

5-17-2023

## Public Opinion of Equal Pay following the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Lawsuit

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### Recommended Citation

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**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, ST. PAUL**

**ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA**

**COLLEGE OF KINESIOLOGY**

**Public Opinion of Equal Pay following the  
U.S. Women's National Soccer Team Lawsuit**

**A GRADUATE PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
MA Sport Management**

**by**

**Kristin Kaldahl**

**St. Paul, Minnesota**

**May 2023**

### **Acknowledgements**

Words cannot express my gratitude to my professor and advisor Dr. Huberty for her invaluable patience and feedback. I also could not have undertaken this journey without the support of all my professors throughout the program, who generously provided knowledge and expertise. I am also grateful to my classmates and cohort members for their insight and ideas throughout our time together.

### **Dedications**

Thank you to all my friends and family who have supported me through this journey. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to make it this far as a student. An extra special thank you to one of my best friends Kyra, I could have not made it to this point without you.

### **Abstract**

On International Women's Day in March 2019, the United States Women's National Team filed a class action lawsuit against the United States Soccer Federation asserting violations of the Equal Pay Act (EPA) and Title VII. The \$24 million suit was settled on February 22, 2022, with the players receiving a \$22 million lump sum payment. Following the victory of the USWNT equal pay lawsuit against the USSF, a new outlook for equal pay in women's athletics began. The objective of this analysis will be to expand the literature and determine how the USWNT Equal Pay movement has shifted public opinion. Specifically, this study is designed to collect the opinions of men and women on their knowledge of the lawsuit and general opinion on women's athletics. Study participants will be university student athletes, teachers, and coaches representing both genders, various races, and ages ranging from 18 years to 80 years. Using quantitative methods, the analysis will include using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test to examine the data from the surveys. Using the MANOVA will make it possible to see if there is a difference in opinion between ages groups, genders, and races.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Capstone Project**

On March 8, 2019, International Women's Day, members of the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) filed a class-action lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) asserting violations of the Equal Pay Act (EPA) and Title VII. The USWNT alleged that the USSF paid the USWNT less than their male counterparts despite the fact that the USWNT had been more successful than the men's team (Masters, 2020). The \$24 million suit was settled on February 22, 2022, with the players receiving a \$22 million lump sum payment, with the remaining \$2 million to go into accounts to benefit the players post-career to be used for charitable efforts with women's and girls' soccer (Carlisle, 2022). Players had originally been seeking \$66.7 million in payback; however, the settlement amount was seen as a significant victory as it has opened the conversation for equal pay in all of women's sports. Following the victory of the USWNT equal pay lawsuit against the USSF, a new outlook for equal pay in women's athletics began.

### **Significance of the Study/Rationale**

During the time that the USWNT started their pursuit for equal pay, another women's team went on strike. The United States Women's Hockey Team (USWHT) went on strike to pursue a better agreement for their league and to receive equitable benefits that equate to that of the men's hockey team (Dakin, 2020). With both teams fighting for gender equality in the workplace, there was significant attention brought to a worldwide problem.

Following the 2015 Women's World Cup, Hope Solo filed an individual lawsuit against the USSF. When that lawsuit was first announced in 2016, sport media accounts questioned the complaint, suggesting the USWNT was not deserving of equal pay given the so-called lack of

interest in women's soccer or the lack of fan base (Cooky, 2018). Conversely, the coverage of the lawsuit filed in 2019 drew upon player statements and interviews, claims made in the lawsuit, and other evidence in constructing narratives of merit, suggesting the women deserved equal pay. In an article published after the 2019 World Cup win, the Philadelphia Inquirer explained how little argument existed for the USWNT to not receive equal compensation, as they had been more successful on the field and in the ticket booth than their male counterparts (Heffernan, 2019). Other media outlets reported on the data from the Wall Street Journal. For example, an opinion article in the New York Times referred to this as a "long legacy of sexism in sports" (Leonhardt, 2019), while an article in Slate Magazine described the unequal pay and treatment of the team as "egregious sexism" and "rank sexism" and challenged the explanations, frequently given in the past, that the unequal pay was due to the lack of fans (Leonhardt, 2019).

Despite the argument that the USWNT received unequal pay due to fans or lesser success, the USWNT has had much more success than the men's team. The USWNT has earned more profit and higher television ratings than the men's team. According to an audit of financial statements by the USSF from 2016 to 2018, women's games generated approximately \$50.8 million in revenue, compared with \$49.9 million for men's games (Hess, 2019). Due to this media coverage during and following the lawsuit, there has been a divide in public opinion facing the overall movement of equal pay for women in sports.

### **Research Question**

The objective of this analysis will be to expand the literature and determine how the USWNT Equal Pay movement has shifted public opinion. Specifically, the research question that will be the focus of this study is to collect the opinions of men and women on their knowledge of the lawsuit and general opinion on women's athletics. The hypothesis being that their opinions



are similar. Ultimately, it is hoped that there will be little divide and both parties show support for equal pay, not only specifically for women's sports, but show support for a nationwide fight.

### **Biases and Assumptions**

There is a potential bias for this study given there is a focus on equal pay and specifically about women's sports. As with any study that focuses on human perceptions and opinions, the data gathered will be subjective. This study will address this topic further in Chapter 2.

### **Limitations**

Limitations may include sample population size. The final number of participants could potentially vary how the results are shown at the end. Another limitation could be the truthfulness of answers provided by the participants. The topic of equal pay has been controversial, and this could lead to people being swayed in their responses to fit the group majority.

### **Conclusion**

The USWNT lawsuit against the USSF is a large movement for equal pay for not only women's soccer but all women's sports. It has opened the discussion on a much larger scale and with media coverage and the popularity of the USWNT, it has brought more attention to a long-standing issue. The hope for this study is to continue that conversation and study the opinions of the public. Surveying the knowledge people have about the USWNT lawsuit and their interest in women's sports will help add insight into this topic. With this study, researchers will look to see if there is a variation in opinions between men and women. The prediction is that there will not be a difference and both parties will be in support of this controversial topic.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to determine the public's opinion on the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) Equal Pay lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF). An additional goal is to determine if there is a difference of opinion between men and women regarding the topic. The study will also determine if there is a difference of opinion between those who are involved in the sport's industry such as student athletes, teachers, coaches, and those who have no ties directly to the industry. This chapter will outline the methodology to complete and achieve the purpose of the study.

### **Participants**

For this proposed study, participants will be university student athletes, teachers, and coaches representing both genders, various races, and ages ranging from 18 years to 80 years. The ideal sample population size would be between 100 and 150 participants. With the gender of the participant being split 50/50. Using a stratified random selection process, the entire population will be divided into homogeneous groups called strata (Hayes, 2022). Using the directory and sports information sites of a midwestern university, participants will be selected and put into a strata based on their characteristics.

### **Instruments**

The participants will be asked three general demographic information questions regarding gender, age, and race. Participants will be asked to complete six multiple-choice (yes/no) questions pertaining to various information from the USWNT lawsuit and knowledge and interest of women's sports. Attached in Appendix A is the survey that will be sent out to the participants. Before beginning the survey, participants will be asked to review and agree to the

informed consent statement. This can be seen at the top of the survey (see Appendix A). The survey was created through Google Forms to easily be delivered via email.

### **Procedures**

Participants will be initially contacted via email with a link to a Google Form survey. Prior to the multiple-choice survey questions, all participants will be asked for demographic information such as age, gender, and race. This information will be provided voluntarily by the participant. The demographic survey will help determine what strata group the participant falls into.

Participants will have a three-week time frame to complete the questionnaire. A follow up email will be sent as a reminder one week after the initial email communication to those who have yet to complete the questionnaire. This process will be repeated, if needed, for the second and third weeks as a reminder to the participants who have yet to complete the survey. Once questionnaires have been submitted, the participants will receive a final email communication thanking them for their participation in the study.

### **Design & Statistical Analysis**

The data collected from the first three demographic questions will allow for the researcher to examine the findings within each age, gender, and race category. With the final six questions being closed-ended (Yes/No), the data collected is quantitative and will be used to examine the relationship between the demographic variables. The analysis will include using a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test to examine the data from the surveys. Using the MANOVA will make it possible to see if there is a difference in opinion between genders, age groups, and races. Additionally, the data across all demographic groups

will be presented to give a general overview of the knowledge people have about the USWNT lawsuit and their interest in women's sports.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants will all remain anonymous throughout the study and to all parties except the researcher. All email addresses and emails will be kept privately. Consent will be obtained from all participants and the research project will be reviewed by the Internal Review Board (IRB). The researcher will go through a program known as the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). The program certifies students in general research and ethics for working with human subjects.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of using these populations is to have an inclusive study that expands outside of not only athletics but incorporates consensus as well. The process and outcomes of this research will help evaluate the public perception of equal pay for athletes by the general population. This study will be valuable for future research in that it brings more awareness and research to the topic of women in athletics and equal pay for women in athletics.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion and Conclusion**

The discussion and action for equal pay in women's sports has grown significantly since the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF). In March of 2019 the USWNT filed a class-action lawsuit asserting violations of the Equal Pay Act (EPA) and Title VII. In February 2022, shortly before the two year anniversary of the lawsuit, the USWNT won against the USSF. This push from the USWNT has ignited the conversation of equal pay in the media. The open conversation that is happening around this topic has brought out many people's opinions. The purpose of this study is to expand the literature and determine how the USWNT Equal Pay movement has shifted public opinion. Specifically, the focus of this study is to collect the opinions of men and women on their knowledge of the lawsuit and general opinion on women's athletics.

#### **Practical Applications**

The basis of this study is to look at the general public's opinion on equal pay. The information collected will hopefully show that there is no significant difference between the opinions of men and women. If the data shows significant differences between gender, it would be valuable to look further into how the variation between male and female significantly impacts the media. This could include looking at what ways articles and other information in the media are swaying perceptions on the equal pay movement, what media providers are talking about relative to the movement and looking at the gender of the writers and publishers. If the data shows that there is no significant difference between gender, there could be a possibility to look at other demographics such as age, race, and religion. Additionally, it may be beneficial to look at geographical data and look at what ways people sway depending on where they live. The

methods of this study can be replicated, but also altered to look at other areas of study regarding this topic.

### **Limitations**

Limitations may include sample population size. The final number of participants could potentially vary how the results are shown at the end. Another limitation could be the truthfulness of answers provided by the participants. The topic of equal pay has been controversial, and this could lead to people being swayed in their responses to fit the group majority.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The USWNT equal pay movement has brought more media attention to a long ongoing conversation. With this attention, this study will consider current research and past research to help support a crucial topic. Recommendations for further research would be to look at other demographic information such as age, race, and religion to understand the topic more thoroughly. Another potential future research topic would be to use geographical data to look at populations based on where they live and how this may impact the results. There are many directions future research could replicate the current study by altering the research question to meet a different hypothesis.

### **Conclusion**

The research completed will bring another level of support and understanding to an ongoing discussion bigger than one singular lawsuit. The information taken from this study is added literature and ideas for others to replicate, support their own theories, or from which to take inspiration. The public's perspective of the USWNT equal pay lawsuit can showcase the support for not only the USWNT, but for other female athletes, teams, and for the general public.

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**Appendix A**  
**Participant Survey**

Kristin Kaldahl, a graduate student at Concordia University, St. Paul, is conducting research on Public Opinion of Equal pay following the USWNT Lawsuit. There are no risks to participating in this survey and all answers will be anonymous. This project has been approved by Concordia's IRB and any questions can be sent to the lead researcher at [kaldahlk@csp.edu](mailto:kaldahlk@csp.edu).

These questions can also be found at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1houpYdH\\_owRjYWtZsvJvD98Mxfq0h9z67Qzfhvjit2g/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1houpYdH_owRjYWtZsvJvD98Mxfq0h9z67Qzfhvjit2g/edit)

Please share the following demographic information:

1. What is your age? (check one)

- Less than 18 years
- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 39 years
- 40 to 59 years
- 60 years and older

2. What is your gender? (check one)

- Male
- Female
- Other

3. What is your race? (check one)

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other



Please review the multiple-choice survey questions, choosing your top choice for each:

4. Have you heard of the U.S. Women National Soccer Team (USWNT)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. Have you ever watched or followed along with the USWNT?
  - Yes
  - No
  
6. Do you watch or follow any other women's professional teams?
  - Yes
  - No
  
7. Did you know the Women's National Soccer Team filed a lawsuit for equal pay?
  - Yes
  - No
  
8. Do you think the equal pay lawsuit will inspire other women's professional teams to fight for equal pay?
  - Yes
  - No
  
9. Do you think it is important for teams to fight for equal opportunities?
  - Yes
  - No