

The Depiction of Beauty Standards Inside and Outside a Sports Context

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Aalborg University: Master's Thesis
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04-01-2024

Summary

This thesis concerns itself with the discrepancy between how the female body is portrayed and perceived in a sports context, in a non-sports context, and how the female body is affected by the prevailing beauty standards. It examines the depiction of Simone Biles, Serena Williams, and Kately Ohashi, as they have all had an impact on their respective sport in terms of athletic accomplishments and effect on the prevailing discourse revolving around mental health, beauty, and clothing.

The thesis takes its starting point in the multimodal approach, semiotics, as defined by Daniel Chandler and Theo Van Leeuwen's approach to multimodality. These methods function as the foundation for the analysis, as semiotics are not limited to only text or media and Van Leeuwen's contributions to critical discourse analysis provide an understanding of why images are just as worthy objects of study as any spoken or written language. Thus, they provide a useful framework for the analysis of this thesis, as it focuses on images from Magazine covers, images from articles, and Instagram posts.

Throughout the analysis, Judith Butler's theory on Performativity and Raewyn Connell's theory on Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity will be utilized, as they provide a useful framework for understanding how gender is created and how certain performances are perceived as natural. Moreover, Laura Mulvey's theory on the *Male Gaze*, Erving Goffman's theory on the *Sociology of Everyday Life Interaction* and his theory on *Gender Displays*, Georg Simmel's theory on *Fashion*, and Stuart Hall's theory on *Representation* will be utilized to analyze and discuss how Williams, Biles, and Ohashi conduct themselves inside and outside of a sports context and what is expected of them in each context. Lastly, Michel Foucault's theory on the *Technologies of the Self* will be utilized as it provides a useful framework for understanding how discourses become internalized.

The analysis is thematically divided, starting with a chapter that provides a brief introduction to Iris Marion Young's theory on *Feminine Compartment*, as it provides a useful understanding of how the female body has been and continues to be limited, in terms of compartment, motility, and spatiality, which illustrates how the analysis of this thesis fits into a greater context. It provides a brief introduction to the history of women's clothing in sports and how it has changed. The second chapter provides an analysis and discussion of Williams, Biles, and Ohashi's hair, makeup, and clothing when they perform in a sports context. The third chapter examines how the media's depiction of the three athletes differentiates from the portrayal of them in a sports context or if they are portrayed similarly,

whereas the fourth chapter examines how Williams, Biles, and Ohashi conduct and depict themselves on social media and their depiction differentiates from the media.

This thesis also provides a discussion of beauty discourses and health, as there are many contradicting definitions of both health and beauty standards. The World Health Organization's three definitions of health is discussed alongside with the prevailing beauty standard of an hourglass figure and full-figured curves, body positivity, and body neutrality.

It can be concluded that the depiction of Williams, Biles, and Ohashi differentiates from one context to another. It became evident that they are highly influenced by the prevailing beauty standards in society and continue to reinforce them inside and outside of a sports context. Moreover, it became evident that they transcend and challenge the normative notions that define how a woman is supposed to internalize feminine comportment, especially in a sports context. In a non-sports context, however, they embody the notion of emphasized femininity and particularly are depicted in a sexualized manner that fulfills the stereotypes related to their race. Additionally, it can be concluded that they enforce different discourses when conducting themselves on social media. Furthermore, it can be concluded that health is not the same for Williams, Biles, and Ohashi, as various discourses influence them differently. They are influenced by contradicting beauty discourses and their respective sport; therefore, they must decide for themselves what the right choice is, albeit their choice might lead them to stand alone and not fit into the prevailing notion of beauty and health.

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Introduction

The human body continues to amaze me, how it can be changed and shaped like a bar of soap. The alteration of the body also reminds me of the gothic novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, as the most beautiful features of the human body were chosen for its creation; however, the monster is perceived as a violation of mankind. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that the monster is misunderstood, and, in my opinion, the monster also seems scared, most likely due to its appearance and how others perceive it, which reminds me of how the human body continues to be perceived today. Victor Frankenstein disapproves of his creation, just as society frowns upon the natural body. In contemporary society, it can be argued that society is today's Frankenstein, whereas the "monster" is the unaltered body.

Certain body types are more prominent in the media than others; thus, diversity is not portrayed as the media continues to portray specific body types, which entails a preconceived notion of how the body is supposed to look. This seems paradoxical, as there is a greater focus on body positivity and self-love (Knapp, 2015, p. 689-690; Yamamiya et al., 2005, pp. 74-75; Chiat, 2021, pp. 3-4). For instance, an individual's body type will vary depending on their chosen sport; a tennis player's physique will differ from a gymnast or an individual who performs CrossFit. Moreover, sport is an area in which gender differentiation is normalized and naturalized due to "*its perceived ability to demonstrate the physical superiority of all males over all females*" (Knapp, 2015, p. 689). This further illustrates how sport plays a significant role in terms of the affirmation and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity; however, it also influences our understanding of femininity, as not all women conform to the embodiment of being subordinate to men or their achievements. Thus, not all women conform to the normative gender differentiation nor fitness goals present in society. On the contrary, sport becomes "*a site for 'gender trouble'*" (Hardin et al., 2005, p. 109), as it enables individuals to challenge the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity (p. 109).

Therefore, this thesis will examine the discrepancy between how the female body is portrayed and perceived in a sports context and a non-sports context and how bodies are affected by the prevailing beauty standards. I have chosen to analyze how three female athletes, namely Simone Biles, Serena Williams, and Katelyn Ohashi, are portrayed and perceived in the media and how they live up to the prevailing beauty discourses in society, their sport, or both contexts.

I have chosen Biles, Williams, and Ohashi because they all have had an impact on their sport in terms of their athletic accomplishments, as well as affecting the prevailing discourse revolving around beauty, mental health, and clothing within their respective field. Biles is an American gymnast

who amazed the audience with her incredible performance at the Olympics in Rio 2016. However, at the Olympics in Tokyo 2020, it was not her athletic performance that impressed the audience. On the contrary, she resigned from the competition to focus on her mental health, which has led her to become an advocate for mental health (Stewart, 2023; Olympics, 2023). Williams has revolutionized women's tennis, and during her career, she has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles, which is more than any other man or woman during the open era (Luebering, 2023). At the 2018 French Open, Williams caused a sensation and a scandal as she wore a black catsuit, as both a fashion statement and to help with her health issues, as it was a full-body compression garment (Friedman, 2018). Ohashi is a former UCLA gymnast who, in her 2018-2019 season, scored six perfect tens. She previously competed against Biles; however, due to injuries, stress, pressure, eating- and mental disorders, she no longer competes at an elite level. She openly speaks about the struggles she had to overcome in terms of being body-shamed and having an eating disorder (Morse, 2019; Katelyn Ohashi, 2019).

Throughout the analysis, I will utilize Judith Butler's theory on *Performativity* and Raewyn Connell's theory on *Hegemonic masculinity* and *Emphasized femininity*. These theories provide a useful framework for understanding how gender is created and how certain performances are perceived as natural. It also provides an understanding of hegemonic gender identities, the power relations between them, and their traditional traits. Additionally, Laura Mulvey's theory on the *Male Gaze*, Erving Goffman's theory on the *Sociology of Everyday Life Interaction* and his theory on *Gender Displays*, Georg Simmel's theory on *Fashion*, and Stuart Hall's theory on *Representation* will be utilized to analyze and discuss how Biles, Ohashi, and Williams perform inside and outside of sports contexts, as well as what is expected from them in those contexts. Lastly, Michel Foucault's theory on the *Technologies of the Self* will be utilized, as it provides a useful understanding of how discourses become internalized. Furthermore, this thesis takes its starting point in Theo Van Leeuwen's approach to multimodality, as well as the multimodal approach, semiotics, as described by Daniel Chandler, giving a short introduction to their methods, which provide the framework for this thesis's analytical approach.

The analysis will be divided thematically, starting with a chapter that provides a brief introduction to feminine comportment by Iris Marion Young, as it provides a useful understanding of how the female body has been limited in terms of both motility, comportment, and spatiality, which further illustrates how the analysis I am conducting fits into a greater context. It will also provide a brief description of the history of women's clothing in sport and how it has changed. The second chapter will provide an analysis and discussion of Biles, Williams, and Ohashi's hair, makeup, and

clothing when performing in a sports context. The third chapter will analyze and discuss how the three athletes are portrayed by the media in a non-sports context, whereas the fourth chapter will analyze and discuss how they conduct themselves on social media.

Lastly, this thesis will provide a discussion of beauty discourses and health. There are many contradicting definitions of what health is, and there are many contradicting beauty standards. In recent years there has been an immense focus on athletes' mental health as well as body positivity; however, at the same time, the media continues to portray an ideal female body: slim, hourglass figure with a large butt and bosom, as well as notions arguing that body positivity is merely glorifying obesity; thus, the question arises: what is health and is it the same for everyone? Therefore, I will examine some of the contradicting notions of health in relation to beauty standards inside and outside of a sports context.

Methodology

The multimodal approach of semiotics, as described by Daniel Chandler (2002), will be utilized throughout this thesis, as semiotics is the study of signs. He defines that signs are anything that refers to something else; thus, signs can take various forms, such as words, media, photography, images, and body language (p. 1). Semiotics is also concerned with how meaning is constructed and how reality is represented (p. 2), which enables me to look at various aspects in my analysis, as this method is not limited to only text or media; on the contrary, it focuses on “*anything that can be taken as a sign*” (p. 2). This method is further complemented by the method of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, as both are concerned with more than spoken and written language (Jones, 2019, p. 31).

When analyzing discourse, it is imperative to understand that discourse includes more than written and spoken language, as it also includes categories such as music, composition, images, and non-verbal communication (Jones, 2019, p. 31). Therefore, this thesis will utilize the method of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, as it is concerned with these other ‘modes’ of communication. In this context, ‘mode’ “*is a system for making meaning*” and “*any system of signs that are used in a consistent and systematic way to make meaning can be considered a mode*” (p. 32); thereby, multimodal discourse analysis is concerned with how multiple modes of communication interact with each other, how they affect language, and how it is comprehended and produced (pp. 31-32). The point of multimodal analysis is not to analyze these other modes instead of those of writing and speech; on the contrary, the point is to understand how language interacts and integrates with other modes of discourse.

This thesis will concern itself with images and the interaction between image and text; therefore, I have chosen the multimodal approach, as it is an ideal starting point for a meaningful analysis. Theo Van Leeuwen's contributions to the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis will be utilized as the main foundation for the analysis, as his work on visual discourse applies to the visual media I have chosen to analyze, namely, Magazine covers, photos from articles, and Instagram posts, as they consist of large images accompanied by written headlines and captions, which are presented to the viewer simultaneously.

In his book *Discourse and Practice* (2008), Van Leeuwen argues that images cannot portray the world objectively. The perceived neutrality and vagueness of images only make them more effective in providing and communicating subjective world views and ideologically colored angles (pp. 136-137): "*If images seem to just show 'what is', we need to show that they may not always be quite so. If images seem to just allude to things and never 'say them explicitly' we need to make these allusions explicit*" (p. 137). Thus, images are just as worthy objects of study as any spoken or written language. Furthermore, he argues for a more multimodal approach to discourse analysis, as images that may accompany a written or spoken text also contribute to the overall meaning (p. 137).

Another aspect of his theory is the idea that images can be analyzed without taking written or spoken language into account, thus contradicting the argument that images are dependent on language and too vague to be understood on their own. Images have their own way of organizing and structuring meaning; thus, their own systemic "grammar" (Jones, 2019, p. 32). A kind of "code" that dictates the tools images use to communicate a message and provide a guide to understanding the meaning behind the image (Jones, 2019, p. 32; Machin, 2007, p. ix):

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) describe this as a grammar approach to visual communication. A lexis approach, which characterises earlier semiotics, would provide an unordered, potentially infinite list of items. A grammar approach, in contrast, would provide an account of the choices that are possible, as in language, and the finite rules for combining items in an infinite number of utterances or visual statements (Machin, 2007, p. ix).

Like languages, this grammar approach perceives images as complex semiotic systems that can be analyzed and understood on their own terms. This approach has also been developed to describe other modes, such as hypermedia or color, each having its own system of "grammar" (Jones, 2019, p. 32).

This thesis will analyze Instagram posts, which is a genre of hypermedia with its own systems of meaning and specific codes. Emilia Djonov (2018) expands on Van Leeuwen's theory on multimodality and argues that social media platforms are worthy of a multimodal analysis, as social media platforms are designed to present certain choices to its users as well as favor certain types of

content (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2018, pp. 641-642):

Social media tools, like other semiotic software, are resources for making meaning. Like human languages, which through their lexicons and grammars shape the values and experiences of the people they belong to (Whorf 1956), social media offer people resources for interaction with each other, acting in and understanding the world [...] Semiotic software tools also have built-in “semiotic regimes” (Van Leeuwen 2005), norms that regulate how the semiotic resources they make available (e.g. layout, fronts, emojis, photo filters) should be (co)deployed. These regimes interact with meaning-making norms that operate within the broader semiotic landscape and socio-cultural context, which shape and may in turn be shaped by the design as well as use of semiotic software (pp. 648-649).

Djonov thereby argues that social media platforms are worthy of multimodal analysis, as they are not objective. On the contrary, social media platforms utilize their design and software to create expectations as to how it should be used.

Theoretical Approach

In cultural studies, there is an immense focus on how the female body is portrayed in terms of beauty standards and body image. One of the main focal points in cultural studies is the perception of women and how they must continue to live up to certain beauty standards that continue to persist in society despite the constant evolution in beauty ideals (Chiat, 2021, p. 3). There is also an immense focus on female athletes and how they are underrepresented in the media, in terms of screen time and visibility in magazines (Namie & Warne, 2017; Sherry, Osborne, & Nicholson, 2015; Daniels, 2009), as well as studies that examine the comparison of female athletes and models, modeling for the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition (Kim & Sagas, 2014). Nevertheless, I continue to be unable to find studies that examine the discrepancy between how the female body is portrayed and perceived in a sports context in relation to a non-sports context and how it affects beauty standards. Thus, it became evident to me that there is a gap within the field of study: how are female athletes portrayed and perceived in the media, and do they live up to the prevailing beauty discourses in society, in their sport, in both contexts or not?

Goffman on Sociology of Everyday Life Interaction

In Goffman’s book *Sociology of Everyday Life Interaction* (2002), he argues that individuals create an impression of themselves and therefore should be perceived as actors on a social stage (pp. 11-15). Whenever an individual interacts with someone, they “*commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed*” (Goffman, 1959, p. 1). For instance, their mood, trustworthiness, or attitude toward them (p. 1). Information is given both

verbally and non-verbally. Non-verbal information can be movements, physical gestures, display of emotions, pitch, or clothing (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 284). The obtained information enables the individual to define the situation, induce a specific response, and know what to expect from others (Goffman, 1959, p. 1). The impression created by an individual must benefit both the spectator and the individual, as the individual “*will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be impressed in some way by him*” (p. 2).

Goffman argues that an individual will try to control the impression they give off to achieve social or individual goals. Thus, the expressiveness of an individual determines two different kinds of information: the information they *give* and the information they *give off*. The information an individual gives consists of communication in the traditional sense and the conscious use of verbal and non-verbal symbols. The information an individual gives off consists of various expressions and signs that the individual displays and the spectator perceives as characteristic of the individual. Thus, individuals are involved in two types of communication when they interact with one another. When an individual engages in social interactions, they express a certain version of themselves; for instance, an individual presents one side of themselves to their colleagues and another to their friends to accommodate the expectations of the current setting; however, an individual may feel they act authentically in both settings despite acting differently. This occurrence can be described by the terms frontstage and backstage (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-69).

The front is an important part of an individual’s performance. Consciously or unconsciously an individual utilizes expressions, attitudes, and presence to construct an image of who they are and want to be perceived as (p. 69). Performances presented in the frontstage takes place in front of an audience and must live up to the prevailing normative structures in society, which entails an individual to constantly adjust their performance (p. 71). The performance displayed by an individual must present something that will be rewarded or appreciated by other interactants. An individual must conform their performance to the social situation and the situationally specific audience, as the social situation dictates the audiences’ expectations (pp. 72-73). For instance, an individual will present themselves in a calculating manner, expressing themselves “*in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain*” (Goffman, 1959, p. 6).

The backstage is an area an individual can withdraw to and express their suppressed emotions; everything not disclosed in the front (p. 112). The backstage enables an individual the opportunity to rehearse, relax, and recharge without the constant pressure to conform. For example, a waiter may

present their ‘front’ when serving customers and to fulfill the expectations dictated by the social situation. However, when entering the kitchen or leaving for the night the waiter can express their authentic self without fabricated performances (p. 112; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 71). The performances an individual presents can be described as different masks that can be changed depending on the situation (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 73). The way we present ourselves creates an impression of us and determine how others perceive us. It also affects our identity and is connected to how the body is represented and perceived in everyday life (pp. 68-73).

Goffman’s theory is relevant, as it elaborates on performativity and how an individual presents themselves. He describes an individual’s performance as a conscious element; they decide how much of themselves they are willing to display. In contrast, Butler describes it as an unconscious element, yet both are concerned with how an individual presents themselves. Therefore, the following section will elaborate on Butler’s perspective on performativity.

Butler on Gender Performativity

Judith Butler developed the concept Gender Performativity, which was inspired by Austin and Searle’s Speech Act Theory, which states that language itself is performative (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52), meaning that language is used to achieve a certain outcome. For instance, when individuals invite, promise, marry, or propose, they are “*performing actions with their words*” (p. 139). Butler expands on this notion, arguing that gender is performative too, constructed through language and repetitive acts to conform to society’s fixed and preferred ideals of femininity and masculinity (p. 52).

Butler (2006) further contests the belief that gender is something natural or fixed:

[...] *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed (p. 34).

Thus, the reason gender is not fixed is due to gender being a constant process of performative acts. These acts, however, is a not a doing by the individual; on the contrary, it is a construct of society and its norms. Gender is an ongoing process of becoming and it cannot be said when the construction originates or ends, meaning that it is a discursive practice which is open to resignification and intervention (p. 45). Furthermore, Butler states that gender is not a constant, a natural extension of biological sex, or a fixed substance; it is culturally constructed (pp. 8-9). Through political constructs,

gender is perceived as something binary that consists of two biological categories: male and female. These categories are perceived as heterosexually and mutually attracted to one another, which has been normalized by hegemonic discourse. However, it does not reflect how gender becomes a free-floating attribute when perceived as independent of sex, but it illustrates how gender may subvert from the normative categories of femininity and masculinity (pp. 8-10). For instance, “*man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one*” (p. 9). This exemplifies how sex and gender distances itself from the normative categories, as it exemplifies how sex and gender are not intertwined, as a female body just as easily can signify masculinity as femininity, as gender and sex does not equate one another (pp. 9-10).

By arguing that gender is performative, Butler suggests that an individual performs according to what is culturally accepted: “*There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results*” (p. 34), meaning that gender is enacted or performed, thus not an expression of the sex an individual was born with, or derived from it (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 301). Additionally, the socialization of gender is an interactive process: “*Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being*” (Butler, 2006, p. 45). Gender is constructed through constitutive acts such as wearing a certain type of clothing, bodily postures that are accepted and recognized by society as feminine or masculine, language, pitch, and lexical choice (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52; Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 301). These acts are repeated and combined to portray the illusion of a ‘whole’ gender conforming to the social construct of what is acceptable for male and female. Therefore, it can be argued that normative masculinity and femininity are not a natural occurrence. On the contrary, Butler argues it is just as much a performance as any fluid or gay gender identity, which has been carefully adjusted and repeated through numerous constitutive acts to create the impression of femininity or masculinity. Gender performativity is thus highly influenced by what is considered acceptable in society and cultural norms (Butler, 2006, p. 45; Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 301).

Butler’s theory on gender performativity is relevant as it provides a useful framework for understanding how gender is constructed and influenced by society. Butler argues that heterosexual desire binds together the feminine and masculine in a hierarchical relationship and that specific performances are perceived as natural through the regulations in society; thus, gender is an unconscious performance (2006, p. 45). Connell, however, argues that masculinity is defined by how

it differentiates from femininity and focuses on the results of society's regulations. Thus, they provide two different perspectives on how an individual constructs their gender and portrays themselves. Therefore, the following section will elaborate on Connell's perspective.

Connell on Hegemonic Masculinity & Emphasized Femininity

Gender is often taken for granted in everyday life; however, we instantly recognize an individual based solely on their gender in the media, real life, and on social media. Despite not noticing it most of the time, our entire life is about gender in the traditional form. For instance, society values conventional heterosexual marriages, and mixed doubles in tennis automatically brings to mind that each team consist of a man and a woman. Society, however, does not only shape our cultural gender norms in this regard. According to Connell the difference is clear, even though we do not notice it: *“As men or women we slip our feet into differently shaped shoes, button our shirts on opposite sides, get our heads clipped by different hairdressers, buy our pants in separate shops, and take them off in separate toilets”* (2002, p. 3). Masculinity and femininity are thus perceived as separate entities by society, and ideas about gender-appropriate behavior are constantly reinforced in society (pp. 3-4).

As mentioned, Butler focuses on how gender is performative and how certain performances are perceived as natural through the regulations in society (2006, p. 45), whereas Connell focuses on the result of these regulations. She has created two normative categories: Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity. Connell describes the characteristics of the two categories while simultaneously criticizing them for being binary and thus vouching for a more fluid approach to gender. Her work on hegemonic masculinity has attracted its share of criticism for lack of complexity and a need for reformulation to fit into a contemporary context, as it was formulated in the 1980s, despite that it has influenced gender studies across many academic fields (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 829 & 834-836). This theory, however, does provide a useful framework for understanding the construct of hegemonic gender identities, what their traditional traits are, and the power relation between them.

The concept of Hegemonic Masculinity describes men as being in a superior and dominant position in society towards women and other men (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 54) in a patriarchal system of power where a man who aspires to embody hegemonic masculinity must display signals of aggression, violence, and heterosexuality. He must also be successful, competitive, and exhibit signs of toughness and strength, as men who do so are in a favorable position compared to men who are homosexual or more sensitive, thus not adhering to this normative version of masculinity (Morettini, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity thereby portrays a *“culturally idealized form of masculine character*

(*in a given historical setting*)” (Connell, 2015, p. 141); it does not necessarily represent the way masculinity most commonly is enacted, on the contrary, it signifies the type of masculinity that is strived for in a given society (p.141).

The critique of hegemonic masculinity’s dominance and the concept itself has gained popularity in especially Western cultures, as these cultures have been impacted by second-wave feminism. Connell, however, argues that the concern and rising interest in masculinity and men have extended worldwide, with a wide range of academic fields taking an interest in topics about masculine relations, identities, and practices, as well as focusing on everything from father’s rights and support groups to men’s emotions and relationships. The visible concern and interest contradict the traditional and normative belief that men should repress their emotions and merely express their masculinity by working hard, remaining tough, and providing for their families (Howson, 2006, p. 1).

A primary focal point in Connell’s theory is the categorization of the distinct roles society expects men and women to fulfill. In her book *Gender* (2002), she asserts that in most contemporary society’s it is primarily women who tend to the children and do the majority of the housework, whereas men are more likely to have a job and be the provider. The average wages for women are lower than men’s; therefore, Connell argues that the post-feminist world we supposedly live in, where equality already has been achieved, is not so equal after all (p. 2). She states that “*most women in the world, especially women with children, are economically dependent on men. And in many parts of the world some men believe that women who are dependent on them must be their property – to discard if they wish, to kill if need be*” (p. 2). Thereby, it is a male-centered gender discourse continues to persist in society, despite the developments there have been in terms of gender equality. Hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, thus continue to be the preferred way of enacting gender.

One of the main characteristics of emphasized femininity is the passivity of women, which Western society (the anglophone world) continues to be influenced by as Western media continues to portray it everywhere you go:

On my way to work I pass a newsagency which displays the posters for the week’s mass-circulation magazines. Almost every poster shows a young woman: usually blonde, always dangerously thin, heavily made up, pretty, and not doing anything. Girls are still taught by mass culture that they need above all to be desirable, as if their main task were to lie on silk cushions waiting for Prince Charming to come [...] (Connell, 2002, p. 2).

Where women are taught to appear pretty and flawless, men are taught not to take an interest in appearing attractive. Instead, they must appear dominant and hard, despite how they feel underneath the surface. At school and in the media, boys are steered towards tough and competitive activities,

such as sports, where they are often exposed to heavy peer pressure to show their toughness; thus, boys are steered away from anything remotely feminine or sensitive. According to Connell it is due to this exact gender order that men are recruited for jobs such as the military, private security, or the police, as it requires force, whereas women are required for jobs such as social work, nursing, or psychology, as it aims to repair the consequences of said violence (p. 3).

Hegemonic masculinity portrays how “*culturally dominant gender codes*” (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 300) are constructed and articulated through advertisements, popular culture, and movies, as the media draw upon and reflect a certain form of masculinity, even though it might not reflect complicit masculinity. On the contrary, the media illustrates the epitome version of masculinity that men in Western cultures should strive to embody (p. 300). It is expected that men who embody hegemonic masculinity portray attributes such as competitiveness, heterosexuality, sexual experiences, toughness, and confidence and show little to no emotions (Morettini, 2016), which is emphasized by men in the media (movies and advertisements) (Connell, 1987, p. 188). Women who embody emphasized femininity are supposed to express desirability, nurturance, gentleness, empathy, passivity, and compliance with the (sexual) desires of men, features that are often displayed in the media as well (p. 188).

Lastly, Connell (2002) argues that men and women are not a fixed state. One is simply not born as one or the other; one’s gender is a “*condition actively under construction*” (p. 4). She points to Simone de Beauvoir, a pioneering French feminist, who said: “*One is not born, but rather becomes a woman*” (1973, p. 301). The process of becoming also applies to men, as they enact and acquire masculinity. The becoming enables different paths, ambiguities, and tensions; therefore, the process may produce unstable outcomes, which raises the question of how something so rigid as gender proves to be so fluid, uncertain, and complex despite it seeming impenetrable on the surface. Thus, manhood and womanhood cannot be thought of as something fixed (Connell, 2002, p. 4), albeit it might seem that way as hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities are being popularized through the media.

When it comes to analyzing gender, it is worth noting that one must be wary of essentialism, arguing that men and women act a specific way because of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity being represented in very fixed terms.

Hall on Representation

Stuart Hall’s theory on representation contributes to the knowledge of how the media, in subtle and non-subtle ways, makes us think about the world and shape our understanding of it. Throughout his

work, he also applied a critical perspective “*on media’s ability to manufacture and reinforce social inequalities through stereotyping practices and, more importantly, he articulated an understanding of how those representations might be subverted and resisted*” (Dixon, 2019, p. 60).

There are various ways to perceive the media; one notion being that online products, television, and print media portray and capture the real world without distorting it. For instance, the media can be perceived as a mirror; thus, providing the audience with a faithful version of the real world. Thereby, the media provides a window to the real world and enables the audience to experience the reproduction of accurate information that they might not be able to access otherwise. Professional media representations provide the audience with more than merely imitation, as they are composed through “*the selection and ordering of visual, aural and linguistic elements*” (p. 61). The media thus depict subjective versions of the world, which correspond to that of their creators. For example, a news story illustrates a real-life event, but it is presented as an edited version through imagery and linguistics. Due to previous exposure to similar linguistic features, imagery, or emotive headlines, the audience has learned to decode the information they are presented with. Thus, the media not only contributes to the audience’s understanding of the world. The use of linguistic features also contributes to a shared symbolic language internalized by the audience through previous media exposure (p. 61). For example, a portrait can reveal a multitude of things about the individual; however, the portrait’s composition determines whether the audience is supposed to find the individual well-liked or not. Different composites, such as nostalgia, power, authority through a fourth wall break, powerlessness, helplessness, or vulnerability can be illustrated through the portrait and thus reveal various things about the individual portrayed. According to Hall, the audience’s ability to decode imagery, such as a portrait, is not innate; it is “*produced as a result of our continued exposure to media products*” (p. 61). The media has a profound influence on the audience, as the media does not reflect reality; on the contrary, the media products are influenced and shaped by the media producers’ subjective meanings, which produce “*ideological inferences for their readers and viewers*” (p. 63) that ultimately have a discursive effect on the audience. Thus, representation is constituted and the media shapes and utilizes the audience’s shared understanding of the world (p. 63).

Stereotypes are enforced, reproduced, and depicted in the media. Stereotypes can position different groups as superior to others, thus some groups are portrayed as social outcasts. Therefore, stereotypes can infer a symbolic social power or social violence, which allow stereotypes to construct boundaries that dictates who and what is socially acceptable, while simultaneously excluding “*all*

other groups from that elite list” (p. 65).

According to Hall, there are three reasons why stereotypes are important. The first reason is that they reflect social attitudes. It portrays what “*wider society thinks about those groups that are routinely stereotyped*” (p. 63). The second reason is how “*media contributes to the construction of stereotypes*” (p. 63), meaning that the audience internalizes the stereotypes the media depicts, which ultimately fulfill the stereotype, and lastly the third reason is that “*stereotypes can be reshaped and repurposed*” (p. 64), which means that the stereotypes depicted in the media can be changed and guided towards a positive depiction (p. 64).

Lastly, Hall’s theory provides a useful explanation of how the media displays and determines how individuals and social groups are perceived. It enables us to understand how the media constructs our understanding of the world in both a positive and negative way. His theory differentiates from Goffman’s, Butler’s, and Connell’s as they describe how individuals present themselves and not how they are perceived by the media. Therefore, the following section will elaborate on how the media depicts women in a certain way and how it continues to influence how women are perceived.

Mulvey on the Male Gaze

Mulvey (2009) explores the sexual aspects of how men and women are perceived in visual media. According to her there are two main forms of pleasure: scopophilia and identification. Scopophilia derives from “*using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight*” (p. 435) and “*subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze*” (p. 434). This pleasure, in its extreme, can be argued to be voyeuristic; being a “peeping Tom”, as scopophilic pleasure depends on a separation of the spectator and the spectacle (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 377). Identification is “*developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen*” (Mulvey, 2009, p. 435). This means that the spectator almost becomes a part of the action that plays out in the movie, as the boundaries that exist between the movie and the self cease to exist. These two main forms of pleasure are both paradoxical and intertwined, which Mulvey further explains through her main concern: sexual imbalance and how the nature of these processes are gendered (2009, p. 436; Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 377).

The male gaze is described as the power of who is looking, and due to the sexual imbalance, the world is controlled by, it is divided into active and passive. The active is the male, whereas the passive is the female. Traditionally, the woman is displayed and looked at simultaneously, as her appearance connotes a strong erotic and visual impact which expresses a “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436). Women are depicted as sexual objects who hold the look of the spectators

and illustrate the male desires. In a normal narrative film, a woman is indispensable, as her visual appearance works against the development of the film's storyline. Women should merely portray an erotic object for the spectators or the characters within the film. They should also invoke feelings, such as love, fear, or concern, in the male protagonist to make him act a certain way (pp. 436-437).

Traditionally, the male figures control the narrative structure and appear as the active leading role. The main male protagonist is identifiable for the spectators, as he is in control of every event and where to look. Therefore, the protagonist cannot be burdened with sexual objectification, as he also depicts a more complete, perfect, and powerful ideal ego that the spectators can identify with. Due to camera movements-, technology, and invisible editing the male protagonist can command the stage, in which he creates action, articulates the erotic look, and controls the events better than the spectator, which ultimately results in the active male reproducing and portraying the "*natural conditions of human perception*" (p. 437). Thereby, it is a natural part of the human perception, that women are subordinate to the male lead, as he determines how they should be perceived. She is merely an objectification of the male viewer's sexual desire and has no importance of her own (p. 436).

Thus, Mulvey's theory enables us to understand how the media depict women as objects, which emphasizes how women are supposed to be perceived in society. It also displays the connection between Goffman's theory and Mulvey's in terms of perception and performance on the social stage. Mulvey argues that the perception of women can affect how women portray themselves on the social stage, as they must display themselves as pleasurable and passive. Whereas Goffman argues that an individual performs a certain way to fit in and live up to society's expectations (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-70). Mulvey's theory also relates to Goffman's theory on Gender Displays, as he describes various features used by the media to depict women as delicate, pleasurable, and passive objects, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

Goffman on Gender Displays

To return to Goffman, he describes how masculinity and femininity are commonly depicted in Western media in his book *Gender Advertisements* from 1976. He extends the study of paintings and novels to "*posed illustrations of contemporary advertising*" (Cavan, 1981, p. 746) to provide an insight "*into the patterned variation of human culture*" (p. 746), a genre he names commercial realism.

Goffman (1976) describes commercial realism as a way of depicting life. It illustrates a scene that is "*conceivable in all detail as one that could in theory have occurred as pictured, providing us*

with a simulated slice of life” (p. 83). Thus, advertisements depict a make-believe scene that infers the point the composer wants the audience to see (p. 83). Goffman primarily focuses on how femininity is displayed and how the poses seen in advertisements are considered natural, albeit they portray women as powerless, vulnerable, and subordinate. He describes several features that illustrate femininity, how these features are conveyed, and how men rarely are to find depicting these features; therefore, he focuses on women, albeit there is no natural or biological reason that this is the case (pp. 92-152).

Goffman describes six concepts that illustrate how advertising depicts women: the feminine touch, the ritualization of subordination, licensed withdrawal, relative size, function ranking, and the family. I have chosen to focus on the three first mentioned, as these are particularly relevant to this study.

The feminine touch describes how women use *“their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface”* (p. 97). It implies how a woman can utilize her hands or fingers to guide the spectators’ eyes and create the effect of barely touching an object (p. 97). It can also include self-touching, where a woman softly touches or caresses herself and conveys a sense of *“one’s body being a delicate and precious thing”* (p. 99).

Ritualization of subordination illustrates how lowering oneself physically implies respect for the one being taller. A feature used to depict this is the *“bashful knee bend”* (p. 115), which can be interpreted as a *“foregoing of full effort to be prepared and on the ready in the current situation, for the position adds a moment to any effort to fight or flee”* (p. 115). The posture implies that the one who performs it trusts their surroundings and that no one would hurt them. A similar feature is the head or body tilt, which illustrates acceptance of subordination and expression of appeasement and submissiveness (p. 116).

Lastly, licensed withdrawal is a feature that removes women psychologically from the situation at hand; therefore, they are *“dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are (or might come to be) present”* (p. 127). Thus, withdrawing one’s gaze implies that one is not paying attention to the surroundings, which emphasizes vulnerability, being adrift, and somewhat isolated from the spectator. Thereby, a woman displays submissive behavior and trusts the spectator not to harm her (pp. 127-132).

Although Goffman focuses on posed bodies in advertising, and this thesis’s analysis includes still images of bodies in motion, his theory remains relevant, as it provides a relevant framework for understanding how men and women are portrayed and perceived by the media. However, the question

does arrive: should these images be read differently?

It can be argued that a still image of a body in motion does not try to convey the same intention as a commercial, as it, to some extent, is taken out of its context. If one were to see the whole performance, it becomes evident that the individual is more in control of their actions and how they are perceived, in contrast to the still images. Thus, the still image of a body in motion is not created to evoke a certain feeling within the spectator as an advertisement. However, a still image continues to reproduce the theoretical definitions described by Goffman, as his theory is not limited to advertising. For instance, Goffman emphasizes that:

advertisements often contain very subtle clues about gender roles and may operate as socializing agents on several levels. Because advertisements are publicly broadcast, the men and women portrayed are often perceived to represent the whole population, and men and women in the advertisements seem to accept these portrayed behaviors, thereby validating the stereotyped roles (Lindner, 2004, s. 409).

Thereby, advertisements shape our ideas of femininity and masculinity. It displays the internalization of how men and women are supposed to conduct themselves, how they are perceived by the media, and thus the connection between Hall's theory and Goffman's in terms of perception and reinforcement of stereotypes. It portrays how the media's portrayal shapes our understanding of the world.

Furthermore, Goffman's theory portrays how the media constructs advertisements based on the same premise as Mulvey describes, namely, the male gaze and scopophilia. Women are depicted as desirable and as a sexual object that seems stimulating to the spectator (2009, pp. 434-435). Both Goffman's and Mulvey's theories, thereby, depict how sexual imbalance is a gendered process emphasized by advertisements.

Thus, Goffman's theory remains relevant to utilize when analyzing still images of moving bodies, as it describes specific features utilized by the media to depict women as subordinate to men, and consequently displays women as desirable objects. However, his theory is specific to how individuals are portrayed by the media. Therefore, the following section will elaborate the importance of, and utilization of fashion based on Simmel's definition, as it describes how fashion either can express individuality or conformity, and thus determine how others perceives an individual.

Simmel on Fashion

Fashion has a customary basis; however, it can be distinguished from custom, which refers to fixed and established forms of conduct and belief. Fashion is an alien notion in traditional societies where customs are slow to change; thus, fashion exemplifies a dual tension between affiliation and

differentiation (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 297), which George Simmel recognized and elaborated on in 1957 with his theory on Fashion, in which he states that it “*unites those of a social class and segregates them from others*” (p. 541). Therefore, it is important to understand the paradox presented in fashion, as it can both segregate and unite individuals. There are two antagonistic tendencies within fashion namely, generalization and specialization (p. 541).

Generalization gives rest to the soul, as an individual peacefully surrenders to collectivism and uniformity. It provides an individual with the opportunity to fit in without actively choosing their appearance and the satisfaction “*of not standing alone in his actions*” (p. 542). The individual imitates what others do, whereby they are not held accountable for their actions in terms of creative demand and their responsibility for the action itself is transferred onto someone else (pp. 542-543). The individual becomes a “*vessel of the social contents*” (p. 543), as they merely appear as another body in the crowd. Specialization enables an individual to stand out from the crowd and move from example to example, as they strive for individualism and uniqueness (p. 542). These two antagonistic tendencies are present on a singular and collective level in society creating a mutual limitation, as everyone must decide to what extent each tendency shall have representation (p. 541): “*on the one hand we seek peaceful surrender to men and things, on the other an energetic activity with respect to both*” (p. 542).

Individuals can both imitate and differentiate from society, which illustrates the dualism present in fashion. The dualism presented in fashion is intricately linked to social classes, as it can either unite or divide social classes. For example, aesthetic judgement, social forms, the style of human expressions, and clothing are constantly changing due to fashion (p. 545).

Fashion is also “*one of the forms by the aid of which men seek to save their inner freedom all the more completely by sacrificing externals to enslavement by the general public*” (p. 553). Thus, fashion represents a major struggle: the desire to belong while expressing individuality, and a coping mechanism that enables individuals to cope with how society constantly changes. Thus, individuals constantly seek acceptance from society while wishing to be perceived as unique, ultimately striving towards both generalization and specialization (pp. 541-558).

Lastly, Simmel’s theory is relevant to include, as it provides a possible explanation to how individuals can utilize fashion to express themselves or conform to what is socially acceptable. It relates to how individuals can express themselves in terms of gender, performativity, and their front-and backstage. However, it also differentiates from Goffman’s, Connell’s, and Butler’s theories, as they are concerned with performativity, how to construct and perform a socially acceptable

appearance, whereas Simmel's theory allows an individual to express themselves independently of social requirements.

Foucault on Technologies of the Self

A central concept is Technologies of the Self, which is centered on showing how the self is constituted through macro technologies of domination and power, and how an individual constitutes themselves through certain discourses, such as religion or science (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1930). Technologies of the Self are connected to Foucault's notions about knowledge and power. He argues that power acts on action, meaning that power is only power, if the recipient of the power remains their capacity to act. Thus, power is *“that ‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relation of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible interventions may open up”* (p. 138). Thereby, power is the capacity to act as the dynamism in social life (Li, 2007, p. 276).

Foucault describes the term Governmentality to clarify how *“specific guiding rationalities whereby individuals and social structures, through norms of thought and behavior, regulate people's understandings and experiences”* (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931). Meaning that technologies of the self is intertwined with governmentality and vice versa, as it is not possible to understand technologies of the self without taking the macrostructure political rationality they are affected by into consideration (p. 1931). Governmentality is the 'conduct of conduct', as it is a form of power being exercised, which is supposed to shape and manage the way individuals conduct themselves (Li, 2007, p. 275; Foucault, 2003, p. 138). The government aims to improve the populations condition and secure its welfare. It is not possible to *“coerce every individual and regulate their actions in minute detail”* (Li, 2007, p. 275), as it requires distinctive means. Therefore, the government operates by configuring and educating beliefs, habits, and aspirations, which leads to a set of conditions internalized by the individuals, ultimately leading them to perform as they ought to (p. 275). Individuals, however, are not always aware that their actions are being conducted, as the power operates from a distance whereby *“the question of consent does not arise”* (p. 275). Following this train of thought, technologies of the self must be *“understood as inextricably linked to governmentality and governmentality is the link between governing and modes of thought”* (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931).

Foucault (1988) states that there are four major technologies that individuals apply to perform and understand themselves, and how they rarely function separately, despite each one being associated with a specific type of domination (p. 18). The first being *“technologies of production”*

(p. 18), which permits an individual to transform, produce, or manipulate things. Secondly, there are “*technologies of sign systems*” (p. 18), which means individuals can utilize symbols, signs, signification, or meanings. Thirdly, there are “*technologies of power*” (p. 18), which determine how individuals conduct themselves, as well as submitting themselves to certain domination, ultimately an objectification of the individual. The last and fourth technology being:

technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (p. 18).

Thus, technologies of the self are techniques and methods by which individuals constitute themselves (pp. 18-19). Foucault further argues that individuals constantly engage in various processes in which they produce and define an understanding of themselves. The processes in which an individual engage are perceived as political, as one must comprehend how macrostructures (forces of power), such as religion, economic or political systems, and health service are intertwined with micro-relations between individuals. Social and governmental administrative power structures determine knowledge that is the ideas, rules, and beliefs individuals utilize and consume to regulate, represent, and understand themselves, their thoughts, and actions. In other words, ‘technologies of the self’ require individuals to internalize specific attitudes, discourses, and skills to conform into the normative framework of society (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931).

Lastly, Foucault’s theory on technologies of the self is relevant, as it contributes with an understanding of how discourses are internalized as the right thing and thus utilized in society. It enables us to understand how discourses contributes to the discipline of the body and how discourses continue to have an impact on us. For instance, it enables us to understand how aggressiveness and competitiveness are considered masculine, whereas delicate movements and taking up less space metaphorically and physically is considered feminine.

Beauty and Sport

The following sections will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will introduce Iris Marion Young’s definition of feminine comportment and describe how women’s sportswear has changed throughout history while utilizing Young’s theory. The second to fourth chapters will provide an analysis and discussion of the discrepancy between how the female body is portrayed and perceived in a sports context and a non-sports context and how it affects beauty standards.

Feminine Comportment and Women's Clothing in Sport throughout History

Young's definition of feminine comportment is fundamental to understand how the female body is perceived and how women are supposed to follow certain movements, rules, ways of being, and regulations to be considered appropriate. It illustrates how my field of study and the analysis I am conducting are not a singular occurrence, but rather fit into a greater context.

In 1966, Erwin Straus described the 'remarkable' difference in which the two sexes throw a ball. He argued that men, in contrast to women, utilized the lateral space and gained full momentum, which resulted in great acceleration, a long flat curve, and perfect aim (Young, 1980, p. 137). The difference is due to a biological difference, as it is visible from an early age; thus, it is not due to the development of breasts. On the contrary, it is due to a "*feminine attitude' in relation to the world and to space*" (p. 138). Straus describes the difference in movement and body comportment as a mysterious feminine essence; thus, he reduces the cultural, economic, historical, and physical limitations of women to an eternal and natural essence (p. 138).

Young, on the other hand, is interested in women's comportment, motility, and spatiality; thus, how they conduct themselves, how they move, and how they relate to space. She argues that the remarkable difference between men and women is produced in society by the structures and conditions women are expected to follow. She believes that feminine comportment can enable us to understand how gendered differences unfold within society and how it ultimately damages women (Longhurst, et al., 2017, pp. 282-283; Young, 1980, p. 138).

She describes feminine existence as a set of conditions and structures that define "*the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves*" (p. 141). Thus, it is not an innate or a mysterious ability that women have by virtue of their biological sex. Her description of feminine existences is important to understand, as it includes how some women transcend¹ the typical definitions, situations, and expectations of women in various aspects and settings (pp. 139-141). In society women are defined as "other", inessential, or as objects; women are "*both culturally and socially denied by the subjectivity, autonomy, and creativity which are definitive of being human and which in patriarchal society are accorded the man*" (p. 141). An individual enacting the existence of women in a patriarchal and sexist society lives a contradiction: By being a woman, the individual is denied their

¹ Transcendence means the experience of the world, and how an individual can manipulate, act on, use, change, or move according to their will. It is the experience of the self as an active subject (Young, 1980, pp. 141- 145).

subjectivity and transcendence, but as a human they are a free subject who actively participates in transcendence. Feminine comportment is characterized by not using the body's full range of motion:

Women generally are not as open with their bodies as men in their gait and stride. Typically, the masculine stride is longer proportional to a man's body than is the feminine stride to a woman's. The man typically swings his arms in a more open and loose fashion than does a woman and typically has more up and down rhythm in his step. Though we now wear pants more than we used to, and consequently do not have to restrict our sitting postures because of dress, women still tend to sit with their legs relatively close together and their arms across their bodies. When simply standing or leaning, men tend to keep their feet further apart than do woman, and we also tend more to keep our hands and arms touching or shielding our bodies (p. 142).

Many of the differences between men and women in the performance of physical tasks are not due to physical limitations but due to the utilization of the body. Women tend to fail to perceive their full potential and capability in terms of how to push, lift, shove, or pull heavy things with considerable force. They are also more hesitant, uncertain, and timid when they approach a physical task; they await and make a calculated and restricted move, whereas men go headfirst with brute force and see where it takes them. Women experience a double hesitation: tentativeness and the fear of getting hurt, which men do not (p. 142). Thus, women's attention is divided in two: "*we must have our attention directed upon our body to make sure it is doing what we wish it to do, rather than paying attention to what we want to do through our bodies*" (p. 144). This results in women feeling self-conscious about appearing awkward and not wishing to appear too strong when they perform or enter a task (p. 144).

Feminine motility is divided into three modalities: an "*ambiguous transcendence, an inhibited intentionality, and a discontinuous unity*" (p. 145). Ambiguous transcendence is a transcendence that is burdened with immanence². All transcendence, however, is ambiguous "*because the body as natural and material is immanence*" (p. 145), which means that the feminine bodily existence, despite its efforts to move toward the world using manipulation, continuously is overlaid with immanence. Ambiguous transcendence is observed in a woman's lack of trust in the capacity of her body and the way she moves. Her body is perceived as a burden that must be prodded and dragged along while being protected, and only one part of the body is in motion, whereas the rest remains rooted in immanence (pp. 145-146). Thus, women exist in immanence and transcendence simultaneously: they are a subject overlaid with objectivity in the world.

Inhibited intentionality is described as "*simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an 'I can' and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed 'I cannot'*" (p. 146). A

² Immanence being the experience of the body as limited. A woman is an object; she is passive and acted upon by the world (Young, 1980, pp 139-141).

woman projects an “I can” in terms of the possibilities of the task but an “I cannot” about her capabilities. Inhibited intentionality is observed in a woman’s underestimation of her real capacity, the tendency to perceive a relatively easy task as beyond her capacities, and via hesitancy (pp. 146-147).

The third modality is discontinuous unity, which means that the feminine bodily existence lacks unity with its surroundings and itself (p. 147). Many motions require an active commitment, coordination, and engagement of the body to be performed properly. However, women primarily move one part of the body, which creates a discontinuity with the rest of the body as it remains relatively immobile. The parts of the body that transcend become discontinued from those which remain immobile. Thus, the surrounding space becomes a “*continuous extension of its own being*” (p. 147), which restricts the movements of the female body. Lastly, the “*feminine bodily existence is self-referred to the extent that the feminine subject posits her motion as the motion that is looked at*” (p. 148), which makes it even more difficult for the body to transcend and live up to its capacity.

The three modalities of feminine bodily existence, however, are contradictory. All three are rooted in the fact that the female body is both an object and a subject. Young concludes that women have constrained bodily motility and comportment, as their bodies are perceived as objects, which renders the feminine existence inhibited, rooted in immanence, and distanced from transcending (pp. 145-148).

The feminine existence is also described in relation to space. Spatiality is divided into three modalities: space as *enclosed*, having a *dual structure*, and the female body as *positioned* in space (p. 149). In 1964, Erik Erikson conducted a study in which he found that boys and girls depict two different settings when asked to construct a fictional scene. Boys depict an outdoor setting, whereas girls depict an indoor setting. He concluded that women emphasize an ‘inner space’ (enclosed space) that mimics “*the enclosed space of their wombs and vaginas*” (p. 149), while men emphasize an ‘outer space’ (a spatial orientation that is outwardly directed) as a “*projection of the phallus*” (p. 149). Young dismisses his explanation and argues that the difference in men’s and women’s depiction of space reflects how they move their body in space. Women tend to sit, walk, and stand with their limbs close to their bodies and have restricted movements. Thus, they do not reach, bend, stride, or stretch to the limits of their capabilities. The space available for women when performing a task is often larger than the space they utilize:

Feminine existence appears to posit an existential enclosure between herself and the space surrounding her, in such a way that the space which belongs to her and is available to her grasp

and manipulation is constricted, and the space beyond is not available to her movement (pp. 149-150).

The space as enclosed is, thus, the experience of an existential enclosure between the surrounding space and the self. For example, when a ball is thrown, a woman will await the position of a ball coming toward her and only react when it arrives within her space: she will remain in the confinement of the feminine living space and not move towards the motion of the ball (p. 150).

The second modality is double spatiality. It is a severed “*continuity between a ‘here’ and a ‘yonder’*” (p. 150). The space of ‘here’ illustrates the enclosed space in which a woman’s bodily possibilities are present and expresses a discontinuity between the capacity and aim of who one wants to be and who they are. The space of ‘yonder’ is out of reach and exists for feminine existence, “*but only as that which she is looking into, rather than moving in*” (p. 150). The space of ‘yonder’ thus portrays possibilities that someone could enter that space, but not the ‘I’.

The third modality is the body as positioned in space. Feminine spatiality is contradictory, as “*feminine bodily existence is both spatially constituted and a constituting spatial subject*” (p. 150). Thus, if the feminine body is experienced as an intentional actor and as transcendent, it lives as constituting. However, if the feminine body is experienced as inhibited and immanent, it is experienced as constituted. The “*feminine spatial existence is positioned by a system of coordinates which does not have its origin in her own intentional capacities*” (p. 151). Thus, women do not have the autonomy to move their bodies freely; they cannot constitute actions but remain rooted in space and receive constituted actions (pp. 150-152).

Lastly, Young describes the diagnosis of feminine bodily comportment, spatiality, and motility. She describes women as being physically handicapped because they have learned to conduct themselves according to the patriarchal and sexist society they live in, as they are physically positioned, inhibited, objectified, and confined. Thus, it is not due to a mysterious essence, physiology, nor anatomy (p. 152). Young girls are implicitly and explicitly taught to internalize limited female spatiality. For instance, a girl must be careful not to get dirty clothes, not to get hurt, and that she must walk, talk, sit, and gesture like a girl. Thus, feminine bodily comportment becomes internalized and when the girl is grown up, she has accepted and embraced the conception that her body is in fact fragile and continues to be both an object and a subject that should be protected (pp. 152-153):

An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject’s intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of

action and intention. The source of this objectified bodily existence is in the attitude of others regarding her, but the woman herself often actively takes up her body as a mere thing. She gazes at it in the mirror, worries about how it looks to others, prunes it, shapes it, molds and decorates it (p. 154).

Women are aware that their bodies frequently are perceived as sexual objects by men. Thus, the feminine body is the recipient of the male gaze (pp. 152-153). The bodily objectification of women enhances the discontinuity women have with their bodies, as the fear of being extroverted, open, bold, and outwardly direct will be perceived by others as an invitation to be objectified. Women also lives with the threat of having their body space invaded, where the worst and most extreme form of invasion is the threat of rape. Women, however, are daily subjects “*to the possibility of bodily invasion in many far more subtle ways*” (p. 154). For example, it is acceptable for women to be emotional under certain circumstances and to be touched by other individuals (i.e., men who put a comforting arm around them) that is not acceptable for men. This suggests that women’s enclosed space is a defense mechanism against such invasions to keep others at a distance. It also projects a small area where they “*can exist as a free subject*” (p. 154).

Young’s description of the feminine bodily existence can also be detected in the historical development of women’s sportswear, as it was not constructed for women to excel. On the contrary, women’s sportswear had an impact on their ability to perform (BBC News, 2017). Therefore, the following section will elaborate on the development of women’s sportswear while utilizing Young’s theory.

Before sports emerged, the focus was not on functional and suitable clothing that could be worn during activities. A woman’s dress displayed her position in society, and usually, it was decorated with laces, frills, and ribbons. In the late 1860s, the first clothes to be considered functional were a walking costume used during horseback riding. However, during the late 1800s, women “*were content to wear their daily clothes*” (Young-Min & Youn-Hee, 2004, p. 141) while they enjoyed sports such as tennis, horseback riding, golf, and croquet. Sport increasingly became more popular, which influenced the daily clothes women wore (p. 141). For instance, Amelia Jenks Bloomer wore pantaloons combined with a knee-length skirt, which became known as ‘Bloomers’, to liberate herself from the restrictive fashion of the mid-1800s. Women were supposed to wear floor-length dresses and showcase a small waist with a full skirt beneath. Therefore, women of both the middle and upper class wore corsets and up to eight petticoats to obtain an hourglass figure and fill out the shape of their dress. Consequently, their clothing weighed roughly 15 pounds, which inhibited their

movements, placed enormous pressure on their hips, impaired their breathing, and led them to overheat (Boissoneault, 2018).

Thus, it can be argued that, as early as the 19th century, women were laden with immanence. It was expected that they wore a certain type of clothing, and if they, like Bloomer, wore something different they experienced harassment (Boissoneault, 2018). Women were objects that could be manipulated and acted upon by the world, failing to express and realize the potential of their bodies. Their clothing restricted their spatiality insofar as they could not breathe properly or move; however, they participated in sports wearing constricted clothing (Young, 1980, pp. 149-152). ‘Bloomers’ were worn for multiple sporting exercises such as basketball, gymnastics, and swimming. The pants were less restrictive than a 15-pound dress, albeit it continued to be like women’s daily clothing and continued to restrict their movements when they performed sports. The ‘Bloomers’ were not accepted in tennis. Tennis, however, was a popular sport for women, but it was required that they wore ankle-length skirts, blouses with long sleeves, and jackets (BBC News, 2017; Young-Min & Youn-Hee, 2004, p. 142). The focus on tennis attire continued to be on fashion and not on performance.

In 1887, Charlotte Dod challenged the ‘form-over-function’ mindset by wearing a “*calf-length garb more similar to a school uniform than a tennis uniform at the time*” (Kambhampaty, 2019). Her clothing enabled her to move faster and in ways that traditional tennis garments did not. Thus, Dod was one of the first to introduce the question of how the attire restricted the agility and mobility of the tennis players (Kambhampaty, 2019). Young would argue that Dod lives as constituting. She experiences herself and her body as transcendent and as an intentional actor. Dod also inhabits the physical space around her and chooses to utilize the full capabilities of her body and defy what tennis attire traditionally should do. Tennis was used to create a meet-cute, as it was one of the few part-time activities men and women were allowed to participate in alongside one another. Therefore, women’s appearance was considered highly important, as they were supposed to meet a potential romantic partner. By wearing garments that were not perceived as suitable for women playing tennis, Dod managed to influence the fashion choices that were made for her and her fellow tennis players, thus challenging the notion that feminine garments should be restrictive, uncomfortable, and a detriment of practicality (Kambhampaty, 2019; Young, 1980, pp. 137-156).

In the 20th century, people experienced increased leisure and sports opportunities. One of the most notable things during this period was the establishment of spectatorship and the culture of directly participating in sports. Spectator sportswear came to its own and originated from active sportswear that was meant for sporting activities. Items such as shorts, blouses, sweaters, pants, and

skirts became socially acceptable to wear during leisure activities (Young-Min & Youn-Hee, 2004, p. 143). However, specific clothing continued to be accepted when performing sports. In 1919, Suzanne Lenglen created a scandal by wearing short sleeves and a calf-length skirt. Like Dod, Lenglen lives as constituting. She also defies Straus' notion that women possess a feminine essence, as she contorted her body when playing; she dived for the ball, sprinted across the court, and did whatever it took to get the tennis ball over the net. Thus, she did as Straus argued only men did: she utilized her entire body and the available physical space. Furthermore, she disregards the internalization of how women are supposed to act prim and proper and the notion that women are fragile beings that need protection (Kambhampaty, 2019; Young, 1980, pp. 137-156). During the 1920s and 1930s, tennis attire began to change, and women began to wear one-piece dresses instead of ankle-length dresses with long sleeves. It also became acceptable to wear colors other than white when playing, as it attracted more spectators to the sporting events (Kambhampaty, 2019; Young-Min & Youn-Hee, 2004, pp. 143-144).

During the 20th century, the classic leotard known from gymnastics also changed. In the 1930s and 1940s, the leg lines on a leotard were low and boxy, which provided the gymnasts with a maximum of butt coverage (Meyers, 2016) in stark contrast to what gymnasts wore when competing at some of the earliest Olympic Games, namely “*baggy knee-length culottes or a loose-fitting romper*” (Brinlee, 2021). The attire changed along with the sport, as it needed to accommodate the new movements. The garment became more stretchy and allowed for more mobility. During the 1970s–1990s, the leg line became higher, which created an optical illusion that the female gymnasts' legs were longer while the sleeves remained long. The color of the romper also changed from being a solid color or a color that represented the athlete's nation to include more colors, stripes, patterns, or other embellishments (Meyers, 2016; Brinlee, 2021).

During the 21st century, women's sports attire has changed a lot in multiple sports and continues to create scandals. For instance, at the Olympics in 2021 Germany's women's gymnastics team made headlines, as they wore unitards. The team hoped to “*spark something of a revolution in Olympic gymnastics fashion*” (Brinlee, 2021) and enable their fellow teammates and competitors to wear whatever makes them feel comfortable (Brinlee, 2021). Another example is the Norwegian beach handball team, who wore shorts instead of revealing bikini bottoms (Bero, 2021). According to the International Handball Federation women's bottoms must have “*a close fit and cut on an upward angle toward the top of the leg. The side width must be of a maximum of 10 centimetres [sic]*” (International Handball Federation, 2014, p. 92). Whereas the men's uniform consists of shorts and a

tank top, where the only demand is that the shorts must “*remain 10 centimetres [sic] above the kneecap*” (International Handball Federation, 2014, p. 92). Thus, there continues to be a double standard for men’s and women’s sportswear. In the 21st century, athletes’ clothing no longer seem restrictive in terms of mobility, and women perform sports to their capability. However, clothing continues to be restrictive, as women are supposed to follow the rules within their chosen sport and consequently be more “*scantily clad than their male counterparts*” (Bero, 2021).

Thus, Young’s theory continues to be relevant to understand women’s comportment, motility, and spatiality. It emphasizes that women are supposed to conduct themselves a certain way and that it is not a new phenomenon. Therefore, the following sections will provide an analysis and discussion of how Simone Biles, Serena Williams, and Katelyn Ohashi are perceived and portrayed by the media and how they conduct themselves on social media.

The Control of Women

This chapter will provide an analysis and discussion of Biles’, Williams’, and Ohashi’s hair, makeup, and clothing when they perform in a sports context.

The medias depiction of women in a sports context is interesting, as women’s sports have existed for centuries, but sports continue to be perceived as a man’s field. Historically, sports have been predominantly male and were used to separate men from women to display their strength and physical size (Dufur, 2006, p. 583). Women participated in sports under different circumstances than men: women performed under “*the constraints of gendered domestic roles, ideas of femininity, and the primacy of men’s sports*” (p. 583). Sports emphasize and reproduce the notion of hegemonic masculinity, as men utilize their strength, speed, size, aggression, and competitiveness when they engage in sports. Thus, women performing sports, do not align well with the notion that sport contributes to the creation of hegemonic masculinity. On the contrary, the dominant notion of femininity is that women should be petite, physically attractive, modest, and have a supportive demeanor rather than portray aggressiveness and muscular bodies like men (pp. 587-588).

Simone Biles is a four-time Olympic gold medalist and thus a prominent figure within gymnastics (Lev & Morse, 2023). However, she has received a lot of negative comments about her physical appearance (Murphy & Klosok, 2017; Gijy, 2022), which seems paradoxical as she is an elite athlete. When a gymnast competes every contour of their body is visible, and Biles is no exception:

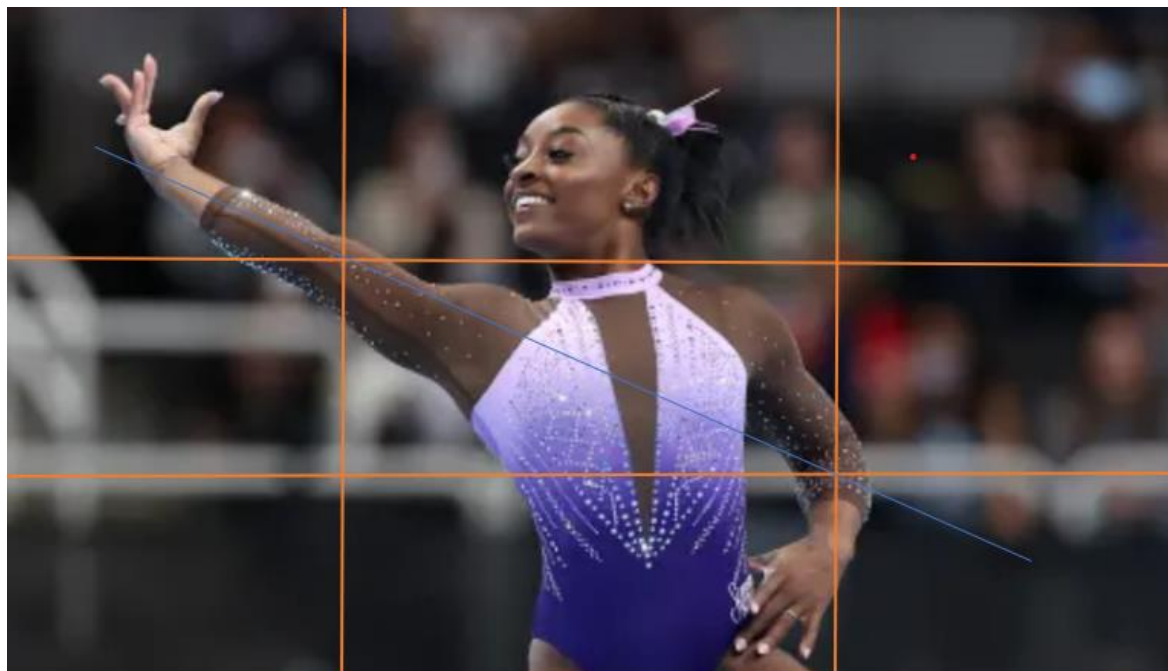


Figure 1: Simone Biles at the US Gymnastics Championships in San Jose (Lev & Morse, 2023). The orange lines illustrate the Golden Ratio, and the blue line the direction of the spectator's eyes. The orange and blue lines are not presented on the original photo, it is how I have chosen to present my data.

Biles is wearing a purple sequined leotard, makeup, and jewelry during her performance. The colorful attire draws the spectators' eyes to look at her and her performance. Her bosom and the delicate placement of her hand is placed within the Golden Ratio. Thus, the spectators notice these features first. This aligns with Hall's argument that the media influences the spectators by using various composesures, which contributes to the spectators' understanding of the world (Dixon, 2019, p. 61). By placing her bosom in the Golden Ratio, the composition of the picture draws the spectators' attention away from her muscular arms and shoulders, which are considered masculine. The placement of her hand also illustrates the 'feminine touch', as described by Goffman. She barely touches her hip; however, she defines the outline of her hip as she gently graces it with a mere total of two fingers (cf. figure 1). The feminine touch also portrays her body as fragile and delicate; a precious thing (Goffman, 1976, pp. 97-99). Hall would argue that the only reason the spectators are able to decode Biles' body as a delicate object is due to previous media experience (Dixon, 2019, p. 61). Thus, the media reinforces how the hegemonic discourse that women should act a certain way, appearing gentle and modest, has been internalized, which is further illustrated by how Biles gazes into the distance. She depicts licensed withdrawal as she does not look directly at the camera, which implies that she is isolated from her surroundings and does not pay attention to them. This emphasizes that she is vulnerable, adrift, and merely a beautiful object to desire. Biles also tilts her head and turns it away from the audience, which indicates submissiveness according to Goffman. Her exposed throat

implies that she accepts her powerlessness and vulnerability (1976, p. 116). The composition of the picture thereby depicts Biles as feminine. Butler would argue that Biles performs according to what is culturally accepted; she acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame (2006, p. 45). For instance, a female gymnast can receive a lower scoring if she does not wear makeup or wear a sparkly leotard (Dufur, 2006, p. 589), therefore female gymnasts, such as Biles, must reinforce and repeat features that are attributed to the notion of being feminine within their sport. This also illustrates how gender continues to be influenced and regulated by society and how women are supposed to create an impression of the ideal woman to fit into the feminine framework created by society (Butler, 2006, pp. 43-44; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52).

The image composition and in particular the Golden Ratio provides an illusion, as it draws attention away from her muscular arms and shoulders towards her feminine features. She performs in an arena that historically is male dominated, but the media depicts her as highly feminine. Participation in sports, and at an elite level, displays clear signs of competitiveness, strength, and determination, features that are predominantly attributed to masculinity (Connell, 2015, p. 141). Biles' physical appearance, however, does not live up to the feminine framework society has created. On the contrary, she embodies features that society connects to hegemonic masculinity. Gymnastics, however, places great demands on gymnasts' physique, as it combines flexibility, strength, coordination, neuromuscular power, dynamic and static balance, and utilizes both the anaerobic and aerobic energy systems. It also requires high levels of strength in the upper and lower limbs to perform diverse and dynamic movements safely and successfully in a sequence (Moeskops, et al., 2019, pp. 1-5). Nevertheless, Biles has been criticized and bullied because of her broad shoulders and muscular arms. She has explained that one of the biggest challenges she had to overcome was her body being different and more muscular than her peers. She tried to hide her muscle definition with clothing, such as wearing jackets all the time (Murphy & Klosok, 2017). Her body does not fit into the notion of how women are supposed to look in society (Greep, 2022). However, the composition of the image portrays a subjective version of women and reproduces the stereotype that women are delicate beings (cf. figure 1). The spectators, as Hall argues, have internalized a symbolic language that enables them to decipher the image. In this case, the shared symbolic language is represented by the visual aids, namely the Golden Ratio, the feminine touch, and licensed withdrawal. The spectators perceive images as highly feminine when presented with these features; thus, it is not an innate ability to understand the meaning an image conveys (Dixon, 2019, p. 61). The image of Biles suggests that the discourse internalized in society is that women must divert their gaze, and the female body must be

soft and delicate. The image also suggests how women are supposed to conform to how society perceives them.

Society's perceived notion of beauty thus influences how gymnasts are supposed to look. Katelyn Ohashi has experienced this firsthand, as her coaches have internalized the notion that a gymnast's body composition must be lean. Ohashi's coaches compared her to a pig and told her that she looked like she had swollen an elephant (BBC Sport, 2019). However, that is not the image that springs to mind when looking at Ohashi:



Figure 2: Katelyn Ohashi on beam. The original source is no longer available; therefore, the image has been found on reddit (reddit, 2023).

Ohashi's leotard is bedazzled, skintight, high cut, which makes her legs appear longer than they are. This emphasizes her body figure that is reminiscent of the female body ideal of 2010s; thin, hour-glass figure, and full curves (Greep, 2022), and the thin-ideal portrayed by celebrities on social media (Slater et al., 2019, pp. 82-83). Thus, her coaches' comparisons to an elephant or pig does not seem fitting. Ohashi performs according to what is culturally accepted and reinforces the notion that gender is a construct. For instance, she wears makeup when she performs, her hair is in place, and the way

her body is positioned illustrates femininity (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52; Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 301). Another compositional feature depicted by Ohashi is the bashful knee bend, which implies subordination according to Goffman (1976, p. 115). It makes her appear vulnerable and as if she is not ready to react to her surroundings. However, the way she looks directly at the spectator is a pose frequently portrayed by men, as it expresses superiority (p. 115).

She breaks the fourth wall, which draws the spectators' eyes to meet hers. This becomes evident as the vertical lines portrayed in the composition of the image creates a sensation of pride, power, and being unashamed (Dunlop, 2023; Goffman, 1976, p. 110), her gaze thus implies that she is in control. Her direct gaze also depicts sexual tones in the image, as she winks to the audience while her lips are parted (cf. figure 2). Thus, Ohashi displays the normative notion of how a woman is supposed to look, despite her masculine posture and direct eye contact with the audience, as she portrays what is acceptable in society; being thin, curvy, vulnerable, and yet connoting a 'to-be-looked-at-ness', by winking to the audience and seeming somewhat submissive by bending her knee (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436; Goffman, 1976, p. 110). By winking at the audience Ohashi connotes a strong erotic and visual impact, which holds the look of the spectators and portrays herself as subordinate to the male viewer (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436). This emphasizes Connell's argument that a male-gendered discourse continues to persist in society (2002, p. 2), as women continues to perform under different premises than men. Female gymnasts, for instance, perform their floor routine with music, whereas men do not (Dufur, 2006, p. 589). Male gymnasts have a serious expression when they perform their routine, additionally they are wearing a tank-top and either shorts or long pants (Hobart, 2016). Female gymnasts, on the other hand, must wear a colorful and sparkly leotard, makeup, and jewelry and have their hair up (Dufur, 2006, p. 589). Therefore, women are expected to create a spectacle and make the spectators look at them; it does not happen automatically.

Thereby, it can be argued that Biles and Ohashi merely portray their frontstage, as they present a certain image of who they are, namely individuals who embody the normative notion of being a woman (Butler, 2006, p. 45; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 69). They perform on a stage in front of an audience; therefore, they must conform to the expectations the setting dictates, otherwise their performance will not be rewarded (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 72-73). Thus, they must wear a leotard that emphasize every curve of their body, makeup, and their hair secured in a bun or ponytail (Dufur, 2006, p. 589; Harrington, 2021). By conforming to the expectations of the social situation they also display the need to fit in, more specifically defined as generalization (Simmel, 1957, pp. 542-543). Thereby, Ohashi and Biles do not stand alone in their actions, on the contrary they are not

held accountable for their creative demand but are merely perceived as another gymnast in the crowd; a vessel of the social contents (p. 543). The need to fit in, however, also presents consequences, namely the need to strive for the body type that is perceived as ideal in gymnastics, a petite and slender figure. Spectators of the sport have been domesticated to want to see this feminine body type (Dufur, 2006, p. 589), despite it being “*incompatible with women’s normal maturation*” (p. 589). Foucault would argue that gymnasts and the spectators of gymnastics have internalized this discourse due to the forces of power, namely the macrostructures that influences an individual’s understanding of themselves. It is the social and governmental administrative power structures that have determined knowledge, meaning the ideal body type for gymnastics, which the public comes to internalize and reproduce in order to fit into the normative framework of society (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931). Thus, Biles and Ohashi have internalized the discourse that their body must look a certain way, slender and petite, as well as present themselves a certain way when they perform: submissive, vulnerable, and desirable (cf. figure 1 & 2). The focus of women’s sport thus comes to focus on how the female body must be conformed and controlled to an extent that their body expresses heterosexual attractiveness (Dufur, 2006, p. 589).

Biles and Ohashi have both received negative comments about their bodies, despite their accomplishment within the sport. It seems paradoxically that men and women are held accountable to different standards when they perform their floor routine. Female gymnasts are expected to include artistic elements, perform to music, make their routine more dance-like, and present themselves in a desirable manner. Male gymnasts, on the other hand, are expected to display power and strength and move directly from one skill to another (Adams, 2023). The display of strength is also evident in the images taken during their performance:

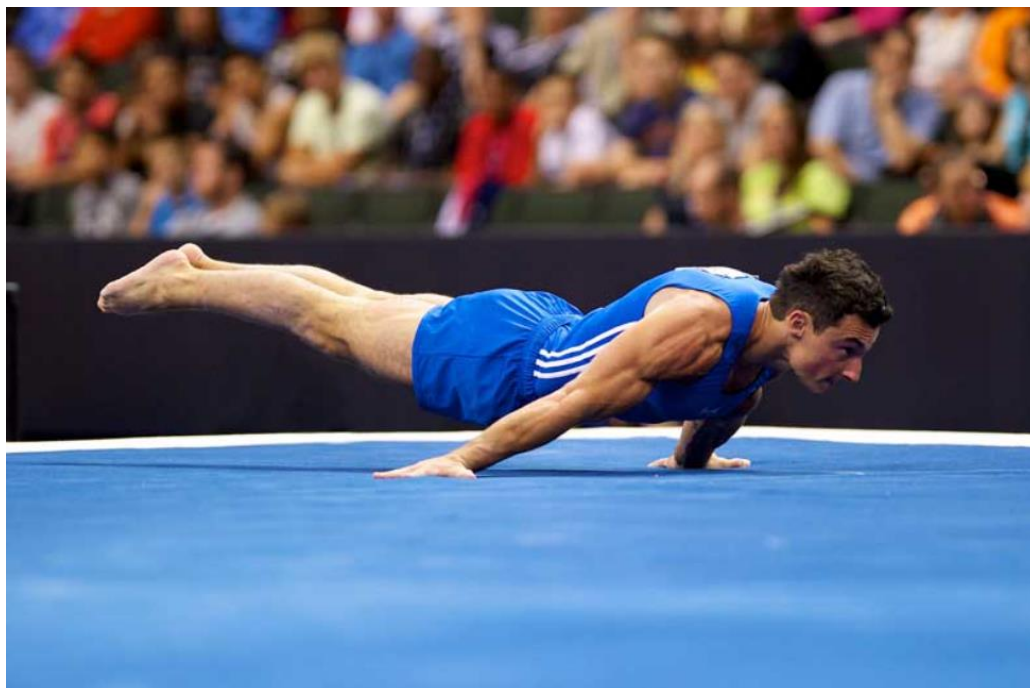


Figure 3: Brandon Wynn displaying strength and balance during his floor routine (Blättler).

Male gymnasts must hold an element that resembles either strength or balance for a minimum of two seconds (Olympics, 2020). They do not showcase grace or delicate movements throughout their routine, on the contrary, they illustrate their strength in silence. This emphasizes the notion that “real men” must steer away from anything that can be considered remotely feminine (Connell, 2002, p. 3). Their silent performance also portrays male gymnasts as stoic: the true embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. They can endure the hard competition without complaining or showing signs of weakness (Connell, 2015, p. 141; Howson, 2006, p. 1). Male gymnasts are displayed as a symbol of the sturdy oak, in both a literal and figurative sense. This implies that men are strong and the provider, who can rescue a damsel in distress, as well as illustrates that men are physically tough and reliable.

Female gymnasts are portrayed quite differently, as they must showcase poise, grace, and gentle movements. This is often demonstrated through different poses and movements of the hands (cf. figure 1 & 2), movements one would never experience in men’s gymnastics (Oswald, 2016). Female gymnasts have more feline movements compared to men’s stoic, still, and tough exterior when they perform. They appear more flexible than their male counterparts, which illustrates that women are supposed to be malleable and controlled. It also displays the embodiment of emphasized femininity, as they express desirability and compliance with the sexual desires of men (Connell, 1987, p. 188). The media utilize images from both Biles and Ohashi’s performances where they appear sexual, Biles is illustrated below:



Figure 4: The image on the right portrays Simone Biles. during the U.S. Gymnastics Championships in 2021 (The Black Wall Street Times, 2021) The image on the left portrays her during the Olympics in 2016 (Jones, 2016). The images do not appear together in their respective sources, it is the way I have chosen to present my data.

Biles poses in a highly sexualized manner, as she bends one leg, arches her back while one hand barely touches her hip and the other reaches for her knee. Her movements guide the spectator's attention from her legs to her bottom, before they look at her chest and parted lips, while she gazes into the distance (Goffman, 1976, p. 97). Biles' poses on the floor expresses a classic stereotype according to Goffman, as "*lowering oneself physically in some form*" (1976, p. 110) illustrates subordination. Biles portrays herself as subordinate to the spectators in addition to being perceived as highly sexual. Her pose also resembles the iconic dance scene from *Flashdance*:



Figure 5: The iconic scene from *Flashdance* (Allen, 2022).

The pose displayed in *Flashdance* is highly sexualized, and only the silhouette of the dancer is visible to the audience; however, it does not leave much room for imagination, as the contours of her body are very clear. Thereby, the audience has internalized a shared symbolic language that enables

them to decipher what Biles' and Jennifer Beals' poses convey. The shared symbolic language, in this case, is represented by the position of the female body: the bashful knee bend, arched back, and bosom pushed forward. Thus, the spectator's ability to perceive the image as sexual is not innate (Dixon, 2019, p. 61). Biles' poses and her clothing also portray her as erotic and sexual and convey that she does not hide her urges. This reinforces the stereotype that Black women are hypersexual. Thus, she portrays untamed sexuality while posing as a subordinate and erotic object for the spectators to enjoy (Friar, 2021). Mulvey would argue that Biles's depiction of the female body reinforces the notion that women should perceive themselves through the looking glass of men and display themselves as available, subordinate, and delicate objects according to the normative conventions of the male gaze (Mulvey, 2009, pp. 436-437; Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 52). Lastly, Biles' utilization of the pose from Flashdance implies the recuperation of erased Africans, as Beals is biracial, albeit it is not mentioned or portrayed in the movie nor large parts of her career; she passed as White (Williams, 2022). Thus, Biles attempts to reclaim control of how Black women have been depicted and hidden by the media by paying tribute to Beals' character in Flashdance.

Furthermore, the images of Ohashi also illustrate the female body from the male gaze:



Figure 6: The image on the left is Ohashi during the Auroa Games in 2019 (Pickus, 2019). The image on the right is Ohashi during the NCAA Gymnastics Championships in 2019 (Brodsky, 2019). The images do not appear in a collage in the respective sources, it is the way I have chosen to present my data.

Ohashi performs in a skintight leotard that highlights the curves of her body. It elongates her legs and emphasize the curve of her hips. The horizontal lines in the image make Ohashi's hips the first thing the spectators notice, as one's eyes scan an image from left to right (Dunlop, 2023). Thus, the leotard

itself is constructed for the male gaze. Ohashi's gymnastic performance is subject to the curious gaze of the spectators as well as being an object of sexual stimulation (Mulvey, 2009, pp. 434-435). This is emphasized by the diversion of her gaze while she bends one knee and arches her back. In addition, she moves her arms towards her hips, which creates a "reader line" for the spectators to follow: Her back is arched, which pushes her bosom forward and her bottom backwards (cf. figure 6, left). Thus, the spectators get a full display of Ohashi's body, which emphasizes her as a passive object that is controlled by the sexual imbalance the world is controlled by (p. 436).

The image on the right depicts Ohashi in control of where the spectator looks. This is emphasized by the vertical lines depicted in the composition of the image, as it creates a sensation of pride and power (Dunlop, 2023), and her direct gaze. The break of the fourth wall contributes to the sexualized tones in the image, as her facial expression connotes a too-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436). Ohashi's facial expression indicates that she is in control of her movements, body, and the spectators' attention, but she is displayed as an objectification of the male viewer's sexual desire (p. 436). Despite the objectification of Ohashi, she breaks the notion of how Asian women's bodies are perceived. Her body is curvier and more muscular than the Asian body type most often represented in sports contexts by the media. Moreover, Asian women are often portrayed as easy and sexual available, which draws parallels to Asian Geishas', who existed to please men (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018, pp. 43-44). Thus, Ohashi tries to reshape the stereotype of how Asian women are perceived towards a positive depiction by portraying herself in control of her body and her actions. Despite that the media counteracts by continuously depicting her in a sexualized manner, which according to Hall, contributes to the construction of stereotypes (Dixon, 2019, pp. 63-64).

Another way the internalization of how the female body is supposed to look is expressed in the criticism and focus on women's hair and clothing, something Serena Williams has experienced throughout her career, as she challenges the notion of what a woman should wear when playing tennis:



Figure 7: Serena Williams wearing a catsuit during the 2018 French Open (Nittle, 2018).

During the 2018 French Open, Williams wore a catsuit instead of the traditional tennis skirt. This was considered disrespectful to the game and the place; thus, the catsuit was banned. The president of the French Tennis Federation explained that Williams' outfit was a problem and that it would not be accepted, despite the catsuit being a necessity for her health, as she was recovering from her pregnancy and multiple blood clots (Friedman, 2018). Williams' fans did not have a problem with her outfit; on the contrary, they focused on her accomplishments and talent at the tennis court (Nittle, 2018; Elliot, 2020). The ban of the catsuit is surprising when the traditional tennis uniform is a short skirt. The media portrays Williams in a certain way and through this shape how the spectators perceive her. It can be argued that she is portrayed as a troublemaker, as she continuously breaks the norms and does not conform to the rules that have been dictated (Dixon, 2019, pp. 60-61). This is emphasized by the media, as it reinforces the notion of feminine bodily comportment and limited female spatiality; women must conduct themselves a certain way and not take up too much space, metaphorically or physically (Young, 1980, pp. 152-153). The spectators have internalized this discourse through previous media exposure and thus it is not expected that Williams breaks

conformity. However, when her appearance does not align with the internalized discourse the media tries to depict her as a rulebreaker, different, or as less feminine (cf. figure 7 & 9). Therefore, the ban of Williams' catsuit raises a greater problem: the need to control women.

Williams performs in a male dominated arena and she excels in it, but the media and her fellow players focus on her physical appearance (Flynn, 2017). Williams has muscular arms and legs, as well as features that are traditionally ascribed to African women; being naturally thick and having a voluptuous body (cf. figure 7; Hughes, 2020). Despite embodying features ascribed to the heterosexual normative notion of how a woman is supposed to look. Williams also embodies features that society ascribes to hegemonic masculinity: clear muscle definition, strength, and competitiveness (Connell, 2015, p. 141), which do not align with the feminine framework created by society. Tennis, however, places great demands on tennis players' physique, as it requires a mixture of power, speed, explosiveness, agility, and medium to high utilization of the aerobic energy system (Fernandez-Fernandez et al., 2009). Despite the physical requirements of tennis, the criticism Williams has received is about the size of her body and her being 'too strong' (Flynn, 2017). This seems paradoxical, as she has one of the fastest serves in women's tennis history at 128.9 mph (Mohamed, 2023), which would not be possible if she did not utilize the power of her body and realized its capability (Young, 1980, pp. 142-143). The fear of appearing to strong, however, is described by Young as a common fear for women, as they experience their body as fragile instead of capable (pp. 143-144). Thus, Williams does not perceive her body as fragile or laden with immanence. She perceives herself as an active subject and her body as capable (pp.139-141), which is further emphasized by her approach to tennis.

In an interview, she explained that she does not play just to have fun; on the contrary, she plays to win (Elliot, 2020). Thus, she does not embody the notion that women should not utilize the space surrounding them (Young, 1980, p. 143). Williams lives as constituting and experiences herself as an intentional actor who moves according to her own will (p. 151). This enables her to move on the gender continuum, as she embodies masculine and feminine features (Butler, 2006, p. 45). This is evident on the tennis court. Her demeanor and physical appearance are perceived as masculine, as she expresses competitiveness, aggressiveness, and does not try to hide her muscular body. Her interest in fashion, acrylic nails, makeup, and jewelry tells another story (cf. figure 8):



Figure 8: Display of Serena Williams' fashion choices. The image to the left portrays Williams in a purple tutu during the U.S. Open in 2018 (Fitzpatrick, 2022). The image in the upper right corner illustrates her acrylic nails during the U.S. Open in 2011 (Paris, 2016), and the image in the bottom right corner display Williams' choice of makeup (Slonim, 2016). The images do not appear in a collage in the individual sources, it is the way I have chosen to present my data.

Williams' exterior illustrates clear signs of femininity, but it can also be argued that she, like gymnasts, needs to create a spectacle to attract the audiences' attention. Her outfits are considered scandalous and make the headlines of many magazines and newspapers (Fitzpatrick, 2022; Gill, 2023; Nittle, 2018), which can be interpreted as a way to draw attention to her performance on the court. Her purple tutu created a spectacle, as it does not resemble the classic tennis attire. It draws parallels to ballet, which is considered highly feminine. Williams has explained in an interview with People Magazine that she always allows her nails to stand out and be colorful, whereas she never wears more than just eyeliner on the court, as the makeup would run due to the physical activity (Baines, 2016). Thereby, Williams' outfits, makeup, and acrylic nails soften her masculine features, which enables her to play around with society's gender expectations, as it is not expected that she expresses her femininity on the tennis court. The red belt on her black catsuit, for instance, creates the illusion of an hourglass figure and highlights Williams' bottom, whereas the grip on the tennis racket is firm (cf.

figure 7), and thus considered more masculine when taking Goffman's concept of the feminine touch into account (1976, pp. 97-99).

Her demeanor and expression of emotions on the tennis court illustrate that she does not suppress her emotions, for example, during the U.S. Open Women's Championships final against Naomi Osaka in 2018. During this match, Williams argues with the umpire, throws her racket, and is on the verge of crying. The umpire issued a violation, claiming that Williams received coaching from the sideline, which is prohibited in tennis. Williams agitatedly responded that she would rather lose than cheat to win, to which the umpire expresses that he is aware of that. However, the tennis match continues to escalate despite Williams and the umpire seemingly understanding each other. She misses a shot and in frustration throws her racket at the ground, where it breaks, for which she receives another point penalty, leading to further mayhem on the court. She yells at the umpire that he stole a point from her, attacked her character, owes her an apology, and called him a thief, for which she receives a point penalty for verbal abuse (Eurosport Tennis, 2022, 1.30-2.51).

Williams is unable to get her emotions under control and states that her male players get away with doing much worse; claiming that the umpire's judgement is due to sexism (Eurosport Tennis; 2022, 4.08-4.26). John Patrick McEnroe is one of the commentators on this incident and agrees with Williams that it is due to gender bias; however, he also claims that she needs to take responsibility for her actions (ABC News, 2018, 3.40-4.33). He indicates that there are different rules for men and women in tennis, which is further supported by Young's argument that women are indoctrinated to follow specific rules. For instance, women are supposed to talk a certain way; it is acceptable for them to express emotions but only in certain contexts (1980, p. 154). Williams performs in a predominantly male arena, thereby it is not acceptable for her to be on the verge of crying or being agitated. She expresses a range of emotions and is considered hysterical³, which have permutated into the angry black women stereotype. It implies that Williams is hysterical, thus it portrays her as animalistic for uncontrollably expressing her emotions (Buxton-Namisnyk, 2022, p. 1331; Friar, 2021). She does not conform to the notion of women being subordinate or delicate objects; on the contrary, she is depicted as fulfilling the stereotype of Black women as hysterical. Her display of emotions at the U.S. Open also led to another problem, namely Williams being portrayed in a problematic way:

³ Hysteria is defined as a state of extreme uncontrollable emotion (Hornby et al., 2015, p. 767)



Figure 9: Caricature of Serena Williams' performance during the U.S. Open Women's Championships final against Naomi Osaka in 2018. The caricature is created by the Herald Sun's cartoonist Mark Knight (Herald Sun, 2018).

Mark Knight, the creator of the caricature, expressed that the cartoon is not racist. It merely displays Williams' poor behavior and temper tantrum (Herald Sun, 2018). Williams' emotions are reduced to a temper tantrum, which emphasizes the infantilization of her. This is illustrated by the pacifier displayed on the court and how she jumps in the air like a child would do when they do not get their way. The language portrayed in the caricature is also derogative, as the umpire asks Williams' opponent if she can let Williams win. It implies that Williams is not good enough to win, but the tantrum will end, and she will resume playing properly without further disturbances (cf. figure 9). The choice of words is problematic, as it draws parallels to the notion that enslaved people could not take care of themselves if they were not under the protection of the slaveowners (Stampp, 1944, p. 41). Thus, the caricature belittles Williams by comparing her to a child or even as less worthy than a white woman.

Knight also portrays Williams in a problematic way in terms of her physical appearance. He has enhanced the size of her nose and lips, while her hair sticks directly into the air and her tennis skirt is reminiscent of an ostrich (cf. figure 9). Thus, the myth of 'Hottentot Venus' continues to be enforced, as women of African descent continues to be illustrated in a bestial manner (Friar, 2021).

Williams' opponent is displayed as a thin White woman with blond and impeccable hair, which is problematic, as Osaka is of Japanese and Haitian descent (Rothberg, 2022). Thus, Osaka's real ethnicity is not represented, which illustrates how problematic women are depicted in a sports context. She is depicted as the ideal tennis player, the one the audience expects to see or are used to see. It reinforces the notion that a woman must look impeccable despite performing in a tournament (Kambhampaty, 2019).

In stark contrast, Williams is portrayed with frizzy and unruly hair, which implies that she does not fit into the framework set for women and their hair. White cultural norms influence how Black women must present their hair. The control of Black hair has its roots in slavery, where White society deemed Black hair unwelcome, unattractive, and unmanageable. It was required that Black women either accommodated their hairstyles to White beauty or covered their hair (Donahoo & Smith, 2022, p. 183). The control of Black women's hair does not only belong in the past; it continues to influence the media and sports. For instance, both Williams and Biles present their hair in different styles:

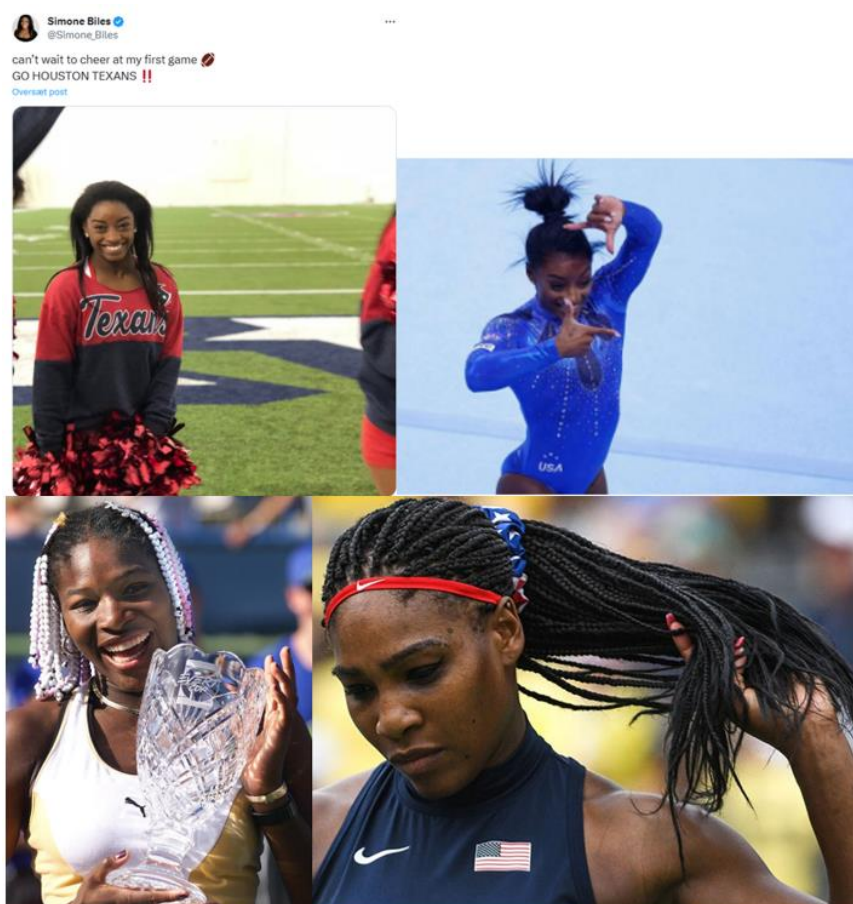


Figure 10: A display of Serena Williams and Simone Biles' hairstyles during various sport events. The image in the upper left and right corner illustrates Biles' hair after training with the Houston Texans cheerleaders (Biles, X, 2017; Michallon, 2017) and during the World Championship in 2023 (Thrane, 2023). The image in the lower left and right corner illustrates Williams' hairstyles during two different events (Griffin, 2018; Bennett, 2016). The way the images are put together in a collage is not from the individual sources, it is the way I have chosen to present my data.

The images illustrate different hairstyles during various sport events. Individuals have criticized Biles' hair for being untidy, frizzy, and that her edges were not done properly. Whereas Williams surprised and enraged the global tennis community by wearing beaded braids when she entered the professional tennis circuit in 1998 (Michallon, 2017; Gill, 2023).

Biles expresses her excitement to cheer for the Houston Texans but received negative comments and unsolicited advice on how to fix her hair; thus, the focus shifted from her excitement and achievements to her appearance (Michallon, 2017). The type of comments reveals that the spectators expect her hair to be controlled and impeccable. Similarly, Williams' beaded braids created controversy for the clinging noise they made and the overall appearance. However, her hairstyle inspired more Black kids to take up tennis as their sport (Gill, 2023). The need to comment on Black Women's hair has a strong connection to the oppression of Black hair. On the African continent, Black women proudly embrace and display their hair in various fashions, but it continues to be a contested issue in Western society (Donahoo & Smith, 2022, p. 183).

Thus, the media have created an expectation of how Black hair is supposed to look and articles about Biles' and Williams' hair enable the media to create and reinforce certain expectations. As a gymnast Biles' hair is supposed to be in a bun with no frizz or uneven edges and as a Black woman her hair is supposed to be managed and to some extent emulate White beauty (Donahoo & Smith, 2022, p. 183). Williams' wore her braids to celebrate her heritage, as beads typically are worn by African American children and as a decoration for adults (Jain, 2022). The fact that the beaded braids enraged the tennis community continues to reinforce the notion that Black hair must emulate White beauty. The ideology of White being superior to Black has been taught for hundreds of years, internalizing the ideology of how long and straight hair is better than natural Black hair (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 93-95). Thereby, the media depict a subjective version of the world that shapes the spectator's understanding of it (Dixon, 2019, pp. 61-63). The stereotype that Black hair is unmanageable is reinforced by the constant focus on their appearance instead of their performance.

The internalization of Black beauty is emphasized by Foucault's notion of how an individual constitutes themselves through certain discourses (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1930). Williams is a Black woman in a predominantly White arena, and she does not conform to the normative notion of how a female tennis player is supposed to look. She utilizes different hairstyles and clothing to constitute herself and who she wants to be perceived as. She does not conform to the internalized discourse that Black hair is unmanageable or needs to be straightened to be beautiful. On the contrary, she embraces her heritage by wearing beaded or long braids (cf. figure 10). Thus, she challenges the

prevailing macrostructures that dictate which discourses individuals must internalize to conform to the normative framework of society (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931). Williams manages to transform herself to attain her state of happiness (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). However, Williams also enforces the notion that she must appear a certain way.

In contrast to the masculine arena she performs in, her hairstyles and fashion choices express clear signs of femininity (cf. figure 8 & 10). Her fashion choices illustrate the duality in fashion, who we are, and who we want to be perceived as (Simmel, 1957, p. 545). Williams presents herself as highly feminine in her clothing, acrylic nails, and hairstyles by which she expresses her individualism. She wears various interpretations of the sportswear traditionally ascribed to tennis (Mitchell, 2019). Thus, she puts her spin on her sportswear, stands alone in her fashion choices, and disregards the need to fit in by matching her opponents' clothing. Williams primarily interprets the classic tennis skirt, which can be interpreted as her surrender to collectivism. Thus, she strives towards both specialization and generalization within her sport (Simmel, 1957, pp. 541-558).

In comparison Biles and Ohashi do not strive towards specialization though their gymnastic attire. They conform to the attire that is expected from them and are a vessel of social contents (p. 543). The reason they do not deviate from the norm may be due to the rules of gymnastics (Dufur, 2006, pp. 587-590; Flynn, 2017). Their individuality, however, is expressed in their creative choice of performance. They perform on a social stage to which there are certain expectations, but they choose their own music and how they want to execute their gymnastic series. Through their music choice and composition of the series they present the audience with glimpses of their backstage (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-73).

It becomes clear that there are certain expectations Williams, Biles, and Ohashi must live up to when they perform in their respective sport. Common for all three athletes is the expectation to appear feminine and delicate when they perform. However, they also transcend and challenge the normative notions set by society in various ways. Williams utilizes her fashion choices and hairstyles to express herself and move boundaries for what is allowed and expected in tennis. Whereas Biles and Ohashi, in two different ways, challenge how the physical appearance of a classic gymnast is supposed to look. Therefore, the next section will examine how the media portrays the three athletes differently in a non-sports context.

Eye Candy

This chapter will provide an analysis and discussion of how the media depicts Biles, Williams, and Ohashi, how the media's depiction differentiates from the portrayal of them in a sports context or if

they are portrayed similarly, and how the three athletes portray themselves outside a sports context. The portrayal of the three athletes will be examined in a non-sports context, as they have been criticized for their masculine features when performing in a predominantly male arena and simultaneously being portrayed in a highly sexualized and feminine manner. Thus, to see which features the media highlights when they are depicted on magazine covers or on the red carpet.

Williams has won 23 Grand Slam singles titles (Luebering, 2023), and when she announced her retirement, she was on the cover of *Vogue* magazine posing as a model and not an elite athlete:



Figure 11: Serena Williams on the cover of *Vogue* magazine September 2022 (*Vogue*, 2022).

The image composition illustrates Goffman's concept of the feminine touch, as Williams' touch is light and barely touches her body (1976, p. 97). Her hands are delicately placed on her hip and just below her bosom. The dress ruffles slightly, which is the only indicator that her hands touch her body. The placement of her hands emphasizes the curves of her body and outlines a more defined hourglass

figure. Her self-touching indicates that her body is delicate (Goffman, 1976, p. 98) and a beautiful object to perceive. The inactivity in the photo also portrays her as a desirable and passive object, merely present to be admired by the spectators; thereby, Williams performs normative femininity. This depiction of Williams emphasizes how gender performance is continuously repeated by the media to create an impression of being the ideal woman (Butler, 2006, pp. 43-44; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52). In a sports context, Williams is portrayed as masculine, a child with a temper tantrum, and a rulebreaker. However, when depicted on the cover of *Vogue* she embodies features ascribed to emphasized femininity: she appears flawless and attractive to the normative heterosexual man (Connell, 2002, p. 3). This is emphasized by the exclusive interview that accompanied the cover.

In the interview, Williams focuses on the process of deciding to evolve from tennis to other things that are more important to her. She does not describe it as a definite farewell to tennis, but she has to choose: either be one hundred percent committed to tennis or her family (Williams & Haskell, 2022). Thus, Williams continues to embody emphasized femininity as she follows the male-centered gender discourse that persists in society: she must tend to the children and focus on the family (Connell, 2002, p. 2). The public declaration to focus on her family and her wish to expand her family expresses normative femininity and emphasizes that she identifies herself with the normatively female role of nurturer and childcare. According to Connell, men and women have different roles in society that they must fulfill. She argues that in contemporary society, men continue to obtain high-paying jobs, and women are expected to do most of the housework, including childcare (2002, p. 2). Williams thus displays normative gender roles in the article, as her desire to expand her family fulfills the idea associated with the biological anticipation of women.

Furthermore, Williams poses on a beach, which is often mentioned as a location with opportunities for sexual contact. Thereby, the beach Williams is portrayed on is linked to “*sexual possibility and the disclosure of the body, particularly the female body*” (Black, 2001, p. 110), which connects to the way she is perceived as a sexual object. Albeit Williams’ outfit does not reveal a lot of bare skin, it is a bodycon dress that hugs her figure. Thus, the spectators can see the outline of her body and the highlighted curves, not leaving much room for interpretation. This supports Mulvey’s theory that women are supposed to be a passive and erotic object for the male viewer to enjoy (2009, pp. 436-437).

Another prominent composure depicted by the cover photo is the break of the fourth wall. The direct gaze is a display of power, albeit her clothing is a depiction of conformity to society’s preferred ideal of femininity (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52). Lastly, the colors of the beach can express emotions.

The colors are light and low in saturation, which connotes feelings of peacefulness and gentleness (Machin, 2007, p. 70). It emphasizes the notion of how the spectators are supposed to perceive Williams as highly feminine in contrast to the depiction of her in a sports context.

Williams' hair is styled differently when she plays tennis compared to when she is on the red carpet. On the red carpet, her hair is controlled and appears with a texture that resembles White beauty standards:



Figure 12: The photo on the left portrays Williams at the Academy Awards in Los Angeles and the photo on the right portrays her at the NAACP Image Awards in 2023 (Herndon, 2023). The photos do not appear side by side in the source, it is the way I have chosen to present my data.

Her hair is portrayed as manageable, as it is both lighter and straighter than the texture of her natural hair (cf. figure 8). She displays the internalized discourse of how Black hair is supposed to look. This discourse and stereotype are portrayed in the media, which develops a twisted idea of the ideal Black beauty. For instance, in the movie, music, and television industries, Black individuals have struggled to achieve equal representation, as many Black leading women are light-skinned, for example, Beyonce Knowles and Queen Latifah:



Figure 13: From left to right - Beyoncé Knowles at the Tidal's hurricane benefit concert (Harwood, 2017) and Queen Latifa at the 73rd Annual Golden Globe Awards (Badger, 2019).

Thus, the ideal Black beauty becomes light skin, lighter, and straighter hair, which darker-skinned individuals try to obtain through skin bleaching, hair extensions, or wigs (Pinkney, 2012, pp. 95-96). The portrayal of Black beauty in the media shapes the spectators' understanding of it, which leads to the internalization of what defines it. Hall would argue that it is due to previous media exposures that spectators come to internalize a symbolic language that dictates one simplified notion of Black beauty. The setting and internalized discourse thus dictate how Williams must present herself on the red carpet or a magazine cover (Dixon, 2019, pp. 60-61).

Williams continues to reinforce the stereotype that portrays Black women's bodies as naturally thicker or curvier. Black women are continuously described as having curvaceous and voluptuous bodies, with large thighs and posterior (Hughes, 2020, pp. 311-312), which are used "as a marker of Black femininity and attractiveness" (p. 311). Williams' clothing on the tennis court, red carpet, and in magazines emphasize the proportions of the lower body (cf. figure 12, 11 & 7). The dresses she wears are narrow at the waist, which highlights her curves and directs the spectator's attention to her bottom and fuller bust. The dresses are also long but with a slit, which enables the spectators to get a closer look at her full-figured thighs (cf. figure 12). Thus, the body ideal portrayed by the media and

expressed by Williams herself emphasizes the stereotype of how a woman is supposed to look: full-figured bottom, thighs, and bosom, and a petite waist. This is evident by looking at Beyonce's dress: it highlights her large bottom and small waist (cf. figure 13). Thereby, Williams does not reshape the stereotype of Black beauty with her hairstyles or clothing on the red carpet; on the contrary, she fulfills the stereotype, which is quite the contrast compared to how she portrays herself in a sports context.

In a sports context, Williams celebrates her heritage through different hairstyles and embraces her natural hair. Goffman would argue that Williams presents the spectators with two different masks, as she should be perceived as an actor on a social stage (1959, p. 1; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-69). On the tennis court, she presents herself as unapologetically Black and tries to inspire young women to be themselves and not conform to acting a certain way (Williams & Haskell, 2022). However, when she performs on the red carpet, she conforms to the social situation and the situational-specific audience (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 72-73). Thereby, Williams lives up to the normative and culturally accepted notion of how women must enact femininity when they perform on the red carpet, whereas she redefines the notion of femininity with her mannerisms and playing style at the tennis court (Butler, 2006, p. 45).

Furthermore, Williams' body type is presented differently on the tennis court. The caricature made of Williams did not favorably portray her (cf. figure 9). Her body type relates to a racialized-gendered stereotype: Black women as animalistic. She is depicted in a dehumanizing way, unable to control her emotions, and bears a resemblance to an animal that cannot be tamed (Buxton-Namisnyk, 2022, p. 1331; Friar, 2021). She is depicted as almost ten times the size of Osaka, which implies racial overtones. Williams' body is larger, stronger, and taller in the caricature, which is emphasized by the whitewashing of Osaka, ultimately reinforcing the notion that Black bodies are different from White bodies (cf. figure 9; Hughes, 2020, pp. 312-313). Thus, the depiction of Williams in a non-sports context is quite different from the portrayal in a sports context, which illustrates how individuals must accommodate their performance depending on the setting, despite perceiving themselves as authentic in both (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-69).

Similarly, Biles is depicted differently when performing inside and outside a sports context. She has openly expressed the need to take a step back, and in 2020, she withdrew from the Olympics in Tokyo. Almost a year later, she gave an interview in *Essence* magazine to express why and was on the cover of the magazine. However, the cover did not display her as an elite athlete:



Figure 14: Simone Biles on the cover of *Essence* magazine photographed by Chrisean Rose (Biakolo, 2021).

The image composition illustrates Goffman's concept of the feminine touch, as Biles' hand gently caresses the top of her shoulder (1976, p. 97). The directions of her fingers point towards her collarbone and create the illusion that her fingers have moved delicately from her other shoulder over her collarbone before reaching their final destination. The implied movement guides the spectators' eyes to look at her body, and the self-touching conveys her body as a delicate and precious object (p. 99). The implied movement combined with the break of the fourth wall implies sexualized tones in the photo. It implies that she is in control of where the spectators look; she can seduce the spectators with her appearance. Her gaze also contributes to the highly sexualized tones in the photo, as the spectators become aware of how she maintains eye contact and maintains a somewhat serious expression. Her makeup creates an exotic and erotic appearance. The lip-gloss provides a wet and shiny look, enhances her lips, and makes them appear fuller and more plump (MAC Cosmetics, 2023).

Her eye-makeup emphasizes the shape and color of her eyes, as the mascara elongates her eyelashes, and the eyeliner draws the spectators' attention to her eyes (cf. figure 14). She appears as a passive and erotic object for the spectators, as she connotes a strong visual impact that expresses a to-be-looked-at-ness for the spectators to enjoy (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436). The direct gaze along with her makeup and utilization of the feminine touch depicts her as alluring and seductive. She does not hide her urges and her stare combined with her body language are intoxicating and lures in the spectators. This reinforces the stereotype that Black women are hyper-sexualized (Friar, 2021).

In addition, the photo's colors add to the sexualized tones. The background is low in saturation, which connotes peacefulness (Manchin, 2007, p. 70), whereas the color of Biles' dress, hair, and skin tone are highly saturated, which "*connote a feeling of sensuality* (Machin, 2007, p. 75). It portrays Biles as sensual and beautiful to look at, which is emphasized by the color of her dress. Mauve symbolizes youth and femininity (Nix Sensor Ltd, 2023), whereas the metallic finish is used to catch the spectators' attention. The metallic color enhances Biles' sculpture-like dress, which creates an illusion of enlarging her breasts (Bruna, 2023). Thus, Biles depicts the normative version of femininity, as she appears flawless and attractive to the male viewer; she accommodates to the current setting (Connell, 2002, p. 3; Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-69). This is emphasized by the presentation of her body on the cover photo: her muscles are hidden by her hair (cf. figure 14). It emphasized how gender performances are repeated by the media to create an impression of being the ideal woman (Butler, 2006, pp. 43-44; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52). In a sports context, the media focuses on her muscular body, competitiveness, and how her hair is out of place (Sharma, 2023; Michallon, 2017). However, when depicted on the cover of *Essence* she embodies features ascribed to emphasized femininity; she appears attractive to the normative heterosexual man (Connell, 2002, p. 3).

On the cover of magazines, she portrays a performance that is supposed to impress the audience and evoke a specific response (Goffman, 1959, p. 6), namely perceiving her as the perfect image of a woman; it is what the media wants the audience to see, as the media influence the audiences' understanding of the ideal female body (Dixon, 2019, pp. 60-61). However, at a red carpet event, she wore a pastel pink dress that showcased her muscular body, which contradicts how the media usually depicts her in a non-sports context:



Figure 15: Simone Biles at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2021 (Bjornson, 2021).

It is a pastel pink gown with a thigh high slit and a one shoulder strap. The dress hugs Biles' figure, while the slit provides the spectators with a peak at her legs. She presents herself in a sexualized and feminine manner, as one leg is set in front of the other showcasing the slit in the dress, while her hand is at the very top of the slit, creating the illusion of how her hand has trailed along her leg and could continue up her body. Biles is depicted to satisfy the male fantasy and emphasizes how women should look from the male perspective (Mulvey, 2009, pp. 436-437; Cwynar-Horta, 2016, p. 52).

The pastel pink dress showcases features that Biles have previously been criticized for (Sharma, 2023; Machin, 2020). Hall would argue that she tries to change the way women are depicted in the media and guide the media's depiction athletic women towards a more positive and inclusive depiction (Dixon, 2019, p. 64). It also illustrates the dual tension between affiliation and differentiation that are present in fashion (Longhurst, et al., 2017, p. 297). Biles' outfits outside a sports context illustrate how she strives towards generalization, as she does not stand alone in her actions. Her clothing and pose are recognized and accepted by society as feminine; thus, she accommodates to the social expectations and display gender-appropriate behavior (Bulter, 2006, p.

45; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52; Simmel, 1957, p. 542; Connell, 2002, p. 2). However, her hairstyle (cf. figure 14) and her dress at the red carpet (cf. figure 15) illustrates how she strives towards individuality. Thus, she adjusts her performance to the social setting and its requirements, as the setting dictates the audiences' expectations (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 72-73). Thereby the portrayal of Biles in a non-sport context is like the depiction of her in a sports context: she must live up to the prevailing beauty standards.

Furthermore, Ohashi does not perform gymnastics at the same level as Biles; thus, she is not featured in the same magazines as Biles or Williams. Therefore, this section will examine if she is portrayed differently. Ohashi does attend red carpet events, albeit the events are smaller than the Met Gala, for instance. The events she attends, however, are advocates for causes she supports, for instance, the Gold Meets Golden Party supports and creates awareness about sports-related causes by bringing together celebrities, Olympic medalists, and professional athletes (Gold Meets Golden, 2023). In 2020, Ohashi participated in the event:



Figure 16: Katelyn Ohashi at the annual Gold Meets Golden party in 2020 (Cubit, 2020).

Ohashi is wearing a white and yellow off-shoulder top with fringes down the side paired with a pair of beige pants. It is a fitted top that shows off the curves of her bosom. The fringe, however, makes it difficult for the spectator to clearly see her figure, as it disguises her curves. She has chosen

an outfit that does not resemble what the spectators usually see from her. In a sports context, she wears dark and bold colors with sequins, whereas the color scheme for her red carpet outfit is subtle and does not create a spectacle. According to Simmel, she strives towards specialization, which enables her to stand out from the crowd (1957, p. 542). She distinguishes herself from what the audience is used to seeing at a red-carpet event: long evening gowns that showcase the feminine figure (cf. figure 12, 13 & 15). Ohashi transcends, as she perceives herself as an active subject (Young, 1980, pp. 141-145). She does not conform to how women pose on the red carpet. She does not utilize her arms to emphasize the curves of her body, as Williams and Biles for instance (cf. figure 12 & 15). On the contrary, her arms are casually down her side and does not touch her body to emphasize how it is a delicate object (Goffman, 1976, p. 97). Thus, she does not repeat the stylization of the body (Butler, 2006, p. 45).

Ohashi embodies features that are considered both feminine and masculine on the red carpet, which is emphasized by her handstand at the ESPN Awards' red-carpet:



Figure 17: Katelyn Ohashi at the ESPN Awards in 2019 performing a handstand in high heels (Quinn, 2019).

Her performance of a handstand in high heels illustrates how she will not be limited by the internalization of feminine comportment and feminine motility (Young, 1980, pp. 145-147). She displays her body's capabilities, which according to Connell is an attribute ascribed to men (2002, pp. 3-4). She does not limit herself to wonder about her capabilities; on the contrary, she expresses herself as confident and capable: as the perfect vessel to achieve her goal (Young, 1980, pp. 143-144). Her outfit, however, does express how the feminine body is the recipient of the male gaze (pp. 152-153). She is wearing a white lace pantsuit that is almost completely see-through, but revealing in a modest way compared to the leotard she is usually depicted in. Her clothing does not conform to bodycon dresses that emphasize her curves or creates an illusion of a more defined hourglass figure, larger bosom, or bottom. Her clothing does not fulfill the expectations of the audience; on the contrary, she transcends and tries to change the perception of women, emphasizing that women should be able to express themselves any way they like. This is further emphasized by how vocal Ohashi is about body image.

She writes for a WordPress site called *Behind the Madness*, where she expresses her thoughts and concerns about body image issues women endure in general and as athletes. She tries to raise awareness about the pressure she has felt in terms of how she must look. She expresses how she feels pressured to fulfill the expectations society has set, how women must have a small waist and a full-figured bottom (Ohashi, 2017). This illustrates how she contests the internalization of the prevailing beauty standards; thus, according to Foucault, she does not conform to the normative framework of society (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931). She has experienced body shaming because it is internalized in society that women must appear a certain way (Greep, 2022). However, she constitutes herself through technologies of production and technologies of the self, as it enables her to transform how she is perceived by others, how women are perceived, and attain a state of happiness (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Thus, she is not merely subject to submission and objectification by others. She can define and produce an understanding of herself that does not necessarily live up to the framework created by society (p. 18; Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931).

Ohashi's appearance on the red carpet and her being vocal about body image issues support Young's argument of living as constituting, as Ohashi utilizes her body's full range of motion and does not fulfill the regulations society has deemed appropriate (1980, p. 138; Longhurst, et al., 2017, pp. 282-283). She does not experience her body as laden with immanence. Young, however, states that women are aware that their bodies are perceived as sexual objects by men (1980, pp. 152-153), which is emphasized by the depiction of women in the media. The bodily objectification of women

enhances the discontinuity women have with their own bodies, as the fear of being open, outwardly direct, and extroverted can be perceived as an invitation to be objectified (p. 154), thus, feminine bodily comportment becomes internalized (pp. 152-153). Ohashi contests this notion, as she has overcome body shaming, an eating disorder, the expectations of society, and openly shares her experiences (Morse, 2019; Katelyn Ohashi, 2019; Ohashi, 2017). She defies the notion that women must live their lives as objects in a patriarchal society and does not let the objectification of her enhance the discontinuity of her body. She has utilized the objectification of her in the media to express herself and create awareness regarding subjects that are considered taboo.

Furthermore, Ohashi wears red lipstick on the red carpet and during her gymnastic performances. She presents the audience with a glimpse of who she is and displays a feature she does not alter due to the social setting (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-69). Red lipstick is a confidence booster, and during the 20th century, it was synonymous with strength and power as it represented the Suffragette movement. The red lipstick came to represent femininity, power, and independence. However, it is also considered scandalous, especially for women of color, as it amplified how Black women were depicted as hypersexual with exaggerated red lips, which also was the image of the Mammy. For White women, it was considered bold, and less so for Black women, as their skin is more melanated. In our day and age, the red lip symbolizes empowerment and strength, despite the color of one's skin (Ware, 2020). Thereby, Ohashi displays power when she is on the red carpet. She has overcome body shaming since the age of 14 (Thorbecke, 2019; BBC Sport, 2019), overcome surgery that had serious consequences for her professional career (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 2019), and rediscovered her love for gymnastics. She connotes femininity and empowerment, as red lipstick continues to draw parallels to women who are in a position of power, such as congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Margaret Thatcher, or Hillary Clinton. Thus, Ohashi is connected to women of power who do not portray the normative notion of femininity, which enables her to move on the gender continuum.

The red lipstick also draws connections to Ohashi's heritage, namely German and Japanese. Her Japanese descent creates different expectations for the spectator, as her race relates to different beauty standards and stereotypes. A prominent stereotypical feature often depicted in the media, such as cinema, is Asian women as hypersexualized and as a villainous temptress; a woman who is exotic, fierce, and sexual (Hwang & Parreñas, 2021, p. 571). For example, Lucy Liu is portrayed as such in Quentin Tarantino's movie *Kill Bill* or *Charlie's Angels* by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts; thus, Asian women are depicted as desirable and dangerous. This stereotype contributes to how the audience

perceives Ohashi, as the media shapes our understanding of the world (Dixon, 2019, p. 60). Thereby, the audience is supposed to perceive Ohashi as highly sexual, fierce, and erotic (Friar. 2021; Ashikari, 2005, p. 85; Dixon, 2019, pp. 60-61). Her appearance on the red carpet (cf. figure 17) does not only depict how she transcends from the normative notion of femininity; it also portrays her through the looking glass of the male viewer (Mulvey, 2009, p. 436), as her pose can be argued to illustrate the ultimate male fantasy: the perfect woman being extremely flexible for their entertainment only. It can be argued that Ohashi fulfills the stereotypes related to her race, as her pose presents her as a temptress luring in the male viewer. Her flexibility and extrovert attitude further imply sexual tones, which depict her as a desirable and yet dangerous individual (cf. figure 17; Ashikari, 2005, p. 85).

Ohashi's physical appearance on the red carpet and her performance in a sports context is also representative of the beauty standards associated with Western beauty and the standard of the 2010s: a small waist and a full-figured bottom (Greep, 2022). Ohashi's body has been scrutinized by the media, which emphasizes how there continues to be an immense focus on the female body and the way it is perceived by others. She tries to change how the female body is perceived by the media by presenting herself in a different manner than what is expected by the audience. Albeit her efforts to pose differently and not highlight her curves by utilizing her hands, she continues to be portrayed in the media as a desirable object for the male viewer to enjoy, which reinforces the prevailing discourse regarding beauty standards; she must look impeccable (Mulvey, 2009, pp. 436-437).

Thereby, it becomes clear that the media depicts Williams, Biles, and Ohashi when they perform inside and outside a sports context. The media portrays them differently, albeit all three embody emphasized femininity and express themselves in a sexualized manner. Williams is portrayed with a defined hourglass figure, in long evening gowns with deep V-necks and high slits, while her hair represents White beauty standards. Thus, the representation of her in the media is highly influenced by White beauty standards and the internalization of how Black beauty is supposed to look. Biles fulfill the stereotype of Black women as hypersexual, which is illustrated through her makeup and body language. She appears attractive to the normative heterosexual man and embodies emphasized femininity, as she is depicted as a delicate object for the viewer to enjoy. Lastly, Ohashi is transcending feminine comportment and motility, as she showcases her physical abilities on the red carpet. However, the media also presents her as a sexual temptress, who fulfills the stereotypes related to her race.

These events have varying degrees of agency, therefore the next section will examine how the three athletes present themselves on social media, as they can portray themselves as they choose to,

which differentiates from the expectations of red-carpet events, magazine covers, and performances in a sports context.

Social Media & Gender Performance

This chapter will provide an analysis and discussion of how Williams', Biles', and Ohashi's performance on social media and how their depiction differentiates from the medias. Thus, it will examine, which features the athletes choose to portray and if they display a side of themselves that is not presented by the media.

All three athletes are active on the social media Instagram and gives an insight to their personal life. They share similar themes, such as the display of self-portraits, mainly centered on their style, make-up, and the body itself, and promotion of their sport. Williams and Biles, however, also give an insight to themes such as family and career.

Ohashi has been body shamed by the media in a sports context and portrayed as a rule breaker and sexual temptress on the red carpet. However, on social media she depicts another side of herself. She embraces her body, skin condition, and artistic side, albeit posing in a more sexualized manner:



Figure 18: Katelyn Ohashi posing in her bikini with the caption "sandy cheeks" (Ohashi, katelyn_ohashi, 2023).

Ohashi poses in a bikini in a highly sexualized manner; thus, her body is the center of attention. Her back is arched, which pushes her bottom backwards and bosom forwards, while her hand rests on her knee, and her foot is placed on the tree. This pose emphasizes the size and shape of her bottom, while the self-touching implies that she is a delicate object (Goffman, 1976, p. 98).

The composition of the image also illustrates Goffman's concept of the ritualization of subordination utilized by the bashful knee bend (1976, p. 115), which also expresses appeasement and trust in the spectator. Thereby, Ohashi portrays herself as vulnerable and objectified for the spectator, which is emphasized by her tilted head and exposed throat, as it implies powerlessness; features predominantly associated with femininity (pp. 115-116). These traits also emphasize Connell's definition of emphasized femininity, in which femininity is defined by passivity, gracefulness, and sexual desirability (1987, p. 188), which is illustrated by Ohashi's stationary pose. It implies that she is a desirable woman who does nothing; she exists merely for the enjoyment of the viewer (Mulvey, 2009, pp. 436-437).

Albeit her pose displays her as a passive and erotic object, it also portrays that she is in control. She is not instructed to pose a certain way, as opposed to a sports context where she is subjected to the rules and norms of gymnastics. Her pose can also be interpreted as empowering, as she takes back control and rejects the notion that she is too large (BBC Sport, 2019; Brodsky, 2019). According to Young, Ohashi experienced her body as laden with immanence; thus, she was an object that was acted upon by the world (1980, pp. 139-145), but Ohashi transcends to a woman who openly speaks about her experiences and embraces her body (cf. figure 18; Ohashi, 2017; Brodsky, 2019). She lives as a constituting spatial subject and experiences herself as an intentional action and an active subject.

Her pose, combined with the break of the fourth wall, contributes to fulfilling the notion of Asian women as highly sexualized temptresses and sexually available (Ashikari, 2005, p. 85). The sexual tone in the post is accentuated by her tilted head and slightly parted lips, as it implies that her erotic demeanor lures in the spectator. Thereby, she is displayed as a desirable object; however, by posting the image herself, she depicts that she is in control of her body and her actions. She has full agency of the image and the composition. For instance, she is positioned in the foreground of the image and is the center of attention, while the background does not draw attention away from her (cf. figure 18).

Thereby, Ohashi portrays different elements in her post, which aligns with Jones' argument that "*many images actually represent multiple processes simultaneously*" (2019, p. 81). He argues that an individual depicts more than the process of posing; they also represent their mental processes through

their facial expressions (p. 81). Her facial expression suggests a sexual invitation and toughness, whereas she communicates a sexual invitation through her body language. These messages are mixed in terms of gender performance, as Ohashi's arched back that emphasizes the curves of her bottom and her parted lips communicate a sexual invitation, a constitutive act characteristic of emphasized femininity, while her confronting and direct gaze signals toughness, which conveys traits of masculinity such as lack of emotions (Morettini, 2016, Connell, 1987, p. 188).

Furthermore, Ohashi's caption says, "*sandy cheeks*," which is a reference to SpongeBob SquarePants, which is evident to the viewer as she included an image of the character in her post (Ohashi, katelyn_ohashi, 2023). The caption is ambiguous as it can also refer to her bottom; thus, it has different connotations. The composition of the image implies that the caption is sexual, as she poses in a bikini while she highlights her figure. Ohashi's pose also creates the illusion that her hand has trailed along her leg and can continue to trace her body and caress her curves. Thus, her pose can be argued to satisfy the male fantasy and emphasize how women should look. This is emphasized by the display of her full-figured bottom and a small waist, which fulfill the beauty standards of the 2010s (Greep, 2022). Mulvey would argue that Ohashi portrays herself as pleasurable and sensual for the male viewer (2009, pp. 436-437), whereas Goffman would argue that Ohashi must appear perfect to live up to the prevailing structures of society as she performs on a social stage (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 69-72). Thus, Ohashi is influenced by the male gaze and portrays herself to please the male fantasy and emphasizes how women are supposed to look and feel about themselves according to the male perspective (Mulvey, 2009, pp.436-437).

Thereby, Ohashi displays different elements in her post simultaneously. She poses in a highly sexualized manner, which implies that she is a desirable object to enjoy and embraces her body and display empowerment. Empowerment and confidence are themes frequently portrayed on her social media. For instance, she posed a selfie with the following caption: "*a reminder that selfies and confidence are never going away*" (Ohashi, katelyn_ohashi, 2023), as illustrated below:



Figure 19: A selfie of Ohashi with the caption “a reminder that selfies and confidence are never going away” (Ohashi, katelyn_ohashi, 2023)

The image is a medium close-up, and Ohashi poses in front of a dim background. A setup that conveys a feeling of physical and psychological closeness (Jones, 2019, p. 81) with her followers. The image composition creates intimacy with the spectators, which is emphasized by the eye-level camera angle. The camera angle reflects the social relationship between Ohashi and her followers, which is characterized by relatability: “*To look at someone from eye level signals equality*” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 139). The image is relatable, as she poses in a t-shirt and not a long evening gown or at a fancy destination.

Her facial expression, however, implies sexual tones to the image. She breaks the fourth wall by looking directly at the camera and thus determines where the spectators look. Hall would argue that the spectators have internalized a shared symbolic language, which enables them to decipher Ohashi’s post as sexual. The shared symbolic language, in this case, is represented by the visual effects in the image, namely Ohashi’s posture and facial expression (Dixon, 201, p. 61; cf. figure 20). Her direct gaze and facial expression can also be interpreted as Ohashi transcending from feminine comportment, how women are supposed to conduct themselves, to redefine the gendered differences

within society as she touches her body, which is considered a feminine way to protect one's body or portray it as a delicate and fragile object (Young, 1980, pp. 138-142; Goffman, 1976, p. 99). Ohashi combines self-touching with a direct gaze that expresses confidence, thus mixing constitutive acts that are constructed to create the impression of either femininity or masculinity, according to Bulter (2006, p. 45). Thus, Ohashi transcends from the feminine existence that defines women as laden with immanence, as she displays herself as an active subject who moves according to her own will as opposed to a woman who experiences the body as limited (Young, 1980, pp. 139-145).

Lastly, her caption emphasizes how she has learned to embrace her body. She expresses that a selfie is a boost of confidence and not merely an image for others to behold. Her body and images are not created for the enjoyment of others or to depict her as a desirable object (Ohashi, 2017; Brodsky, 2019). However, almost "*three quarters of Americans aged 18-24 years old use Instagram, and it is the most popular social media service for young women aged 18-29 years*" (Slater et al., 2019, p. 83). Therefore, it is problematic that Ohashi's performance on social media also illustrates a thin body ideal, albeit she creates empowering captions. It has been proven that there is a correlation between body image disturbance and the use of social media. Images that depict a thin body ideal on social media have shown to have a negative impact in adult and young women's body satisfaction and mood (p. 83). Thus, individuals are constantly confronted with beauty standards that reinforce the notion of being thin and having curves, as well as being feminine and muscular as depicted by Biles when she promotes her limited-edition leotard on her Instagram profile:

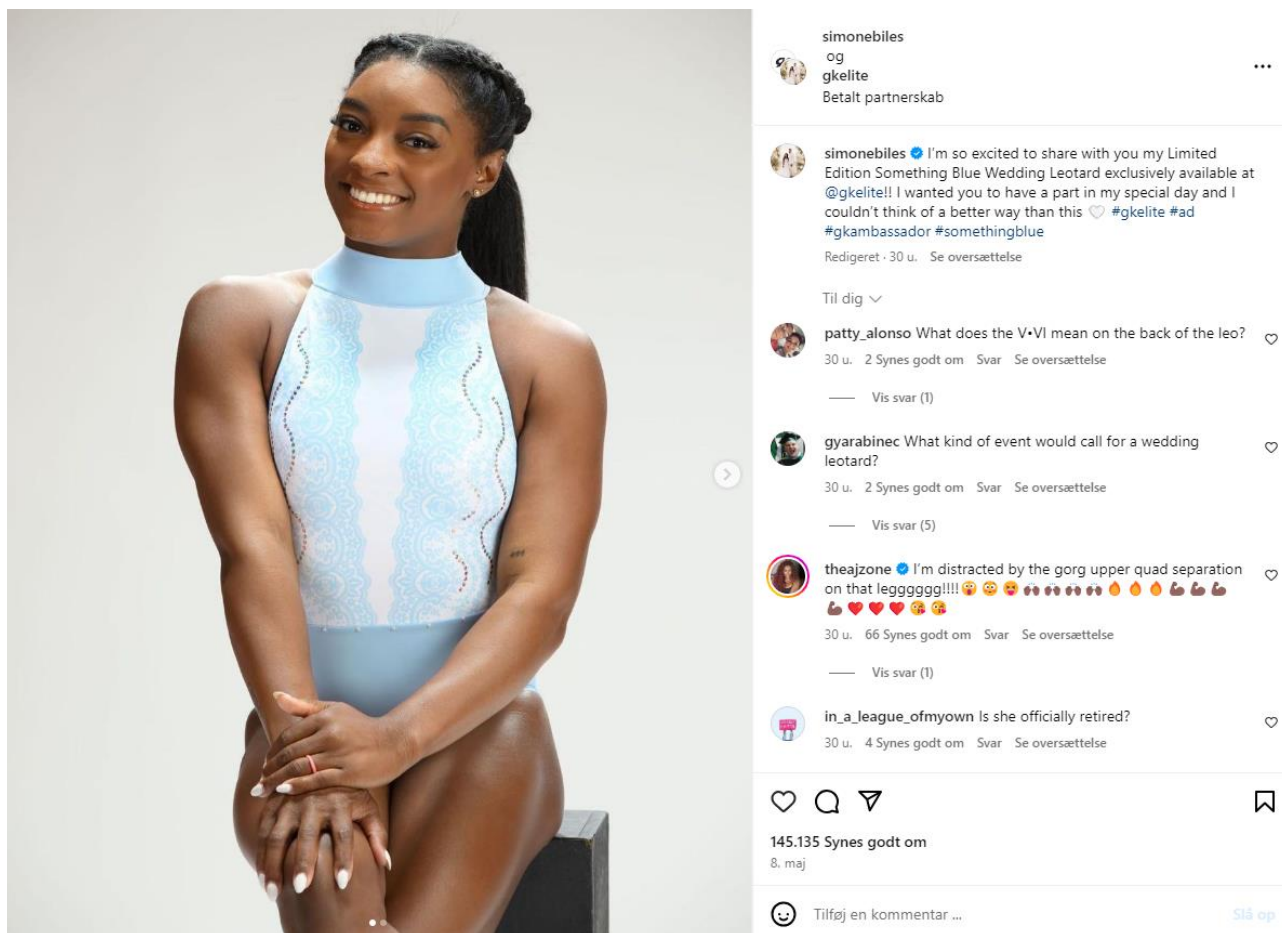


Figure 20: Simone Biles advertising for her limited-edition leotard made in relation to her wedding in collaboration with GK Elite (Biles, *simonebiles*, 2023).

Biles's image illustrates Goffman's concept of ritualization of subordination, as her head is slightly tilted while she smiles at the camera. The head tilt illustrates that she accepts her submissiveness, and the smile functions as a ritualistic mollifier, meaning she has no bad intentions (1976, pp. 115-117). Her facial expression and body posture also illustrate how Young's concept of feminine comportment has been internalized and continues to influence how women are perceived (1980, p. 138). Biles sits at the very edge of the "chair" with her legs close together and is displayed as a passive object (cf. figure 20). Her arms are stretched out in front of her, and her hands gently rest on her knee. The position of her arms also illustrates Young's argument that women experience their space as enclosed, meaning that they tend to utilize less space than their male counterparts. Thereby, Biles has internalized the notion of limited female spatiality and reinforces it through her advertising for her leotard and thus accepts her body as a fragile object that should be protected (1980, pp. 149-153).

Biles is a brand ambassador for GK Elite, a company that designs gymnastics apparel for elite athletes (GK Elite, 2023) and has created the leotard in collaboration with them. Thus, she does not

have full agency, as the advertisement is influenced by GK Elite and how they want to depict Biles and the new leotard. The leotard has subtle colors and fewer sequins compared to the leotards Biles wears during her gymnastic performances (cf. figure 1 & 4). The blue pattern on the upper part of the leotard resembles laces, which draw parallels to a garter belt traditionally worn by women on their wedding day. However, the position of her arms and legs displays her triceps and quadriceps, showcasing features that are softened in her floor routine by feline movements and long-sleeved sequined leotards (cf. figure 1 & 4). Thus, GK Elite portrays Biles as a passive and desirable object and as a strong athlete.

Furthermore, Biles creates intimacy with her followers through her post. She promotes a new product; however, instead of focusing on her accomplishments, Biles focuses on how exciting it is to share the news with her followers and how she wants them to be part of her big day. She expresses a gender normative feature in her caption, as she conveys' gratitude for her followers and their interest in her wedding, implying that they are one of the reasons for her to create this exact leotard (cf. figure 20). Biles' caption portrays her as emphatic and emotional; two attributes Connell ascribes to normative femininity (1987, p. 188). It also illustrates Butler's concept of performativity, as language is used to construct an individual's gender performance (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52).

Lastly, advertising for the leotard on her social media illustrates a digital marketing strategy that enables GK Elite to promote its products by utilizing Biles to reach consumers in a personal and relevant manner, thus creating awareness about the firm (Kok, et al., 2021, p. 4806). Her caption is created by herself; however, when collaborating with GK Elite and being a brand ambassador for them, she is influenced by the company and its agenda to sell products. Therefore, the depiction of her is influenced by GK Elite's production team. She has designed the leotard in collaboration with the firm; thus, she has some agency regarding the appearance, design, and color of the leotard, but not full agency (GK Elite, 2023).

Albeit some posts are influenced by Biles' collaboration deals, she portrays herself in a highly feminine manner, like the portrayal of her in a sports context, when having full agency:



Figure 21: Biles is posing in a bikini on a beach on the Turks & Caicos Islands (Biles, simonebiles, 2022).

Biles poses on a beach while her gaze is withdrawn, a representation technique that, according to Van Leeuwen, objectifies Biles: “If they do not look at us, they are, as it were, offered to our gaze as a spectacle for our dispassionate scrutiny” (2008, p. 140). This is emphasized by Mulvey’s concept of pleasure, namely scopophilia, which is emphasized by Biles’ pose (2009, p. 434). Her bosom is pushed forward, which creates the illusion of it being larger, whereas the position of her hands draws attention to her legs and bikini bottom. She holds the edge of her bikini bottom and almost lifts it, which creates an illusion that it could be removed completely. Biles is thus portrayed as an object of sexual stimulation and is subject to the curious gaze of the spectator (p. 434; cf. figure 21).

Furthermore, her caption says “turks and caicos” [sic.] (Biles, simonebiles, 2022), which refers to her location, but it is not the blue sky and clear water that catches the eye. The beach setting is a location with opportunities for sexual contact and the disclosure of the female body (Black, 2001, pp.110-111). The colors are increased in saturation and appear vigorous and rich, which can create “a sensuous experience” (Manchin, 2007, p. 75). High saturation have been said to connote “a felling

of sensuality or emotional richness” (p. 75), which contributes to a sense of sensuality to the surroundings and Biles herself. The interpreted effects of the setting, desirability, and sexuality are associated with Biles, as it can be argued that she becomes one with nature. Biles is also positioned in the foreground of the image; thus, attention and focus are drawn to her. The background, however, has a connotative effect, as Biles is linked to the interpreted effects of the setting.

Thus, Biles continues to reinforce feminine bodily comportment and spatiality in her advertising for the leotard (cf. figure 20), while her self-representation is like her performance in a sports context. Her movements are delicate, and she expresses emphasized femininity, as she appears passive and desirable to the spectator (Connell, 2002, pp. 2-3). She reproduces Goffman’s concepts of licensed withdrawal and self-touching inside and outside a sports context. According to Simmel, she surrenders to collectivism, as she becomes a vessel of social content (1957, p. 543), as her bikini photos do not stand out from the crowd. For instance, celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and Nicole Scherzinger have multiple images on Instagram that display a beach setting and very little clothing (Scherzinger, 2023; Jenner, 2023). Thus, presenting oneself with a withdrawn gaze, little clothing, self-touching, and sexual tones implied in the image continues to reinforce the notion of how women are supposed to conduct themselves and their bodies in terms of feminine body comportment and spatiality. It displays how individuals have internalized a discourse that dictates how women must present themselves as desirable objects. Foucault would argue that it is due to technologies of sign systems (1988, p. 18), as a beach location implies opportunities for sexual contact, and the level of privacy and dress codes does not apply; it is allowed to disclose the body and for the spectators to look (Black, 2001, pp. 110-111; Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 140). Thus, Biles and Ohashi have internalized specific discourses and skills that enable them to conform to the normative framework of society (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931).

Similarly, Williams have internalized the discourse of how to present herself as feminine according to what is accepted and recognized by society (Baker & Ellece, 2011). Like Biles, she portrays herself with a withdrawn gaze:



Figure 22: Williams portrayed in a red dress expressing normative femininity (Williams, serenawilliams, 2023)

Williams expresses signs of normative femininity, as her pose draws attention to her figure, whereas her withdrawn gaze implies that she is lost in her thoughts and removed from the current situation (Goffman, 1957, p. 127). The image composition emphasizes the depiction of her as a passive object, as the long shot enables the spectators to view the surroundings and her entire body. The image composition: the distant camera position and her pose contribute to the objectification of Williams, which, according to Van Leeuwen, are representation techniques that depict an individual as “other” with the function of either objectification, disempowerment, or to distance them (2008, p.141). Williams, thus illustrates Butler’s concepts of gender performativity, as she portrays the preferred ideals of femininity by repeating constitutive acts that society accepts as feminine (2006, p. 45; Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 52).

The feminine notions in the image are emphasized by Williams’ red dress. Red symbolizes sexuality and intimacy (Olesen, 2013) and intensifies how she is a desirable object. This illustrates Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze. Mulvey would argue that Williams depicts herself through the looking glass of men and continues to reinforce the notion that women should perceive themselves as subordinate and passive objects who exist solely to please the spectator (2009, pp. 436-437).

Williams' appearance has a strong visual impact, as red draws attention "*like no other color*" (Olesen, 2013). She connotes a to-be-looked-at-ness and illustrates the male desires and the sexual imbalance that Mulvey argues is a natural part of human perception, as women are perceived as sexual objects in visual media (2009, pp. 436-437).

Williams' post also illustrates Young's argument that women are aware that their bodies are perceived as sexual objects by men (1980, pp. 152-153), which is emphasized by the depiction of women in the media (Mulvey, 2009, 435-437). The bodily objectification of women enhances the discontinuity women have with their bodies, as the fear of being extroverted and open can be perceived as an invitation to be objectified (Young, 1980, p. 154). Thus, Williams' pose emphasizes how the objectification of her has enhanced the discontinuity of her body, as she lives as an object in a patriarchal society. She has internalized the notion of feminine bodily comportment and has accepted and embraced the conception that her body is fragile and continues to be an object that must be protected (pp. 152-153), which is illustrated by the compositional features in her post.

Moreover, her hair is controlled and appears with a light texture that resembles White beauty standards and displays how she has internalized how Black hair is supposed to look (cf. figure 8 & 10). Williams' self-representation thus supports Hall's argument that the media shapes our understanding of the world through visual elements and the reproduction of stereotypes (Dixon, 2019, pp. 60-64). This further illustrates Goffman's theory on gender displays, as the media's depiction of men and women are presented as representative of the whole population and thus validate and reinforce the portrayed behaviors (Lindner, 2004, s. 409). Williams thereby conducts herself according to the discourses present in society and conforms to the normative framework of society by submitting herself to objectification (Esteban-Guitart, 2014, p. 1931; Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Williams also focuses on her family on her Instagram page and expresses her feelings about it. She shares her journey to get back in shape and regain her abs after giving birth (Williams, serenawilliams, 2023) and how she takes care of herself by having her lashes done:



Figure 23: Image of Williams with her newborn baby (Williams, serenawilliams, 2023).

The post illustrates how Williams engages in self-care, albeit she just had a baby. She looks directly at the spectator and is a “*subject addressing the viewer with their gaze and symbolically engaging with the viewer in this way*” according to Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 141). The image composition thereby gives agency to Williams, as she is the one in charge. This is emphasized by the break of the fourth wall that makes the spectator’s eyes meet hers (Dunlop, 2023), whereas the close-up camera angle contributes to the intimacy displayed in the image and does not merely portray Williams as a beautiful and desirable object to look at.

The image also illustrates how Williams continues to embody emphasized femininity, as she has publicly declared how she wants to focus on her family and expand it after her retirement (Williams & Haskell, 2022). Thereby, she follows the male-centered discourse that persists in society; she must tend to the children and focus on her family (Connell, 2002, p. 2). The display of motherhood further expresses normative femininity and emphasizes that she identifies herself with the female role of nurturer. Williams, thus, displays normative gender roles on her Instagram, as her desire to have children and more time with her family (Williams & Haskell, 2022) fulfills the idea associated with the biological anticipation of women.

Williams' post illustrates how she engages in self-care; however, by doing so, she expresses that there is an expectation that one should always look impeccable. She reinforces the unrealistic beauty ideals displayed on social media and fulfills the notion that social media is all about looks. Social media has proven to be one of the largest contributors to a distorted body image and low body satisfaction (Henriques & Patnaik, 2020, pp. 1-3). She displays an unrealistic ideal that illustrates what is expected but not what is realistic. Williams constructs an image of who she wants to be perceived as; thus, she displays her front. The performance presented on the frontstage must live up to the audience's expectations and the prevailing normative structures in society. The performance must also present something that will be rewarded by other interactants (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, pp. 68-73). In this context, she is rewarded with likes, which means that her performance must conform to the situationally specific audience and setting to obtain a large number of likes. Thus, she constructs her gender performance through constitutive acts, such as her body posture that displays intimacy between herself and her baby while having long eyelashes (cf. figure 23). This illustrates how gender performativity is highly influenced by what is considered acceptable in society (Butler, 2006, p. 45).

Thus, Williams' depiction on social media is like her performance outside of a sports context. She portrays herself in a highly feminine manner as she highlights her figure by utilizing Goffman's concepts of licensed withdrawal and ritualized subordination in her poses. She also expresses emphasized femininity, as she displays herself as a passive object that is pleasurable and desirable to look at. Her performance on social media also illustrates how she is influenced by the prevailing beauty standards and continues to reinforce them, albeit challenging feminine bodily comportment in a sports context. Thus, she displays herself in a desirable manner that illustrates emphasized femininity and scopophilia when she has full agency, as she is subjected to the curious gaze of the spectator and is an object of sexual stimulation (2009, pp. 434-435).

It becomes clear that Williams, Ohashi, and Biles illustrate emphasized femininity and present themselves in a sexualized manner on social media. They utilize visual features that portray them as passive and desirable object for the spectator to enjoy. Ohashi's self-representation includes empowerment and stereotypical features, which is like the media's depiction inside and outside a sports context. Biles depicts herself in a sexualized manner and reinforces the concept of feminine comportment, both when advertising for her leotard and displaying herself on vacation. Williams displays herself as a passive object and continues to reinforce the notion of White beauty standards when presenting herself, which is further emphasized by her hairstyles on the red carpet.

Thereby, the three athletes continue to reinforce unrealistic beauty ideals, which is problematic considering the impact social media has on young and adult women's body dissatisfaction (Slater et al., 2019, p. 83). Therefore, the next section will discuss how the notion of health compares to the prevailing beauty standards in society, which to some extent affect Williams, Biles, and Ohashi, as their bodies have been criticized, albeit representing the perceived notion of beauty.

Health & Beauty

This chapter will provide a discussion of the contradicting notions of health and beauty discourses in and outside a sports context. In recent years, there has been an immense focus on athletes' mental health, whereas beauty standards have shifted towards a more inclusive ideal: body positivity. At the same time, however, the media continues to depict an epitome of the female body, namely an hourglass figure with a large bosom and butt, while portraying body positivity as a glorification of obesity. Therefore, the question arises: what is health, and is it the same for everyone?

There are three definitions of health that are used today:

The first is that health is the absence of any disease or impairment. The second is that health is a state that allows the individual to adequately cope with all demands of daily life (implying also the absence of disease and impairment). The third definition states that health is a state of balance, an equilibrium that an individual has established within himself and between himself and his social and physical environment (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662).

If one follows the first or second definition of health, it is the medical profession that can determine whether an individual is healthy, or not. An individual who is declared healthy today can be found diseased tomorrow due to new medical improvements that can diagnose the medical condition earlier. These paradigms do not consider how an individual feels about their state of health; on the contrary, it is merely how "*the surrounding people judge the behavior and appearance of an individual*" (p. 662) that is considered relevant if their observations align with the diagnosis or abnormality determined by the medical profession (p. 662). There are various difficulties and consequences with the first and second definitions. For instance, it is not taken into consideration that some individuals can have abnormalities that do not feel like illness but are considered a symptom of disease, whereas others can feel ill, but their bodies do not show signs of disease (p. 663).

The third definition implies that health is dependent on "*whether a person has established a state of balance within oneself and with the environment*" (p. 663). Thereby, individuals are considered healthy if they have established an internal equilibrium that enables them to live their lives to the fullest despite the presence of an illness. Consequently, health continues to be a part of human existence regardless of the presence of impairments or illnesses. When following this definition, a

doctor must take into consideration how an individual feels about the illness, how it has influenced their lives, and whether they will live with the illness or fight it (p. 663).

Thus, the physical environment affects an individual's balance, as they must accept themselves and how they are perceived by others. This illustrates Foucault's theory of Disciplinary Power, as he argues that disciplinary power is embodied in everyday discourses: the way we think, act, and speak. Meaning the clusters of conduct, images, practices, ideas, and forms of knowledge that construct and define how the world is perceived and how individuals are perceived in it (Marsden, 2001, pp. 54-60). Therefore, it is difficult to comprehend what notion of health to follow, as individuals are confronted with one definition that states how an individual must find balance within oneself and the environment, while simultaneously being met with a notion that:

Any form of physical activity can be beneficial to the physical and mental health of youth and adults when undertaken regularly and with sufficient duration and intensity [...] These recommendations are highly relevant since there is simultaneously a worldwide prevalence of physical inactivity and obesity [...], and this results in a high prevalence of dissatisfaction with the perceived body image (BI) because of the ideal of body thinness prevalent in Western societies (Zaccagni & Gualdi-Russo, 2023, p. 1).

This implies a discourse that an individual is not healthy if they do not exercise, and thinness is the ideal to strive for as inactivity equals obesity. This is problematic, as the thin body ideal prevalent in society has a negative effect on body satisfaction and mood, which can lead to body dysmorphia and affect young and adult women's self-esteem (Slater et al., 2019, p. 83). It also illustrates how individuals correct, evaluate, and compare themselves to various 'objective' standards and norms (Marsden, 2001, pp. 54-60).

For instance, it can be argued that Williams, Biles, and Ohashi are influenced by the thin body ideal. They are presented in a highly feminine manner when depicted by the media but also when they present themselves at social events or on their social media (cf. figure 15, 18 & 22). However, their own depiction emphasizes how they are affected by Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, as it affects how an individual conducts themselves. Thus, the discourse of an ideal female body being thin while having full curves is embodied in everyday discourses, such as commercials, movies, and the definition of health (Marsden, 2001, pp. 54-60). The definition of health states that an individual must be in a state of balance (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662), thus accepting themselves and how they are perceived by others; however, Zaccagni and Gualdi-Russo (2023) argue that health is equivalent to physical activity, as it has a positive impact on mental and physical health, albeit it has a negative impact on individuals perceived body image (p. 1). Thereby, Williams, Ohashi, and Biles are

influenced by perceived health and beauty standards despite being in impeccable shape due to their sport.

It can be argued that Ohashi fulfills the third definition of health, as she has found a balance within herself and her environment. However, she contests the notion that health is equivalent to physical activity and its positive impact on mental health. She has struggled with mental health, as she was body shamed and compared to an elephant due to her size in a sports context (BBC Sport, 2019). However, after her injury, she has returned to the sport and embraces her body, as she has accepted how it looks and its capabilities (Morse, 2019; Katelyn Ohashi, 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that she represents the beauty standard of body positivity.

The body positivity movement celebrates the acceptance of diverse body types and shapes, appearances, and diversity (Chiat, 2021, p. 3). The movement has become more prevalent on social media, as its main goal is to challenge the unrealistic beauty standards represented in society. This is done by “*rejecting the current image of beauty and embracing and reconciling with parts of oneself that was deemed unattractive*” (p. 4) by the standards of society (p. 4).

Ohashi’s posts on social media both enforce the dominant beauty ideal of a slim and yet curvy body and defy it. She has openly displayed her skin condition, granuloma annulare⁴, which she has previously tried to hide. She has expressed that she used to refuse to take pictures in her bathing suit and felt ashamed of her skin (Miller, 2019). This also illustrates Simmel’s concept of generalization, which can be achieved by imitating the discourse presented in the media (1957, pp. 541-548). Thus, Ohashi used to follow the beauty standards dictated by society that depict women with flawless skin and compare herself to them. However, she has reconciled with parts of her body that were shamed by society, and now she proudly displays them. She celebrates her body and contributes to the display of diversity on social media (cf. figure 18) and in her gymnastic performance, as her skin condition is visible in a leotard (cf. figure 6). According to Simmel, Ohashi stands alone in her actions, as the prevailing beauty discourse does not include diversity, and thus, her choice can lead to her standing alone and not fitting in (1957, pp. 542-543).

Biles, on the other hand, displays her body and its capabilities differently, namely body neutrality. Body neutrality is an alternative to body positivity, as it focuses on “*body appreciation, counteracting negative body self-talk with body neutral statements and focusing on strengths (intrinsic qualities) as ways to cultivate body neutrality*” (Pellizzer & Wade, 2023, p. 435). Biles

⁴ It is a “*chronic degenerative skin disorder*” (Miller, 2019) and the symptoms is small firm yellow or red “*colored bumps that appear like a ring on the skin*” (Miller, 2019).

accepts the way her body looks and has publicly stated that she and other gymnasts would not “*be able to do the things or achieve the things we did without our bodies so we’re very grateful for them*” (Murphy & Klosok, 2017). Thus, she does not express either positive or negative self-talk; on the contrary, she recognizes her body’s capabilities and how it allows her to engage in her sport and perform the skills she does. She does not focus on the appearance of her body and explains how others can judge her body all they want, but it is her body, and she is comfortable with how it looks (Murphy & Klosok, 2017).

The criticism Biles, Ohashi, and Williams have received regarding their bodies emphasizes how the body image in sports differentiates from the beauty standards outside of a sports context (Zaccagni & Gualdi-Russo, 2023, p. 2). It illustrates how their bodies are affected by the beauty standards within their sport when they perform, emphasizing the aesthetic and highly feminine movements in gymnastics, whereas the attire and the physical demand in tennis influence the perceived body ideal (Fernandez-Fernandez et al., 2009; Flynn, 2017). Williams, for instance, depicts her body as capable and strong in a sports context; however, she conforms to the prevailing beauty ideals of society and the stereotypes of African women (Hughes, 2020) when she is on the red carpet or posts on social media (cf. figure 12 & 22). It can be argued that she has not found the equilibrium within herself and her environment (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662); thus, she does not fulfill the notion of health. On the contrary, she adjusts her performance to live up to the prevailing normative structures of society (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2015, p. 71).

Furthermore, athletes are under constant scrutiny from their coaches and the audience. Their trainers often pressure them to “*retain a body that is favorable to their respective sport*” (Zaccagni & Gualdi-Russo, 2023, p. 2). This emphasizes how disciplinary power influences Williams’, Biles’, and Ohashi’s social performance, as they are compared to ‘objective’ standards. This affects how their bodies are perceived by others and themselves; thus, influencing our understanding of the world. Foucault’s theory on disciplinary power includes normative regulation through mass surveillance, which, in this case, is illustrated by social media and the audience to sports events. Social media and sports events become a form of power that influences an individual’s performance, as their behavior is monitored according to the prevailing standards of normality. Thus, the power of surveillance encourages Williams, Biles, and Ohashi to adjust their performance through constant self-evaluation (Marsden, 2001, pp. 54-60).

Thereby, disciplinary power influences their way of conducting themselves and the way health and beauty are internalized in society. It also illustrates how Williams, Biles, and Ohashi represent

different beauty standards, albeit being influenced by their respective sport and the prevailing beauty ideal (Greep, 2022). Moreover, body positivity challenges the notions of health and the perceived notions of beauty, as it focuses on the appreciation of diversity, thus enabling more individuals to love themselves and their insecurities despite how the media idealizes the slim and curvy body ideal and equates health with exercise. Body neutrality challenges the notions of health by focusing on an individual's mental health and not their perceived beauty (Chiat, 2021, pp. 3-4; Pellizzer & Wade, 2023, p. 435). Neither body neutrality nor body positivity fulfills the World Health Organization's first or second definition of health, as an individual must be declared healthy by the medical profession (Sartorius, 2006, p. 662), and the two movements focus on how the individual perceives themselves and not how others perceive them.

Thus, health is not the same for everyone, as individuals are influenced by various discourses, and they must decide for themselves what the right choice is. It can be argued that health is not the same for Williams, Biles, and Ohashi, as they are influenced by their respective sports and contradicting beauty standards. Williams is highly influenced by the prevailing beauty ideal set by society and continues to reinforce and portray it inside and outside a sports context. Biles is influenced by the same beauty standard when she portrays herself outside a sports context, whereas she is influenced by body neutrality and focuses on the capabilities of her body instead of its appearance when performing in a sports context. Lastly, Ohashi is influenced by body positivity when she is portrayed outside a sports context, but in a sports context, she is highly influenced by the aesthetics of the sport and the prevailing notion of femininity.

Conclusion

After having analyzed and discussed how Serena Williams, Simone Biles, and Katelyn Ohashi are portrayed inside and outside a sports context, and how they conduct themselves on social media, it has become evident that the depiction of them differentiates from one context to another. It further became evident that they are highly influenced by the prevailing beauty standards depicted in society and continues to reinforce them.

It can be concluded that there is a certain expectation that Williams, Biles, and Ohashi appear feminine and in a delicate manner when they perform in a sports context. However, they also transcend and challenge the normative notions that define how a woman is supposed to follow the notion of feminine comportment. It became evident that Williams utilizes her clothing and hairstyles to move the boundaries for what is allowed and expected in tennis, as well as express herself and her perception of gender and identity. In two different ways Biles and Ohashi challenge how the physical

appearance of a female gymnast is supposed to look. Biles challenges the notion by displaying her muscular body and not always having the perfect hair. Whereas Ohashi tries to reshape how the physique of an athlete is supposed to look, while simultaneously trying to reshape the stereotype of how Asian women are perceived towards a positive depiction as she portrays herself in control of her body and her actions.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that Williams, Biles, and Ohashi are depicted differently by the media when they perform outside a sports context, albeit all three embody the notion of emphasized femininity and are depicted in a highly sexualized manner. The media depicts Williams with a defined hour-glass figure, which is emphasized by long evening gowns with high slits and deep V-necks, while her hair is long, straight, and light. Thus, it became evident that the media's representation of her is highly influenced by White beauty standards and the internalization of how Black beauty is supposed to look. Biles is depicted in a highly sexualized manner, which is emphasized by the utilization of her body language and make-up, all of which fulfill the stereotype of Black women as hypersexual. In addition, the media portrays her as a delicate object for the viewer to enjoy; thus, she embodies emphasized femininity and appears attractive to the normative heterosexual man. Lastly, it can be concluded that Ohashi is presented as a sexual temptress who fulfills the stereotypes related to her race, while simultaneously breaking the normative notion of how a woman is supposed to present themselves in terms of feminine comportment, as she showcases her physical abilities on the red carpet.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that Williams, Biles, and Ohashi present themselves in a sexualized manner and illustrate emphasized femininity when they post on social media. They utilize visual features that emphasize passivity and desirability when they pose, presenting them as objects for the viewer to enjoy. It became evident that Williams presents herself as a passive object for the viewer to enjoy while she emphasizes her curves and continues to reinforce the notion of White beauty standards, just as how she appears outside of a sports context. Biles presents herself in a highly sexualized manner and reinforces the concept of feminine comportment when she displays herself on vacation and advertises her leotard. Thereby, she portrays herself the same way she is portrayed by the media inside and outside of a sports context where she does not have full agency. Lastly, Ohashi portrays herself as highly sexualized, which continues to fulfill the stereotype about Asian women's bodies; she portrays the same features that the media highlights when she is depicted in a sports context. However, it also became evident that she utilizes visual features that showcase how she is in control of where the spectator looks, albeit wearing very little clothing. This displays empowerment

and emphasizes how the media depicts her outside of a sports context. Thus, it can be concluded that all three continue to reinforce unrealistic beauty ideals, which is problematic as social media has a negative impact on young and adult women's body dissatisfaction.

Lastly, it can be concluded that health is not the same for everyone, as various discourses influence individuals, who must decide for themselves what the right choice is. It also became evident that it can be argued that health is not the same for Williams, Biles, and Ohashi, as they are influenced by contradicting beauty discourses and their respective sport. Williams is highly influenced by the prevailing beauty standard that emphasizes an hourglass figure and full curves, which is the ideal she continues to reinforce and display on social media, in a sports context, and outside a sports context. Biles is influenced by the same beauty standard when she portrays herself outside a sports context, which becomes evident by her clothing and the visual features she utilizes to highlight her figure, feminine appearance and soften her masculine features. However, it can be argued that she is influenced by body neutrality when she performs in a sports context, as she focuses on her body's capabilities instead of its appearance, albeit her movements are dictated by the norms in gymnastics. Lastly, it can be concluded that Ohashi is influenced by body positivity when she portrays herself on social media and the media's depiction of her outside a sports context. This is evident as she embraces her body figure and skin condition and challenges the unrealistic ideal of femininity present in society. However, in a sports context, she is highly influenced by the sports' aesthetics and the prevailing notion of femininity, as she expresses objectivity and sexual notions when she performs gymnastics.

Thus, it is relevant to examine how beauty standards and sport correlates as there are different expectations due to the setting. It portrays that one individual presents themselves differently depending on the context, but also how the media's depiction changes. They have different degrees of agency when portrayed on the cover of magazines in comparison to their social media. However, even on social media, their agency is affected by others when they collaborate with firms, but also due to the concept of social media. It is also relevant to examine in a sports context, as sport plays a major role in the affirmation and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and our understanding of femininity. It can be concluded that the three chosen athletes challenge the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity – thus transcending from feminine body comportment.

Further perspectives

I could also have utilized another theory, namely Mimi Schippers' theory on recovering the feminine other. Her theory could have provided another way to perceive and understand femininity, as she suggests how Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity can be replaced by co-construction of hegemonic forms, and those who reject the idealized model of expressing one's gender become a pariah within patriarchal society (Schippers, 2007, pp. 90-95). Her theory could have provided a useful framework for understanding how Williams, Biles, and Ohashi conduct themselves and express femininity inside and outside of a sports context, as it could have been used to examine whether they display hegemonic femininity or become pariahs. However, I chose to exclude Schippers' theory due to the scope of this study, as it would have required an in-depth section to explore her theory properly. I also chose to exclude her theory, as I found that Connell and Butler's theories provided a better theoretical framework for understanding how gender is performed and constructed and for the study at hand.

Another feature that could have been examined further is the three athlete's agency; thus, examining how much or little influence they have on the images portrayed in magazines and articles by the media. A greater focus on agency might also provide a greater insight into whether it is the athletes' depiction or the medias that determines their posture, makeup, clothing, and compositional features. It is also worth mentioning that the medias portrayal of Williams, Biles, and Ohashi is not a singular occurrence; other athletes and sports could have been chosen. However, the medias focus on femininity and sexual appearance can vary depending on the magazine and the editorial staff.

Lastly, if the scope of this study had been larger, the examination of the discrepancy between how the female body is portrayed and perceived inside and outside of a sports context, as well as how their bodies are affected by the prevailing beauty standards compared to the media's depiction of men in the same settings would have been interesting. It would be relevant to examine to understand how men are portrayed and perceived by the media and which stereotypes and discourses they are affected by. It would provide an interesting discussion of gender performativity, the utilization of visual features to emphasize masculine or feminine notions in the depiction, and the stereotypes regarding men's bodies.

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