



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS:
**EMPOWERMENT
IN SPORT MEDIA**

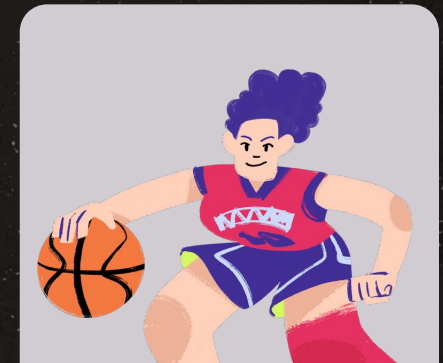
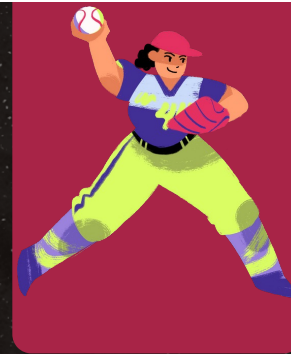
Exploring Black Girls' Relationships
with Sport Media

“[...]empowerment is an affective force, or “a sensation, a welling up of positivity, that inspires confidence and even bravery when someone sees themselves represented” (*If you let me play: girls' empowerment and transgender exclusion in sports*, Jennifer McClearen 2023, p1364).

INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the complex relationship between girls, sport, and sport media, with a particular emphasis on how media narratives shape perceptions of empowerment for Black girls. The inspiration for this exploration stems from Jennifer McClearen's article, *If you let me play: girls' empowerment and transgender exclusion in sports*, particularly her section titled "Who can be empowered?". McClearen's work provides a critical lens through which to examine the ways in which sport media constructs and conveys ideas about who can be empowered and under what conditions.

Through this exploration, the goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of how sport media influences girls' relationships with sport, the implications of these narratives, and the potential for creating more inclusive and empowering representations.



OVERVIEW OF KEY SECTIONS

The Importance and Implications of Sport Media

Overview of McClearen's Article

Who Can Be Empowered?" - A Critical Question

Empowerment in Sport Media

Case Study: Nike's "If You Let Me Play"
Advertisement

Black Girls in Sport - A Focused Exploration

Empowerment for Whom? A Critical
Examination

Deconstructing the Concept of Empowerment

Reimagining Empowerment in Sport Media



THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF SPORT MEDIA

SPORT MEDIA AS A CULTURAL FORCE

HOW SPORT MEDIA SHAPES PERCEPTIONS AND VALUES IN SOCIETY:

- **Cultural Influence:** Sport media holds significant power in shaping societal values, often reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms. Through constant exposure, audiences absorb messages about what is valued in society, such as athletic prowess, competition, and physical appearance.
- **Representation:** The way athletes are portrayed—whether through commentary, visuals, or storytelling—can influence public perception of what is deemed important or desirable. For example, the glorification of certain sports over others can elevate specific values like resilience or collaboration.
- **Social Impact:** Sport media has the ability to unite people across diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of community and shared identity. However, it can also perpetuate stereotypes and inequalities, particularly when coverage is biased towards certain genders, races, or classes.



SPORT MEDIA AS A CULTURAL FORCE

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONSTRUCTING GENDER IDENTITIES AND NORMS:

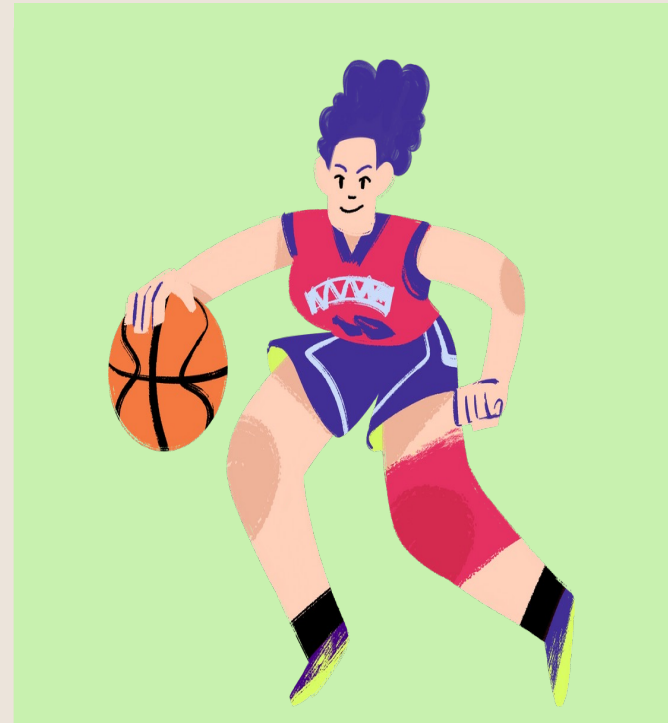
- **Gender Representation:** Sport media often perpetuates traditional gender roles by showcasing male athletes as strong, dominant, and aggressive, while female athletes are sometimes depicted in ways that emphasize their appearance, emotions, or femininity over their athletic abilities.
- **Stereotyping:** The selective portrayal of female athletes can reinforce outdated stereotypes, such as the idea that women are less competitive or that their participation in sports is secondary to their appearance. This can influence how girls view themselves and their potential in sports.
- **Normalization:** Repeated exposure to gendered narratives in sport media helps normalize these roles, making them seem like the natural or only way to be a man or a woman in sports. This can limit the opportunities and aspirations of young girls who do not fit these narrow molds.



SPORT MEDIA AS A CULTURAL FORCE

WHY FOCUSING ON GIRLS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH SPORT MEDIA IS CRUCIAL FOR UNDERSTANDING BROADER SOCIAL DYNAMICS:

- **Identity Formation:** For girls, sport media plays a critical role in shaping their self-concept, aspirations, and understanding of what is possible in sports and beyond. The way girls see female athletes portrayed can influence their own participation and engagement in sports.
- **Empowerment vs. Exclusion:** While sport media has the potential to empower girls by providing role models and narratives of success, it can also exclude or marginalize them by underrepresenting their achievements or framing them within limiting stereotypes.
- **Broader Implications:** Understanding how girls interact with sport media is essential for grasping larger social dynamics, such as gender equality, media literacy, and the role of cultural institutions in either challenging or perpetuating social inequalities. By critically analyzing this relationship, we can develop strategies to create more inclusive and empowering media representations.



OVERVIEW OF MCCLEAREN'S ARTICLE

KEY THEMES IN MCCLEAREN'S WORK

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENTS OF THE ARTICLE:

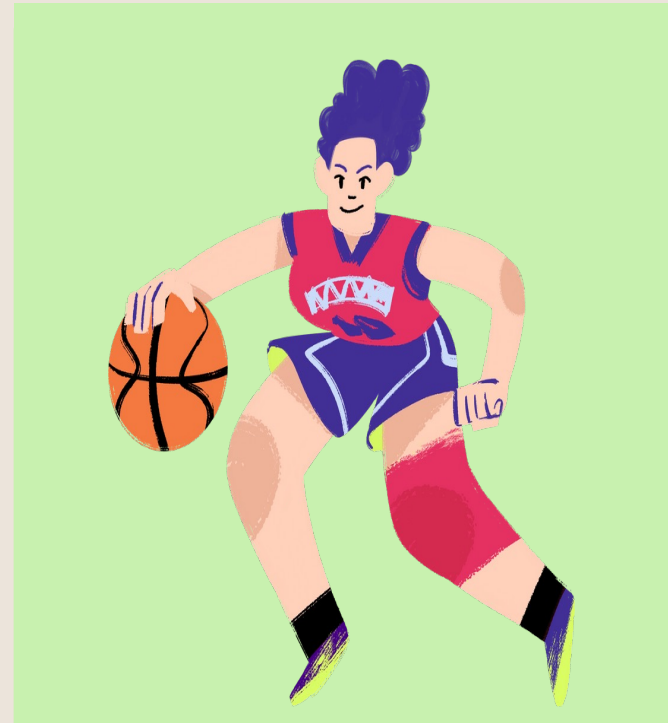
- **Empowerment and Exclusion:** Jennifer McClearen critically examines the concept of "empowerment" in sports, particularly focusing on how mainstream empowerment discourses can simultaneously include and exclude certain groups. While sports are often framed as empowering spaces for girls, this empowerment is not universal and can be restricted by factors like gender identity and race.
- **Transgender Exclusion:** A key argument in the article is the exclusionary practices in sports that often leave transgender athletes out of the empowerment narrative. McClearen discusses how policies and cultural attitudes within sports can marginalize transgender athletes, highlighting the tension between the rhetoric of inclusivity and the reality of exclusion.
- **Commercialization of Empowerment:** McClearen also critiques how empowerment is commodified in sports media, particularly through advertising and branding. The commercialization of empowerment often reduces complex issues to simple, marketable messages, which can overlook or even reinforce existing inequalities.



KEY THEMES IN MCCLEAREN'S WORK

THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT AS DISCUSSED BY MCCLEAREN:

- **Conditional Empowerment:** McClearen argues that the notion of empowerment in sports is often conditional, meaning that it is accessible only to those who conform to certain norms, such as gender or body type. This creates a paradox where empowerment is offered but only within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable.
- **Empowerment as a Marketing Tool:** The article highlights how empowerment is frequently used as a marketing tool by brands, often targeting young girls with messages of strength and independence. However, these messages can be superficial, focusing on individual success while ignoring systemic barriers that many face.
- **Critical Empowerment:** McClearen calls for a more critical understanding of empowerment—one that recognizes the structural challenges faced by marginalized groups in sports, including girls and transgender athletes. She advocates for an empowerment that is truly inclusive and addresses the broader social dynamics at play.



KEY THEMES IN MCCLEAREN'S WORK

THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE, AND SPORT IN THE ARTICLE:

- **Intersectionality:** McClearen's analysis is grounded in intersectionality, recognizing that the experiences of girls in sports cannot be understood in isolation from their race, gender, and class. The article explores how these intersecting identities affect the way girls experience and are portrayed in sports.
- **Racialized Empowerment:** The article delves into how race plays a role in the empowerment narrative, with certain racial identities being more readily celebrated in sports media, while others are marginalized or exoticized. McClearen discusses how Black and minority girls often face additional barriers to empowerment, both in terms of participation and representation.
- **Gender Norms:** The article also examines how traditional gender norms influence who is seen as capable of being empowered through sports. For example, girls who do not fit into the traditional mold of femininity may find themselves excluded from the empowerment narrative, particularly in media portrayals that prioritize appearance over athletic ability.



**"WHO CAN BE EMPOWERED?"
- A CRITICAL QUESTION**

ANALYSIS

INTERROGATING 'EMPOWERMENT'

McClearen's question, "Who can be empowered?" invites a critical examination of the concept of empowerment in sports and sport media. Rather than accepting empowerment as a universally accessible or equitable process, the question challenges us to consider who is truly afforded the opportunity to feel empowered and who is systematically excluded.

EMPOWERMENT AND ACCESS:

The query suggests that empowerment is not equally available to everyone; it is often mediated by factors like race, gender, class, and sexuality. This implies that empowerment narratives may favor certain groups while marginalizing others, questioning the inclusivity of popular empowerment rhetoric in sports.



THE IMPLICATIONS FOR GIRLS IN SPORT

- **Exclusionary Practices:** For girls in sport, McClearen's question highlights the ways in which empowerment can be selectively offered, often based on conforming to specific ideals, such as being white, middle-class, or heterosexual. Girls who do not fit these norms may find themselves excluded from the empowerment narratives promoted in sport media.
- **Impact on Self-Perception:** The question also underscores how the selective nature of empowerment can affect girls' self-perception. Girls who are not represented or who do not see themselves reflected in empowering narratives may internalize a sense of inadequacy or believe that sport is not a space where they can thrive.
- **Intersectionality:** The implications of this question are particularly significant when considering intersectionality—the idea that different aspects of a person's identity (such as race, gender, and class) intersect and create unique experiences of oppression or privilege. McClearen's question pushes us to consider how intersecting identities can influence who gets to be empowered in the realm of sport.

HOW DOES THIS QUESTION CHALLENGE TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES AROUND EMPOWERMENT?

- **Rethinking Empowerment:** Traditional narratives around empowerment often assume that providing opportunities or visibility is sufficient. McClearen's question disrupts this assumption by suggesting that the power dynamics underlying who is empowered need to be critically examined.
- **Empowerment as Conditional:** The question challenges the idea that empowerment is an inherent right, proposing instead that it may be conditional upon meeting certain societal expectations or norms. This challenges the traditional, often simplistic, narratives of empowerment as universally positive and accessible.
- **Revealing Power Structures:** By asking "Who can be empowered?" McClearen prompts a deeper investigation into the power structures that determine who is deemed worthy of empowerment in sports. This includes questioning who controls the narrative, who benefits from it, and who is left out, thereby encouraging a more nuanced and critical approach to understanding empowerment in sport media.

EMPOWERMENT IN SPORT MEDIA

The Mainstream Narrative

THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVE

HOW EMPOWERMENT IS PORTRAYED IN POPULAR SPORT MEDIA:

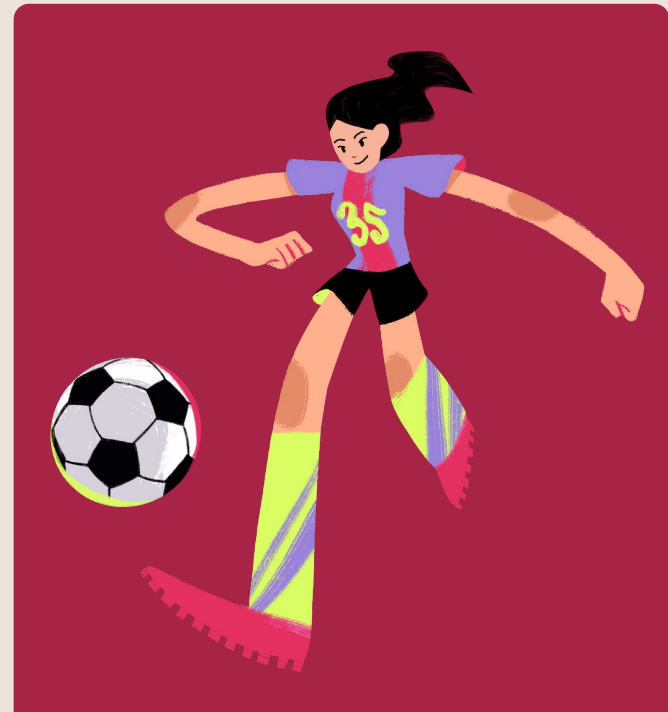
- **Commercialized Empowerment:** Empowerment in sport media is often framed as a personal achievement, emphasizing individual success, resilience, and the breaking of barriers. This narrative is frequently linked to the idea that anyone can overcome challenges if they work hard enough, promoting a meritocratic view of sports.
- **Heroic Individualism:** Athletes are typically portrayed as heroes who embody the ideals of strength, determination, and perseverance. This narrative often emphasizes personal triumphs over adversity, which can be inspiring but also oversimplifies the structural barriers that many athletes, particularly women and girls, face.
- **Empowerment through Participation:** Popular campaigns often promote the idea that participation in sports inherently leads to empowerment, suggesting that engaging in sports builds confidence, self-esteem, and leadership skills.



THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVE

EXAMPLES OF CAMPAIGNS AND ADVERTISEMENTS THAT PROMOTE EMPOWERMENT

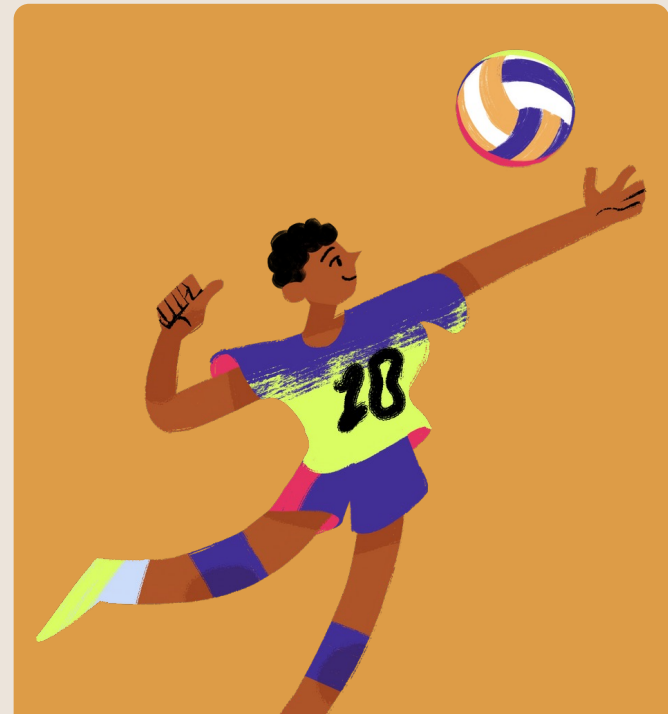
- **Nike’s “Dream Crazy” Campaign (2019):** This ad celebrated women who have pushed the boundaries in sports, showcasing athletes like Serena Williams and Simone Biles. It promoted the idea that women should embrace being called “crazy” for pursuing their dreams, framing it as a form of empowerment.
- **Always’ “Like a Girl” Campaign (2014):** This campaign aimed to challenge the negative connotations of the phrase “like a girl,” turning it into a statement of strength and capability. It empowered young girls by redefining what it means to do something “like a girl” in a positive light.
- **Gatorade’s “Sisters in Sweat” Campaign (2017):** This campaign highlighted the importance of keeping girls in sports and the benefits they gain from it, such as confidence and resilience. It portrayed sports as a critical space for personal development and empowerment for girls.



THE MAINSTREAM NARRATIVE

THE POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS AND EXCLUSIONS WITHIN THESE NARRATIVES:

- **Oversimplification:** The mainstream narrative often reduces empowerment to a matter of personal effort, neglecting the systemic issues that many athletes face, such as discrimination, lack of resources, and media bias. This can create a misleading picture of what it means to be empowered in sports.
- **Exclusion of Marginalized Voices:** Many empowerment campaigns focus on high-profile athletes or those who fit conventional ideals of beauty, strength, and success, often excluding those who don't conform to these standards. For example, Black women, transgender athletes, and athletes with disabilities may be underrepresented or their struggles oversimplified.
- **Commercial Interests:** Empowerment narratives in sport media are often driven by commercial interests, with companies using empowerment as a branding tool to sell products. This can lead to a superficial treatment of empowerment, where the focus is more on selling a lifestyle or product than on addressing deeper social issues.
- **Reinforcement of Stereotypes:** While these campaigns aim to empower, they can sometimes reinforce stereotypes by highlighting only certain types of empowerment that align with traditional gender roles or societal expectations, such as focusing on physical strength or beauty over other forms of success.





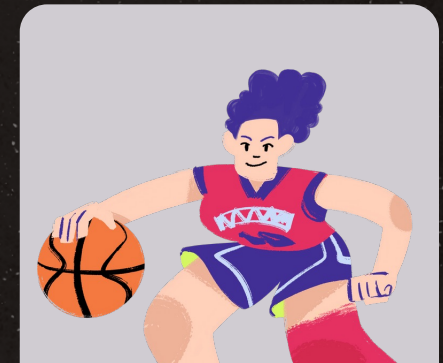
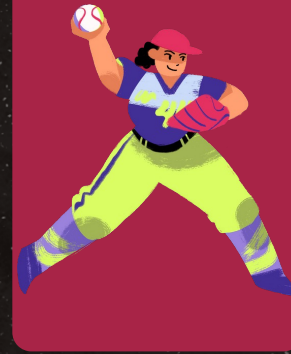
CASE STUDY:

NIKE'S "IF YOU LET ME PLAY" ADVERTISEMENT

Launched in 1995, Nike's "If You Let Me Play" advertisement was part of a broader campaign aimed at promoting female participation in sports. The ad features a series of young girls speaking directly to the camera, expressing the benefits that sports can provide if they are allowed to participate.

NIKE AD OVERVIEW

Nike's 1995 advertisement "If You Let Me Play" is often celebrated as a groundbreaking campaign that promotes the empowerment of girls through sports. However, a critical analysis reveals underlying systemic issues that shape how girls see themselves and how society perceives which girls are "meant" to play sports.



UNDERLYING SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN THE AD

COMMONALITIES AMONG THE GIRLS PORTRAYED:

Despite the inclusion of some Black girls, the ad largely centers on a narrow vision of girlhood that is aligned with white, middle-class norms. This portrayal excludes a broader representation of girls who might not fit this mold—those who are older, less traditionally feminine, or from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

REINFORCEMENT OF EXISTING NORMS:

While the ad champions the idea of girls playing sports, it does so within a framework that reinforces certain societal norms. The message that girls need to be "allowed" to play implies that access to sports is conditional, perpetuating the notion that girls require permission to participate in activities that are often freely available to boys.

EXCLUSION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:

Girls who do not see themselves represented in the ad may feel alienated or believe that they are not the "right" kind of girls to benefit from the empowerment that sports offer. This can lead to internalized feelings of inadequacy and a belief that sports are not for them.

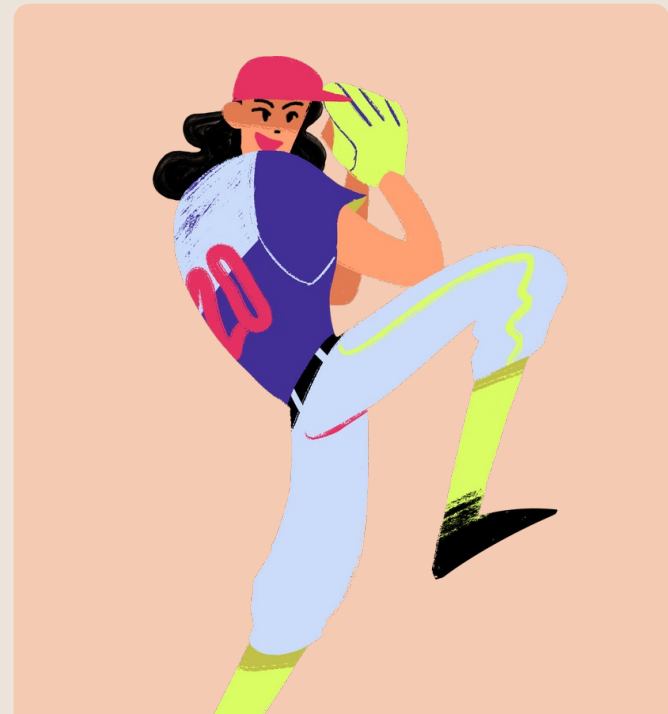
NIKE'S "IF YOU LET ME PLAY" ADVERTISEMENT

IMPACT ON BLACK GIRLS

Representation vs. Empowerment:

While the ad includes Black girls, their representation is largely superficial. They are present in the ad, but their inclusion does not translate into meaningful empowerment. The campaign does not address the unique challenges that Black girls face in accessing sports or the specific barriers related to race and class.

The ad's universal message of empowerment does not acknowledge the intersectional struggles that Black girls often encounter, such as systemic racism, economic disparities, or cultural stereotypes that discourage their participation in sports. By failing to address these issues, the ad falls short of genuinely empowering Black girls.



NIKE'S "IF YOU LET ME PLAY" ADVERTISEMENT

IMPACT ON BLACK GIRLS

Nike's Historical Relationship with Black Communities:

Nike, as a global brand, has a complex relationship with Black communities. On one hand, it has capitalized on Black culture and athletic excellence, particularly in sports like basketball. On the other hand, Nike's broader marketing strategies often fail to address the specific needs and experiences of Black girls.

For Black girls watching this ad, the failure to address their unique challenges can lead to feelings of exclusion rather than empowerment. They might see themselves in the campaign but recognize that their struggles are not acknowledged, making the ad's message feel hollow or unattainable.



NIKE'S "IF YOU LET ME PLAY" ADVERTISEMENT

IMPACT ON BLACK GIRLS

Shaping Societal Biases:

The ad's limited portrayal of girlhood contributes to societal biases about who belongs in sports. By centering white, middle-class girls as the primary beneficiaries of sports empowerment, the campaign reinforces the notion that sports are not for everyone—especially not for those who do not fit this ideal.

For Black girls, this can result in a double marginalization: they are both underrepresented and misrepresented. This shapes societal perceptions that Black girls are either not interested in sports or are only suited for certain types of sports that align with racial stereotypes, such as track and field or basketball, rather than the full spectrum of athletic opportunities.

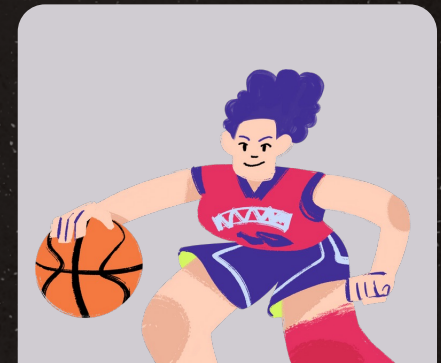
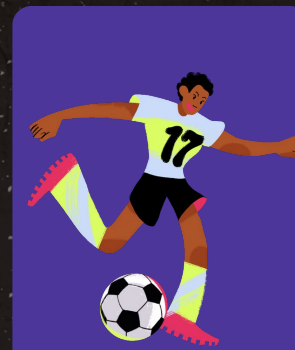
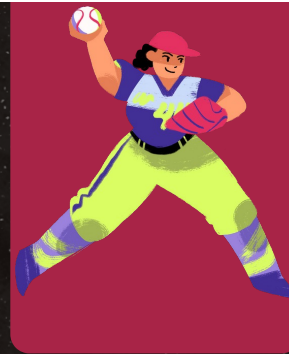


**BLACK GIRLS IN SPORT - A
FOCUSED EXPLORATION**

INTERSECTIONALITY AND EMPOWERMENT

The Unique Challenges Black Girls Face in the Context of Sport and Empowerment:

- **Intersectional Oppression:** Black girls in sport often face multiple layers of discrimination based on both race and gender, a concept known as intersectionality (coined by Patricia Hill Collins). This dual burden can manifest in fewer opportunities, less media coverage, and limited access to resources compared to their white counterparts.
- **Stereotyping:** Black girls are frequently subjected to racialized and gendered stereotypes that can undermine their athletic achievements. For example, they may be stereotyped as "naturally" athletic, which can diminish recognition of their hard work and skill development.
- **Policing of Bodies:** Black girls often experience the policing of their bodies in sports, where they might be criticized for being too muscular or not fitting traditional standards of femininity. This scrutiny can lead to body image issues and discourage participation in sports.
- **Lack of Representation:** There is often a lack of role models who look like them in leadership roles within sports organizations, which can impact their aspirations and sense of belonging in the sports community.



HOW SPORT MEDIA PORTRAYS OR IGNORES BLACK GIRLS IN SPORT

Underrepresentation: Black girls are significantly underrepresented in sport media, particularly in mainstream outlets. When they are featured, the focus is often on their physicality rather than their skill, intelligence, or strategic thinking.

Stereotypical Narratives: When Black girls do appear in sport media, they are frequently portrayed through a limited set of narratives. These may include the "angry Black woman" trope or the "strong Black girl" stereotype, which can overshadow their individuality and complexity.

Invisibility: In many cases, Black girls are rendered invisible in sport media, with their achievements and stories overlooked in favor of those of white athletes. This invisibility reinforces the idea that sports are not a space for Black girls, limiting their opportunities for empowerment.

STATISTICS

Accurate and up-to-date statistics specifically on the underrepresentation of Black girls in sport media are difficult to find, as most research tends to focus more broadly on race and gender rather than on Black girls specifically. However, general trends in sports media representation can provide some context.

Race and Gender Representation: Studies consistently show that women of color, including Black women and girls, are underrepresented in sports media. For example, a 2021 study by the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) found that over 80% of sports editors, columnists, and reporters are white men. This lack of diversity in media staff can contribute to the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Black girls in sports coverage.

Media Coverage Disparities: Research from the Women's Sports Foundation in 2020 highlighted that women's sports receive only 4% of all sports media coverage, and within that small percentage, coverage of Black women and girls is even less frequent. While this study does not isolate data for Black girls specifically, it underscores the broader issue of gender and racial disparities in sports media.

Portrayal in Media: A 2017 study published in the *Journal of Sports Media* explored how Black female athletes are portrayed in media and found that they are often either ignored or portrayed through limiting stereotypes. The study also pointed out that Black female athletes receive far less media attention than their white counterparts, and when they do, the coverage often focuses on their physicality rather than their achievements or personal stories.

Social Media as an Alternative: Some studies suggest that Black girls and women athletes are more likely to be represented in social media platforms, where they can control their narratives. This shift highlights the importance of digital spaces in providing visibility that traditional media often fails to offer.

IMPACT

The underrepresentation and negative portrayal of Black girls in sports media create significant barriers to their empowerment. To truly empower Black girls in sports, it is essential to challenge and change the narratives that dominate sports media, ensuring that Black girls are visible, celebrated, and supported in their athletic endeavors.

Empowerment through Visibility: Visibility in media is a crucial aspect of empowerment. When Black girls are underrepresented in sports media, they have fewer opportunities to see themselves reflected in successful athletes. This lack of representation can limit their belief in their potential to succeed in sports, as they may struggle to find role models who look like them. The absence of relatable role models can undermine their confidence and sense of belonging in the sporting world.

Impact of Negative Portrayals: When Black girls are portrayed in sports media, they are often subject to stereotypes that reinforce negative perceptions, such as being overly aggressive or less feminine. These portrayals contribute to a narrow and often damaging view of what it means to be a Black female athlete. This can discourage Black girls from participating in sports or expressing their full potential, as they may feel pressured to conform to these limiting stereotypes.

Alternative Platforms for Empowerment: While traditional sports media may overlook Black girls, social media provides an alternative platform where they can share their stories and connect with others who face similar challenges. However, social media can also expose Black girls to online harassment and racism, which can negatively impact their mental health and self-esteem. The dual nature of social media means that while it offers opportunities for empowerment, it also presents new challenges that must be navigated carefully.

Empowerment through Participation: Media representation plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of who belongs in sports. When Black girls see few examples of people like them in sports media, they may feel that sports are not meant for them, leading to lower levels of participation. This reduced participation can have long-term effects on their physical health, social development, and overall empowerment, as sports offer valuable opportunities for personal growth and achievements.

**EMPOWERMENT FOR
WHOM? A CRITICAL
EXAMINATION**

REVISITING MCCLEAREN'S ARGUMENTS

DEFINITION OF "EMPOWERMENT":

General Definition: having the knowledge, confidence, means, or ability to do things or make decisions for oneself

IN THE CONTEXT OF SPORT MEDIA: :

In sport media, empowerment often refers to narratives that promote the idea that participation in sports can lead to personal growth, confidence, and social mobility. However, these narratives may oversimplify or commodify empowerment, presenting it as something easily attained through consumption or participation in certain sports.



QUESTIONING WHO BENEFITS FROM THE CURRENT EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVES IN SPORT MEDIA:

Who is Left Out or Marginalized in These Narratives?

- **Underrepresentation of Marginalized Groups:** Current empowerment narratives in sport media often focus on a narrow, idealized image of empowerment that predominantly features white, middle-to-upper-class athletes. This leaves out many groups, including Black girls, girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those with diverse gender identities.
- **Intersectionality and Exclusion:** The experiences of girls who face multiple forms of marginalization—such as those based on race, class, or sexuality—are often ignored or inadequately addressed in these narratives. This exclusion can perpetuate feelings of disempowerment among these groups, as their stories and struggles are not reflected in mainstream media.
- **Tokenism vs. Genuine Representation:** Even when marginalized groups are featured, they are sometimes portrayed in a tokenistic manner, where their representation serves more to fulfill diversity quotas rather than to genuinely engage with their unique challenges and contributions.



QUESTIONING WHO BENEFITS FROM THE CURRENT EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVES IN SPORT MEDIA:

The Role of Commercial Interests in Shaping These Empowerment Messages

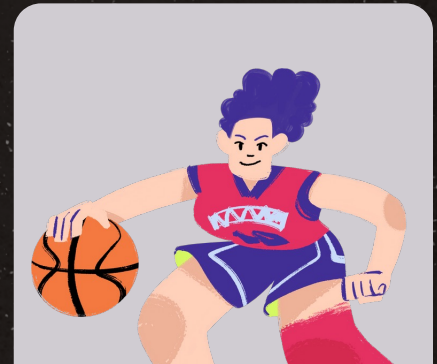
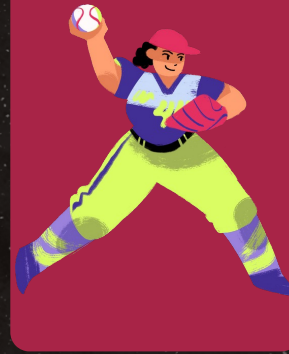
- **Commercialization of Empowerment:** The concept of empowerment in sport media is often tied to commercial interests, with brands using empowerment as a marketing tool to sell products. This can lead to a commodification of empowerment, where the focus shifts from meaningful social change to consumerism.
- **Selective Empowerment Narratives:** Brands and media outlets may promote certain empowerment stories that align with their commercial goals, often choosing those that are palatable to a broad audience and avoiding more complex or controversial issues. This selective storytelling can create a skewed perception of what empowerment looks like and who it is for.
- **Profit Over Purpose:** The underlying motive of commercial empowerment campaigns is often profit rather than genuine social impact. As a result, these campaigns may prioritize uplifting narratives that are easy to sell over those that critically engage with systemic issues affecting marginalized groups.



**DECONSTRUCTING THE
CONCEPT OF
EMPOWERMENT**

WHAT DOES EMPOWERMENT REALLY MEAN?

To truly deconstruct and understand empowerment in sport, it's crucial to look beyond surface-level portrayals and recognize the complex, multifaceted nature of empowerment. This involves challenging the narratives presented by sport media, advocating for more inclusive and nuanced representations, and ensuring that empowerment initiatives are designed to address the unique needs and experiences of all athletes.



WHAT DOES EMPOWERMENT REALLY MEAN?

A DEEPER EXPLORATION OF WHAT EMPOWERMENT SHOULD MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF SPORT:

Holistic Empowerment: Empowerment in sports should go beyond mere participation or achievement. It involves fostering autonomy, confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency in athletes, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls and women. True empowerment allows individuals to take control of their own narratives and challenges the structures that limit their opportunities.

Inclusivity: Empowerment should be inclusive, acknowledging and addressing the diverse experiences and needs of all athletes. This includes creating environments that respect differences in race, gender identity, socio-economic background, and ability. It's not just about creating opportunities but ensuring that these opportunities are equitable and accessible.

Critical Empowerment: Encourages athletes to question and challenge existing power dynamics in sports. This involves recognizing how systemic issues like sexism, racism, and ableism impact their experiences and being equipped to advocate for change.



WHAT DOES EMPOWERMENT REALLY MEAN?

HOW CURRENT MEDIA PORTRAYALS MIGHT OVERSIMPLIFY OR MISREPRESENT EMPOWERMENT:

- **Surface-Level Narratives:** Media often portrays empowerment in simplistic terms, focusing on individual success stories or triumphs over adversity. While these narratives can be inspiring, they often fail to address the structural barriers that many athletes face, such as lack of access to resources, discrimination, or societal expectations.
- **Commercialization of Empowerment:** Empowerment is frequently used as a marketing tool in sports media, where brands capitalize on the idea of female empowerment to sell products. This can reduce empowerment to a commodity, stripping it of its deeper significance and ignoring the systemic issues that need to be addressed.
- **Selective Empowerment:** Media tends to celebrate empowerment that aligns with mainstream values, such as competitiveness or physical strength, while overlooking other forms of empowerment, such as collaboration, emotional intelligence, or community-building. This selective portrayal can marginalize those who do not fit the dominant narrative.



WHAT DOES EMPOWERMENT REALLY MEAN?

THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH TO EMPOWERMENT:

- **Exclusionary Practices:** A one-size-fits-all approach to empowerment can exclude those who do not conform to the dominant narrative of what an "empowered" athlete should look like. For example, athletes who prioritize mental health or those who challenge traditional gender norms may be overlooked or even stigmatized.
- **Perpetuating Inequality:** By focusing on individual success and personal responsibility, a universal approach to empowerment can ignore the structural barriers that different groups face. This can reinforce existing inequalities rather than addressing them, as it places the burden of success solely on the individual.
- **Cultural Insensitivity:** A uniform notion of empowerment may not resonate with athletes from diverse cultural backgrounds. What is considered empowering in one context may not be relevant or appropriate in another, leading to a disconnection between athletes and the empowerment messages they receive.

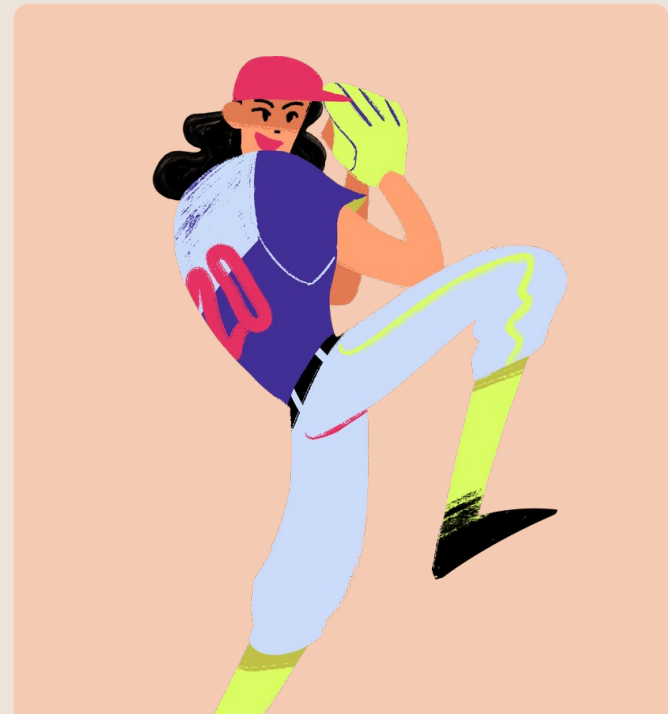


**REIMAGINING
EMPOWERMENT IN SPORT
MEDIA**

TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE NARRATIVE

IDEAS FOR HOW SPORT MEDIA CAN BETTER REPRESENT ALL GIRLS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM MARGINALIZED BACKGROUNDS

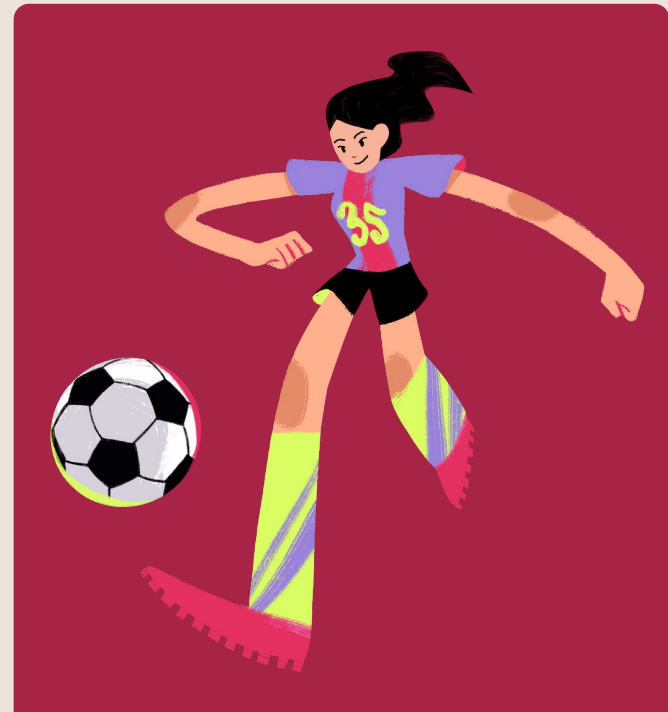
- **Diverse Representation:** Ensure that media coverage includes a wide range of girls and women from different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds. This includes not just highlighting their successes but also telling stories that reflect their challenges, resilience, and unique perspectives.
- **Intersectional Narratives:** Move beyond one-dimensional portrayals by embracing intersectionality—recognizing how race, gender, class, and other identities intersect to shape the experiences of girls in sport. Highlighting these complexities can provide a richer, more accurate representation of their lives.
- **Amplifying Underrepresented Voices:** Actively seek out and amplify voices that have been historically marginalized in sport media. This could involve featuring more stories of Black girls, girls from indigenous communities, or those with disabilities, thereby challenging the dominant narratives that often exclude them.



TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE NARRATIVE

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSE VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES IN SHAPING EMPOWERMENT NARRATIVES

- **Broadening Perspectives:** Incorporating diverse voices into sport media helps challenge the status quo and opens up new ways of thinking about empowerment. When girls see a variety of role models who look like them and share their experiences, they are more likely to feel empowered and included
- **Challenging Stereotypes:** Diverse perspectives can counteract harmful stereotypes by showcasing the full range of what girls can achieve in sports. This not only benefits the girls themselves but also educates broader audiences, promoting greater understanding and empathy.
- **Promoting Authenticity:** Empowerment narratives are more authentic and impactful when they are shaped by those who have lived the experiences. Encouraging women and girls from diverse backgrounds to share their stories can lead to more genuine and relatable portrayals in sport media.

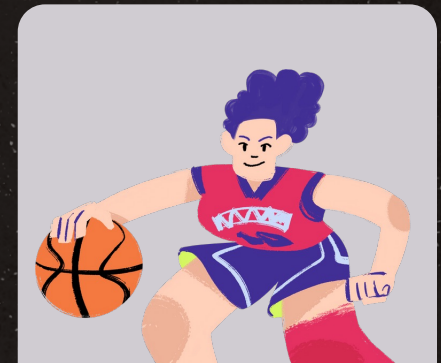
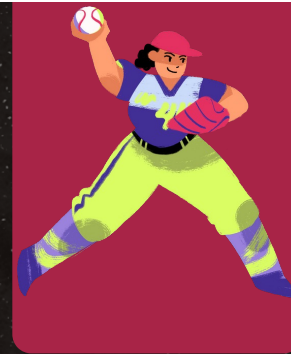


CONCLUSION

In this presentation, we've explored the profound influence of sport media as a cultural force, especially in shaping perceptions, values, and gender identities in society. We examined how these narratives often fall short in representing the diverse experiences of all girls, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds.

Reimagining empowerment in sport media requires a commitment to more inclusive and intersectional storytelling. By amplifying underrepresented voices and diversifying media leadership, we can begin to dismantle harmful stereotypes and promote authentic, relatable portrayals of empowerment. This reimagined approach will not only inspire a broader range of girls to see themselves in sports but also foster a more equitable and inclusive sporting culture overall.

Ultimately, the goal is to create a sport media landscape where all girls, regardless of their background, can see themselves empowered and celebrated, and where their diverse experiences are recognized as central to the narrative of sports. By taking these practical steps, we can move toward a future where empowerment is not just a selective narrative but a truly inclusive reality.



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