is not real.

II. Judith Butler

A. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution

Judith Butler is a popular theorist commonly associated with gender theory, queer theory, and feminist theory (Salih, 1). The main point made in Butler's journal *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* is that gender itself is an act, and Butler writes that "In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 519). The difference between gender and sex is becoming a big topic of conversation,

specifically regarding the LGBTQ+ community. Interestingly, Butler applied it to feminism before that conversation. Although it is two separate groups, the point remains the same. Sex often applies to genetics and biology, while gender is a social construct. Butler specifically speaks on gender as a series of acts. There are specific actions that are dictated as feminine and specific actions that are dictated as masculine. Butler goes on to say “Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, 519). Gender relies a lot on the physical aspects of bodies. Everything that defines gender comes from the differences between male and female bodies. These observable differences are how society differentiates people into societal norms. These observable differences also affect how people move. Therefore, certain body language and physical features have been defined as either masculine or feminine. Butler then states that “To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (Butler, 522). According to Butler, being a woman is not being born female, but being born to learn and perform like a female. A girl is trained to become a woman, rather than being taught that she already is one without putting on the performance.

B. Gender Trouble

In another of Butler's journals, one of her most famous, *Gender Trouble*, she also speaks on the idea that gender is simply a social construct. Butler claims that gender is not as fixed as sex. People can go against gender by making decisions about how they dress or what their hair

looks like, but neither defines their sex (Butler, 6). Gender was created to make a binary and make life simple for society. There is a way to divide clothes, toys, media, and colors by gender. If anything, it has been enforced by marketing schemes to be able to target specific audiences. Butler describes this binary “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler, 6). The things that are not genetic, but are seen as masculine or feminine are things that can apply to anyone. Your sex does not define what you should look like or what activities you can do. This can also apply to the body language that Butler spoke of before. Anyone can have body language that may be associated with the opposite gender.

C. Bodies That Matter on the Discursive Limits of Sex

Butler also explores the topic of sex and gender in her 1993 book *Bodies That Matter on the Discursive Limits of Sex*. In this book, Butler touches on the relationship between materiality and bodies. Many of the ideas Butler presents in the two previously mentioned works are also in this book. Butler writes that “In other words, "sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” (1). One of Butler’s main points in feminist theory seems to be that the differences between men and women are a construct that society has built. We then continue to maintain the construct because we as humans find that categorizing things makes them easier to understand. These preset constructs are also so deeply engraved in society that it is easier to just follow along with them than to fight them. Sex has become less of something we are born with and more of something that we become, Butler explaining it as “not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this

materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms” (2). Sex has been materialized into clothing, objects, and activities. Things are perceived as masculine or feminine by social stereotypes. When a girl is born there is nothing that stops her from playing football, other than the social norm that it is considered a “Boy’s sport.” If sex were a simple fact about a person that did not go beyond biology, then it would not have the impact it has on people’s everyday life. Everything from the clothing people wear, to the way they are meant to act is deeply rooted in sex and gender.

Butler also speaks of men’s fear of femininity, mentioning the theory that “women are always already punished, castrated, and that their relation to the phallic norm will be penis envy. And this must have happened first since men are said to look over and see this figure of castration and fear any identification there” (101). This idea that men have something that women do not, so men must have come first suggests that women are lesser than because they do not have it. There are biological things that women have, but men do not. This “punishment” of castration is terrifying to men, and the loss of their masculinity is unfathomable. The social authority that men have been given only increases this fear. If not being castrated is the only thing that allows them power, castration would mean helplessness. This theory also views women as already punished. If castration is seen as punishment, and women are already “castrated,” then they are immediately lesser than. With the men believing they are powerful, and deeming the women as punished, this puts women below men. It gives men the understanding that they can treat women as lesser than them.

III. Liesbet van Zoonen

A. Feminist Perspectives on the Media

In van Zoonen's chapter entitled *Feminist Perspectives on the Media*, she speaks on three different types of feminism. She begins by saying that "Feminist theory is often rather electric, incorporating elements from different ideologies as circumstances and issues necessitate" (van Zoonen, 33). Feminist theory as a whole is not only constantly changing with the world, but adapting alongside other theories. Feminism's goal relies heavily on where the world stands in culture and politics. As Van Zoonen calls it "rather electric," it is always ready and accepting to change. Once one goal is completed there is always further to go and more to accomplish. It is also a theory that can help lift and assist other theories. The three types of theories that Van Zoonen writes about are Liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. In Liberal feminism, Van Zoonen states that "In liberal feminist discourse irrational prejudice and stereotypes about the supposedly natural role of women as wives and mothers account for the unequal position of women in society" (Van Zoonen, 33). This standpoint brings attention to the harmful stereotypes, but also the equally harmful bashing of the stereotypes. Women should not be limited to only being wives and mothers, but if they chose to be they should not be discouraged from that. These mothers and wives should also not be shamed or told that they are alright with being treated unfairly. Women are applauded when they go against gender norms, but this does not mean we should talk down on those who happen to fit into them. The second type of feminism is radical feminism described as "In radical feminist discourse 'patriarchy,' a social system in which all men are assumed to dominate and oppress all women, accounts for women's position in society" (Van Zoonen, 35). This type of feminism is very straightforward and creates a binary. It is not true that all men oppress women and that all women have the same position in society, but this view makes it so they can focus on women in general. All women are included in this type and it focuses on inequalities specific to gender. The third type of feminism

is socialist feminism which “does not focus exclusively on gender to account for women’s position but attempts to incorporate an analysis of class and economic conditions of women as well” (Van Zoonen, 36). This view considers the other elements that could affect a women’s position. Class, race, and sexuality are all other elements that affect any person in society, but it is essential to recognize the specific effect it has on women.

B. Gendering the Internet

In Van Zoonen’s article *Gendering the Internet*, she goes into detail about the relationship between advancing technology and gender. Similarly, to Van Zoonen’s *Feminist Perspectives on the Media*, she makes note of the internet becoming a women’s medium, explaining that authors are creating “a redefinition of the Internet from the exclusively masculine domain born out of the American military–industrial–academic complex towards its feminine antithesis of peaceful communication and experimentation” (10). Communication methods were created for military purposes. Everything from the telegraph, radio, and telephone was primarily made so that the military could speak to other people within their branch. As technology improved, it became more accessible and these forms of communication entered the social world. Now, with the internet, it is easier than ever for women to socialize, network, and connect. In the twenty-first century, many women make a living off online jobs. Currently, women are not forced to stay at home or are even expected to, but when they were, the internet was an accessible way for them to not feel alone. Women have taken advantage of what used to be a male-dominated communication system.

Cyberfeminism has become a new term to describe feminism in new technologies, such as the internet. Van Zoonen writes about some examples of cyberfeminism, like transgender politics, genderless identities, and technophilia (12). The advancements the world is making in

technology, specifically medicine have given people the ability to live their lives to the fullest. The idea of changing one's gender is not new, but it is becoming more widely accepted and talked about in the medical field. It is still very difficult for transgender individuals to get the medical care they need, but the places that are accepting of them help them live the life they want with safe medical procedures. Technophilia allows technology to live as a part of us and not as an outside force. Medical technology is allowing people to see, hear and speak. Both topics are allowing people to change their bodies, something that was once thought impossible and even today is sometimes looked down upon. It is out of the norm and many people do not understand, which is exactly what creates hatred towards something or someone.

C. Rethinking Women in the News

Women may hold jobs within the media, but that does not mean that they are treated equally in the workplace. In *Rethinking Women in the News*, Van Zoonen speaks on the role women play in the news. Women are in broadcast media, but they are often tasked to cover women's and youth's programs instead of politics and economics (Van Zoonen, 36). Similarly, to what Butler speaks on, gender has gone so far past biologically identifying someone. These women are being assigned stereotypically feminine topics such as children and other women, while the men get the masculine topics. The topics the men receive are more widely broadcasted, but there are also more stories on them. Not only are they mistreated in work assignments, but they are mistreated in expectations. Women tend to have unfair expectations that lie outside of the work that they do. Van Zoonen writes that "They are judged primarily as women, which means a lot of comment on appearance and 'come-ons' from male colleagues" (37). In predominantly male fields it is easy for women to be judged on a different scale than men. They are to be dressed a certain way, and if they are not, and get unwanted attention from a male

colleague, it is their fault. Often women's outstanding work is overlooked, while the focus is shifted to their appearance and dress.

Many women in the media believe that if there were more women in the media, the content of the news would not change (Van Zoonen, 39). To assume that women would bring more feminine topics in the news would be suggesting that they hold different work values than men. The men could write stories about women if they wanted to, and women could not write about women if they so pleased. Gender should not be a deciding factor in what stories are being written about. Those in the media, although do have control over what stories have headlines, cannot control the events that there are available to write about. The news is the news and the main goal is to inform the people. As Van Zoonen mentions, the lack of women in the news could be related to the lack of women working in the news, or it could not be (39). There is a possibility that with more women in the newsroom, there would be more stories about women, but it is also possible that this issue might be bigger than the newsroom. Meaning if there are no noteworthy stories about women in the community, that would be linked to a bigger societal problem. On the other hand, if there is an influx of negative news stories about women and there are many women in the newsroom, then they might not want to write about all of them.

It is understood that men and women are not the same, but to base it off explicitly gender creates more inequality issues. The news mainly comes from "male journalists with a male conception of the world" (Van Zoonen, 48). This issue of men versus female in the news comes from a male-dominated world. At this point, most women have lived through some experiences where they were treated a certain way because of their gender. Therefore, this gives women a different view of the world. Even within the category of women, there are many women from different backgrounds who have different perspectives. These different perspectives come

through when reporting news stories. Van Zoonen cites Linden and Kuipers who report that “The women did perceive differences in approach, but not in the choice of issues (39). The news stories that women report on may be the same as men, but their perspectives will differentiate the product of the story. The news may not be lacking feminine stories, but rather the feminine perspective. Women were raised differently, treated differently, and have different expectations they are expected to fill; therefore, they bring a new lens to the table.

Van Zoonen also explains the other side of the argument, that content would change if more women would be in the newsroom. Many researchers believe that if there are more women reporters there will be more feminine stories (Van Zoonen, 42). This again is possible but is based on gender, exclusively. The softer news is expected to be reported on by women and the harder news is expected to be reported on by men. Overall, this enforces the theory that women not only have different social expectations in the workplace but different work expectations as well.

Considering Butler’s theories on gender as an act and Van Zoonen’s theory on women working in the news, women are almost expected to go along with society’s preconceived notions and play a part. They are to act a certain way, and report on stories, they do not necessarily want to report on but are expected to report on. Women are defined by expectations. The way women are taught to act is not based on reality but is instead rooted in expectations from men. When they meet these expectations, they are seen as good women and if they do not meet expectations, they are not good women.

IV. Conclusion

Feminist theory is in constant movement, changing alongside the world it is a part of, but it also keeps its roots in creating an equal world for men and women. As the world improves,

there is always more to fix. Some things are so rooted in society that we do not even realize limits on women. One of them is gender, something so easy to change, but so engraved in society. Gender has defined so many things from hobbies, clothes, hair, activities, and makeup. Being a male or a female does not limit you from these things, but society has dictated that it does. Therefore, gender itself is an act, everything we do we have been taught to do to go with the flow of society. We dress a certain way, we act a certain way, and we like certain things, but we do not have to. There is nothing stopping anyone from doing things outside of their gender. All that must be done is for people to have the courage to do the unexpected.

V. Analysis

Offside is a play written by Sabrina Mahfouz and Hollie McNish in 2017. The play centers around two women and their journey to make it onto England's national football team. After England beat Brazil at the 2012 Olympics, artistic director and originator Caroline Bryant wrote in *The Story of How 'Offside' was Developed*, "with a buzz around women's football, I knew this was a play we needed to write." With England's nationalism at a high with the Olympics and scores to prove the talent of England's women's team, it was a perfect time to bring up the issue of sexism in football. Football, or as Americans call it, soccer, is the most popular sport in England; often compared to the popularity of American football in America. It is an integral part of many people's lives, often having their favorite team chosen for them at birth depending on where they live or what their parent's favorite team is. In England, every big team has both a men's and a women's team. The men's team plays in the Premier League, while the women's team plays in the Women's super league. Ask anyone what team they support and they will give you a name such as Manchester City, but they will not specify if they are referring to the men's or the women's team. It is more likely than not that they mean the men's team. I know

from personal experience that it is easier to follow along with the premier league than the Women's Super League. This is probably due to the overwhelming popularity of the men's team over the women's team. Most recently in 2022, England's women's team The Lionesses, won the 2022 EUROs, a year after the Men's team lost the match that would have given them the trophy. The celebration for the women's team was huge and with all the recent attention on Women's football, this play is just as important now.

In the published version there is some history of women's football before the play. This information was not only interesting but also gave some background on the play itself. Bryant writes in her development that women began playing football once the men left to fight in World War I (8). The women took over all the jobs that the men left behind when they went to fight in the war, so it only made sense that they took over the leisurely activities as well. Like the 2012 Olympics and the 2022 EUROs, women football players proved that not only could they play the sport, but they were good at it as well. Yet, this proof did not do them much good. Like both recent events, it was celebrated at the time but quickly forgotten. In the text extract written for the play's developmental process, it states that "Women were officially banned from playing football on FA grounds in 1921. This put an end to the professionalization of the sport for women for fifty years (Mahfouz and McNish, 12). After the men came back from war the women were immediately deprived of the right to play the sport. They were expected to go back to their day-to-day jobs simply because of their gender. Women in the present time take the ability to play the sport as a privilege, a gift because there were fifty years when women were not allowed to play. This can be seen in the play when Mickey and Keeley, the two football players, look to their football heroes who fought to be able to play.

There are two real-life football stars in this play, Carrie Boustead, and Lily Parr, two pioneers in women's football (Mahfouz and McNish, 15). For a very long time, Carrie Boustead was credited for being the first recorded black footballer in the UK, but it was recently discovered that Emma Clark was the first (Where Is the Black History of Women's Football?). The mistake and how long it was told as fact is proof of how poorly early women's football was documented. This mistake was made because "Clarke also played in goal, though was confused for decades with fellow keeper Carrie Boustead, who was originally billed as the first Black female footballer until historian Stuart Gibbs discovered she was white" (The FA: Ten Influential Black Figures from Football History). It is a simple mistake that could have been avoided, but because of lack of attention and care, lived on for many years. In *Offsides* Carrie's character is significant because she was meant to be a black heroine for Mickey. Mickey looks up to her, and even though the facts were disproved, things, like this play, cement these mistakes in history, which only shows how insignificant women's football was to the media. Lily was the first female footballer to be in the football hall of fame and played on a factory team during World War I (Mahfouz and McNish, 15). Keeley looks up to Lily as an English woman who was also one of the younger players. Despite these footballers being from different periods, the 1800s, 1900s, and 2010s, they all still love the sport and struggle with being a woman within it. There have been many monumental events in women's football where it seems like they will begin earning recognition, but it never happens.

A big aspect of the play is how the media treats Mickey and Keeley, as well as how the public perceives them. In scene four the two athletes go back and forth between practice and an interview with a journalist. The two players are asked questions such as "How does it feel to be picked for the England team...?" and "Can you tell our readers what you'll be doing to get ready

for it?” But then the questions become more judgmental and personal. Questions such as “Do you feel it’s a sacrifice to not be able to look your best because of the career you’ve chosen?” “Have you had any male fans stalking you?”, “Are there any romances on the team?”, and “Do you like Kim Kardashian?” It was irritating, to say the least when reading this scene because of the lack of interest in the sport that Mickey and Keeley love. It is disheartening to know that personal questions like these will catch more eyes than questions about women playing the sport. Mahfouz and McNish added these interactions with the media because inequality in the media is an issue that spans across time periods. How news outlets report on women, and their behavior toward them has been a constant issue. The play also shows the part of reporting readers do not see. The readers see the final product which can be tampered with and changed to put the reporters in a good light. The interactions that happen in the play are real, raw, and unedited.

This representation of the media links back to Van Zoonen’s theories about women in the newsroom. The reports in the play are about the women’s football team, but they are done by men. Stories about women are not lacking, but their perspectives. The reporters seemed to ask more questions about Mickey and Keeley’s personal lives, than their football careers. The men do not know what it is like to be a woman and ask about that, while other women know what it is like to be judged for their looks and would probably ask about what they do not know about, in this case, football.

Within the play, both Mickey and Keeley have parts of their lives that they do not want to share with the press, but that they know it is bound to happen. Being a professional football player has become not just about the sport, but the popularity and celebrity status that comes with it. Everyone wants to know all the dramatic details about your life. For Mickey, it is her sexuality and relationship with Rosie, another player on the England team. Mickey must go

against not only being a woman but also being black and gay. Three things that do not define her talents as a football player, but make her more interesting to the media. Mickey is also constantly asked by the journalist about her body and weight gain. The public sees her and immediately comments on what she looks like. For Keeley, her mother is “psychiatrically not doing so good” and often takes her mother with her wherever she goes for football. Keeley knows the press is aware that her mother always comes with her, but she does not want them bothering her mother as much as they bother her. This interest in her mother’s role in Keeley’s life makes the media perceive her as childish and unable to be on her own.

Near the end of the play, Mickey and Keeley have a heart-to-heart because Keely is considering quitting before the match. This conversation has both women speaking on the struggles of having their life on display for everyone to see. The career they have chosen is not simply about playing the game, but about being a public figure and being aware of the effect it has on the people around them. It is so overwhelming that Keely almost quits. It is a difficult switch to be solely concerned about the sport to having to be aware of your public appearance. Now you have a whole country judging you and it can be an overwhelming and isolating experience.

Currently, in the real world, we live in, social media is the media outlet of choice. As of 2022, Instagram has become a huge platform for public figures, companies, and sporting teams. Along with most women footballers having accounts, their teams also run accounts. Most popular teams have separate Instagram accounts for their men’s teams and women’s teams. This makes sense as they are two separate teams, but one team that goes against this trend is Manchester City.

Manchester City is one of the most popular teams in both leagues, in the 2021-22 season the men won in the premier league while the women came in third in the Women’s Super League only eight points below second and nine points below first (Barclays WSL 2021/2022 Table & Standings). As of the early 2022-23 season, the men are in second while the women are in fourth. There are multiple men and women from Man City (as the teams are casually nicknamed) on England’s national teams. Manchester City is a very talented team with an army of fans behind them whom they call “Cityzens.” I bring up this team because they do not split and have separate Instagram accounts for each team. Instead, there is one Instagram account (@mancity) that encompasses both teams which have 36.8 million followers.



To put that into perspective, both of Arsenal’s teams are at the top of the table in their league and the Arsenal men’s team has 23.8 million followers, while their women’s team only has 1.6 million followers. This means Manchester City has 10.7 million more followers than both of Arsenal’s accounts combined.

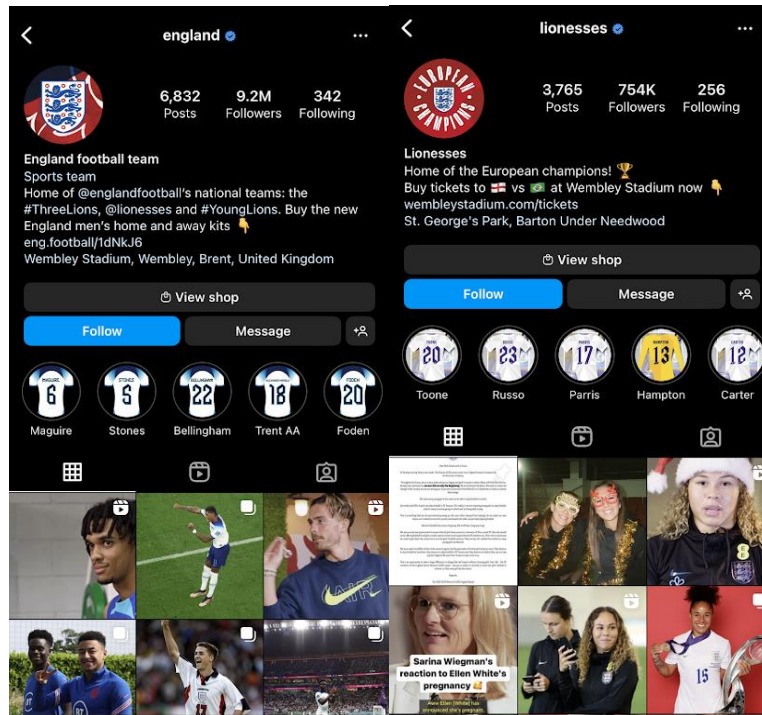


With Arsenal's teams, there is a way to tell that there is a significantly lower number of supporters for the women's team. With Manchester City, there is no way to know for sure if someone has followed the account for both teams or one or the other. The upside to this is that even if all 35.7 million Manchester City followers are fans of the men's team, they are all exposed to content about the women's team. Every follower is updated on the women's scores, matches, and accomplishments. While those who follow the Arsenal men's team do not get information on the women's team unless they go and follow a separate account.

This could be seen as a marketing technique as most women's team accounts follow the same trend in followers as Arsenal. They have significantly fewer followers than the men's teams. Manchester City's decision to combine the two does bring more attention to the women's team, but it is giving into the hierarchy of men's football. This could either be seen as a form of unity or as a form of erasure. Uniting the two teams can dissolve the divide between the two, but it can also represent no difference at all or can be seen that the women's team is not a team on its own.

The best solution to this problem may be what England's football teams' accounts are doing. Both the Lions and Lionesses have an Instagram account and different names which makes them both easier to identify. The England Football Team account (@england) is mostly dedicated to the Three Lions, the men's team, but it does feature the Lionesses, the women's team, while the Lionesses have their own account as well (@lionesses). The gap in followers is still blatantly obvious with the men's account having 8.6 million followers and the women's account only having 741 thousand followers. Having separate accounts allows for the women's team to have a space to spotlight their players and post more often. Having the England account posting content for the women's team as well gives the team more exposure to those who do not

follow the women's account. It may also encourage others to follow the women's account and maybe one day the follower ratio will not be as unbalanced and the women's team can solely post for themselves.



Social media has created a space for everyone to control their perceptions. Only the best snippets of people's lives are posted on social media. Therefore, according to social media everyone is happy and doing the most exciting things. Sports teams follow the same trend, celebrating wins, successes, and good plays. Football teams often acknowledge their losses and what the scores are posted, but they tend not to linger on this fact as much as if they would have won. Not only is the act about having a perfect life, but it also differs depending on gender. Generally, on social media women pose and want to look nice while men show off cool, "manly" things that they do. The difference I have noticed with many football accounts is that more videos are posted of the men's team, while the women's team posts mostly pictures. The men's teams commonly post more videos of daily shenanigans, training, interviews, and fun challenges.

This is not to say that the women's teams do not also do these, their videos just mostly consist of highlights of the games, interviews, and sponsorships. Their feeds are commonly filled with posed pictures and photographs from the games. This trend of posting could imply better audience engagement when the women's team is not interacting directly with the camera. This could be due to the disinterest of knowing the players personally and just wanting to know them physically. Like in *Offsides*, the public is more interested in how the players look, rather than what they have to say about the game. Photographs as well as these short-form videos could also be due to a lack of attention span when it comes to women's teams. The men are expected to be fun, and hilarious and have engaging banter with one another. The higher interest in the men's football teams also means fans are more likely to engage with longer-form content.

There is an obvious difference in tone between the social media accounts of men's and women's football teams. There is no doubt that how the women's teams are being represented is changing and becoming more in line with the men's teams, but there is still a difference in performative expectations for the teams. It is simpler for a small social media team to acknowledge the issues and change how they post, especially if there are women on the team. So, social media accounts can change their content to equally represent their teams, but this is only a small step in the right direction when it comes to the bigger picture. The issue lies in the deep-rooted male dominance of the sport in society. For there to be a noticeable societal change in support for the women's team, then it is going to take more than just effort from the social media teams.

Football is a sport with a largely male audience. The love for men's teams is passed down from generation to generation, so the lack of support for women's teams is rooted in society. It would take many men to start supporting their men's teams and women counterparts for there to

be a noticeable change in society. For fans to differentiate between the men's and women's teams while in conversation would take a huge societal change. The change in social media and the efforts made there is a start.

Another huge issue that fans do not see or necessarily take notice of is the pay. This is probably the issue that affects the players the most. This is a topic that has come up recently with the 2022 Men's World Cup. England's women's team, the lionesses, won \$16 million when they won the Euros in 2022 (Burton). According to FIFA, the men's teams who do not make it past the round of sixteen, the second round of the competition, win 13 million dollars. If you place in fifth through eighth place, the team wins 17 million dollars (FIFA). Therefore, the men do not even have to come in the top three teams to win more money than the women's team earned for winning. If the men's team does happen to win, they would receive \$42 million (FIFA). That is more than double the amount the women's team made. Fans do not normally care much about how much the players make or what the team wins. They just want their team to come out victorious and know that their players are paid a substantial amount of money. This is true, but the gap between the pay for the teams and the ongoing fight to have equal pay is just as important as who wins, if not more.

Offsides created a space that made the issue of media in women's football accessible to audiences. The difference in treatment between the men's and women's teams can be difficult to see if you are not looking for it specifically. Especially in the 2020s, as it is improving. Not everyone pays attention to follower count, or the specific content being posted, or comparing the content of the men's and women's teams. For *Offside* to have the main issue in the play be the media, brings it to the forefront of the audience's attention and encourages them to pay attention to these things. Plays are created to initiate conversations, and this play's target audience

includes both theater and sports lovers alike. The discussion the two groups can have will ignite a movement within the current climate. It will encourage more people to research the topic.

Offside may be dealing with other media besides social media, but it starts the research and the conversation. Most of the information is accessible to everyone through their phones. It only takes a few seconds to look up an Instagram account and get data from there. Sports and theater are known for bringing people together for a single cause, so when you combine the two groups, a lot can be accomplished.

This is all to say that there are many aspects and perspectives to how women are treated and represented in football. There are improvements in some areas, such as social media and uniforms. While there is little change in fan mindset and pay grade. Sexism is deeply rooted in society in many other areas besides sports and it will take a lot of time and effort to reach the equality we seek, but it is reassuring to see this issue be addressed in so many forms. So many people pay attention to social media and now players have their separate platforms to speak their minds. The play *Offsides* brings the issue to theater artists who may be disconnected from the sports world. Both disciplines can help each other and crossing these boundaries could make a lot of improvements. Just like football, it is going to take a lot of collaboration and connection, but it is possible. Even the most unexpected teams can win.

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