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“It’s a Balancing Act”: Contradictory Ambitions of Journalistic Media in Addressing Harassment in Sport

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Abstract

Over the last five years, the Finnish sports media has played a key role in disseminating information and stimulating debate on gender equity, sexual harassment, and the structures and culture that perpetuate the latter in sport. Triggered by the Me Too movement, the handling of harassment cases has shifted from the private domain to the public debate in the media, making it political. In this article, I study the perception of the politicisation of harassment within sports media. The article utilises interviews with 16 Finnish sports journalists who have been reporting on harassment cases in national and regional media houses. In the thematic analysis, the facilitators and constraints of harassment reporting are examined in relation to the prevailing power structures, culture, and attitudes in the professional sports environment. While the interviews highlight the changing face of sports journalism and, within it, an ambition to move from entertainment and performance reporting to socio-politically critical journalism, the article also highlights the problematic contradictions embedded in the ambition within sports media to address harassment in sport. The findings of this research suggest that when studying the outcomes of news reporting, it is important to pay attention to news production processes and the gendered aspects that influence them.

Keywords

digitalisation; gender equity; hegemonic masculinity; identity politics; sexual harassment; sports journalism

1. Introduction

This research originates in publications by the Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports from 2018 to 2022 revealing the widespread nature of sexual harassment across the sports field. According to a report

pertaining to all sectors of Finnish sport (Lahti et al., 2020), every third female and every fifth male in sport have encountered sexual harassment. Arguably, the investigations that led to the aforementioned publications may not have taken place without the media's active role in reporting on individual cases of harassment and pointing out that they reflect a larger problem in sport. This was particularly evident in the events of March 2022, when the public service media company Yle reported that there had been undisclosed internal cases of sexual harassment within the Finnish Olympic Committee (Suopuro, 2022). Due to the increasing media coverage and public pressure, a top official of the committee resigned, and yet another report investigating harassment within the Olympic Committee was released.

In this article, I understand sexual harassment as unwanted sexual behaviour that violates the mental or physical integrity of another person (see Burn, 2019). It is widely understood that sexual harassment in sport is closely linked to the power structure and culture of hegemonic masculinity (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). The increasing journalistic sports coverage of harassment has put pressure on political figures in Finland to react and issue demands for the implementation of sports policy measures (see e.g., Arkko, 2022; Vainikka & Hyyppä, 2020). By bringing violence and the abuse of power to the public's attention, the journalistic sports media has politicised sexual harassment (see Seippel et al., 2018). Yet the role of the media and individual journalists in this context has remained unrecognised both in research and sports policy debates. In this study, I examine how sports journalists perceive the reporting of harassment incidents and what supporting and constraining factors are involved therein. This article thus aims at identifying structural, cultural, and attitudinal points of change in journalistic work that may impact harassment and gender equity issues in sport.

While criticism surrounding sporting performance has always been an integral part of sports journalism, critical journalism directed at the socio-political issues surrounding sport and done by the sports departments of Finnish media houses, has been scarce in the past (Laine & Turtiainen, 2018). The journalistic sports media, as understood in this article, includes media houses and actors producing sports news content in accordance with journalistic principles, such as the quest for truthfulness, objectivity, and accuracy (see Cooper, 1990). In Finland, the journalistic sports media has traditionally reported on sport from a nationalistic, entertaining, and success-focused value base (Laine & Särkivuori, 2023). This stems from the historical lack of criticism in reporting on the national heroes of competitive sport (Laine & Särkivuori, 2023). Internationally, sport has long been seen as a distinct entity, which has led to the absence of journalistic reporting on the social context of sport and has earned sports journalism the reputation of being the toy department of media houses (McEnnis, 2020). The lack of criticism in reporting has led to the maintenance of the status quo regarding sports politics and power positions (Broussard, 2020). Evidently, this has been particularly disadvantageous from a gender equity perspective.

Equality in Finnish sport is known to have been promoted through legislation (e.g., Act on Equality, Sports Act) and funding (e.g., grant conditions), but so far, the role of the media has received little attention. In this study, I approach the treatment of gender equity and harassment in sports journalism, in contrast to the usual approach, not from the perspective of news reporting but from that of journalists. In this article, I additionally consider how the prevailing power structures, culture, and attitudes in the professional sports environment affect and are reflected in the work of sports journalists. I argue that taking a wider perspective on gender in the context of reporting on harassment is crucial because the working body of journalists is constructed in relation to the media content they produce, and because embodiment, sexuality, and gender are argued to

be present in the daily work of journalists (Kivinen, 2016). This study thus makes visible the work of sports journalists and the cultural and structural constraints associated with it and broadens our understanding of the ways in which the professional sports environment can be changed in a more egalitarian direction.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Digitalisation and the Change in Sports Journalism

Outlining the change from “stick to sports” journalism (Broussard, 2020) to socio-politically critical sports journalism requires an understanding of the changing media environment. In this respect, addressing the changes induced by digitalisation is of utmost importance. In the digital era, print journalism is being supplemented or replaced by online journalism, and there is increased competition for the public’s attention as the audience has simultaneous access to various global media content around the clock. Digitalisation has thus made journalism more vulnerable and dependent on the attention and expectations of the public because journalists are constantly competing with other media actors (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016). In this competition, an increasing number of media players, such as global scoreboards, sports blogs, and in-house media, are challenging the place and legitimacy of journalistic sports media (English, 2022; McEnnis, 2016). Moreover, through social media, athletes can report on events and raise issues in their own words without media interference and set the discourse for public discussion (Cooky & Antunovic, 2020). Often, content produced by athletes is also used by sports journalists in their news production (Nölleke et al., 2017). Therefore, if journalists want to frame a news event or a social media topic differently, they face the urgency to define the news narrative before they are tuned into the discourse established on social media.

Taken together, this reflects that the role of (sports) journalists as gatekeepers of news information has weakened (Nölleke et al., 2017). Today, (sports) journalism is under pressure to be more open and accountable to audiences and is under scrutiny as its actions and operations are critically monitored by audiences, stakeholders, and competitors alike (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2016). Digitalisation has thus led journalistic sports media into a situation where it is forced to redefine its role and re-establish its professional legitimacy (Suggs, 2016).

Conclusively, previous literature indicates that the growing ambition to do socio-politically critical sports journalism constitutes a two-level response to the diversification of the media landscape. On one hand, due to growing competition, the journalistic sports media is forced to reinvent itself with a new kind of journalistic content production (English, 2022; Perreault & Nölleke, 2022). On the other hand, the journalistic sports media seeks to meet societal and audience expectations, and by doing so, attempts to secure legitimacy and authority in the public eye (McEnnis, 2020; Suggs, 2016). The choice to address sexual harassment as a topic can be seen as a prime example of this. Due to changes in the cultural discourse around sexual and gender-based harassment (led by the Me Too movement), new opportunities created by digital media (e.g., athletes constructing their own narratives), and challenges caused by a diversified media environment (e.g., growing competition), the Finnish sports media now has the ambition to address sexual harassment in sport. The existing literature (e.g., Broussard, 2020) provides a comprehensive account of the reasons why the change in reporting has been underway in recent years, but there is scant research on how this is perceived by journalists themselves and under what conditions this is done. Therefore, the first two research questions of this article are as follows:

RQ1: How do Finnish sports journalists perceive their own agency in promoting gender equity and addressing sexual harassment in relation to audiences and sports organisations?

RQ2: What are the factors that support or constrain reporting on harassment in sport and how do they relate to each other?

2.2. Hegemonic Masculinity and the Media's Politicisation of Harassment

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a society's valuing of certain traits and behaviours associated with masculinity, which over time become normative (i.e., expected or accepted; Connell, 1987). Hegemony does not require the use of force but implies a wide acceptance of actions and practices that institutionalise men's dominance over women (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is thus recurrently constructed in relation to both femininity and to subordinate alternative forms of masculinity (Connell, 1987). As an ideal, it is not sought to be fulfilled per se but is sustained because it benefits men's dominant position in society (Connell, 1987).

Sports culture is often seen as the bastion of hegemonic masculinity because it has been constructed materially and symbolically in ways that have naturalised the hegemonic position of men (McKay et al., 2000). In sport, the hegemonic ideal of a strong, victorious, and disciplined body can, at least up to a certain point, be embodied, which makes the sporting environment a fertile ground for the practice of hegemonic masculinity (see Connell, 1987). This bodily sense of masculinity is also used to subjugate others, as evidenced by the extent of sexual harassment of women in sport (see Lahti et al., 2020).

Deeply ingrained views of sport as virtuous, fair, and non-political, and as an arena for public confrontation between men, have for long inhibited actions to address sexual harassment in sport (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002). However, in recent years, media politicisation has moved the issue of sexual harassment from the private to the public domain (see Seippel et al., 2018). The politicisation of sexual harassment is closely linked to fourth-wave feminism and the associated Me Too movement that originated in the US in 2006 to raise awareness about the sexual harassment of women of colour and marginalised people and became viral and global in 2017 when people started posting their own experiences of harassment on social media under the hashtag #metoo (see Chandra & Erlingsdóttir, 2021). In sport, the movement changed the climate of the debate on gender equality, first internationally and, later on, in Finland (Bachynski, 2020; Lahti et al., 2020).

Based on Connell's (1987) theorising on gender and hegemonic power, in this article I approach the media's politicisation of sexual harassment from a broader conceptual framework called the trinity of gendered discourses (Figure 1). Within this framework, I understand that historical gender norms are not just reproduced in the sports culture but are also embedded in sports newsrooms and reflected in sports news coverage (see Whiteside & Hardin, 2012). For example, in the journalistic sports media, both vertical and horizontal segregation have been identified as taking place, meaning that there is a gendered division in the organisational hierarchy in sports newsrooms and in the tasks and types of stories assigned to journalists of different genders (Schoch, 2022). Additionally, studies (e.g., Hardin & Shain, 2005; Schmidt, 2018) consistently indicate that female journalists face discrimination and harassment in sports newsrooms. Inequality in sports reporting has, in turn, been shown to exist not just in relation to the quantity but also to the quality of sports coverage (Bernstein, 2020; Cooky et al., 2021; Fink, 2015), and in research, the media has long been criticised for trivialising and sexualising women's athleticism (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999).



Figure 1. Trinity of gendered discourses.

To sum up, prior literature shows that long-held values and attitudes in sport that stem from the ideals of hegemonic masculinity still affect the whole sports culture and manifest in daily practices across the sports field. Sexual harassment, as such a practice, is rooted in the abuse of power dynamics in sport—that is, those in more vulnerable positions across the cultural and structural environments in sport more often face harassment (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Arguably, the trinity of gendered discourses in sport is self-sustaining, and a closer examination of the roots and outcomes of gendered thinking in newsrooms is, therefore, needed to understand how journalists perceive their own position in addressing sexual harassment. The gendered body of a media professional is seen as more vulnerable than ever when it is reproduced under the cross-pressure of the media organisation, the product and the audience, and especially when the content that a journalist produces deals with (abusive) embodied experiences (Kivinen, 2016). Based on these premises, the third research question of this article is as follows:

RQ3: How do the prevailing power structures, culture, and attitudes in professional sports environments affect and get reflected in the work of sports journalists?

3. Materials and Methods

Data for this study were obtained through expert interviews. From March to May 2023, I interviewed 16 Finnish sports journalists who had reported on harassment between the years 2018 and 2022. The sampling procedure combined purposeful sampling and snowball sampling approaches. The first round of expert recruitment entailed systematically scanning news articles in the sports sections of three national news media houses from the past five years using the keyword “harassment.” Next, I sent emails to journalists who had written extensively on the subject. The second round of expert recruitment relied upon peer recommendations from the interviewed journalists.

The research was conducted according to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. According to the guidelines, an ethical review statement for the study was not needed and it was therefore not sought. On first contact, participants were sent a research notification (a brief description of the study) and a privacy notice (a description of the processing of personal data), which they were asked to read before

agreeing to be interviewed. Informed consent to participate in the study was explained and obtained verbally from the interviewees at the beginning of the interviews. The interviewees were given the option of being interviewed face-to-face or by video call. Five interviews were conducted face-to-face in public or private spaces and the rest were conducted over the Funet Miitti (Zoom) video call service provided by the university.

Altogether, the interviewees represented six different national and regional news media houses. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Eight interviewees self-identified as female and eight as male. Female journalists were over-represented in the interview data as, in Finland, women account for an estimated 10–20% of all people working in sports journalism (E. Hatunen, personal communication, 13 November 2023).

In the interviews, I asked the journalists about how they see their role and responsibilities as changemakers and how they perceive reporting on topics outside of the usual sports news, which might evoke strong emotions and stances, or even stigma. Examples of the interview questions include the following: What led you to start producing content on harassment in sport? Do you think the media or individual sports journalists have a responsibility to report on social and cultural problems, such as harassment? How have you been received by athletes and people with influence or power in sport when you have collected material for reporting on harassment? What kind of feedback have you received when producing content on harassment-related topics? Do you think your gender has any influence on how you are able to do your work or are perceived as a sports journalist?

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, meaning that all predetermined questions were asked in each interview, but their order varied and they were supplemented by other questions depending on the course of the discussion. An interview guide provided a structure to the interviews and enabled cross-interview comparisons in the coding and analysis phases. At the same time, the flexibility offered by the method enabled a deeper exploration of the interviewees' insights and experiences and allowed them to discuss personal and sensitive issues, such as harassment, on their own terms. The interviews were recorded and later manually transcribed using intelligent verbatim transcription. During transcription, all direct identifying information, such as the names of people and media, as well as passages in which interviewees described in detail unpublished information from publicly covered harassment cases, were left out of the transcripts.

A systematic analysis of the research data was undertaken using applied thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2012). In line with the research questions, I examined the data from two overlapping thematic perspectives. On one hand, I sought to identify factors raised by the interviewed journalists that either supported or constrained reporting on harassment in sport. On the other hand, I sought to identify how the prevailing power structures, culture, and attitudes in the professional sports environment affected and were reflected in the sports journalists' work. Table 1 shows the final coding scheme of the main themes that emerged in the two parallel analyses. In the first analysis, the codes had mirroring dynamics: Each factor supporting critical sports journalism had a counterpart factor constraining it. In the second analysis, journalists' agency in relation to gender formed the main coding categories, and each category had subcategories describing the relationship between gender and reporting on harassment. Section 4 outlines the joint understanding of insights from the two analyses.

Table 1. Coding categories.

1. Supporting factors	2. Constraining factors	3. Gender perspectives
1.1. Societal change	2.1. Permissive culture of harassment	3.1. Agency of female journalists 3.1.1. Experience of belittlement or harassment
1.2. Generational change	2.2. Generational gap	3.1.2. Responsibility for covering women's sport
1.3. Changing face of sports journalism	2.3. Reputation of sports journalism	3.1.3. Responsibility for covering harassment
1.4. Cooperation and trust	2.4. Proximity and tensions	3.2. Agency of male journalists 3.2.1. Gender irrelevance
1.5. Employer support	2.5. Realities of work	3.2.2. Distance from women's issues

4. Results

4.1. Agency of the Sports Media in Addressing Harassment

The interviews indicated that reporting on societal issues through sport lies at the core of today's sports journalism. Interviewee (henceforth IW) 5 reflected on how covering harassment cases is "admittedly emotionally draining" but also "makes work meaningful" because "it clearly has an impact." Nevertheless, in combination, the information gained from reviewing national news articles dealing with harassment and from the interviews indicates that reporting on the grievances of sport falls not on the shoulders of everyone but on those of certain journalists. According to the interviewees, younger sports journalists, more and more of whom are female, come from more educated backgrounds and have more of an interest in raising awareness about societal issues. IW1 explained:

In the morning meetings, I keep women's sport on the agenda a lot and then these social issues. Certainly, even if I were a man, I would bring up these topics. But I have yet to meet a man who would be so keen to promote these issues....The victims have often been either the same age or younger than me. I think about those experiences I've had myself. It's rare for a male journalist to have similar experiences. If you were born and live as a man, it's hard to understand the position of women.

Female journalists expressed that their own adverse experiences in sport have contributed both to their interest in raising awareness about harassment and to their competence in reporting on it. They also linked this to the fact that the vast majority of victims of harassment about whom they had reported were women. IW14 noted that "It has been easier for athletes to talk if there has been a female journalist on the other side." IW16 elaborated, stating that this may also be an assumption that has led to "the desire to prepare the interview situation in such a way that there would not be any walls right away" because "those situations are really difficult anyway."

Reporting on harassment also requires a new type of knowledge and skills, the lack of which can be reflected in journalists' professional identity. IW2 elaborated:

For the previous generation of journalists, professionalism was about watching the game and writing about it. They may have asked the coach why you went from a four-defender line to a five-defender line. That was their professionalism. And all of a sudden, they should have some idea about, say, the post-George Floyd protests or how a coach should treat a female athlete. Suddenly, they are required to have a kind of competence and a mindset that they may not have accumulated at all in their lifetime. It's quite a difficult place to be.

Furthermore, there is a pronounced gap between generations that is seen to cause friction in sports departments. As IW12 summarised, "The old sports journalistic tradition, which has always respected the masters of sport, who are good sources of news, feels reluctant to shake up the system it has become accustomed to living with." IW13 noted that "there hasn't been a collective change in attitudes yet, but everywhere, it has already started" because "big media houses cannot afford to fall behind the changing world." According to the interviewees, the editorial management of media houses broadly endorsed addressing harassment. The interviews revealed both the economic logic and the virtuous motives of the media. IW12 elaborated:

This is where I see the future of sports journalism. It involves reaching out to new audiences. It's a lifeline for us to survive and even an opportunity to strengthen. Each sports department is trying to gain a stronger foothold in its own media house—to be an important part of the editorial meetings and not just a curiosity....If you spend 40 years writing about seconds and metres, it's not really meaningful work. It has to be inspiring and important. Journalists usually enter the field with a strong desire to improve the world. That's coming into sports journalism now.

Journalists had seen the impact of their work when they reported on incidents of harassment, which motivated them to do more stories. IW2 noted that "usually, when these cases come up and are discussed, it leads to something, for example, to an anonymous line to report incidents to," or as IW9 described, it "prompts the federation to change its rules." The interviewees explained how the coverage of harassment cases in the media alone puts pressure on clubs and sports federations to examine their own environment. One way to increase this pressure, according to IW7, is to "follow up on what the sponsors have to say about it." Another way, according to IW16, is to later on "challenge the federation on whether it has been able to deliver on its promises."

Overall, the interviews highlighted the changing face of sports journalism and, within it, an ambition to move from entertainment and performance reporting to socio-politically critical journalism. At the same time, the interviews revealed contradictions regarding resources, integrity, and gender that are embedded in the sports media's ambition of addressing harassment in sport. In the following subsections, I unpack these observations.

4.2. Contradictions in Critical Sports Journalism

4.2.1. Contradiction of Resources

The first contradiction that emerged from the interviews relates to the commercial logics guiding journalists' daily work. IW12 described harassment cases as "sort of jackpots for the commercial media" because they "don't just come out of nowhere" and are thus "wanted and fished for." Unearthing cases of harassment was

unusual and often required considerable effort and mental capacity that the interviewees compared to undertaking investigative journalism. IW8 elaborated, “It’s a lot easier to do a couple of really catchy Instagram stories than it is to tackle topics like this” because “you can’t write them with your left hand.” As IW3 explained, covering harassment requires resources that are not in line with the shrinking size of journalistic editorial teams:

You need to get something productive done during the shift. When it’s your writing shift and you think, “I’m going to dig up stories about sexual harassment,” if there’s nothing to grab on to or no answers to be found, there’s a blank piece of paper in front of you after your shift. It doesn’t do much for the newspaper. The editorial staff has been reduced. Nowadays, there are not as many journalists in the entire sports department as there used to be in the Olympics. With that kind of workforce, if you had the resources and used them efficiently, you could or should get a lot more done.

The interviewed journalists could not see how to address harassment also when there are no individual cases to report. According to IW2, “Readers are not very interested if we talk about distant issues or if we talk about problems in general” and that leads to “a loss of commercial interest in doing them.” Additionally, the journalists acknowledged that in order to address harassment as a topic, it must be attractive to readers, and the attractiveness often comes from scandalising it. IW8 reflected:

When you are a journalist in [X media], you are constantly aware that you have to sell the story with the headline and the details and the horror. It’s like having an angel and a demon on your shoulders. After years of doing it, you know the rules of the trade. And of course, as a journalist, you want the story to be read and clicked on. That’s what you do it for. But then there is a human being in the middle: the victim, a young woman in this case. You want to write respectfully. I haven’t written the most terrible details in many cases. Some of them are certainly important, but you don’t have to write about all of them. It’s a kind of balancing act with such topics.

Some journalists, such as IW14, questioned the commercial logic of media:

In a way, I’ve been really worried about how the commercial media in particular, but also the public media, sometimes fall into the trap of trying to do things quickly and efficiently. We think about the external and commercial factors, how much the stuff sells. That’s the starting point for valuing everything.

Following that, IW4 had taken concrete steps to “keep this issue in the spotlight, so that it doesn’t stay in that one story,” although the general understanding among journalists was that follow-up stories on harassment are not commercially profitable. Some journalists also raised the need to portray female athletes in ways other than via tragedy. IW9 reflected:

What I personally wish is that, sometimes, we could focus on something else in women’s sport other than how small a bikini they have to play in or how they get harassed out there or what kind of pregnancy rules they have. It seems to me that we are still in a situation where women’s sport is not that interesting. What is interesting is that they are harassed, humiliated, and bullied.

Conclusively, the observed contradiction of resources is that the journalistic sports media is ambitious about discarding its toy department reputation by doing socio-politically critical journalism; simultaneously, it wants to create profitable entertainment for the audience, for example, with scandalous headlines and stories about harassment.

4.2.2. Contradiction of Integrity

The second contradiction that emerged from the interviews is the journalists' proximity to sports culture and organisations. The interviewees explained that reporting on incidents of harassment often relies upon a long-standing close relationship of trust with the athletes and the surrounding sports community. IW7 elaborated:

It's not just about ensuring that if a journalist wanted to dig something up, they would need the time to do it. Typically, in such cases, there must be some kind of trust between the person who has been harassed and the journalist, so that the person will talk to the journalist. Of course, it is much more natural to talk to someone who has interviewed you 20 times at sporting events than to someone who is just a voice on the phone once a year and whose name you don't remember...Then it's also about which media can afford to be there and send journalists to these events year after year.

Being close to a certain type of sport provides sports journalists with a unique vantage point that enables them to observe both the success and the grievances in sport. This also allows them to report on the problematic aspects of the sport, but this proximity may sometimes also prevent them from doing that. IW9 reflected:

I would like to see the media watching the sports field, but in a way, it's also an extension of the field. You should have some kind of contacts or relations with these people, so that you can get interviews from them, so that you can write stories. So, it is a bit of a balancing act. In a way, you should stay in touch, but you should also be able to be very critical and also write about the unpleasant things.

Locality is another aspect that was problematised in the interviews. Journalists representing national media houses could see their advantage in reporting on stigmatising topics, such as harassment, because they do not have to think about their relationship with the local sports clubs and teams. As IW16 noted, local and regional media actors are "seen as entertainers" and are expected to "go and report the game and not interfere with anything else" because, otherwise, "you're suddenly seen as the one who's fouling your own nest." IW4 was of the opinion that "you still have to have the courage to tackle even the most unpleasant topics, even if you burn a few bridges." Further, IW15 wished that journalists "would at least tell someone else, if they don't feel that they are capable of reporting."

When covering harassment cases, journalists' attempts to maintain contact and cooperate with sports federations varied widely. IW14 stated that "the federation's reaction was a shocking disappointment" because "they belittled the issues that the athletes brought up." IW13 said that "it is typical that sports federations are afraid of the damage to their reputation," and to prevent that, they "internally try to sweep such issues under the carpet." With regard to national sports organisations, journalists were even more cautious. IW13 continued:

The way this small circuit runs Finnish top-level sport....There is this powerful little clique out there that defines and belittles and acts in a very arbitrary way. There are pretty strong means at their disposal to influence that [critical] stories would not be done....By no means can it be said that there is intimidation or anything, but it is implied that if this kind of [critical] stuff comes out, then any kind of cooperation or communication will be broken. This is not said directly, but....It's difficult to put into words, but you can sense it clearly in the messages you get.

IW12 stressed that when addressing grievances with national sports organisations, it is important to act as a united front:

It is always the case that if one media outlet goes off in a strong direction and doesn't get support from the others, it becomes a pathetic crusade by one single media [outlet], which actually turns against that media [outlet] because then it's made to look like a chase.

Conclusively, the observed contradiction of integrity is that learning about harassment cases requires close relations with the sporting community, whereas too much closeness and goodwill in networks could predispose journalists to uncritical journalism or silence.

4.2.3. Contradiction of Gender

The third contradiction that emerged from the interviews concerns gender. Interviews revealed that both male and female journalists wished for a more diverse editorial staff. As IW3 expressed, "A more diverse voice in sports journalism, from a wider range of backgrounds, is needed to ensure that topics are covered as widely and as richly as possible." Nonetheless, women, for example, were perceived as not wanting to enter the profession because of the poor reputation of sports journalism.

The interviews revealed differences in how female and male journalists described their profession in relation to their identified gender. Male journalists did not largely view their gender as affecting how they are perceived or able to do their work as sports journalists. Insightfully, IW6 pointed out how significant it is to be male in this field by saying his gender "has no effect whatsoever—in other words, you could say that it has quite a lot of effect." Conversely, being female still had multiple, often negative, impacts on the sports journalism profession. Female journalists experienced more pressure to prove their professional competence compared to their male colleagues. They also talked about their heightened responsibility to ensure that women's sport and athletes are covered in the sports media according to the equality guidelines set by the media houses. Additionally, female journalists described instances of being looked down on, questioned, or harassed by athletes, male colleagues, audiences, or influential people in sports, especially in the earlier stages of their careers. IW10 shared the following:

It can be difficult for many [female journalists] to hang around locker rooms. I don't know if some players do it on purpose or if they just don't care when you meet them there, and they walk around naked—all that kind of stuff. And then, back when I entered the industry in my 20s, a couple of sports journalists who were in a relationship sent me really loaded messages: something along the lines of "I would have wanted to kiss you today." It was only later on that I realised it wasn't really okay. Also, players sometimes make suggestive remarks to me through private messages on social media. I understand that it can be really distressing for many.

The interviews reiterated how the new generation of female journalists in particular has been attempting to change the social climate and language use in newsrooms. IW13 reflected:

In the media houses, it has been customary for some key figures to throw around a bit of lowbrow humour at morning meetings. Everyone laughs and it is generally accepted. But then, when a new generation comes along, someone can find it really distressing. Later on, they might say to their manager that they find it really strange that this is happening, and that they feel disgusted by such things. That's when you realise that a new generation is coming along. Someone else may have sometimes felt uncomfortable with this kind of culture but then thought it was just the way things were and didn't take it further.

The changes promoted by younger journalists were well received by many of those who had been in the industry longer, but a generation gap was also evident. IW11 shared that, "Nowadays, if you want to make a joke, you have to be quiet. At least I don't dare to say anything outrageous in the editorial office anymore, unless I know it's really a good friend." At times, the consequences of advocating for an equal and safe culture in sports and in newsrooms could be severe. IW2 divulged how a female journalist who had covered equality topics was "treated with quite a lot of hostility" and "called names in a WhatsApp group for male journalists."

In addition to newsrooms, journalists witnessed disturbing behaviour in the sports environment. IW16 shared:

This is the kind of job that, as a woman, you have had to toughen up a bit. It has been really difficult for me, especially at the beginning of my career, when men of a certain age would criticise the appearance of female athletes. It has been such an everyday way of talking to criticise their weight and breasts. And I probably have the reputation of being a bit of a tight-ass, because I have pointed some of my colleagues out...I have written a lot about how people talk about female athletes, but I have never, not even in any of my columns, referred to my own colleagues and their behaviour.

Conclusively, the observed contradiction of gender is that the journalistic sports media, from the perspective of an employer, encourages covering harassment cases, while negative manifestations of hegemonic masculinity are present in the work environment for female journalists.

5. Conclusion

In recent years, the Finnish sports media has played a key role in disseminating information and stimulating debate on sexual harassment in sport and the structures and culture that perpetuate it. This study indicates that media houses view socio-politically critical sports journalism both as a moral imperative and an opportunity to redefine and relegitimise their competence and authority and also, importantly, to grow their audiences and revenues and thus strengthen their market positions. The journalistic sports media seems to be in a situation where it (is forced to) act as an intermediary between the society and the sports organisations. On one hand, society puts more pressure on sports journalists to be more critical of the sporting culture and, on the other hand, sports journalists put more pressure on sports organisations to be more transparent, reactive, and proactive.

This study shows that Finnish sports journalists perceive their own agency as influential in addressing sexual harassment: Although reporting on harassment incidents is resource-consuming and emotionally draining for the journalists, it is also a rewarding and deeply meaningful experience that is seen to have an impact. At the same time, the journalists recognise how their individual agency is conditioned by the commercial logic of media, which, according to this research, is visible both in the commercial and public service media and is reflected, for example, in the way competition drives the fast-paced news environment.

From a broader media perspective, this article has highlighted contradictions embedded in the sports media's ambition of addressing harassment in sport. What makes these contradictions particularly problematic, in my view, is that gender seems to be an integral part of every contradiction. The resources allocated for covering harassment cases existed reactively, instead of being used proactively to keep the topic on the table. Instead, the topic of harassment was scandalised through female suffering as this was financially beneficial for the media houses. Furthermore, the sports media was deeply engaged in politicising harassment by shifting the topic from the private to the public sphere; at the same time, female sports journalists were perceived to be more capable of writing about it because the topic fell within women's private domain. Finally, female journalists felt the need to toughen up to be able to maintain mutual integrity with sports organisations and co-workers alike.

Referring to the proposed framework of the trinity of gendered discourses, this study shows how important it is not just to look at the news coverage but to pay attention to the news production processes and the gendered aspects that influence them. A recurring narrative in this study concerns the fact that young female journalists entering sports newsrooms often come from more educated backgrounds and have a strong interest in raising awareness about societal issues in sports. However, in the newsroom, they are compelled to use a considerable number of resources to prove their professional competence, to make sure that women's sport is covered, and to change the social climate and language use in the newsroom, all while they are being looked down on, ridiculed, or harassed. I argue that this combined with the requirements of a fast-paced news environment likely does not afford them much capacity to do socio-politically critical sports journalism.

This study has mainly examined the upper part of the above-mentioned framework—that is, the roots and outcomes of gendered thinking in newsrooms in relation to the coverage of sexual harassment. In future research, orienting the triangle differently would provide a complementary understanding of the gendered media sports dynamics. Moreover, an international comparison of the role of sports media reporting on sexual harassment would shed light on the situation beyond Finland. The main limitation of this study is its focus on one national context, and therefore the results cannot be straightforwardly extended to other countries. Yet this study contributes to the existing literature on the changing landscape of sports journalism by highlighting how the gendered body of a media professional is indeed vulnerable to the cross-pressure of the media organisation, the product, and the audience (see Kivinen, 2016) and should therefore be considered when outlining this development in different countries.

By grasping the structural and attitudinal points of change found in this study, I argue, it is possible to better support the work of individual journalists in promoting gender equity and addressing sexual harassment. In practice, this would, for instance, require the journalistic sports media to more consciously name its gender equality goals, facilitate an ongoing discussion about well-being at work, discuss the guidelines for

story production, develop an editorial policy for monitoring harassment cases, provide more journalists with the opportunities and time to do socio-politically critical journalism, invest in support for the work community, and make the media's role unambiguous to the surrounding sports community.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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