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**A content analysis of Twitter attitudes on women's Australian
and North American sports**

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Statement of Authentication

This work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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Abstract

Background

The Sport Nexus has been described as an institution that replicates the inequalities of society, where men are considered as first-class citizens (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). This notion has implications for how sport women are treated and viewed within the sport industry. This thesis explores the lack of coverage women's sport has received. It considers how the digital space has provided an alternate avenue for female athletes to establish both their sporting and personal identity, contesting the notions of their inferiority that traditional media has historically perpetuated. Increasingly, sport fans have followed suit, utilising platforms such as Twitter to voice their sentiments on women's sport, however, research into fan perception of women's sport is limited. The purpose of this study was to investigate fan attitudes on women's sport in an Australian and North American context.

Methods

This study examined Twitter users' perceptions of women's sport across two time points and two continents. Tweets related to Australian women's sport leagues (AFLW and WBBL) and national team (Matildas), and North American leagues (WNBA, NWHL, and CWHL), and national teams (USWNT and CANWNT) were collected on the opening day of each respective season, or the opening match for national teams, and analysed using content analysis. The concepts of micro-aggression and micro-kindness were used to create a coding scheme to categorise negative and positive sentiments in two stages. Stage one involved categorising Tweets based on the presence of micro-aggression and micro-kindness, and stage two involved categorising tweets in relation to the sub-categories of micro-aggression (assumption of inferiority, sexual objectification, restrictive gender roles, and general dislike) and micro-kindness (acknowledgement, challenge, and excitement). Frequencies were calculated for each category across time points to assess changes in fan sentiments over time.

Results

A total of 14,510 tweets were collected and analysed. When neutral tweets were excluded from the sample, 1022 (15.5%) tweets were categorised as micro-aggression and 5591 (84.5%) tweets were categorised as micro-kindness. The proportion of tweets categorised as micro-aggression ranged from 35.8% in the WNBA in 2017 to 2.7% in the CANWNT in 2019 while the proportion of tweets categorised as micro-kindness ranged from 97.3% in the CANWNT in 2019 to 64.2% in the WNBA in 2017. Including neutral tweets, micro-aggression increased over time in tweets referring to the AFLW (8.3%), Matildas (4.1%), CWHL (3.4%), and USWNT (3.3%). Including neutral tweets, micro-kindness increased over time in tweets referring to the CANWNT (17.4%), WNBA (8.2%), and Matildas (4.7%).

Conclusion:

The study highlights that Twitter is an ideological terrain where dominant ideas of the inferiority of female athletes may be reinforced or challenged. Although micro-aggression was present across all leagues and national teams, the presence of micro-kindness demonstrated the ways in which sport fans' views on women's sport can differ from what is being presented in traditional media. Future research should extend the timeframe to investigate the difference in sentiments in the opening and closing season to gain a better understanding of whether fan sentiments change.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this thesis is to explore Twitter user's attitudes on women's Australian and North American sport. The study utilised the concepts of micro-aggression and micro-kindness and applied a critical and feminist theoretical perspective to explore both negative and positive views on women's sport. This chapter will provide an overview on the Sport Nexus as bearers of hegemonic masculine ideas, and by extension, the inferiority of sportswomen. It highlights also how female athletes are challenging those idea through social media. Additionally, this chapter will address the significance of the current study and outline the research questions of the thesis.

1.2 The Sport Nexus

Female athletes' identity and body has been described as an ideological terrain in an institution that favours male superiority (Messner, 2007). The institution of sport has denied female athletes' power both economically and culturally. This is evident in the body of literature on the coverage of women's sport, recognising that coverage of female athletes has been limited despite the increase in participation by females in a variety of different sports (Kane, 2013). This section will provide an overview on how the Sport Nexus has replicated the inequalities and mistreatment of women in society into the sporting world, noting the role of traditional media as a tool to reinforce and reproduce gendered ideologies and the inferiority of women in sport.

Burstyn (1999) defines the term *Sport Nexus* as an entity made up of "sports and its association with mass media, corporate sponsors, governments, medicine and biotechnology" (p. 17). It is an entity that has been constructed on the display and glorification of the masculine

qualities of the human body. In doing so, it has created a culture where the presentation of the gendered body has become essential when celebrating the athletic activity. According to Duncan (2006), sport is the bearer of masculine hegemony, where the athletic activity of men are regarded as heroic, strong and powerful, and are recipients of the sport citizenship. Therefore, the presence of female athletes in sport can be viewed as impeding on the gendered hierarchies of the Sport Nexus. Women are regarded as the *other*, as second-class citizens with inferior athletic ability.

Several studies have found that sportswomen receive very limited media coverage, with men's sports receiving most, if not all broadcasting minutes, and are framed as the exciting *it* sport (Billings, 2008; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings et al., 2010; Billings et al., 2008; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Messner et al., 2000; Messner et al., 1996; Messner et al., 2006). The media has played a substantial role in reinforcing and upholding these dominant ideologies in the Sport Nexus in two ways. First, by limiting coverage of female athletes and emphasising on their physical appearance, attractiveness, desirability and inferiority in comparison to men (Messner et al., 2000). Second by reinforcing the perception of superiority of men thereby normalising that female athletes are inferior. This has transferred into how people view and talk about women in everyday life, further illustrating how sport is both a conductor and mirror of broader society and the gendered social norms that govern it.

1.3 Micro-aggressions in the Sport Nexus

The perception that sportswomen are inferior to their male counter parts has been emphasised and normalised through the media and has subsequently transcended into everyday dialogue in society. Micro-aggressions are described as subtle everyday comments that communicate negative and derogatory messages that are often dismissed as harmless, though the content communicates oppressive ideas. While the concept of micro-aggression was first used to

explore racism experienced by Black Americans (Pierce et al., 1977), the concept has recently been adapted to describe the experience of women and other minority groups. Despite micro-aggressions being considered minor, the cumulative exposure can have biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences (Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Moody & Lewis, 2019; Nadal, 2008, 2018; Nadal et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2011; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Sue et al., 2007). A small but emerging body of literature on micro-aggression and sport has highlighted the media to be the driving force behind negative perceptions. This work suggests that despite sportswomen being the target, the public are exposed to these micro-aggressions which impact how they view female athletes (Allen & Frisby, 2017; Frisby, 2017; Kaskan & Ho, 2016). This concept will be further explained and qualified in the method section of this thesis, illustrating its usefulness for understanding the types of tweets being made related to professional women's sport.

1.4 Disrupting the Sport Nexus through micro-kindness

Social media, however, has provided a space, albeit digital, that has enabled female athletes to be the authors of their own sport narrative. Scholars have noted that social media platforms such as Twitter have given sport fans and athletes agency, where they have become the authors and producers of their sport narrative (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Shockley, 2010). Previous literature on athletes' use of Twitter has found that the platform has given fans a more intimate look into their lives, emphasising how athletes are able to disassemble the framing of traditional media and present their own image of who they are on their own terms (Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Frederick et al., 2014). For female athletes, this is significant, as they have a space to challenge dominant ideas of the inferiority of women that traditional media has reinforced through micro-aggressions (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). According to Laughter (2014) the challenging of micro-aggression is important in facilitating change. Micro-kindness, the antithesis to micro-aggression, is characterised as verbal, behavioural, or

environmental acts of respect that are intended to provide a positive and humanizing interaction, it aims to disable and prevent micro-aggressions (Laughter, 2014).

An example of this, are sportswomen utilising their voices in the digital space to facilitate change in their presentation. Thorpe et al. (2017) discuss the transformative nature of the digital space, noting that social media has enabled sportswomen to offer their own commentary and alternative narrative of who they are, beyond the perspective of men. Similarly, a small but emerging literature have found that social media platforms like Twitter have provided sport fans a space to challenge dominant ideas of the inferiority of women (Ash et al., 2017; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016). The consequence of this, according to previous literature is the dismantling of the Sport Nexus (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). This thesis, through comparing examples of micro-aggression and micro-kindness, aims to understand how this has been experienced by female sports leagues and offers insights into how fans have perceived, valued, and engaged with women's sport.

1.5 Purpose of the study

Using Twitter as a platform, the purpose of this study was to explore fan attitudes on women's sport in an Australian and North American context. The study provides insight on the current attitudes of sport fans, specifically exploring micro-aggression and micro-kindness.

1.6 Significance of the study

The body of work on sport fan literature, have been limited to analysing fan comments across various media channels on fan motivation in the consumption of men's sport in a North

American perspective, fan engagement with North American sport organisations and athletes (Filo et al., 2015; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Stavros et al., 2014).

This study builds on previous literature in two ways, first, it builds on previous sport fan perspectives, by investigating them in relation to women's sport in the underexplored Australian context as most studies have been based in a North American context (Cooky et al., 2013; Messner et al., 2010; Messner et al., 1996; Messner et al., 2006). By broadening the context from North America to include Australia, this thesis aims to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of sport fans' perception on sportswomen.

Second, it utilises Twitter which has been described as a space where dominant ideas of hegemonic masculinity are being exercised and have transformative potential for changing the framing of sportswomen (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Thorpe et al., 2017; Vann, 2014). Additionally, this study broadens sport fan literature, by addressing both negative and positive attitudes on women's sport with the social media platform Twitter.

1.7 Research questions

The study aims to address the following questions:

1. How frequent are micro-aggression and micro-kindness attitudes expressed in tweets about women's sport in Australia and North America?
2. What is the frequency of each of the four categories of micro-aggression (assumption of inferiority, objectification, restrictive gender roles, general dislike), and micro-kindness (acknowledgement, challenging of micro-aggressions, excitement) present in tweets related to each league or team?

3. Has the proportion of tweets presenting micro-aggression and micro-kindness changed over time, within and across leagues and teams?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Messner (2007) describes sport as a battleground where dominant ideologies of male superiority are exercised and praised. Duncan (2006) credits this to how sport represents a microcosm of society, where the subordination of women is commonly accepted. The presence of sportswomen in the sport realm remains a foreign space and ideal. Historically, society has reinforced that men and women are biologically different, with men being considered more suited to playing and engaging in sport (Duncan, 2006). In this way, men are regarded as strong and powerful, while women are regarded as inferior athletes, unknowledgeable and inauthentic sport fans (Messner et al., 2000; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016). This research aims to address a gap in the current literature relating to female sport athletes and the attitudes of fans on women's sport in social media. Drawing on scholarly research that targets how women in sport have been treated in the Sport Nexus, this chapter will provide insight on how social media has given agency to female athletes empowering them to challenge how they are framed in broader society.

More contemporary work has revealed a gradual shift in scholarship, where attention is paid to female fans of sport, as well as, the harnessing of social media as a platform for female athletes to promote themselves and their sport outside of traditional media platforms (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; Ridinger & James, 2002; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016; Toffoletti, 2017; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018, 2020). This does however remain an underdeveloped area in academic scholarship, and one that this study wishes to contribute to. To contextualize this study, this chapter draws on a body of academic literature to explore the subordination of sportswomen within traditional televised media, to better understand how and why social media has become a virtual battleground for sports women. It argues that social media has become a way forward when it comes to offering a new set of perspectives on the narrative of women's sport. But also, one that must be engaged with caution.

This chapter first outlines the three traditional approaches (functionalist, critical and feminist) to understand sport and later delves into a discussion into how we can better understand the current playing field for females in sport by using a feminist perspective and drawing on research focused on the coverage of women's sport. This chapter aims to set the scene for this study by demonstrating the lack of coverage of female athletes and the gendered framing that continues to misrepresent their athletic achievements. Additionally, the chapter will highlight how social media has provided an avenue for sportswomen to offer an alternative narrative that frame them in a more accurate setting, suggesting how social media is the way forward for the framing of sportswomen.

2.2 Sociological and Feminist approaches to understanding women in sport

Traditional sociological views of sport and the role it has in society are often discussed in relation to three perspectives or frameworks. The first perspective adopts a functionalist approach, whereby sport is an institution that promotes common values that are considered essential for the integration and development of society (Hargreaves, 1986). The issue with this perspective is it positions sport as an untouchable force that associates common values with misogynistic ideals and does not account for gender inequality. Within this perspective, one of sport's main purposes is to entertain the masses thus providing an escape from everyday working life (Messner, 2007). Here, sport takes on the role of promoting positive social values such as teamwork and collectivism that are considered essential for society functioning, but often fails to consider gender injustices.

The second perspective is situated within a critical theoretical approach where those involved in sport's production reproduce dominant ideals and ideologies that are used to exploit the masses and replicate social inequality, but mostly in relation to social class (McDonald, 2015). Scholars who champion the second approach can be found in the work of the Frankfurt School's Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Both scholars conceptualised this idea through their seminal

work the Culture Industry. The Culture Industry describes how popular culture objects such as books, music, film and media content, such as sports coverage, are created by those in position of power and designed to reproduce the status quo (Özsoy, 2018). More recently, the Culture Industry has been adopted by Neo-Marxism to critique the control of capitalism in society beyond traditional ideas of Marxism and its views on class and labour. With increasing commodification, sport represents a facet of the Culture Industry where it has been used to reproduce traditional gender norms and idealizations (Durham & Kellner, 2012). Put another way, sport continues to reinforce and replicate the dominant values of capitalist society that champion traditional ideas of hegemonic masculinity and by extension the fragility of femininity.

Due to the nature of the Culture Industry reinforcing current dominant ideologies of society, sport has followed suit in reproducing what Connell (1987) describes as the 'gender order'. Connell (1987) is situated within the third perspective, the feminist perspective, which aids an understanding of how society is structured through social institutions that reproduce inequality and disparity between the life chances and choices of males and females. This perspective provides the most appropriate lens for this thesis to better understand how female athletes are portrayed within the sport media, and by extension, offers insights into their treatment on social media. According to Roth and Basow (2004) sport offers a portrayal of women that is dependent on patriarchal ideals that reduce female athletes to their physicality, often with strong emphasis on their fragility and sexual desirability to men. Scheadler and Wagstaff (2018) built on this perspective noting that constant exposure to repetitive images that glorify male athletes has negative consequences not only for the athletes, but how broader society perceive men and women differently as athletes. Put another way, limited broadcasting of women's sport in traditional media amplifies the notion that women's sport is less exciting and unimportant.

Gender ideology defines women as invaders (Coakley et al., 2011) with men's sport continuing to be seen as the 'standard' to judge sport in terms of status. As a result, women's

versions of sports are often gender marked as the 'other' version. Travers (2008) explains that through "gender marking" women's sport as "women's" (e.g., Women's Australian Football League [AFLW]) in comparison to men's leagues that remain unmarked (e.g., Australian Football League [AFL]) sidelines women's sport as the other and insinuates the men's sport is *the* sport. The implication of gender marking only women's sport creates the assumption that the men's leagues are the national sport, thereby, reiterating the idea that the sport citizenship male. Bruce (2008) further emphasised this point, noting that gender marking identifies men's sports and events as the default. This perspective offers unique insights for this thesis as sport and the sport media nexus remains to be a largely male-dominated product that reflects and reproduces social attitudes and gender hierarchies that remain anchored in traditional ideologies of masculinity and femininity.

Despite the increase in participation of women in sport, female athletes therefore still remain to be trivialised and constrained by rigid heterosexual and heteronormative idealisations of femininity (Fink, 2015). In order to understand why and how this occurs, this thesis draws on the work of Fraser's (2007) theory of Participatory Parity to draw attention to the trivialisation and second-class citizenship of women in the sports field. Participatory Parity is a useful conceptual framework this thesis employed to understand and assess the level of gender inequality in broader society, with it having strong application to sport. Fraser (2007) explains that each gender has a different status in society, where men are socially and economically valued (specifically heterosexual men) over women. Fraser (2007) argues this has led to what she calls a gender injustice. Factoring in women's place in society, where we see the devaluation of unpaid domestic occupations, gender injustice according to Fraser (2007) is two dimensional. The first dimension is 'material equality', which relates to the political and economic apparatus of society. Material equality emphasises the importance of the redistribution and access to economic resources to enable all members of society the means to survive and be independent. The second is 'cultural equality' which relates to the cultural values and norms that govern everyday life. Cultural equality refers to the recognition that all members of society are treated equally and valued. Travers (2008) utilised participatory parity to

assess the climate of the Sport Nexus, since sport can be interpreted as a social institution (Kane, 1996). The current study adopted the contextualisation of Travers (2008) on Participatory Parity to recognise the gender injustice experienced by female athletes who have been denied of economic resources and have been devalued society.

2.2.1 Gender Stratification

In order to understand why female athletes are perceived and treated as inferior, Blumberg's (1984) conceptual discussion of *Gender Stratification* becomes a useful tool as it refers to the hierarchies that occurs within societies. Specifically, normalisation of gender inequity where women are considered second-class citizens and sexual objects for the desire of men. In *A General Theory of Gender Stratification* Blumberg (1984) breaks down how women's economic productivity has been underestimated and the influence of biological factors such as attributing some females ability to birth is associated as dependence and a weakness. Economic power is described to be vital, where women's control of their income and economic resources can contribute to how a woman governs herself (Blumberg, 1984). Similar to the concept of Participatory Parity (Fraser, 2007), economy and control of means of production are recognised by Blumberg (1984) to play a key role in establishing the breakdown of gender stratification, whereby women have the ability to be the actors and control who are able to govern the markets. It is only when women are able to gain control over their image in sport that movements towards equality can begin (Blumberg, 1984; Fraser, 2007). This perspective aids the understanding of the Sport Nexus as the following literature review reveals how female athletes traditionally have been devalued and trivialised, which consequently reflects upon their lack of economic power. Though, as this literature review will reveal later, social media has provided a digital avenue for sportswomen to govern their framing and challenge their cultural and economic devaluation.

This perspective is situated within a Neoliberal Feminist perspective that emphasises and encourages women to be part of the global market and be the agents in control of their product (Rottenberg, 2014). Neoliberal Feminism recognises the individual empowerment of women, through entrepreneurial subjecthood (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Whereby, women are the authors of how they govern themselves and by extension the producers of the products they introduce into the global market. Thorpe et al. (2017) ties the entrepreneurialism that Neoliberalism promotes with how athletes' self-brand themselves and use social media. For example, the WNBA utilized their Twitter account with what they called "dear trolls" videos. They responded to sexist remarks made by users through the use of humour (Spector, 2018). Their response to trolls who trivialise their athleticism could be argued as a form of branding, whereby, the league and their players are utilising their platform to control the market by displaying themselves as women who do not tolerate disrespect. Additionally, their presence on the platform led to a partnership to livestream their season games in 2017, opening a new market through which to gain fans (Glass, 2017). With Twitter being labelled by Statista (Tankovska, 2021) as one of the most popular media platforms, the WNBA's partnership with Twitter is an example of the self-entrepreneurialism of Neoliberal Feminism Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) recognises. Whereby, female athletes are finding different paths to market themselves, where they are in control.

2.3 Not an equal playing field: Female athlete representation in the media

According to Fink (2015) women's participation in sport has increased, however mainstream coverage has declined. A longitudinal study which began in 1989, studied the coverage of women's and men's sport at 5-year intervals in the United States, examining the coverage of local and national televised news media. The research found only 5% of women's sport was being covered in 1989, increasing in 1993 (5.1%) and 1999 (8.7%). However, after 1999 there was a decline that continued between the years of 2004 and 2009 (Cooky et al., 2013). The proportion of coverage

continued to decrease despite the addition of SportCenter in 1999, and ESPN's affiliates news shows KNBC and KCBS in 2009, with only 3% of women's sport covered on SportsCenter in 1999, 2004 and 2009, and 3.2% for KCBS and KNBC combined in 2009 (Cooky et al., 2013; Messner et al., 2006). Kane (2013) highlights the decrease creates an assumption that there is a lack of consumer demand by sports fans for women's sport.

This trend continues in research by Cooky et al. (2013) who labelled 2009 as the year with the lowest percentage of coverage of females in sport in the past two decades, where the WNBA only received 5 segments while the NBA had 153 on U.S. television. An important finding of this research was that coverage of women's sport did not improve over time, rather the news segments reporting women's sport had longer airtime (2 minutes). However, the content of the segments was mostly focussed on objectification and trivialisation, where female athletes were targets of humorous sexualisation, which only reinforced the devaluation of women's sport. Further research found a similar pattern on the international stage. Eastman and Billings (1999) who focused on CBS and NBC's coverage of the Summer and Winter Olympics for the years 1994, 1996 and 1998, found that men were consistently mentioned more in comparison to women. Messner and his colleagues (2013; 2007; 2006) deduced similar results, suggesting that mainstream commercial networks favoured men's sport. Billings and Eastman (2002) research on the coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics also supports this assumption of inequality in coverage of athletes, where male athletes received 53% of airtime, and 47% for female athletes with a focus on gymnastics, swimming, and track-and-field. The favouring of NBC's coverage of men's sports in the Olympics continued into the 2004 Summer Olympics, with male athletes receiving two more hours of televised coverage in contrast to female athletes (Billings & Angelini, 2007). These findings reiterate Connell's (1987) argument of gender order, where institutions in society like sport are experienced through structures that are embedded in gendered power relations that subordinate women and underrepresent their experiences in professional sport.

Interestingly, Billings et al. (2010) credits the association of nationalism with the Olympics and its ability to “trump all other forms of identity” as a factor into why Olympic and International sporting events’ seemingly offer more equitable coverage of women’s sport, in contrast with the domestic leagues mentioned earlier. Similarly, Wensing and Bruce (2003) whose research explored the issue through an Australian context, suggested that national identity can override the lack of traditional media’s coverage of women’s sport. They did however note though that it often had an emphasis on feminine qualities of the athlete. Their study found that while Australian newspapers noted the national significance of track athlete Cathy Freeman in representing not just Australians but also Indigenous Australians, media coverage also focused on gendering Freeman’s identity by reinforcing her heterosexuality. This was done by describing her previous and current relationships in articles in addition to her athletic achievements (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). What this literature review highlights is the selective nature of the media when reporting on the achievements of female athletes with a focus on reporting non-sport related content. Bruce (2008) notes that while international competitions such as the Commonwealth Games and Olympics does provide a greater increased coverage of sportswomen in contrast with domestic leagues, it is often correlated to the success of the athlete and nationalism. Similarly, Billings and Eastman (2003) attributes this to the media’s focus on the spectacle of nations competing with one another. Specifically, when sportswomen succeed and win for their nation, it is only then when there is an increase in coverage. Bruce (2008) highlights that this communicates that women’s sport and female athletes are only regarded as important when they are winning, and when they fail to do so they will remain invisible.

Further research exploring Summer and Winter Olympics between 1996 and 2006 by Billings (2008) found that the Winter Olympics was more likely to cover male athletes, while the Summer Olympics displayed more equitable coverage for female athletes. Billings (2008) notes the increase in coverage for volleyball in the summer Olympics could be attributed to how skilled the women’s team was, though the appeal may be due to the attractiveness and sexual desirability of the female athletes. This finding was challenged by a study conducted on NBC’s coverage of the 2012 Summer

Olympics in London, where Coche and Tuggle (2016) reported that women's sport received more broadcasting opportunities. However, it was limited to typically 'hyper- feminine' sports that focus on aesthetic, grace and movement with little to no contact element, reinforcing that women's sport is only acceptable when it exercises traditional ideas of femininity. These sports include gymnastics, track and field, swimming, beach volleyball and diving. Pedersen and Whisenant (2003) credits the graceful movement of women's bodies in gymnastics as a feminine display and as such, a socially acceptable sport for female athletes to participate in. This stands in contrast with sports like boxing and contact team sports such as football and basketball that have been identified as masculine due to the physicality and aggression displayed, which have been shown to receive less coverage (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2003).

Recent research examining news websites in Australia, Brazil, China, Great Britain and United States, on the 2012 London Olympics does suggest an improvement in the coverage of women's sport (Eagleman et al., 2014). Whereby, none of the six countries favoured in covering male athletes. Tang and Cooper (2012) emphasised that Olympics telecast to be more equitable in coverage and broadcasting in comparison to other televised domestic sport in North America. However, despite the increase in the coverage of female sports (specifically through international sport tournaments such as the Olympics) the selection of coverage on female athletes clearly illustrates continued marginalisation of women's sport. Returning to the material equality that Fraser (2007) participation parity highlights by mainstream media typically favouring (by way of broadcasting and reporting) men's sports, it deprives women's sport from gaining equal opportunities to be seen by viewers and the associated benefits of sponsorship that often build from that coverage. The benefits of the sponsorship of women's sport, acknowledges that female athletes are of equal value than their male counterparts, increases their exposure to the sport market that is overly saturated by men's sports (Morgan, 2019). Limiting the coverage on women's sport not only demonstrates a barrier towards material equality but also plays a role in reinforcing boundaries

towards cultural equality of gender justice as it implies women's second-class citizenship and reinforces that sport is a male domain.

It is important to note that studies previously mentioned have been centred around the coverage and broadcasting by North American networks, and its favouring of men's sports in the previous Summer and Winter Olympics. Toffoletti et al. (2018) discourages assuming that the perspective coming from the Global North could be interchangeable and assumed to be applicable in the Global South, whereby we assume that the North American based scholarship on the lack of coverage of women's sport is representative of the how women's sport is covered and perceived universally. Henne and Pape (2018) emphasised that the production of global knowledge, structures and institutions are embedded in a Global Northern perspective that assumes to be universal despite its Eurocentric worldviews. Given this current study is a comparison of them both, it offers unique insights into this growing area of scholarship and contributes to our understanding of how women's sport is perceived in a Global North and Global South perspective.

Despite research indicating trends that broadcasting coverage is increasing for female athletes, they remain marginalised with studies showing announcers attributing male athlete's successes to their superior courage and athletic consonance, where for female athletes commentary revolved around their physical appearance and femininity (Bruce, 2017). This idea will be explored in the following section of this chapter where a discussion of the framing of female athletes in the media offers insights into how and why marginalisation in sport continues to exist.

2.4 Visual framing of female athletes in mainstream media

Maintaining the masculine status quo of sport requires exclusion or "othering" those who do not properly fit the category, which is apparent in the media framing of female athleticism (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998). The framing of female athletes in the mainstream media represents a multifaceted

and complex terrain. Female athletes are either presented as masculine and hence lesbian (Blinde & Taub, 1992) which results in derogation, exclusion and invisibility; traditional heterosexuality femininity or “softer” forms of masculinity (e.g., tomboy) (Mean & Kassing, 2008). Framing as a concept has been utilised by various scholars, employed to examine the type of content and its presentation in the portrayal of athletes (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Romney & Johnson, 2020). Entman (1993) in The Framing Theory, argued that authors such as journalists and broadcasters have the power to create or promote an issue or message to the direction of their desires, which consequently their audience adopts. Which for sportswomen this becomes an issue due to mass media’s tendency to glorify heterosexual masculine ideas and reinforce and perpetuate inaccurate narratives of femininity. For the purpose of this thesis framing refers to how sportswomen have been presented, and how the narrative of women’s sport is associated as the other in contrast with men’s sports that has been presented as *the* sport.

Knight and Giuliano (2003) argued that the media’s over-emphasis of the female athletes’ relationship with men, has created an assumption that female heterosexuality is an important aspect of a female athlete’s character, more so than their athleticism. Participants in their study favoured articles about female athletes who were portrayed as heterosexual rather than those whose sexual orientation was ambiguous. What this suggests is that female athletes may only be acceptable in broader society when they follow strict ideas of femininity. Similarly, Jones and Greer (2011) found male participants favoured online articles where female athletes’ feminine appearance and a slim body in a sexualised pose was congruent with their feminine sport. This assumption is also supported by Organista et al. (2019) who analysed the attitudes of sport journalists on the media coverage of women’s sport. This study involved a series of interviews with Polish sport journalist to understand attitudes on the coverage and representation of female athletes in sport. They found that female sport journalists presented more negative views that criticised female athletes’ athleticism and appearance more than their male colleagues which they suggested was a result of the treatment and lack of coverage of women in sports becoming internalized by female journalist

(Organista et al., 2019). Organista et al. (2019) results was consistent with previous research, where journalists either displayed neutrality to gender issues of representation within the sport industry (Knoppers & Elling, 2004) or displayed resistance whether unconsciously or consciously in recognizing that their views are an internalised product of the treatment of the female athletes they are reporting on (Gee & Leberman, 2011; Hardin & Shain, 2005, 2006; Lobo et al., 2017; Sherwood et al., 2017). This cycle of internalisation displays a pattern of unconscious bias that can determine the type of content that sport journalists produce, and consequence work to frame the publics opinions on female athletes and the value of women's sport.

Kane (2013) builds on this idea noting that the lack of coverage in women's sport reinforces a narrative that suggests that female athletes are considered less important. The implications of this representation often push women to the sidelines of professional sport. In doing so, their achievements become trivialised, whilst at the same time, they are visually represented as objects to be sexualised and gazed at by men (Messner, 2002; Messner et al., 2000). An example of this is the sexualisation of a now infamous image of Women's Australian Football League (AFLW) player Tayla Harris kicking a goal. Despite photographs of male players in similar poses, this particular image slew of derogatory and sexist remarks that viewed the image as sexual and inappropriate (O'Halloran, 2019a). Mainstream sport media's objectification of sportswomen positions them as sexualized prizes and objects to men instead of being represented as professional sportswomen (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). The repetitive exposure of women in sport in this manner not only impairs the legitimacy of female athletes as athletes in their own right, but has implications for broader society in how women are considered second-class citizens within the sport realm. However, the use of social media has disrupted traditional media's presentation of sportswomen by offering an alternate frame where the female athletes themselves are the authors of their presentation.

2.5 The Digital Revolution in sport: From mainstream media to social media

The advancement of technology has revolutionised the way society is organized and connected. Through technological innovations sport has become a commercialised and globalized product (Creedon, 2014). It has enabled people across the globe to witness sporting events from the comfort of their home through free televised networks or more cost-effective platforms of paid subscriptions. The first digital revolution in the sport industry sought a subscription to satellite or cable digital television coverage (David & Millward, 2015). The change from free televised sporting events to subscription only viewing, not only signifies the commodification of sport and athletes, but a change in who is in control, where consumers are given power to choose the type of broadcasts they want through paid subscriptions and satellite services. This control is further exercised through the second wave of the digital revolution, where paid subscriptions to view sporting events is more accessible through apps on mobile phone devices.

Carr and Hayes (2015) argues that there is little consensus on what defines social media due to the variety of platforms that all offer something unique. In short, social media is used as a communicative tool situated in the digital space, offering networking between people with no geographic or time limits. Sandvig (2015) argues that our use of social media platforms has personalised our personal, professional, and intimate conversations due to the algorithms that make decisions on what we are consuming while being immersed in these platforms. Subsequently, social media can be viewed as a piece of mass media product produced by the Culture Industry (Sandvig, 2015). Despite platform user's being able to share content, there are elements of control through algorithmic content selection and filtering (Sandvig, 2015). It must be considered that the Culture Industry stresses that change occurs only when those in control of the means of production alter the social script. As will be shown in the following section of this thesis, this is difficult to conceptualise due to how content is created and shared on social media.

2.5.1 Breaking down the passiveness of the consumer through social media

The personalisation social media can offer, where platforms such as Twitter and Instagram hold its user accountable for the content they produce, to some degree gives its users ownership. This assumption about social media is supported by Gomez-Diago (2016) who argued that the internet has provided citizens a tool to breakdown their passiveness of being a 'just a consumer' by allowing users to be the producers of content in cyberspace. Put another way, social media platforms have revolutionised the way in which sport organisations and athletes communicate with their fan base. Social media has created a digital space where fans from across the globe are not only able to interact directly with their teams and athletes, but simultaneously other fans, all in real time (Shockley, 2010). This is particularly significant during live sporting events, where fans from all over the world are able to interact with one another and discuss the events of a game as it is happening. For the purpose of contextualising the remainder of this chapter and this research, the following section of this chapter will briefly introduce Twitter to offer context on how female athletes have used the platform to challenge the constraints of mainstream media discussed earlier in this literature review.

2.5.2 Twitter: State a conversation

Twitter was launched in 2006, and is a social media platform intended to be a communicative microblogging site for users to describe their thoughts and activities, and to communicate with other users. User's post 'tweets', which are a maximum of 240 characters, and often contain hashtags, allowing tweets to be categorised by topics. What was unique about Twitter was its short message micro-blogging service (Java et al., 2007). Instead of traditional blogging, which is traditionally longer in content, Twitter encouraged shorter posts where the required

thinking time about the type of content posted required a shorter time, and users were able to tweet more than once a day. According to *Statista*, in the first quarter of 2010, Twitter boasted 30 million active users, and this has continued to grow with 330 million users as of the first quarter of 2019 (Tankovska, 2021). Additionally, the number of published tweets grew from 5,000 per day worldwide in 2006 to 60,000 in 2007, to 500 million per day as of 2021 (Internet Live Stats, 2021; Iqbal, 2020).

The use of Twitter has altered the way the public emote their attitudes, especially in the realm of sports. Cultural sociologist Tomlinson (2007) describes Twitter as an altering phenomenon that we have adopted in our everyday life due to our desire to be continually be present within the online sphere. Tomlinson (2007) refers to this phenomenon as '*telepresence*,' whereby people have become present at a distance, readily available through opening a mobile app.

Research has explored how athletes have used their personal Twitter accounts to establish a personal brand and set of personas to offer a more intimate perspective on their character (Gibbs et al., 2014; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012). However, existing literature is mostly limited to men's North American sports, such as, the Canadian Football League (CFL) (Gibbs et al., 2014), National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), Major Soccer League (MLS), Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) and Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) (Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012).

Ash et al. (2017) emphasised that social media has provided likeminded people a space to discuss popular culture, described as empowering its users to share their opinions and emotions making it a popular platform for sports fans to discuss and banter amongst each other. In this way, the Twitter platform has challenged traditional forms of the one-way media communication experienced in televised reporting discussed earlier, and has provided a faster way to break news (Creedon, 2014; Creedon, 1994; Tomlinson, 2007). Additionally, sports fans go online for easily accessible sport updates and news, absorbing content without the constraints of having to be

present in a sport arena. In a systemic review, Filo et al. (2015) identified that Twitter has become increasingly popular with sport organisations who are using the platform to cultivate their fan base and grow their branding for leagues, teams, and individual athletes. The review found Twitter to be a significant communication tool for sport organisations as it provides real time updates and information generating a participatory atmosphere where fans are able to converse in sport related topics with others without being limited to a geographical site such as a stadium. This interaction, as noted by Creedon (2014), has created an interpersonal, intercultural, and digital connection with fans. Twitter provides a platform for two-way communication, where fans can communicate and express their perspectives and opinions– both positive and negative – in real-time.

An example of this, is found in research conducted by Ash et al. (2017), who investigated Twitter interaction by fans discussing the State of Florida attorney decision to not charge former quarterback of Florida State University Jameis Winston with sexual assault. The research recognised how the majority of fans used Twitter to uphold victim-blaming attitudes, though there was a small portion of users who used their accounts to voice their criticism on the connection between rape and sport culture. The study highlighted how Twitter has given sports fans a voice to express their sport but also political opinions, whether it be to reinforce ideologies or criticise them. Similarly, Hull and Schmittel (2015) noted that Twitter has become a platform where users are able to engage in important topics that are often overlooked by sport organisations such as the impact of concussion related incidents in the National Football League (NFL). Their study highlighted that concussion awareness advocates' missed opportunity during the Superbowl, in opening discussions on the impact of head trauma. Additionally, their research encourages for advocates to utilise their social media networks to engage and challenge important topics that sport organisations, and by extension sport fans overlook.

Previous research has recognised the transformative nature of Twitter in opening avenues, providing a digital space for two-way communications to occur for users to discuss sport and gender

with one another that traditional media had failed to do. An example can be seen in the Twitter conversations surrounding the hiring of the first female full-time assistant coach in the National Basketball Association, Becky Hammon by NBA team San Antonio spurs in 2014 (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016). Their findings found that while there was resistance to the change in sport culture, that criticised Hammon's coaching ability based on her gender, overall, having a space for two-way conversation empowered users to engage with one another and discuss the relationship between the culture of sports and gender.

Another example of this, is a recent video posted on video-sharing platform Tiktok by basketball athlete Sedona Prince, comparing National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) men's and women's training facilities (Deliso, 2021b). The video displayed the women's 'weight' room that only consisted of a single set of dumbbells, and yoga mats, in contrasts to the men's that was well stocked with training equipment. It was later reposted on Twitter and garnered 17.3 million views, opening a discussion on the disparity between the treatment of female and male athletes in the NCAA. The NCAA faced backlash from sport fans that prompted the association to apologise to the public and upgrade the training facilities for the female athletes (Deliso, 2021a).

This is especially significant for women's sport, which traditionally has struggled to gain equal broadcasting opportunities in mainstream media, in contrast to men's sports (Bruce, 2008, 2017; Cooky et al., 2013; Fink, 2015; Messner, 2007; Messner et al., 2010; Messner et al., 1996; Messner et al., 2006). This enables women as fans to show their support and alter the way in which female athletes are perceived and interacted with. This is supported by Vann (2014) who recognized the accessibility of Twitter has given users agency to voice their opinions, which could play a significant role in changing negative attitudes that traditional media has imposed upon women's sport. Mahan and McDaniel (2006) credits this to the accessibility that cyberspace offers, noting that sport fans have been given a space to be the producers the sport narrative. Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018) offer valuable insights into this discussion by outlining the potential transformative aspect of

social media platforms. They outline that social media can be a platform where women's sport are able to challenge the patriarchal nature of sport organisations by constructing their own alternative sporting identities. Using platforms like Twitter or Instagram offer fans a voice, to voice their opinions and engage in conversation with one another.

2.6 Digital Revolution: Females Athletes owning their own image on social media

According to Toffoletti and Palmer (2019) the popularity of digital platforms has led to opportunities for women to offer their own commentary on sports, which has traditionally been reserved for men, whether it be as athletes or fans. This plays a significant role in how female athletes are being framed, but also with the audience social media platforms afford female athletes. Social media has enabled female athletes to showcase their personality and opinions on occasions where traditional media may silence them, allowing them to share information freely to a wide audience (Pegoraro, 2010). This is supported by Thorpe et al. (2017) who argues that social media has given female athletes a platform where they are able to gain control in their representation and potentially build a new audience, being able to shape and mould their sporting femininities online. This is where social media platforms, if explored in the perspective of the Culture Industry, can provide a change in the authors of the production, whereby female athletes are utilising their social media accounts to present more accurate and personal perspectives of who they are. With the limited coverage of women's sport in the mainstream media, this is especially significant.

Thorpe et al. (2017) in their analysis discussed the multilayered and complex terrain that social media affords female athletes, offering multifaceted image that embraces traditional femininity, while simultaneously addressing the objectification and trivialisation intertwined with it. Thorpe et al. (2017) used the example of surfer Alana Blanchard's social media platform on Instagram to discuss the intricacies that female athletes must balance, implementing a third-wave,

post-feminism and neoliberal feminist perspective. Their research highlighted Blanchard's Instagram posts that show her body in bikinis, as a celebration the female body as both empowering and an embracement of womanhood, whilst also recognising such framing could be oppressive by promoting female athletes within a heterosexual white frame. What this suggests is that female athletes simultaneously preserve and counter traditional gender norms and roles in sports. However, within their work, self-presentation appears to be a key idea, whereby, there at least on this platform there is a level of control or at least ownership from the athlete in what is posted (Thorpe et al., 2017). This self-presentation is specifically important, as it can play a part in changing the frame in which women are presented in mass media.

Social networking sites therefore are a space where women have the ability to govern how they are promoted and presented, where females athletes are capitalising on their femininity to market themselves (Banet-Weiser, 2013; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). This can be argued as a form of Fraser's (2007) cultural recognition and by extension political economy of redistribution, where women are establishing their value in society by commodifying their persona in the digital space and controlling their representation and visibility.

2.6.1 Invading the Sport Nexus: Female athletes claiming authority in the digital space

Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) investigated how female? Muslim athletes have utilised social media to present their narratives that challenge dominant discourses and stereotypes. The study utilised Puwar's (2004) concept of Space Invaders to highlight how people of colour who enter spaces that previously have excluded them become space invaders as they disrupt the status quo (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020). One of the examples from the research was a 34-year-old Muslim powerlifter from the United States, and their use of hashtags on Instagram and Facebook to draw

attention to stereotypes about Muslim women that people have in and out of the Muslim community.

Their research emphasised the significance of social media, and how Muslim sportswomen have presented their own narrative. This is significant as it not only challenges the image and stereotypes society has of Muslim women, but it also diversifies and promotes an alternative image that may differ from what has been traditionally presented in the media. Additionally, the research recognises the movement where Muslim sportswomen used hashtag #FIBAAIallowHijab to shed light on the discriminatory policies against Muslim women by the International Basketball Federation that was later overturned. The research emphasised how Muslim sportswomen have used their social media platforms, specifically hashtags to initiate social movements, and defy stereotypical norms.

Further research notes similar opportunities that social media can provide for sportswomen, such as that explained in a study conducted by Pegoraro et al. (2018), who analysed hashtags relating to the US women's FIFA 2015 WWC. The study poses similar findings to Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) where social media offers an alternative representation of sportswomen that challenges the images framed by traditional media discussed earlier. Their findings found that 90% of Instagram users who used hashtags relating to USWNT portrayed images of sportswomen in or preparing for athletic action, presenting an image of sportswomen as powerful and athletic (Pegoraro et al., 2018). These shared images challenged the stereotypes that have trivialised women and suggest sport may be in the turbines of change in regard to who controls athletes' framing within the Sport Nexus. This could be considered transformative as fans who are traditionally docile consumers of sports media have become the producers of content that promotes a more accurate presentation of how we frame sportswomen.

AlKhalifa and Farello (2020) attribute this to the ability to use social media as an instrument to challenge gender norms as a form of soft power, where attraction is used instead of brute force or aggression to positively change perception or desires. Their work studied how the Women's

Football Committee (WFC) from three countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates [UAE]) utilised their social media networks to encourage sport diplomacy. This was achieved through aligning their social media platforms with sport institutions such as FIFA and conducting workshops online. As a result, the WFC controlled the digital social media space and projected their own image of who they were. This subsequently led to the establishment of their own identity as sportswomen through their engagements with major international counterparts, disrupting the perception that members of the WFC's were not regarded as professional athletes.

2.6.2 Social media as tool for Empowerment

Reflecting upon previous literature mentioned above, social media has the potential to empower both female athletes, female fans, and supporters in the sports realm. Firstly, social media has enabled sportswomen a space where they are able to have direct and unfiltered access to express their perspective as athletes offering an image of who they are that challenge traditional image of female athletes that have historically been built on misogyny. Secondly, social media has provided sports fans/supporters an opportunity to express themselves and their engagement with sport. Bruce (2016) refers to these themes that have merged from social media as the *new rules*. Referring to old rules as the representation practices of traditional media where sportswomen are ignored, trivialised, and sexualised. The *new rules* are key themes that have emerged from how social media has revolutionised the sports mediascape, where the themes of *our voices* and *pretty and powerful* are highlighted. *Our voices*, refers to the control that social media has provided not only for sportswomen but their fans. Recognising that there has been a shift in who authors the narratives of women's sport, identifying that sportswomen and their use of social media have a sense of agency and control over their image. The second theme Bruce (2016) introduces is *pretty and powerful*, challenging the sexualisation of the female athlete's body and perceived notions of

inferiority. It reclaims the concept of femininity where it addresses the old frames of women and revolutionises it where femininity is empowering.

Reflecting upon the literature reviewed within this chapter, it can be deduced that social media platforms like Twitter have provided an avenue for sportswomen to have voice of authority when it comes to their narrative as athletes. Specifically, Twitter has become a digital battleground where the old frames associated with women's sport are being challenged by the sport women themselves, and by extension sport fans. It signifies the breakdown of the Sport Nexus, where the consumer the Culture Industry refers to, is no longer passive and have become the producers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Since the launch of Twitter, the social media platform has gained traction and importance in our everyday life. With millions of users, Twitter provides a unique opportunity to explore opinions and discourses on the range of societal issues. This chapter will provide an overview of how this platform was utilised in the context of the current study by outlining the methodology used to explore attitudes on women's sport. With a focus on Australian and North American Leagues and utilising the concepts of micro-aggression and micro-kindness, this study conducted a content analysis to investigate fan attitudes between two time points for each league and national team.

3.2 Study design

Influenced by a critical and feminist approach, this research was designed to employ key concepts discussed in chapter 1 and 2 to better understand dialogue related to women's sport on social media. The work of the aforementioned scholarship provided a solid platform to begin scoping this study, with content analysis chosen as the most appropriate method to collect data and answer the research questions of this study. The study builds on previous scholarship by presenting a strong empirically based discussion which aims to further our understanding of the types of content generated on social media regarding women's sport. The study and its design will be explained in this chapter, including the value of content analysis and how the coding system was developed to justify the approach and account for the studies overall validity and reliability.

3.2.1 Content analysis

Content analysis has been a favoured method in media analysis as it is a unobtrusive method, where the researcher does not intrude or influence how the data is produced (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016). It is a form of analysis that can quantify large sets of qualitative data by coding it based on concepts or themes of previous knowledge or themes that emerge in its analysis (Armat et al., 2018; Carley, 1993; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Within previous literature, Twitter content analysis has not only been useful in providing insight on the types of interactions that take place, but has been used to inform the development of new approaches for preventative health interventions. An example of this includes research that conducted a hashtag and keyword analysis of tweets relating to eating disorders (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2019) and depression (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016) to understand how the topics are discussed in an online environment. Their research found a sense of openness with users discussing their symptoms and views, highlighting that researching social media using content analysis in this way can provide important insights for healthcare professionals in developing targeted prevention methods and create awareness.

In the context of sports, content analysis has been useful in identifying how athletes and organisation use their social media platforms (Adá Lameiras & Rodríguez-Castro, 2020; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Gibbs et al., 2014; Hambrick et al., 2010; Linvill et al., 2012; Wallace et al., 2011), sport reporters use of Twitter to disseminate information (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010), traditional and print media's gendering and portrayal of female athletes (Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Frisby, 2017; Jones et al., 1999; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2003; Pedersen et al., 2003; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Weber & Carini, 2013), fan motivation and enjoyment (Stavros et al., 2014), and fan discourses on sport news and events (Ash et al., 2017; Blaszkowski et al., 2012; Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Sanderson & Truax, 2014). With the network and broadcasting elements of Twitter and its communicative nature, the platform has enabled sport reporting and cultural conversations to occur simultaneously. The simultaneous exchanges in reporting and communication between sport organisations, fans and

athletes is regarded to be important for women's sport in inflicting change in their narrative (Vann, 2014).

The method has therefore enabled the aforementioned researchers to quantify the presence, meanings and relationships of certain words, themes and concepts. It has provided a framework where scholars can not only determine the overall coverage of women's sport, but enabled them to delve further and identify common themes in the way females are portrayed and engaged with on social media. For example, content analysis of women's sport in traditional media has identified the limited coverage which often presents a narrow narrative of female athletes, that often trivialized and objectify their bodies and perpetuated traditional norms of gender (Allen & Frisby, 2017; Cooky et al., 2013; Frisby, 2017; Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Turner, 2014). Contrastingly, there have been research to suggest social media to be a space for progress in how female athletes are (Thorpe et al., 2017; Vann, 2014). Therefore, it was deemed an appropriate research method to tabulate and explore both the negative attitudes against women's sport that but also the positive attitudes. However, before coding could begin a framework was required to be established to aid in the data collection and subsequent analysis.

3.3 Conceptual Content Analysis

This research employed what has been coined as 'conceptual content analysis', whereby key terms and concepts are counted and qualified conceptually (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). This approach enabled for the current study to analyse written, visual and verbal communicative messages, and has been recognised as a suitable method to analyse large empirical datasets (Cole, 1988). As a research method it is designed to understand different patterns and key themes through researchers employing either a deductive or inductive approach to the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). A deductive approach administers a structured or directed form of analysis that is based on previous

knowledge or frameworks (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). An inductive approach on the other hand, highlights key themes that emerge from the analysis where there are no previous knowledge directing the approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Originally this study was situated in the deductive approach, utilising the concepts of micro-aggression and micro-kindness to code the data, however it should be noted that as time progressed the research also employed an inductive approach to illuminate some additional findings that sat outside this original framework (Armat et al., 2018). The following section of this chapter will outline how micro-aggression and micro-kindness as a coding scheme offered a coding framework to understanding the subtle misconceptions and challenges female athletes receive.

3.3.1 Micro-aggression

In 1970 psychiatrist Chester Pierce coined the term *micro-aggression*, described as subtle exchanges to highlight the type of put downs experienced by Black Americans (Pierce et al., 1977). These statements Pierce et al. (1977) described as offensive comments that are often innocuous, though the ideas behind the statement or exchanges have weighted narratives based in stereotypes. Micro-aggressions can occur in different settings, and often those expelling micro-aggressions are sometimes unaware of the impact of their behaviour since the ideas of their comments have been normalised and seeped into everyday dialogue (Nadal et al., 2011). However, the impact it can have on individuals and groups who experience them are quite detrimental, as it can be internalised by those often from minority groups (Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Sue et al., 2007). An example of racial micro-aggression identified by Sue et al. (2007) are buildings in colleges that display only figures of history who are white men. It is described as a micro-aggression especially for people of colour as it insinuates that it is only white men who have made significant contributions to society. Building upon the work of Pierce et al. (1977), Sue (2010b) created a taxonomy of racial micro-aggressions,

breaking the concept down to three different sub-categories, *Micro-insults*, *Micro-assaults*, *Micro-invalidations*.

Micro-insults are communications that convey insensitive and rude messages aimed to demean a person's racial heritage. *Micro-assaults* are conscious derogations primarily communicated through violent verbal, non-verbal or environmental attacks. *Micro-invalidations* are messages that exclude and nullify the thought, feelings, and reality of people of colour. While this taxonomy was built to recognise racial micro-aggression, it has been extended by research in addressing the experiences and reactions of LGBTQI+ micro-aggressions. Research on LGBTQI+ micro-aggressions highlight the assumption of heterosexuality, the application of heteronormative and gender confirming cultures, with the intersections of race in society. Similar to racial micro-aggressions studies, LGBTQI+ micro-aggression research addresses the psychological and physical trauma that can occur, and the deep implications of stereotypes in society (Nadal, 2008, 2018; Nadal et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2011). This understanding of micro-aggression and the sub themes that sit underneath it will be shown to be useful in its application for understanding, collecting and coding data on women's sport and the type of comments being shared and discussed on social media.

The unconscious indignations of micro-aggressions reflect the normalisation of stereotypes against minorities and its existence into everyday dialogue. Traditional media's reinforcement of the trivialisation of women in sport has followed a similar path, where social media has been regarded as a terrain where dominant ideologies reinforced by traditional media, that view women as inferior are being practiced and challenged. In the realm of sports, Kaskan and Ho (2016) identified that there are three key categories of micro-aggressions against women that are very evident when analysing how female athletes have been treated in the media and sport organisations, *Assumption of Inferiority*, *Sexual Objectification*, and *Restrictive Gender Roles*.

Assumption of Inferiority refers to ideas that assume that women are less physical or mentally able than men. It identifies that women are second-citizens, and reiterate that men are the

main and only actors in the sport industry. This theme also recognises that the success of female athletes is attributed to the weakness of the opponent rather than crediting the female athlete who has won. Another aspect to *assumption of inferiority*, is the infantilisation of women being called 'girls' reducing their athletic ability (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan et al., 1994). Kaskan and Ho (2016) argue that the assumption of inferiority of female athletes is attributed to the lack of coverage they have historically had. This was evident in this thesis, and will be explained throughout the chapter.

Sexual Objectification refers to the reduction of a woman to her body, where worth is often measured with the appeal and desirability to men (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). This category of micro-aggression implies that women aren't considered to be equal to men, and are mere objects for the spectacle of men. Additionally, the association of worth and desirability to men reinforce heteronormative ideas. An example of this in sports is, the emphasis on appearance and attractiveness rather than athletic ability of female athletes when it comes to reporting women's sport. The implication of this is it conveys to audiences that the athlete is less powerful and strong, which undermines their athletic ability.

Restrictive Gender Roles are narrow ideas of acceptable behaviours based on gender that are influenced by stereotypical heteronormative ideas of femininity (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). These ideas are strictly defined and originate from heteronormative ideas of where women belong in society. An implication of this is it reinforces heterosexual ideas of femininity, and limits the type of sports that are endorsed. An example of this is Olympics coverage of "feminine" sports like gymnastics or figure skating where it is perceived as feminine as it displays grace and beauty, is given more media attention in contrast with masculine perceived sports (Hardin & Greer, 2009; Knight & Giuliano, 2003). It conveys to the audience that women's sport will only be displayed when they are constrained and display a feminine look.

Similar to other spheres of micro-aggressions, gendered micro-aggression research on sportswomen convey the alienation and othering of sportswomen, denying sportswomen power and reinforces that men are first-class citizens (Allen & Frisby, 2017; Frisby, 2017; Kaskan & Ho, 2016). These concepts were useful for this study in providing a framework to identify and differentiate the various types of micro-aggressions female athletes were exposed to on social media. the sub-categories of micro-aggression, *Assumption of Inferiority*, *Sexual Objectification*, and *Restrictive Gender Roles* was employed as a coding scheme to categorise and address negative sentiments the women's leagues and national team in the current study received.

3.3.2 Micro-kindness

Building upon the research on micro-aggression, Laughter (2014) proposes an anthesis theory of micro-kindness. Defined as, "brief verbal, behavioural, or environmental acts of respect, consciously intended to provide a potential space for positive and humanizing interaction," it counters the negative impacts of micro-aggressions (Laughter, 2014). Sanderson and Gramlich (2016) argue that while there is resistance to sport culture changing, in some spaces sportswomen are being accepted and respected in the sport industry. Recognising micro-kindness in the sport realm is therefore important as there is emerging evidence mentioned in the Chapter 2 that sport fans are creating a different perspective on women's sport that challenges the traditional media's narrative. As such, it was important for this research to account for and quantify this aspect of the data set to best provide an accurate representation of the current sport climate for women.

Most research on micro-aggressions have merged from a mental health and psychology field, and often gathered respondents in a higher degree setting. Laughter (2014) argues that the implementation and adaption into the school context could be very beneficial, especially for educator's in ensuring that they create a safe space for their students and educate them in the

impacts of the different forms of micro-aggressions. The framework consists of actions that emphasise on acknowledgement, the challenging of micro-aggressions and negativity, being conscious and active in creating a humanizing interaction. Bartleet (2019) argues that the implementation of micro-kindness does not negate micro-aggression and the impacts it has had on minorities. Additionally, Laughter (2014) emphasises that while their theory of micro-kindness was in the context and implementation in an educational and community setting, it is applicable at different settings as acts of kindness is a tool to support the change for social justice that recognises that there needs to be a large-scale systemic social change that requires action and reflection. This study has recognised that the community setting referred to by Laughter (2014) could be applicable and substituted with the digital space like Twitter, where sport fans have built a community within one another to engage in discourses related to sports. Therefore, this current study employed the main actions of micro-kindness acknowledgement and the challenging of micro-aggressions to address positive sentiments that the leagues and teams in the study received in their respective timeframe.

3.4 Australian and North American women's sport leagues

The leagues that were selected for the study were based on two variables, popularity in viewership and appearance in sport news channels. As mentioned in chapter 2, previous literature on the sports nexus has been limited to a North American context, specifically men's sports. Coverage, broadcasting and even research on the utilisation of social media platforms by sport organisations, athletes and fans have mostly been directed at men's sport in a predominantly North American context (Brown & Billings, 2012; Browning & Sanderson, 2012; Frederick et al., 2014; Hambrick et al., 2010; Pegoraro, 2010; Pegoraro & Jinnah, 2012; Sanderson & Truax, 2014; Shockley, 2010). Toffoletti et al. (2018) addressed that it is important to recognise that the North American perspective on the Sport Nexus should not be substituted or assumed as universal knowledge. For

this reason, the study will build upon previous work, in two ways, by presenting an Australian and North American perspective and centring it around women's sport. The study will look at both domestic and international teams, since previous research has identified that nationalism appears to play a significant role in lessening the gendering of female athletes in contrast with domestic leagues (Billings et al., 2010; Bruce, 2017; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). The following section will provide an overview of the leagues and national teams included in this study.

3.4.1 Women's Australian Football League (AFLW)

According to an article by Nielson Sport (Allen, 2019), Women's Australian Football League has had the highest interest, in terms of viewership and fan attendance, of all the domestic women's sport league in Australia and labelled it an integral part of the national sporting calendar. Its inaugural season in 2017 boasted a 24,500 attendance in its 22,000 seat capacity Ikon Park stadium (Allen, 2019; Perry, 2019). The historic 2017 season has provided a contrasting perspective to how women's sport is viewed in Australia, where the general public displayed general interest challenging the traditional discourse that women's sport is uninteresting (Kane, 2013). In a study comparing tweets and media coverage surrounding the historical inaugural 2017 games, Sherwood et al. (2019) found that sentiments on Twitter emphasised the positive socio-cultural impact of the AFLW, whilst the media articles inhibited match review and reporting similar to the AFL. Though, there was a small portion of media articles that objectified the players appearance, with a correlation found between the number of articles on players and the attractiveness of their personal life off field. The research provided evidence that the discourses on social media may not necessarily reflect the narratives portrayed in mainstream media (Sherwood et al., 2019).

With the AFLW's continued and growing popularity with the Australian public, it was therefore deemed to be an appropriate women's league to represent Australia for the study, with the WBBL and Matilda's.

The timeframe selected for the AFLW was the first day of the 2017 (3 February) and 2019 season (2 February) respectively. Based on previous literature, it was concluded that 2017 specifically the opening day, was an important date to assess Twitter attitudes (Sherwood et al., 2017)

3.4.2 Women's Big Bash League (WBBL)

Similarly to the AFLW, Nielson Sport reported the Women's Big Bash League to be another domestic women's sport in Australia to have gained traction in fanship, sponsorship and broadcast revenue since its launch in 2015 (Perry, 2019). Cricket Australia displayed great support for the WBBL, arranging a free-to-air broadcast of the opening games on national television in 2015, which had an average of 216,500 viewers in the first two games (Barrett, 2015). The league since its launch continues to be well supported by Cricket Australia who, in 2019, adopted a parental leave policy aimed to support their players and guarantee job security. According to a Commonwealth Bank Women in Sport 2019 study (ACA Research, 2019) the WBBL garnered 2.5 million Australians in viewership in the opening 2018-2019 match. Cricketer Ellyse Perry credited the viewership to the increased exposure and investment to the league, and noted that such broadcasting has the potential to inspire young girls in Australian to participate in sports (ACA Research, 2019).

The timeframe selected for the WBBL was on the first day of the 2016 season (10 December) and 2018 season (1 December). Factoring in a report that recognised season 2 of the WBBL (2016-2017) to have increased in viewership by 67% in contrast with season 1 (Joshi, 2016),

and for consistency purposes of conducting the study in the same time frame as the AFLW, 2016 was deemed the most appropriate year.

3.4.3 Matildas

The Australian Women's Soccer Association (AWSA) was established in 1978 when the league competed in the first World Women's Invitational Tournament in Chinese Taipei, a prelude to the Women's World Cup we have today. Prior to 1995, the women's team were often referred to as the "Female Socceroos," a symbolic name to highlight the second-class citizenship of women in sport, until a televised poll that gave the league its name today (Yap, 2020). Since the establishment of the Women's World Cup, the Matildas have continued to improve with 2011 being marked as one of their best performances where their results in the Asian Cup in 2010 guaranteed a place in the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup. However, despite guaranteeing a place in the Women's World Cup, coverage was lacking. According to a case study by Caple et al. (2011), the Matildas' performance in the 2010 Asian Cup had only gained one-fifth of the coverage that the Socceroos had received, despite the men's national team not performing as successfully. Despite the Matildas outperforming the Socceroos it was reported by ABC News that the men's league had earned \$8 million just for qualifying, in contrast with the Matilda's who only earned \$1 million (O'Halloran, 2019b). The report also detailed that the pay disparity was not due to the men's team gaining revenue which was the presumed assumption but due to "an opaque political process where an arbitrary figure is allocated" (O'Halloran, 2019, para. 9). Consequently, it led to a landmark agreement in 2019 between the Football Federation Australia and the Professional Footballers Australia to close the pay disparity between the national women's and men's teams (Zraick, 2019). Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 2, there is evidence to suggest international sporting events have more equitable coverage in broadcasting women's sport, and attributed nationalism can triumph over gender issues and femininity. Therefore, this study deemed it appropriate to investigate whether the attitudes

surrounding a national team will present a different narrative in contrast with domestic leagues, considering nationalism being labelled to have the potential to override gender politics.

. The timeframe selected for the Matilda's were the teams first game group match in the FIFA Women's World Cup of 2011 (29 June) and 2019 (9 June). Aiming to have consistency in the timeframes similarly to the domestic Australian leagues, the 2015 FIFA WWC was not included in the data analysis.

3.4.4 Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)

The Women's Basketball League Association was established in 1996 with the approval and backing of the National Basketball League (NBA), with its first game being played on June 21, 1997 (Staffo, 1998). Prior to its establishment, the U.S. saw several leagues established, Women's Basketball League (WBL) in 1978 and the American Basketball League (WBL) in 1996. Though both leagues experienced numerous obstacles such as pay disparity between teams and players, mistreatment of players the league and lack of corporate sponsorships are considered the main reasons for its disestablishment.

The WNBA in 2017 was the first women's professional sports league to sign game stream rights deal with Twitter (Booton, 2018; Casey, 2017). This deal is significant for women's sport (and this thesis!) as fans were able to watch games while simultaneously conversing real-time with other fans on the platform. Currently Canada does not have a Canadian team in the WNBA, though there have been current bids for Toronto to establish a team (Bassam, 2019a; Carter, 2019). The success of the Toronto Raptors in the NBA according to NBA Canada's managing director had increased the Canada's interest in basketball which factored into the WNBA securing numerous broadcasting deals with Canadian sporting channels, TSN, Sportsnet and NBA TV Canada (Bassam, 2019b). Canada is

limited in women's professional leagues, despite a report highlighting that the Canadian population being interested in professional women's sport. The study also found that the following for the WNBA is less than the NBA, attributing accessibility as a factor (Summerfield, 2020). Despite the WNBA having no Canadian team, its broadcasting deals with three major Canadian sporting channels highlight that there is a market in Canada. For this reason, the WNBA was deduced to be an appropriate league to represent North American women's sport.

Similarly, to the Australian leagues the timeframe for data collection was on the first day of the 2017 season (13 May 2017) and 2019 season (14 May 2019).

3.4.5 National Women's Hockey League (NWHL)

The National Women's Hockey League was founded in 2015, with a similar mission to the Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL) in providing a home for women's hockey and provide strong female leaders in the community (*NWHL History*, n.d). Women's hockey in North America was represented by two separate leagues, CWHL which folded in 2019 and NWHL. The league was the first professional women's hockey league to be established in the United States. The leagues ability to secure several sponsors that enabled them to pay their players prompted several CWHL players to leave and join the NWHL. Additionally, in 2017 the NHL's New Jersey Devils became the first team to hold stake ownership of the New York Riveters which was renamed to Metropolitan Riveters (Berkman, 2017a). The partnership included providing rent-free facilities for the Riveters club and assisted in sponsorship (Berkman, 2017a, 2019).

The timeframe selected for the NWHL were the first day of the 2016 season (7 October) and 2018 season (6 October). Similarly, to other leagues, the in between 2016 and 2018 season was skipped for consistency purposes.

3.4.6 Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL)

The CWHL was founded in 2007, it was the subsequent to several hockey leagues such as the Central Ontario Women's Hockey league in 1992 which was later succeeded by the previous National Women's Hockey League in 1998 (different to the current NWHL) which eventually folded prior to 2007 (Syrén, n.d.). The CWHL was structured as a non-for-profit league aimed to provide a home for professional hockey players to develop their skills and provide a future for a sustainable women's hockey. The League emphasised the values of inclusion and equal opportunity.

Unlike other women's leagues up until 2017 the CWHL did not compensate their players. This was predominantly due to its non-for-profit business model that heavily relied on volunteer management, donor investors, and corporate sponsors (Rajasekaran, 2019). In 2017 it was reported that players would be paid between \$2,000 - \$10,000, a non-liveable wage, with each club having a \$10,000 salary cap (Berkman, 2017b; Brady, 2017; Nafio, 2017). The League gained an additional collaboration with NHL teams in Boston, Calgary, Montreal and Toronto, and secured broadcasting deals to cover the Clarkson Cup playoffs with broadcasting network Sportsnet (Flynn, 2017). The league appeared to have gained momentum financially and support, however, March 31, 2019 the CWHL released a statement that the league were to cease operations May 1 describing that their business model as "economically unsustainable" (Spencer, 2019). The folding of the team opened conversation on Twitter about the importance of financially supporting women's sport.

On 19th May 2020 the NWHL announced the newest sixth team the Toronto Six, the establishment of a Canadian team was integral for the league since the aftermath of the CWHL in 2019 (NWHL Media, 2020). The shut of the CWHL prompted the NHL to increase their support for the NWHL in ensuring that CWHL players are given the chance to continue playing professional and be compensated (Blackburn, 2019; Jay, 2019).

The timeframe selected for data collection for the CWHL were the league's first game of the 2017 season (15 May) and 2018 season (13 May). For consistency purposed a season gap was skipped in the data collection.

3.4.7 United States Women's National Team (USWNT)

Since the establishment of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 1991, the United States Women's National Team has continued to dominate with four titles, 1991, 1999, 2015 and 2019 (Lewis, 2019). The team proven themselves to not only be a force on the field but a force in challenging the gender pay discrepancies between the Women's and Men's FIFA and demanding equal pay. According to the Wall Street Journal, USWNT games between 2016 and 2018 generated \$50.8 million in revenue and the men's team generated \$49.9 million (Bacham, 2019). In the USWNT's gender discrimination lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF), top tier USWNT players in the team who played and won 20 non-tournament games in a year, were only being paid 38% (maximum \$99,000 annually) of what a top tier USNT player would make (\$263,320) (Wamsley, 2019). The USSF claimed that the differences in pay was due to the ticket sales and gender was not a factor. This lawsuit occurred prior to the 2019 Women's World Cup which ended with the USWNT winning their fourth title in France which was met with a deafening chant of "Equal pay" as the team was awarded their trophy following their victory (Politi, 2019).

3.4.7.1 Selected timeframe for the USWNT The timeframe selected for the USWNT were the teams' first game group match in the FIFA Women's World Cup of 2011 (28 June) and 2019 (11 June). Aiming to have consistency in the timeframes similarly to the domestic Australian leagues, the 2015 FIFA WWC was not included in the data analysis.

3.4.8 Canadian Women's National Team (CANWNT)

The first national women's soccer team was first established on Canada Day, July 1, 1986 by the Canadian Soccer Association in Winnipeg. The national team in their team photo were pictured wearing second-hand men's jerseys and were subjected to strange sport science ideas that led players to eat very little to fight jet lag (Larsen, 2015). After the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup the CANWNT threatened to boycott all international competition after it was revealed that the team's head coach, Carolina Morace, intended to leave due disputes with the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) and the lack of compensation. In 2019, Canadian sport media network TSN reported the CSA had struck a compensation deal for two years with the women's national team that would cover the players performances and competition roster bonuses, image rights, player appearance, travel and accommodation (Davidson, 2019).

The timeframe selected for the CANWNT were the teams' first game group match in the FIFA Women's World Cup of 2011 (26 June) and 2019 (9 June). Aiming to have consistency in the timeframes similarly to the domestic Australian leagues, the 2015 FIFA WWC was not included in the data analysis.

3.5 Data collection

This section will detail the application used to collect tweets and a list of keywords used related to each league and international team. A guide of the coding procedure, with the description of sub-categories of micro-aggression and micro-kindness is provided.

3.5.1 Intercoder reliability

Intercoder reliability measures the extent independent coders are able to evaluate characteristics of a message and reach the same conclusion, indicating the measurement of consistency (Lombard et al., 2010). There is mixed consensus on the most appropriate measurement of intercoder reliability for two reasons, firstly, due to the vast list of measures, secondly, the lack of sufficient information on the processes of calculation for reliability and how results are interpreted (De Swert, 2012). Therefore, a standardised measurement has yet to be determined in content analysis literature. Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) argues, Krippendorff's (2004) alpha to be the most appropriate measurement due to its flexibility, whereby, it can be used with multiple coders, missing data, and account for different sample sizes for numerous variables. For the purpose of this study, Krippendorff's (2004) alpha was used, following previous Twitter content analysis on sport. Whereby, data were coded, analysed, and disagreements between coders were resolved through discussions to refine the description of categories (Ash et al., 2017; Coche, 2017; Frisby, 2017). The coding was undertaken by one researcher, but to ensure intercoder reliability, two additional researchers each independently screened 5% of the sample. According to Hayes and Krippendorff (2007) an alpha greater than 0.8 is considered an acceptable standard of reliability. The intercoder reliability for the current study is presented in table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Intercoder Reliability

Leagues	% agreement	Krippendorff's Alpha
AFLW 2017	95.19	0.89
AFLW 2019	94.62	0.91

WBBL 2016	94.38	0.89
WBBL 2018	95.92	0.92
Matildas 2011	91.55	0.85
Matildas 2019	96.77	0.94
WNBA 2017	99.49	0.99
WNBA 2019	98.99	0.98
NWHL 2016	94.34	0.89
NWHL 2018	97.22	0.95
CWHL 2016	100	1
CWHL 2018	93.94	0.88
USWNT 2011	98.06	0.94
USWNT 2019	97.09	0.95
CANWNT 2011	97.03	0.95
CANWNT 2019	98.06	0.96

3.5.2 Application and coding procedure

Based on pilot testing and existing literature, *Web Scraper* Google Chrome extension was deemed the most suitable application to retrieve tweets for the current study. *Web Scraper* is a web data scraping Google Chrome plug in tool that is designed to examine and extract data from a web page. The information retrieved from the application is reliant on the sitemap which instructs the application to retrieve specific information from a web page (Dastidar et al., 2016; Love et al., 2018). For this specific study, the application was used to crawl tweets by utilising Twitter's Advanced Search page to conduct a query search. Twitter's Advanced Search enables the user to conduct a query search of a combination of keywords, within a specific time frame. The approach used for the current study was based on previous research (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2019; Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016), using keywords and timeframes provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

List of keywords and date used for Twitter Advanced Search

League	Country	Search terms	Year searched	Sample Size intended to be collected
AFLW	Australia	AFLW	2017	2017: (n = 1000)
			2019	2019: (n = 1000)
WBBL	Australia	WBBL02*	2016	2016: (n = 1000)
		WBBL04*	2018	2018: (n = 1000)
		ThunderWBBL		
		RenegadesWBBL		
		StrikersWBBL		
		HurricanesWBBL		
		SexersWBBL		
		*WBBL02 specific to 2016		
		*WBBL04 specific to 2018		
Matildas	Australia	Matildas	2011	2011: (n = 1000)
		TheMatildas	2019	2019: (n = 1000)
WNBA	Unites States	WNBA	2017	2017: (n = 2000)
		lvaces	2019	2019: (n = 2000)
		dallaswings		
		wnbachicagosky		
		la_sparks		
		pheonixmarcury		
		indianafever		
		connecticutsun		
		nyliberty		
		washmystics		
		minnesotalynx		
		seattlestorm		
		atlantadream		
NWHL	United States	NWHL	2016	2016: (n = 1000)
		thebostonpride	2018	2018: (n = 1000)
		buffalobeauts		
		ctwhal_NWHL		
		riveters		
		whitecapshockey		
		thetorontosix		
CWHL	Canada	CWHL	2016	2016: (n = 1000)
		thecwhl	2018	2018: (n = 1000)

		torontocwhl		
		thundercwhl		
		infernocwhl		
		worcestercwhl		
		kunluncwhl		
		lescanadiennes		
		wearethegame		
USWNT	Unites States	USWNT	2011	2011: (n = 1000)
			2019	2019: (n = 1000)
CANWNT	Canada	CANWNT	2011	2011: (n = 1000)
		CANADARED	2019	2019: (n = 1000)
		WWC2011 CAN*		
		WWC2011 CANADA*		
		WWC CANADA		
		* Specific to 2011 only		

3.5.3 Keywords for data collection.

Keywords were a combination of the acronyms of the women's leagues (e.g., AFLW) and the usernames of respective teams. Keywords were determined after an initial scoping search, which found that some teams were more commonly referred to by their nickname (e.g., Matildas) than by the national team acronym (e.g., AUSWNT).

3.5.4 Sample size for each league or team.

The sample size intended to be collected was 1000 tweets for Australian women's league and 2000 tweets for North American women's league. The sampling size of 1000 tweets was based on Takahashi et al. (2015) sample size and taking into consideration the scope of the Master of Research, 1000 tweets per Australian league and 2000 tweets per North American league was deemed appropriate and a realistic amount for one person to code. For North America, the sampling size was doubled to cater to the geographical size difference and population of North America in comparison to Australia. The 2000 tweets were split between USWNT and CANWNT, and CWHL and NWHL. Unlike the men's National Hockey League, the women's league was split into competing leagues until the CWHL's closure in 2019, though as of recently the NWHL did add a sixth team to include a Canadian team. Additionally, a simple random sampling technique (SRS) was replicated based on Takahashi et al. (2015), where a random sample of data or population is collected from what is collected.

3.5.4.1 Initial screening The tweets collected either contained, or were replies to tweets that contained, the acronyms and keywords that were posted within the given time frame identified in Table 1.1. The tweets retrieved by *Webscraper* contained the text of the tweet, user's Twitter username and Twitter handle. Once tweets were collected using the *Webscraper* extension, they were organised by username and screened using International Business Machines' Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) to remove multiple tweets under one username. This was done to ensure that only one tweet was representative of one Twitter user, and is in line with previous research (Haque & Park-Poaps, 2019). For leagues that had more tweets than the intended sample sizes, tweets were randomized, and 1000 tweets were extracted using IBM SPSS. For the purpose of respecting the privacy and identities of the Twitter users, the usernames and Twitter handles were removed prior to analysis. The purpose of this study was to determine the themes of attitudes towards the leagues and teams, therefore tweets were not reported verbatim in this study.

3.5.5 Coding procedure and categories

As previously mentioned in chapter 2 review *Micro-aggressions*, refer to subtle statements or jokes that assumes inferiority (Sue, 2010c). In the sphere of women's sport, micro-aggressions are often a combination of assumed inferiority and objectification that trivialize women's athleticism (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). Micro-kindness is the antithesis of micro-aggression that practices verbal, behavioural and or environmental acts of respect intended to create a positive space and environment for interaction (Laughter, 2014).

3.5.5.2 Neutral tweets. tweets that were categorised as neutral comprised of content that did not fall into in any of the categories of micro-aggression or micro-kindness. Tweets coded as neutral were betting related links, a majority of betting related tweets were promotional links that did not express direct opinion or on the league itself, therefore it was deemed as neutral. Tweets comprised of shared links of news articles without further comments or opinion were also labelled as neutral, while sport articles provide readers with an opinion, it was regarded not plausible to go through every link to gain an understanding of attitudes the writer was attempting to convey.

3.5.5.3 Coding procedure For the first stage of analysis for this study, tweets were analysed and coded on the presence or absence of micro-aggression and micro-kindness. If the tweet did not meet criteria it was coded as not present (neutral).

Table 3.3

Identifying micro-aggression and micro-kindness

Are there any themes of micro-aggression or micro-kindness present?	
0	Not present (Neutral)
1	Micro-aggression present
2	Micro-kindness present

The second stage of coding grouped tweets that were identified as present in micro-aggression and micro-kindness into sub-categories. Micro-aggression sub-categories were based on themes identified by Kaskan and Ho (2016), Frisby (2017) and Sanderson and Gramlich (2016) that were specifically directed at women in sport. These themes were a simplified taxonomy of Sue's (2010a, 2010c) interpretations of micro-aggression. The key themes that were implemented into the

study were: *Assumption of inferiority*, *Sexual Objectification* and *Restrictive Gender Roles*. The sub-categories of micro-aggressions provided a deductive approach in categorisation, where the data were categorised in an operational way from previous literature (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). However, during the screening process, this study identified an inductive approach similar to Sanderson and Gramlich (2016) was important. Whereby, a category was deduced based on the themes that emerged from the data. Therefore, for the current study, a fourth category *General dislike* was created to capture the general negative attitudes of Twitter users towards the leagues, that did not fit the other sub-categories of micro-aggression. The fourth category was similar to the observations of Sanderson & Gramlich (2016) on the attitudes regarding the employment of Becky Hammond by the San Antonio Spurs of the NBA in 2014.

The sub-categories for micro-kindness were based on Laughter's (2014) list of actions of micro-kindness, aimed to reverse and prevent micro-aggression from occurring. Key actions listed were *acknowledgement* and *challenge*. Despite the list of actions being intended for an educational space, Laughter (2014) highlighted that these key actions were applicable in community settings. Similarly, to the creation of a fourth sub-category for micro-aggression, a third sub-category, *Excitement* was created for micro-kindness to emphasise the general interest and excitement of sport fans. This category was based on previous content analysis of Twitter attitudes on women's sport that have highlighted how social media have the potential to propose contrasting views on female athletes that are positive (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Sherwood et al., 2019; Vann, 2014).

Table 3.4

Coding descriptors of the sub-categories of micro-aggression

Code	Category	Description and characteristics
1.1	Assumption of inferiority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notion that women are less physical or mentally able than men. • Attributing win on opponent's weakness or luck rather ability of the athlete or team. • Language used – referring to women as <i>girls</i> in a trivializing manner, or other terms that perpetuate female athletes as less than in contrast to their male counterpart.
1.2	Sexual Objectification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing the athlete to their body, as a sexualized object. • Sexualisation of female athletes where worth is measured by sexual desirability to men. • Assuming and reinforcing heterosexuality upon the athlete, or assumption on the athletes sexual orientation and gender identity based on their looks. • Emphasis on visual appearance rather athletic function, this includes the emphasis on clothing or hair.
1.3	Restrictive gender role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined boundaries of acceptable behaviours based on traditional gender norms. • Stereotypical characteristics of womanhood and femininity.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restricting abilities to one set league, (i.e., talking negatively of the AFLW in comparison to WBBL or other leagues or negatively comparing the women's league to its counterpart men's league)
1.4	General dislike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of general dislike with or without explanations that does not fit description and characteristics to above sub-categories, including inflammatory comments with no context. The resistance to women's sport and achievements.

Note: The description of each sub-categories of micro-aggression were based on the descriptions and findings of Allen and Frisby (2017); Frisby (2017); Kaskan and Ho (2016); Sanderson and Gramlich (2016).

Table 3.5

Coding descriptors of subcategories of micro-kindness

Code	Category	Description
2.1	Acknowledgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The acknowledgment and expression of gratitude towards the female athlete/team. Praising the team or female athlete for the accomplishment, triumphs or athleticism.
2.2	Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The challenging of micro-aggressions, negative language or attitudes made by other users.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing and critical analysis of any variations of micro-aggressions this include the issues of gender disparities between women's and men's league.
2.3	Excitement/ interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expression of excitement towards female athlete/team. Any expression of interest, this can include, wishing the team good luck – opposite of the sub-category of micro-aggression (1.4 general dislike)

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study. Descriptive results on the frequency and percentage of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets on each women's league will be presented. Followed by descriptive result of the frequency and percentage of micro-aggression and micro-kindness sub-categories. Additionally, this chapter will present the difference in the frequencies and percentages between the two time points selected for each league and international team, to explore changes in attitudes toward women's sport over time.

4.2 Descriptive results

Australian leagues that did not meet the 1000 tweets sample size included the WBBL (2016, n = 808; 2018, n = 545), and Matildas 2011 (n = 793). North American leagues that did not meet the 2000 tweets sample size that were split between two leagues, Canadian and American league: CWHL 2016 (n = 139), CWHL (n = 354), NWHL 2016 (n = 475), NWHL 2018 (n = 404), CANWNT 2011 (n = 992). For example, in Australia, the search for tweets related to the opening day of the WBBL seasons in 2016 and 2018 retrieved 808 and 545 tweets, respectively, and the search for tweets relating to the Matildas' first international game in 2011 retrieved only 793 tweets. In North America, the search for tweets related to the opening day of the CWHL retrieved 139 tweets in 2016 and 354 tweets in 2018, while the search for the NWHL retrieved 475 tweets in 2016 and 404 in 2018.

Using the approach described in section chapter 3, tweets were categorised into the categories of 'micro-aggressive' (i.e., subtle statements or jokes insinuating the inferiority of women), 'micro-kindness' (i.e., verbal acts of respect, acknowledgement and challenging of micro-

aggression), or 'neutral' (i.e., tweets that did not fall into micro-aggression or micro-kindness category, betting, promotional or news links). Table 4.1 provides a high-level overview of the number and proportion of tweets in each category.

Table 4.1.

Total number of tweets collected across leagues and national teams

League/team	Micro-aggression	Micro-kindness	Neutral	Tweets collected
AFLW 2017 (t1)	38 (3.8%)	653 (65.3%)	309 (30.9%)	N = 1000
AFLW 2019 (t2)	121 (12.1%)	457 (45.7%)	422 (42.2%)	N = 1000
WBBL 2016 (t1)	48 (5.9%)	400 (49.5%)	360 (44.6%)	N = 808*
WBBL 2018 (t2)	27 (5%)	275 (50.5%)	243 (44.6%)	N = 545*
Matildas 2011 (t1)	12 (1.5%)	240 (30.3%)	541 (68.2%)	N = 793*
Matildas 2019 (t2)	56 (5.6%)	350 (35%)	594 (59.4%)	N = 1000
WNBA 2017 (t1)	235 (11.8%)	421 (21.1%)	1344	N = 2000
WNBA 2019 (t2)	133 (6.7%)	586 (29.3%)	(67.2%)	N = 2000
			1281	
			(64.1%)	
NWHL 2016 (t1)	15 (3.2%)	176 (37.1%)	284 (59.8%)	N = 475*
NWHL 2018 (t2)	9 (2.2%)	148 (36.6%)	247 (61.1%)	N = 404*
CWHL 2016 (t1)	2 (1.4%)	69 (49.6%)	68 (48.9%)	N = 139*
CWHL 2018 (t2)	17 (4.8%)	138 (39%)	199 (56.2%)	N = 354*
USWNT 2011 (t1)	82 (8.2%)	465 (46.5%)	453 (45.3%)	N = 1000
USWNT 2019 (t2)	115 (11.5%)	392 (39.2%)	493 (49.3%)	N = 1000
CANWNT 2011 (t1)	98 (9.9%)	322 (32.5%)	572 (57.7%)	N = 992*

CANWNT 2019 (t2)	14 (1.4%)	499 (49.9%)	487 (48.7%)	N = 1000
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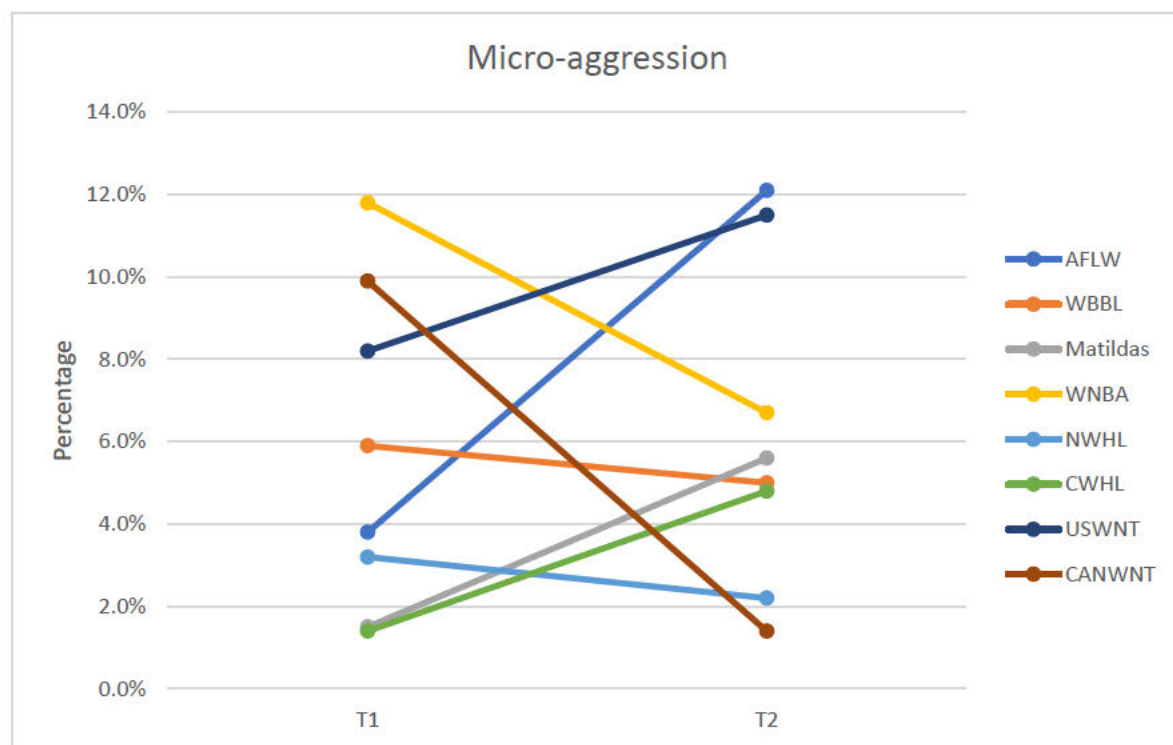
Notes: *Fewer than 1,000 tweets collected, t1 = time point 1, t2 = time point 2

4.2.1 Micro-aggression and micro-kindness: Changes in sentiments over time

As shown in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1, the proportion of micro-aggressive tweets increased from time point 1 to time point 2 for the AFLW, Matildas, CWHL and USWNT, and decreased over time for WBBL, WNBA, NWHL and CANWNT. Additionally, in Table 4.1 and figure 4.2, the proportion of tweets categorised as micro-kindness increased from time point 1 and time point 2 for the WBBL, Matildas, WNBA, and CANWNT, and decreased over time for AFLW, NWHL, CWHL, USWNT.

Figure 4.1

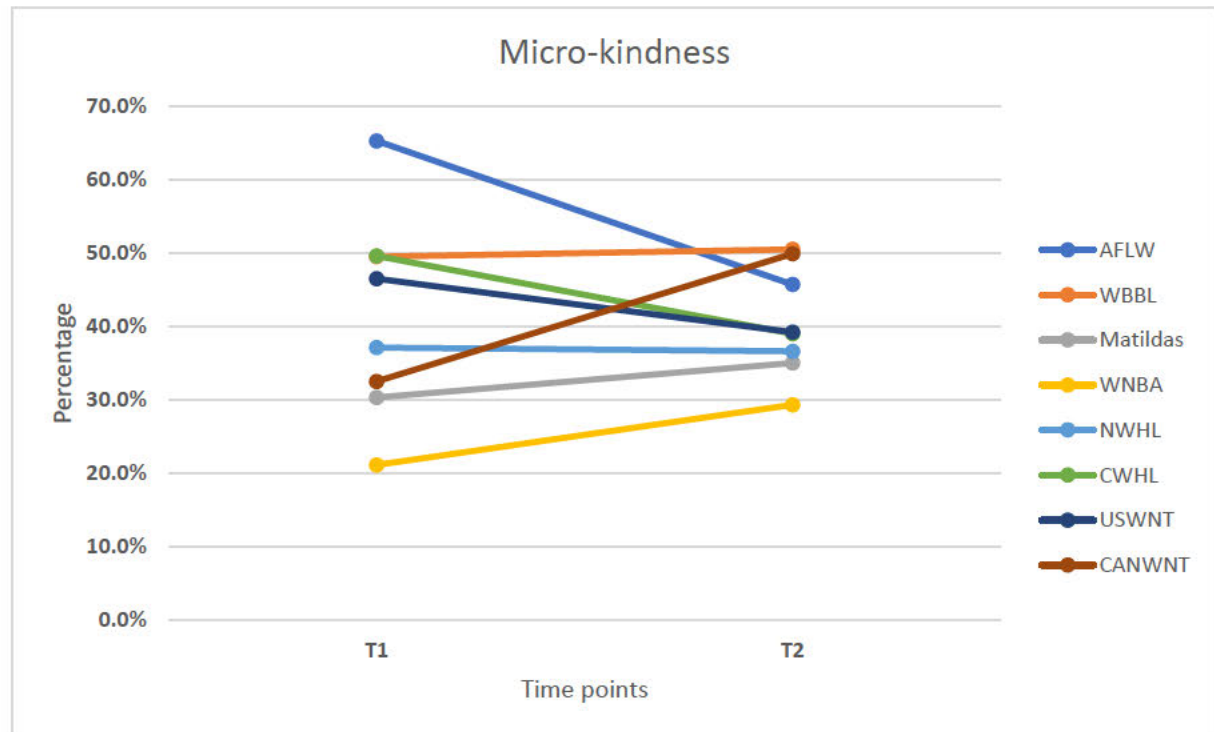
Changes in proportion of micro-aggressive tweets over time.



Note: t1 = time point 1, t2 = time point 2

Figure 4.2

Changes in proportion of micro-kindness tweets over time



Note: t1 = time point 1, t2 = time point 2

4.3 Descriptive results for individual leagues and national teams

This section will present descriptive results for each respective league and national team at each time point, and will provide a detailed description of the proportion of tweets within each sub-category of micro-aggression (assumption of inferiority, sexual objectification, restrictive gender roles and general dislike) and micro-kindness (acknowledgement, challenge, excitement).

4.3.1 Australian Football League Women's (AFLW)

Tweets related to the AFLW 2017 first day of opening season met the N = 1000 tweet extraction criteria. Of the 1000 tweets, 653 (65.3%) coded as micro-kindness, followed by 309 (30.9%) neutral, and 38 (3.85%) micro-aggression (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

AFLW table of frequencies and percentages of micro-aggressions, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

AFLW	T1 (2017, N = 1000)			T2 (2019, N = 1000)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	38 (3.8%)	38 (100.0%)	5.5%	121 (12.1%)	121 (100.0%)	20.9%
Assumption of inferiority	6 (0.6%)	6 (15.8%)		16 (1.6%)	13.2%	
Sexual Objectification	1 (0.1%)	1 (2.6%)		6 (0.6%)	5.0%	
Restrictive gender roles	9 (0.9%)	9 (23.7%)		43 (4.3%)	35.5%	
General dislike	22 (2.2%)	22 (57.9%)		56 (5.6%)	46.3%	
Micro-kindness	653 (65.3%)	653 (100.0%)	94.5%	457 (45.7%)		79.1%
Acknowledgement	229 (22.9%)	229 (35.1%)		90 (9.0%)	19.7%	
Challenge	89 (8.9%)	89 (13.6%)		103 (10.3%)	22.5%	
Excitement	335 (33.5%)	335 (51.3%)		264 (26.4%)	57.8%	
Neutral	309 (30.9%)			422 (42.2%)		

A total of 57.9% of all micro-aggressive tweets in AFLW 2017 were categorized as general dislike, while 23.7% were categorized as restrictive gender roles. Additionally, a total 51.3% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 35.1% were categorised as acknowledgement, and 13.6% as challenge.

Tweets related to 2019 of the AFLW met the N = 1000 tweet extraction criteria, with 457 (45.7%) categorised as micro-kindness, followed by 422 (42.2%) neutral, and 121 (12.1%) as micro-aggression (table 4.2).

Of the 121 micro-aggressive tweets, a total of 46.3% were categorised as general dislike, while 35.5% were categorised as restrictive gender roles as second most frequent of micro-aggression. Of 457 micro-kindness tweets, a total of 57.8% were categorised as excitement, followed by challenge with 22.5% as the second most frequent.

Between the AFLW 2017 and 2019 seasons, *general dislike* continued to be the highest frequent form of micro-aggression. Similarly, the order of frequency of each category remained the same. Between the two season there was an increase of 8.3% of micro-aggression. *Excitement* category remained to be the most frequent form of micro-kindness within the 2017 and 2019 season. However, the order of frequency of *acknowledgement* and *challenge* changed between 2017 and 2019. A 22.6% decrease in micro-kindness was deduced between the AFLW 2017 and 2019 season.

4.3.2 Women's Big Bash League (WBBL)

Tweets collected and in relation to the first day of the WBBL 2016 season did not meet the 1000 tweets cap, only extracting n = 808 with 400 (49.5%) appearing as micro-kindness, followed by 360 (44.6%) neutral tweets, and 48 (5.9%) micro-aggression.

Table 4.3

WBBL frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

WBBL	T1 (2016, N = 808)			T2 (2018, N = 545)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	48 (5.9%)	48 (100.0%)	10.7%	27 (5.0%)	27 (100.0%)	8.9%
Assumption of inferiority	7 (0.9%)	14.6%		3 (0.6%)	11.1%	
Sexual Objectification	4 (0.5%)	8.3%		6 (1.1%)	22.2%	
Restrictive gender roles	4 (0.5%)	8.3%		18 (3.3%)	66.7%	
General dislike	33 (4.1%)	68.8%		0 (0.0%)	0.0%	
Micro-kindness	400 (49.5%)	400 (100.0%)	89.3%	275 (50.5%)	275 (100.0%)	91.1%
Acknowledgement	295 (36.5%)	73.8%		81 (14.9%)	29.6%	
Challenge	22 (2.7%)	5.5%		20 (3.7%)	7.3%	
Excitement	83 (10.3%)	20.8%		174 (31.9%)	63.3%	
Neutral	360 (44.6%)			243 (44.6%)		

A total of 68.8% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 14.6% were categorised as assumption of inferiority, followed by categories sexual objectification and restrictive gender both with 8.3%. Additionally, 73.8% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as acknowledgement, while 20.8% were categorised excitement as the second most frequent micro-kindness sub-category.

Similarly, to the 2016 season, tweets collected on the first day of the 2018 season relating to the WBBL did not meet the 1000 tweets cap, only extracting $n = 545$ tweets with 275 (50.5%) micro-kindness tweets, followed by 243 (44.6%) neutral tweets, and 27 (5%) micro-aggression tweets. A total of 66.7% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as restrictive gender roles, with 22.2% categorised as sexual objectification.

Between the 2016 and 2018 WBBL season the most frequent form of micro-aggression changed from general dislike to restrictive gender roles, with tweets from 2018 appearing to have no general dislike. Additionally, a 0.9% decrease between micro-aggression tweets was found, with users appearing to have tweeted less in 2018 in relation to the WBBL. Similarly, the frequency of micro-kindness tweets changed from acknowledgement to excitement. Additionally, while the frequency of micro-kindness appears to have decreased, in proportion to the tweets collected there was a 1% increase.

4.3.3 Matildas

Tweets collected in relation to the Matildas international game in 2011 did not generate the 1000 tweets, only, only ($n = 793$) tweets were collected, with 541 (68.2%) regarded as neutral tweets, followed by 240 (30.3%) micro-kindness, and only 12 (1.5%) micro-aggression tweets.

Table 4.4

Matildas frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

Matildas	T1 (2011, N = 793)			T2 (2019, N = 1000)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	12 (1.5%)	12 (100.0%)	4.8%	56 (5.6%)	56 (100.0%)	18.3%
Assumption of inferiority	0 (0%)	0%		3 (0.3%)	5.4%	
Sexual Objectification	3 (0.4%)	25%		7 (0.7%)	12.5%	
Restrictive gender roles	3 (0.4%)	25%		7 (0.7%)	12.5%	
General dislike	6 (0.8%)	50%		39 (3.9%)	69.6%	
Micro-kindness	240 (30.3%)	240 (100.0%)	95.2%	350 (35%)	350 (100.0%)	81.7%
Acknowledgement	(7.2%)	23.8%		127 (12.7%)	36.3%	
Challenge	(0.5%)	1.7%		23 (2.3%)	6.6%	
Excitement	(22.6%)	74.6%		200 (20%)	57.1%	
Neutral	541 (68.2%)			594 (59.4%)		

A total of 12 micro-aggression tweets were categorised as 50% as general dislike, while 25% were categorised as sexual objectification and restrictive gender roles.

Tweets collected in relation to the Matilda's game in 2019 did generate 1000 tweets, with 594 (59.4%) neutral tweets, followed by micro-kindness with 350 (35%), and micro-aggression 56 (5.6%). A total of 69.6% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, followed by 12.5% categorised as sexual objectification and restrictive gender. Additionally, a total of 57.1% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 36.3% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 6.6% coded as challenge.

The 2011 first match of the FIFA WWC for the Matildas did not meet the tweet criteria. However, in 2019 it did meet the criteria. There was a 4.1% increase in micro-aggression tweets when comparing 2011 and 2019. General dislike remained to be the most frequent form of micro-aggression. However, the frequency for other sub-categories of micro-aggression changed. Similarly, excitement remained the most frequent form of micro-kindness, with the order of frequency of other sub-categories also remained. Additionally, micro-kindness was deduced to have a 4.7% increase.

4.3.4 Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA)

Tweets collected in relation to the WNBA's first day of the 2017 season met the 2000 tweets, with 1344 were regarded as neutral tweets (14.6%), followed by 421 (21.1) micro-kindness, and 235 (11.8%) micro-aggression.

Table 4.5

WNBA frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

WNBA	T1 (2017, N = 2000)			T2 (2019, N = 2000)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	235 (11.8%)	235 (100.0%)	35.8%	133 (6.7%)	133 (100.0%)	18.5%
Assumption of inferiority	12 (0.6%)	5.2%		16 (0.8%)	12%	
Sexual Objectification	23 (1.2%)	9.8%		13 (0.7%)	9.8%	
Restrictive gender roles	51 (2.6%)	21.7%		30 (1.5%)	22.6%	
General dislike	149 (7.5%)	63.4%		74 (3.7%)	55.6%	
Micro-kindness	421 (21.1%)	421 (100.0%)	64.2%	586 (29.3%)	586 (100.0%)	81.5%
Acknowledgement	95 (4.8%)	22.6%		106 (5.3%)	18.1%	
Challenge	34 (1.7%)	8.1%		98 (4.9%)	16.7%	
Excitement	292 (14.6%)	69.4%		382 (19.1%)	65.2%	
Neutral	1344 (67.2%)			1281 (64.1%)		

A total of 63.4% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 21.7% were categorised as restrictive gender, followed by 9.8% coded as sexual objectification, and 5.2% as assumption inferiority. Additionally, a total of 69.4% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 22.6% were categorised as acknowledgement.

Tweets collected in relation to the WNBA's first day of the 2019 season met the 2000 tweets, with 1281 (64.1%) as neutral, followed by micro-kindness 586 (29.3%), and micro-aggression 133 (6.7%). A total of 55.6% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while, 22.6% were categorised as restrictive gender, followed by 12% coded as assumption of inferiority, and 9.8% as sexual objectification. Additionally, a total of 65.2% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 18.1% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 16.7% as challenge.

There was a 5.1% decrease in micro-aggression between the 2011 and 2019 WNBA related tweets, with general dislike as the most frequent form of micro-aggression, however the order of frequency for the other sub-categories of micro-aggression changed. Similarly, the excitement category of micro-kindness remained to be the main form of micro-kindness. The order of frequency of the other sub-categories also was consistent. Additionally, there was an 8.2% increase in micro-kindness.

4.3.5 National Women's Hockey League (NWHL)

Tweets collected in relation to the first day of the NWHL's 2016 season did not meet 1000 tweets, only (n = 475) tweets were collected, with 284 (59.8%) categorised as neutral, followed by micro-kindness 176 (37.1%) and micro-aggression 15 (3.2%).

Table 4.6

NWHL frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

NWHL	T1 (2016, N = 475)			T2 (2018, N = 404)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	15 (3.2%)	15 (100.0%)	7.9%	9 (2.2%)	9 (100.0%)	5.7%
Assumption of inferiority	0 (0.0%)	0.0%		1 (0.2%)	11.1%	
Sexual Objectification	11 (2.3%)	73.3%		2 (0.5%)	22.2%	
Restrictive gender roles	0 (0%)	0.0%		0 (0.0%)	0.0%	
General dislike	4 (0.8%)	26.7%		6 (1.5%)	66.7%	
Micro-kindness	176 (37.1%)	176 (100.0%)	92.1%	148 (36.6%)	148 (100.0%)	94.3%
Acknowledgement	81 (17.1%)	46%		58 (14.4%)	39.2%	
Challenge	10 (2.1%)	5.7%		14 (3.5%)	9.5%	
Excitement	85 (17.9%)	48.3%		76 (18.8%)	51.4%	
Neutral	284 (59.8%)			247 (61.1%)		

A total of 73.3% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as sexual objectification, while 26.7% were categorised as general dislike. Additionally, a total of 48.3% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 46% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 5.7% as challenge.

Tweets collected in relation to the first day of the NWHL's 2018 season did not meet the 1000 tweets, only (n = 404) was collected with 247 (61.1%) categorised as neutral followed by micro-kindness 148 (36.6%), and micro-aggression 9 (2.2%). A total of 66.7% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 22.2% were categorised as sexual objectification, followed by 11.1% coded as assumption of inferiority. Additionally, a total of 51.4% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 39.2% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 9.5% were coded as challenge.

Both Twitter samples surrounding the first day of the 2016 and 2018 NWHL did not meet the intended 1000 tweets, with 2018 to have had less tweets collected in contrast with 2016. Despite the frequency of micro-aggression to be higher in 2016 than 2018, in proportion to the tweets collected there was a 1% decrease in micro-aggression. The most frequent form of micro-aggression changed between 2016 and 2018, from sexual objectification (73.3%) to general dislike (66.7%). Additionally, the order of frequency for the other sub-categories of micro-aggression changed, and category restrictive gender roles was not identified. Excitement was consistently the most frequent form of micro-kindness for both 2016 and 2018, with other sub-categories having no change in the order of frequency. Similarly, to micro-aggression, despite a higher frequency in micro-kindness in 2016 in contrast to 2018, percentage in proportion to the tweets collected there was a 0.5% decrease.

4.3.6 Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL)

Tweets collected in relation to first day of the CWHL's 2016 season did not meet the criteria of 1000 tweets, only collecting (n = 139), with 69 (49.6%) categorised as micro-kindness tweets followed by neutral 68 (48.9%) tweets, and micro-aggression 2 (1.4%).

Table 4.7

CWHL frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

CWHL	T1 (2016, N = 139)			T2 (2018, N = 354)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	2 (1.4%)	2 (100.0%)	2.8%	17 (4.8%)	17 (100.0%)	11%
Assumption of inferiority	0 (0.0%)	0.0%		1 (0.3%)	3.9%	
Sexual Objectification	0 (0.0%)	0.0%		10 (2.8%)	58.8%	
Restrictive gender roles	1 (0.7%)	50%		3 (0.8%)	11.5%	
General dislike	1 (0.7%)	50%		3 (0.8%)	11.5%	
Micro-kindness	69 (49.6%)	69 (100.0%)	97.2%	138 (39.0%)	138 (100.0%)	89%
Acknowledgement	19 (13.7%)	27.5%		26 (7.3%)	18.8%	
Challenge	5 (3.6%)	7.2%		11 (3.1%)	8.0%	
Excitement	45 (32.4%)	65.2%		101 (28.5%)	73.2%	
Neutral	68 (48.9%)			199 (56.2%)		

A total of 50% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as restrictive gender roles, while the other 50% were categorised as general dislike. Additionally, a total of 65.2% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 27.5% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 7.2% coded as challenge.

Tweets collected in relation to the first day of the CWHL's 2018 season did not meet the 1000 tweets, only collecting 354 tweets, with 199 (56.2%) categorised as neutral tweets, followed by micro-kindness 138 (39%), and micro-aggression 17 (4.8%). A total of 58.8% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as sexual objectification, while 11.5% were categorised as restrictive gender roles, followed by 11.5% as general dislike, and 3.9% as assumption of inferiority. Additionally, a total of 73.2% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 18.8% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 8% coded as challenge.

Both 2016 and 2019 did not meet the 1000 tweets criteria., though there was increase in the tweets collected from 2016 to 2018. For 2016 restrictive gender roles and general dislike were the only sub-categories of micro-aggression that appeared to be present, though the frequency changed in 2018 with sexual objectification being the most frequent. There was a 3.4% increase in micro-aggression. Excitement was the most frequent form of micro-kindness for both 2016 and 2018. The order of frequency of the sub-categories did not change between 2016 and 2018. While it appears that there was an increase in the number of micro-kindness tweets, in proportion to the tweets collected there was a 10.6% decrease.

4.3.7 United States Women's National Team (USWNT)

Tweets surrounding the first international FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC) for the USWNT's 2011 tournament did meet the 1000 tweets, with 465 (46.5%) neutral tweets, followed by neutral 453 (45.3%), and micro-aggression 82 (8.2%).

Table 4.8

USWNT frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

USWNT	T1 (2011, N = 1000)			T2 (2019, N = 1000)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	82 (8.2%)	82 (100.0%)	15.0%	115 (11.5%)	115 (100.0%)	22.7%
Assumption of inferiority	7 (0.7%)	8.5%		25 (2.5%)	21.7%	
Sexual Objectification	27 (2.7%)	32.9%		6 (0.6%)	5.2%	
Restrictive gender roles	12 (1.2%)	14.6%		13 (1.3%)	11.3%	
General dislike	36 (3.6%)	43.9%		71 (7.1%)	61.7%	
Micro-kindness	465 (46.5%)	465 (100.0%)	85.0%	392 (39.2%)	392 (100.0%)	77.3%
Acknowledgement	190 (19.0%)	40.9%		232 (23.2%)	59.2%	
Challenge	20 (2.0%)	4.3%		141 (14.1%)	36.0%	
Excitement	255 (25.5%)	54.8%		19 (1.9%)	4.8%	
Neutral	453 (45.3%)			493 (49.3%)		

A total of 43.9% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 32.9% were categorised as sexual objectification, followed by 14.6% coded as restrictive gender roles, and 8.5% as assumption of inferiority. A total of 54.8% micro-kindness tweets were categorised as excitement, while 40.9% were categorised as acknowledgements, followed by 4.3% coded as challenge.

Tweets surrounding the first international FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC) for the USWNT's 2019 tournament did meet the 1000 tweets, with 493 (49.3%) categorised as neutral, followed by micro-kindness 392 (39.2%), and micro-aggression 115 (11.5%). A total of 61.7% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 21.7% were categorised as assumption of inferiority, followed by 11.3% coded as restrictive gender roles, and 5.2% as sexual objectification. Additionally, a total of 59.2% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as acknowledgement, while 36% were categorised as challenge, followed by 4.8% were coded as excitement.

Both 2011 and 2019 met the 1000 tweet criteria. The most frequent form of micro-aggression between 2011 and 2019 continued to be general dislike. However, the order of the other sub-categories of micro-aggression changed. There was a 3.3% increase in micro-aggression. The most frequent form of micro-kindness changed from excitement in 2011 to acknowledgement in 2019. There was a 7.2% decrease in micro-kindness.

4.3.8 Canadian Women's National Team (CANWNT)

Tweets surrounding the first international FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC) for the CANWNT's 2011 tournament did not meet the 1000 tweets, only 992 were collected with 572 (57.7%) categorised as neutral, followed by micro-kindness 322 (32.5%), and micro-aggression 98 (34.4%).

Table 4.9

CANWNT frequencies and percentages of micro-aggression, micro-kindness, and neutral tweets

CANWNT	T1 (2011, N = 992)			T1 (2019, N = 1000)		
	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets	n (%) of total tweets	n (%) within categories	% excluding neutral tweets
Micro-aggression	98 (30.4%)	98 (100.0%)	23.3%	14 (1.4%)	14 (100.0%)	2.7%
Assumption of inferiority	9 (2.8%)	9.2%		0 (0.0%)	0.0%	
Sexual Objectification	27 (8.4%)	27.6%		4 (0.4%)	28.6%	
Restrictive gender roles	22 (6.8%)	22.4%		1 (0.1%)	7.1%	
General dislike	40 (12.4%)	40.8%		9 (0.9%)	64.3%	
Micro-kindness	322 (32.5%)	322 (100.0%)	76.7%	499 (49.9%)	499 (100.0%)	97.3%
Acknowledgement	169 (17.0%)	52.5%		171 (17.1%)	34.3%	
Challenge	9 (0.9%)	2.8%		24 (2.4%)	4.8%	
Excitement	144 (14.5%)	44.7%		304 (30.4%)	60.9%	
Neutral	572 (57.7%)			487 (48.7%)		

A total of 40.8% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 27.6% were categorised as sexual objectification, followed by 22.4% coded as restrictive gender roles, and 9.2% as assumption of inferiority. Additionally, a total of 52.5% of all micro-kindness tweets were categorised as acknowledgement, while 44.7% were categorised as excitement, followed by 2.8% coded as challenge.

Tweets surrounding the first international FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC) for the CANWNT's 2019 tournament did not meet the 1000 tweets, with 499 (49.9%) categorised as micro-kindness, followed by neutral 487 (48.7%), and micro-aggression 14 (1.4%). A total of 64.3% of all micro-aggressive tweets were categorised as general dislike, while 28.6% were categorised as sexual objectification, followed by 7.1% coded as restrictive gender roles. Additionally, a total of 60.9% of all micro-kindness were categorised as excitement, while 34.3% were categorised as acknowledgement, followed by 4.8% were coded as challenge.

Tweets collected in 2011 did not meet the intended 1000 though, 2019 met the criteria. General dislike between 2011 and 2019 remained the most frequent form of micro-aggression. However, micro-aggression tweets decreased by 8.5%. The most frequent form of micro-kindness changed from acknowledgement in 2011 to excitement in 2019 with challenge remaining to be the least frequent. Micro-kindness between 2011 and 2019 had a 17.4% increase.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the findings of this study within the context of current literature on the place of sportswomen in the Sport Nexus and the digital space. The results of the study will be discussed in relation to the Culture Industry, Participation Parity of Gender Justice and Gender Stratification, highlighting how Twitter was used both to disassemble and replicate the stratification of gender through micro-kindness and micro-aggression. The research has contributed to a growing body of literature, on how Twitter is a digital battleground, where dominant ideas of the inferiority of female sports exist and are being challenged.

5.2 Reinforcement of sports citizenship as male through micro-aggressions

There has been extensive research on the lack of coverage on women's sport and the framing of men's sport as superior, which has had unfortunate consequences on how society has viewed sportswomen (Billings, 2008; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings et al., 2010; Billings et al., 2008; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Coche & Tuggle, 2016; Cooky et al., 2013; Davis & Tuggle, 2012; Eagleman et al., 2014; Messner et al., 1996; Messner et al., 2006). As discussed in Chapter 2, the implications of limited broadcasting and media coverage for women's sport has reinforced the traditional view that sport is a male domain, where male athletes are recognised as first-class citizens (Bruce, 2008; Kane, 2013). Previous literature by Messner et al. (2000) identified that men's sport has been framed in a way that associates male athletes as warrior like, glorifying the sacrifice of the athletic body and associating the sacrifice with physical aggression as a display of heroism. In turn, the Sport Nexus has become the bearer of hegemonic masculine ideals, and by extension reinforcing the inferiority of female sports. Consequently, female athletes may be regarded as

sexualised objects, a prize for the conquest of winning, reinforcing not only the objectification of women but perpetuating heterosexual ideals of femininity.

This is where the significance of micro-aggression highlights how sport is a facet of the Culture Industry, whereby, micro-aggressions directed at female athletes are evidence of sport reproducing the dominant ideologies of society that view women as inferior. While micro-aggression was first conceptualised to recognise the everyday subtle put downs and insults directed at Black Americans, Sue (2010b) highlights micro-aggressions can be expressed in numerous settings to attack marginalised groups whether it is in a racial, gendered, or class-based manner. The identification of micro-aggressions expressed toward the women's leagues and teams within the current study highlighted the types of verbal indignities that are too often directed at sportswomen. When considering the sub-categories of micro-aggression (i.e., assumption of inferiority, sexual objectification, restrictive gender roles and general dislike) these categories are a reflection of how sportswomen have been treated within the sports industry (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). It could be argued that traditional media has historically excluded or limited the coverage of women's sport, and has often highlighted women's inferiority, fuelling the sub-categories of micro-aggressions to exist and be reinforced.

Reflecting upon the micro-aggression results in this study (presented in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1), across the two designated time points, the AFLW had the largest increase in the presence of micro-aggression (8.3%), followed by Matildas (4.1%), CWHL (3.4%) and USWNT (3.3%). When neutral tweets were excluded, the average proportion of tweets that were categorised as micro-aggression was 15.5%, symbolising an existing rejection and trivialisation of female athletes, similar to the findings of Sanderson and Gramlich (2016). The presence of micro-aggression and increases in micro-aggressive sentiments expressed toward several leagues and teams indicate that there is still a sub-set of society who continue to view sportswomen in a trivialised manner, mimicking the same

ideas perpetuated by traditional media that previous studies have recognised (Fink, 2015; Kane, 1996; Kane, 2013).

Additionally, considering the argument that the Olympics and international sporting events provide a more equitable coverage in broadcasting of women's sport, which previous studies have associated with nationalism and its ability to "triumph" over gender issues (Bruce, 2008), the results of the current study provided a different story. Specifically, the findings from the current study identified increases in micro-aggression over time for two of the international teams, the Matildas and USWNT. While there is evidence that women's FIFA has increased in viewership (Glass, 2019), based on this study, micro-aggressive sentiments increased amongst Twitter users by 4.1% for the Matildas and 3.3% for USWNT. However, the increase in viewership could be associated with the increasing success of both the Matildas and USWNT throughout the FIFA years (Lewis, 2019; O'Halloran, 2019b). Bruce (2008) argued that there is a correlation between the increase in visibility and broadcasting for women's sport and winning, emphasising that there is a pattern of increased coverage only when sportswomen display triumph over other opponents reinforcing that sportswomen are only important when they are winning. However, it is important to consider other factors in explaining why there was an increase in micro-aggression for the Matildas and USWNT.

Tweets extracted from time point 1 for both international teams was in 2011, and time point 2 was 2019, Twitter was only launched in 2006 and there has been a change in the level of openness and how the platform has been utilised by users. However, Ash et al. (2017) noted in their study there is evidence to suggest that Twitter still remains to be a place where dominant ideas of the Sport Nexus are reinforced. This increase in micro-aggression sentiments for the AFLW, Matildas, CWHL and USWNT suggest that Twitter users are conveying the same notions traditional media has presented on female athletes.

An example of this was observed in the tweets related to the AFLW, which had largest decrease in micro-kindness (22.6%), and second largest increase in micro-aggression (8.3%)

sentiments over time. Duncan (2006) notes male athletes to be the recipients of the first-class citizenship of the Sport Nexus. The presence of women in sport impedes on the gender order that values men as the main actors in sport, therefore, it could be argued that women's presence will always be regarded as foreign and attacked.

The results related to the USWNT over time, also paints a similar narrative of sportswomen invading the Sport Nexus. The team's pay disparity lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation, drew large public attention, and prompted a roar of "equal pay" chants during the medal ceremony when the team won their fourth Women's World Cup in 2019 (Politi, 2019) when the tweets were collected. This is a significant scene, that portrayed sport fans challenging the gendered hierarchies in sport. The lawsuit and fans collective chanting is an example of Fraser's (2007) material and cultural equality in Participatory Parity of Gender Justice, whereby, the lawsuit of the USWNT exercised for material equality, the demand for political economy of redistribution, where the team sought to be economically valued as equal to their male counterparts. The fans' collective chant for "equal pay" exercises cultural equality, where fans challenged the devaluation of female athletes, demanding them to be recognised and treated equally to the men's team. Additionally, the collectivism of fans in their chants symbolises the breakdown of the passiveness of the consumer in the Culture Industry, whereby, fans are exercising their voice of authority to change how the market values women. However, this image of change contrasts with the increase in micro-aggressive (3.3%) sentiments and decrease in micro-kindness (7.2%).

While it is difficult to determine the causation, possible correlations can be drawn from Ahmad and Thorpe (2020) interpretations of Puwar's (2004) *Space Invaders*, whereby, the presence of a minority group, like women, in a heavily dominated space saturated in men's superiority can cause disarray. It can be interpreted that the presence of sportswomen who have displayed resistance to ideas of hegemonic masculinity invade the sports nexus with a different narrative of women. The results of the study on the sentiments expressed toward the AFLW and USWNT reflect

this idea. However, it is important to note that the percentage of tweets coded as neutral did increase for the ALFW (11.3%) and USWNT (4%) which lowers the proportion of micro-aggression and micro-kindness tweets.

Blumberg (1984) notes economic power to be vital, where the control and access to income and economic resources can play a part in how an individual governs themselves in society. The closure of the CWHL heavily reflects this, who's non-profit model was regarded as economically unsustainable (Spencer, 2019). Hall (2019) argued, for women's hockey to succeed, an ideal economic model was needed where ownership of corporations or individuals was essential, and investment for promotion was regarded vital to expand the consumer market. The lack of economic power and support the CWHL received could be attributed to the limited Twitter samples collected in the study in 2016 (n = 139) and 2018 (n = 354), and by extension the decrease in micro-kindness. The CWHL had the lowest number of tweets collected. Neoliberal Feminist perspective reiterate that women's involvement in the global market is vital, as it gives them agency in controlling their product.

5.3 Disassembling old frames of sportswomen through micro-kindness

While traditional media has enabled dominant ideas of hegemonic masculinities to be reinforced and practiced, there is evidence to suggest that the digital space has revolutionised and enabled the disassembling of how sportswomen are viewed (Ahmad & Thorpe, 2020; AlKhalifa & Fareello, 2020; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). The study builds on this literature, whereby, the presence of micro-kindness symbolises that sport fans are no longer passive in their consumption of sport, exercising their opinions and challenging dominant ideas.

As described by Laughter (2014) the justification for creating micro-kindness was to establish a positive and humanizing environment. This is evident within the increase in micro-

kindness from time point 1 and 2 for CANWNT (17.4%), WNBA (8.2%), and the Matildas (4.7%) (presented in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1). When neutral tweets were excluded, the average proportion of tweets that were categorised as micro-kindness was 84.5%, symbolising that there is a cultural change amongst the sentiments around the leagues and teams in the study.

Despite the decrease in micro-kindness over time for the USWNT, CANWNT had the greatest increase in micro-kindness from 2011 and 2019, despite the team not making it into the quarter finals in the 2019 FIFA WWC. Their results in the 2019 FIFA WWC provide contrasting evidence to Bruce (2008), who argued that sportswomen's coverage is reliant on their success and winnings. The increase in micro-kindness appear to align with the argument outlined by Billings and Eastman (2003), where national identity has the ability to triumph over gendered politics in the Sport Nexus, by extension, disassembling the gendered hierarchies in society that have been reinforced by traditional media.

Thorpe et al. (2017) argues that the digital space has given a voice to sportswomen and their fans to challenge dominant ideas of the inferiority of female athletes. This is evident in the increase in micro-kindness for the WNBA in the current study. The increase in micro-kindness, from the perspective of the Culture Industry, highlights the change in who is in control, where sport fans' are no longer passive consumers of the Sport Nexus and voicing their opinions that challenge dominant ideas. Additionally, the WNBA's use of their social media platform to address the Twitter trolling and abuse they have received could be correlated to the increase in micro-kindness (Johnson, 2018), whereby, sport fans are mimicking the voice of authority the athletes have expressed. Moreover, the WNBA was the first women's professional sports league to sign a deal to stream their games on Twitter, and this deal was significant for two reasons. Firstly, the WNBA already had multiple broadcasting deals with North American sport networks, and by utilising Twitter, the league opened a new market to gain fans outside of North America. Secondly, the deal allows users to simultaneously watch the game while having real-time conversations, providing a public space to

discuss women's sport. By enabling real-time conversation in a public platform, it enables like-minded people to discuss women's sport and engage with others who are opposed to the league, opening the opportunity to have cultural conversations on gender and sports. According to Toffoletti and Thorpe (2018), social media platforms encourage discourses and conversations to take place, for women's sport this is vital as it enables sportswomen and fans to engage in conversation to challenge dominant ideas in the sport industry which are embedded in patriarchal ideas. It provides sportswomen and fans to be the producers in the framing of women's sport by constructing an alternative sporting identity. This is supported by previous research by Ash et al. (2017) and Sanderson and Gramlich (2016), who highlight the presence small conversations that challenge dominant ideas are significant as it recognises that sport fans' are changing their views about female athletes.

The Neoliberal Feminist perspective encourages women to be a part of the global market, which allows them to be the agents in control of their product. The streaming deal between the WNBA and Twitter highlights the entrepreneurialism that Neoliberalism promotes. This is supported by Thorpe et al. (2017), who argues that athletes use of their social media to be a form of self-branding and entrepreneurialism, where athletes are governing their brand in the global market. The livestreaming of games on Twitter increased the visibility of the WNBA which extended their market of reach to user's who may not have been fans. The increase in micro-kindness (8.2%) and decrease of micro-aggression (5.1%) could be correlated to the streaming of WNBA games on Twitter.

Similarly, the results of the AFLW in 2017 presented the largest percentage of micro-kindness (65.3%), reflecting similar sentiments on media reports of the game that emphasised the electric atmosphere, and the historic significance the game and the league represented for children, especially girls, in Australia (Allen, 2019). The electric atmosphere reported within the news was reflective of the proportion of micro-kindness tweets (94.5%), with sub-category excitement

representing more than 50% of the micro-kindness sentiments. It could be deduced that the positive attitudes found within the study could be correlated to the anticipation that was demonstrated through the broadcasting and framing of the game (Sherwood et al., 2017). The positive attitudes expressed through micro-kindness for the 2017 AFLW in the study, provide an alternative narrative to traditional view that women's sport is not interesting. Previous research on women's sport emphasised the lack of coverage female athletes have received in a North American context, contrastingly, the AFLW in its inaugural season received television coverage in the media, and women's sport in Australia has been reported to have increased in coverage (Sherwood et al., 2019; Sherwood et al., 2017).

5.4 Twitter as a digital battleground for women's sport

The results of this study provide insight into how Twitter represents a digital battleground for women's sport. The dominant ideas of the inferiority of female athletes that traditional media has reinforced through their limited coverage and framing has seeped into the discourses that take place in the digital sphere. The identification of micro-aggression sentiments regarding the women's leagues and teams within the study highlighted how verbal indignities mimic traditional media's treatment of sportswomen in society. Micro-aggression literature highlights that, despite micro-aggressions being considered minor, the cumulative exposure can have biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural consequences (Kaskan & Ho, 2016; Moody & Lewis, 2019; Nadal, 2008, 2018; Nadal et al., 2014; Sue, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The study suggests that despite sportswomen being the target, the public are exposed to these micro-aggressions and have been impacted in how they view female athletes. The average proportion of tweets that were categorised as micro-aggression was 15.5% (with neutral tweets excluded), highlighting that there are still sentiments shared by sport fans that replicate traditional medias derogatory views on sportswomen.

However, the presence of the micro-kindness in the study recognises that a majority of sport fan sentiments differ to the ideas perpetuated by traditional media. Average proportion of tweets categorised as micro-kindness, excluding neutral tweets represented 84.5%, suggesting that female athlete's invasion of the Sport Nexus is being accepted by sport fans. Traditional media has reinforced the discourse that female athletes are inferior sexual objects and have fuelled the notion that women's sport is uninteresting by limiting their coverage. The proportion of micro-kindness identified in the study contends with these discourses, and highlight how sport fans' acknowledge the athleticism of sportswomen. Reflecting upon the themes of micro-kindness, it practices the respect of sportswomen, encourages the challenging of micro-aggressions, reiterates that they are a valued member of society (Laughter, 2014).

5.5 Strengths, limitations, and future research

This study contributes to the growing body of evidence on sport fans' attitudes toward women's sport, however, the findings of this study must be viewed in light of its potential limitations. Tweets that were coded as neutral included tweets that did not represent sentiments of micro-aggression or micro-kindness. This content included news links or reports, betting related tweets (that were particularly prevalent in the WNBA sample), or promotional or shared links. These tweets were regarded as neutral as they did not express direct opinion of the user. The high proportion of neutral tweets for some leagues and teams limited the total number of tweets that could be included in the content analysis. Despite this, the current study is the first to have an analysis of both negative and positive sentiments of sport fans on Twitter across popular Australian and North American leagues and teams. The use of micro-aggression and micro-kindness as a conceptual tool to highlight negative and positive sentiments, contributes to the body of literature on the fan perception research. Additionally, the current study is the first to have applied the concept of micro-kindness in sport literature.

The second limitation was the limited number of tweets retrieved for the WBBL (2016 and 2018), Matildas (2011), CWHL (2016 and 2018), NWHL (2016 and 2018), and CWNWNT (2011) during the specified timeframe. The timeframes were set to explore attitudes at comparable points during season and competition, however, the small number of tweets for some leagues and teams may provide a limited representation of fan sentiments. For future research, the sample could include tweets posted within a broader timeframe (e.g., one week) to increase the total sample size. Due to the constraints and scope of the study, the number of tweets collected was limited to ensure the coding process was as efficient and achievable as possible. Nevertheless, this study included a total of 14,510 tweets, providing important insights into fan attitudes and perceptions of women's sport. For future research, extending the timeframe to investigate the difference in sentiments in the opening and closing season would be beneficial to gain a better understanding of whether fan sentiments change over a longer period of time.

The final limitation of the study was the coding process that was conducted by one person. Two additional researchers each independently screened 5% of the data to ensure intercoder reliability, and the agreement ranged from 91.55% to 100%. Despite following a process that aligned with previous research (Ash et al., 2017; Coche, 2017; Frisby, 2017), which involved discussion on disagreements or clarification of the descriptors of the coding categories, there may still be a level of subjectivity within coding. Future studies with a larger scope may consider employing an independent coding approach whereby all tweets are independently coded by two members of the research team.

5.6 Conclusion

This study used Twitter as a platform to explore fan attitudes on women's sport in an Australian and North American context. The findings of this study suggest that Twitter is a digital

battleground for women's sport, where dominant ideas of the inferiority of women are being replicated and contested. Traditional media's treatment of female sports has transcended into how they are viewed in society through micro-aggressions. The presence of micro-aggression in the study emphasise how women are still viewed by some fans as inferior. While the portion of micro-aggression could be considered as minor, the presence of it draws attention to how the normalisation of traditional media may have skewed sport fan's views on women's sport. However, the large percentage of micro-kindness in the study highlight how sport fans are no longer passive consumers and voicing an alternate frame of women's sport that contest the negative ideas in micro-aggression. The study recognises that sport fans' sentiments on women's sport in Australia and North America can differ to what traditional media has produced, specifically in the digital sphere. Future research is needed to investigate fan attitudes and perceptions toward women's sport across various social media platforms, continents, and sports, over time.

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HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

30 March 2020
Doctor Emma George
School of Health Sciences

Dear Emma,

Project Title: "A content analysis of Twitter attitudes on women's Australian and North American sports"

HREC Approval Number: HI3765

Risk Rating: Low 1 - LNR

I am pleased to advise the above research project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Approval of this project is valid from 30 March 2020 until 30 March 2021.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Emma George, Rachel Esmundo, Jessica Richards

Summary of Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.
6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.
7. Approval is only valid while you hold a position or are enrolled at Western Sydney University. You will need to transfer your project or seek fresh ethics approval from your new institution if you leave Western Sydney University.
8. **Project specific conditions:**
There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Professor Brett Bowden.

Professor Brett Bowden
Presiding Member,
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee

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