Olympic and Paralympic Analysis 2020: Mega events, media, and the politics of sport

Early reflections from leading academics

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Contents

3 Performance & Identity

4 Fandom & National Identity

5

Politics of Sport

Introduction

Prof Daniel Jackson
Bournemouth University

Dr Alina Bernstein
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Prof Michael Butterworth
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Dr Younghan Cho
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Prof Danielle Sarver Coombs
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Viewers of the Closing Ceremony for the 2016 Rio Olympics may recall the energetic and technologically sophisticated preview of the 2020 Games in Tokyo. Featuring a video tour of the host city, an homage to the legendary video game character Super Mario, and a surprise appearance by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the production "hinted at the innovation, originality and creativity that we [could] expect from Tokyo 2020."

Such optimistic commentary is a standard part of Olympics discourse. As a sport mega-event and commercial spectacle, the Games are as much a ritual exercise in geopolitical idealism as they are about athletic competition. Yet, the chasm between the festive closing of the Games in Rio and the subdued opening of those in Tokyo feels unusually large. 2016 is only five years ago, but that span of time fails to account for the distance between now and then in socio-political terms. Consider that, at the closing of the 2016 Olympics on August 21:

- Neither Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil, 2019), nor Boris Johnson (UK, 2019), nor Donald Trump (United States, 2017) were the leaders of their respective nations
- "Athlete activism" was still largely understood as an artifact of the 1960s and 1970s (Colin Kaepernick first "took a knee" less than a week after the Games concluded)
- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had not revisited or revised its controversial "Rule 50," which prohibits political or religious expressions within the Games
- No one anticipated a global health crisis, let alone the COVID-19 global pandemic, a development that delayed the Games by a year

In light of such events (and many others) over the past five years, it might seem miraculous that the Tokyo Olympics took place at all. Depicting the 2020 Games as a triumph over adversity, IOC President Thomas Bach declared, *"This is the unifying power of sport. This is the message of solidarity, the message of peace and the message of resilience. This gives all of us hope for our further journey together."*

Bach's celebratory message is muted by the well-reported opposition of the Japanese public, with more than 80% of citizens having been against holding the Games. Meanwhile, the original $7.5 billion USD budget proposed in 2013 ballooned to $15.4 billion USD by 2021, with government audits speculating costs could be as high as $25 billion. Regardless of final cost, Tokyo represents the most expensive Olympic Games on record.

Ultimately, the athletes provide the lasting images and memories of any Olympiad. During the Tokyo Games, that included not only an array of record-breaking athletic feats but also the moments of humanity and courage displayed beyond the competition: Simone Biles' insistence that her mental health be a priority; a shared gold medal triumph between Mutaz Essa Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi in the men's high jump; the nod to Black Lives Matter in the floor routine by Costa Rican gymnast Luciana Alvarado. Such moments express the beauty of the Olympic ideal, but also point out its limitations.

Between the logistics of hosting the Games during a pandemic, the beauty, power, and joy of the athletes' performances, and the mediated production and consumption of the Olympics, Tokyo 2020 has given us much to contemplate. In this report, we turn to scholars from around the world to reflect on and evaluate this Olympiad. Our focus on global sport is primarily in symbolic terms—that is, we are guided by the construction, interpretation, and contestation of messages and their meaning. We think of these messages and meanings expansively, taking an interest in communication at individual, organizational, mediated, and political levels. Our academic experts reflect this point of view, with scholars of communication and media as well as those with interests in history, political science, psychology, sociology, and more.

In keeping with the Olympic theme, we have adapted the five Olympic rings to the five sections of our report. Section 1 examines the Games by focusing on the Olympics as a "mega-event," including discussions of the scope of Olympic spectacle in general and the logistical concerns of staging the Tokyo Games in particular. Section 2 turns to media coverage and representation. The Summer Olympics remain the largest televised spectacle in the world, and these contributions evaluate the global production of the Games as well as the choices made about who to feature and how to represent those athletes. Section 3 focuses on performance and identity. This relationship of terms affords the opportunity to think both in terms of athletic performance and in terms of the choices athletes make about identity during the Olympics. Section 4 considers various forms of fandom and national identity. The Olympic Games remain a showcase of patriotism and, at times, problematic expressions of nationalism. Here, we examine the presentation of "nation" both within and between the countries competing in the Games. Section 5 concludes with an assessment of the politics of sport. Despite the IOC's insistence that it is apolitical, few observers deny the conflation of politics and the Olympics. This final section thus attends to the political issues from the outside that might affect the Games as well as the moments of activism and political expression found within the Olympics themselves.

We hope you will engage with each of the contributions in this report. They are accessible, relatively short, and, most importantly, insightful. We are grateful for our authors' time and expertise, and we thank our readers for engaging with this project.

Paralympic Medal Count

Rank	Team/NPC	1	2	3	Total	Rank by Total
1	People's Republic of China	96	60	51	207	1
2	Great Britain	41	38	45	124	2
3	United States of America	37	36	31	104	4
4	RPC	36	33	49	118	3
5	Netherlands	25	17	17	59	9
6	Ukraine	24	47	27	98	5
7	Brazil	22	20	30	72	7
8	Australia	21	29	30	80	6
9	Italy	14	29	26	69	8
10	Azerbaijan	14	1	4	19	20
11	Japan	13	15	23	51	11
12	Germany	13	12	18	43	12
13	Islamic Republic of Iran	12	11	1	24	15
14	France	11	15	28	54	10
15	Spain	9	15	12	36	13
16	Uzbekistan	8	5	6	19	20
17	Poland	7	6	12	25	14
18	Hungary	7	5	4	16	24
19	Switzerland	7	4	3	14	27
20	Mexico	7	2	13	22	18
21	New Zealand	6	3	3	12	28
22	Israel	6	2	1	9	35
23	Canada	5	10	6	21	19
24	India	5	8	6	19	20
25	Thailand	5	5	8	18	23
26	Slovakia	5	2	4	11	30
27	Belarus	5	1	1	7	41
28	Tunisia	4	5	2	11	30
29	Algeria	4	4	4	12	28
30	Morocco	4	4	3	11	30
31	Belgium	4	3	8	15	25
32	Ireland	4	2	1	7	41
33	Nigeria	4	1	5	10	34
34	South Africa	4	1	2	7	41
35	Cuba	4	1	1	6	47
36	Jordan	4	0	1	5	50
37	Colombia	3	7	14	24	15
38	Venezuela	3	2	2	7	41
39	Malaysia	3	2	0	5	50
40	Denmark	3	1	1	5	50
41	Republic of Korea	2	10	12	24	15
42	Turkey	2	4	9	15	25
43	Indonesia	2	3	4	9	35
44	Czech Republic	2	3	3	8	39
45	Chile	2	3	1	6	47
45	Serbia	2	3	1	6	47
47	Norway	2	0	2	4	57
48	Singapore	2	0	0	2	63
49	Austria	1	5	3	9	35
50	Sweden	1	5	2	8	39

Source: https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/paralympic-games/en/results/all-sports/medal-standings.htm

Olympic Medal Count

Rank	Team/NOC	1	2	3	Total	Rank by Total
1	United States of America	39	41	33	113	1
2	People's Republic of China	38	32	18	88	2
3	Japan	27	14	17	58	5
4	Great Britain	22	21	22	65	4
5	ROC	20	28	23	71	3
6	Australia	17	7	22	46	6
7	Netherlands	10	12	14	36	9
8	France	10	12	11	33	10
9	Germany	10	11	16	37	8
10	Italy	10	10	20	40	7
11	Canada	7	6	11	24	11
12	Brazil	7	6	8	21	12
13	New Zealand	7	6	7	20	13
14	Cuba	7	3	5	15	18
15	Hungary	6	7	7	20	13
16	Republic of Korea	6	4	10	20	13
17	Poland	4	5	5	14	19
18	Czech Republic	4	4	3	11	23
19	Kenya	4	4	2	10	25
20	Norway	4	2	2	8	29
21	Jamaica	4	1	4	9	26
22	Spain	3	8	6	17	17
23	Sweden	3	6	0	9	26
24	Switzerland	3	4	6	13	20
25	Denmark	3	4	4	11	23
26	Croatia	3	3	2	8	29
27	Islamic Republic of Iran	3	2	2	7	33
28	Serbia	3	1	5	9	26
29	Belgium	3	1	3	7	33
30	Bulgaria	3	1	2	6	39
31	Slovenia	3	1	1	5	42
32	Uzbekistan	3	0	2	5	42
33	Georgia	2	5	1	8	29
34	Chinese Taipei	2	4	6	12	22
35	Turkey	2	2	9	13	20
36	Greece	2	1	1	4	47
36	Uganda	2	1	1	4	47
38	Ecuador	2	1	0	3	60
39	Ireland	2	0	2	4	47
39	Israel	2	0	2	4	47
41	Qatar	2	0	1	3	60
42	Bahamas	2	0	0	2	66
42	Kosovo	2	0	0	2	66
44	Ukraine	1	6	12	19	16
45	Belarus	1	3	3	7	33
46	Romania	1	3	0	4	47
46	Venezuela	1	3	0	4	47
48	India	1	2	4	7	33
49	Hong Kong, China	1	2	3	6	39
50	Philippines	1	2	1	4	47
50	Slovakia	1	2	1	4	47

Source: https://olympics.com/tokyo-2020/olympic-games/en/results/all-sports/medal-standings.htm

1

Tokyo & Mega-Events

The typhoon games

The Olympics are constitutively environmental: their very division between summer and winter contests is climatic. And within six decades, few world cities will be cool enough to host the event safely, due to climate change.

So the natural world should be front and center. But many sports avoid or alter geography. Pool swimmers and divers are sedulously sheltered from salt and river water and basketballers securely shielded from weather. Skateboarders and bicycle-motocross riders rely on the evisceration of anything natural in their path. Our fellow-animals are largely absent, other than the enslaved horses of equestrianism and the pentathlon (one that stepped out of line in the Tokyo Olympiad was slapped into submission) skeet shooting's mimetic birds—and occasional mascots (*pace* Théâtre Sans Frontières and 動物オリムピック大会).

And the Olympics' environmental history is dubious. The record of Tokyo's previous Games incarnates despoliation. As with all rapid, massive modernizations (the United States, Soviet Union, and People's Republic of China), Japan's transformation was achieved through violence; in this case, war and its detritus. 1964's flashy welcome to Tokyo modernity featured a façade of newness, technology, and efficiency; how not to fall prey to Marxism-Leninism when emerging from fascism.

But prior to those Games, construction of a high-speed rail link between Osaka and the capital saw canals, sea, and rivers inundated with concrete and landfill and a centuries-old seaweed field destroyed. Water stagnated, sludge emerged, and marine life perished. Estuaries turned into cesspools and/or became roads. The tramway system was virtually destroyed in favor of freeways, and sadistic clearances saw hundreds of thousands of homeless cats and dogs killed by the state.

2020 was meant to be different: a putatively green Olympics. Five thousand medals were constructed from electronic waste—discarded cellphones *et al*. The IOC (International Oligarchy Committee) signed up to that great capitalist oxymoron of our times, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Adopting the slogan "Be better, together, for the planet and the people," it guaranteed a Games characterized by mass transit, renewable energy, and recycled rainwater.

The Committee makes outlandish claims of environmental leadership. But the massive misallocation of public and private resources that embodies the Olympics is predicated on two myths: promises of re-useable new infrastructure and ongoing tourism have seduced city after exploited city. Meanwhile, the use of raw materials and accumulation of airmiles compromise any supposed accommodation to our climate crisis. Officials estimated 2.73 million tons of carbon dioxide would be emitted courtesy of the 2020 Games—more than many countries produce in a year, though banning foreign spectators diminished that figure.

Tokyo 2020 saw public parks and housing razed and iconic landmarks ruined; the organizers pillaging rainforests to build their stadium; and Fukushima re-imagined for local and international propaganda: don't fear radiation—come home, or visit for the first time—it's safer than smoking (a propos, 1964 featured an Olympic cigarette, leading to massive increases in Japanese smoking and lung cancer)!

Then there is the question of timing. A thousand fatalities during the 2018 Japanese summer were declared, "The First Undeniable Climate Change Deaths." In 2019, the Games period saw Tokyo's daily maximum temperature average 92°, with 80% humidity. 20,000 people were hospitalized nationwide.

The 1964 Olympics were in October. But a repeat of such a calendar was unacceptable to NBC. Ever since poor ratings for the September 2000 Sydney Games, NBC gets what NBC buys: 7.75 billion dollars' worth of influence, if not intellect, competence, or artistry.

On August 4 2021, host broadcaster NHK's meteorologist Sayaka Mori noted that the weather was "really torturing the Olympians and volunteers." The athletes' own testimony was equally damning. Needless to say, NBC covered the 2021 "heat wave" and typhoon as "another hit of nature's power." For its part, the International Oligarchy Committee put responsibility onto participants for their health, as if the impact on different sports and identities were not the IOC's doing. Nor did it discipline the many federations that had done next to nothing to care for competitors.

Then there was COVID-19, which hung over these Games like a shroud of death, the latest in a long line of diseases imperiling human life as a consequence of the meat and fashion industries attacking the environment: of the fifteen hundred known human pathogens, two-thirds pass to us from other animals, courtesy of carnivorous capital.

In short, Tokyo 2020's vacant hotels and spectator-free stadia stood as witless, mute, plastic testimony to the effect of COVID-19 on IOC greenwashing, while the anachronistic invocation of a year that had already passed to describe the Olympics celebrated a pomp and arrogance so thoroughly articulated to marketing that it overdetermined the simplest chronological truth.

NBC hegemons complained that a "drumbeat of negativity" dragged down its ratings. But those numbers, and the event's physical emptiness, enshrined a void at the core of the movement's very being, while spurious claims to greenness indexed an avoidable pandemic.

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A green Olympic legacy for future generations?

Prof Brett Hutchins

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The Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics features an eye-catching sequence in which traditionally dressed Japanese performers manoeuvre large timber circles with ropes into the formation of the Olympic rings. Australian television commentators emphasise the powerful symbolism of the rings and state that they represent a "Green Olympic legacy for future generations".

Reflecting the ongoing fetishization of legacy by the Olympic movement, the commentators explain that the wooden rings are crafted from timber grown since Tokyo's previous Olympiad in 1964. Seeds planted by athletes at this time grew into commemorative trees that were harvested and crafted for this performance in 2021. New seeds are now planted in the place of the harvested trees to continue a virtuous circle of environmental symbolism posing as sustainability.

Staged among the silence of a locked down city in a state of emergency triggered by Covid-19, these Games continued the damaging environmental legacy of the city's previous summer Olympiad over 50 years ago. The contemporary reality of climate crisis was projected to the world as athletes were "tortured" by dangerously high temperatures during "the hottest Games in history". The Russian Olympic Committee tennis player, Daniil Medvedev, played a match in "suffocating" heat and humidity that required two medical time outs and a visit from a trainer. Asked by the umpire if he could continue the match, he responded, "I can finish the match, but I can die. If I die, are you going to be responsible?"

These conditions realised the warnings made prior to the Games, with the mean annual temperature in Tokyo having risen 2.86 degrees since 1900 (three times as fast as the world's average). Prior to the Games, the marathon and race walk events were relocated 830 kilometres north to Sapporo, a city that is, on average, five degrees cooler than Tokyo in summer. Even with this move, viewers observed runners and walkers resorting to the frantic use of ice packs as they raced and the intermittent need for wheelchairs at the finish line as exhausted athletes collapsed into them.

The weather conditions on display for viewers around the world follow from the severe typhoons that interrupted the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan, which were also widely regarded as evidence of climate change disruption. In Tokyo, the reality of climate crisis also visited the mythical home of the Olympics, as out-of-control wildfires threatened the UNESCO World Heritage site of Ancient Olympia in Greece. The Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, stated that the fires evidence "the reality of climate change".

The IOC is ill-prepared and unwilling to confront with this reality. It styles itself as an environmental leader, but a superficial focus on sustainability leadership and collaboration distract from the carbon intensity of the Games. Amounting to little more than magical thinking, the IOC professes faith in technology and an ability to motivate behaviour change in addressing environmental problems – while demonstrating little appetite for change itself.

A mainstay of Olympic environmental efforts thus far are low-quality carbon offsets generated through The Olympic Programme (TOP) Partner, Dow Chemical, and their "Climate Solutions Framework". Questions need to be asked about the effectiveness of the nominated carbon offsetting projects attached to the Dow–IOC Framework, especially given the connections between biomass production and deforestation in the countries where these projects are based.

Spectator travel and related emissions usually account for over half the Games' total carbon footprint. The spectator-less Tokyo Olympics demonstrated the show can go on even without the international movement of tourists. Reduced spectatorship is consistent with the "New Norm" commitment of the IOC to scale back the Games' physical impacts, yet is not on the agenda for the future. The latest host of a Games, Brisbane (in 2032), plans to build new aquatic, basketball, gymnastics and boxing venues, in addition to a $1 billion (AUD) expansion of the pre-existing main stadium.

Just after Tokyo 1964 is referenced in the broadcast of the Opening Ceremony, a segment presents a message from Tony Estanguet, three-time Olympian and President of the Paris 2024 Organising Committee. Projecting a clean and bright Olympic future, and in language straight out of the IOC sustainability playbook, Estanguet claims "we are building a new model for the Games with minimum footprint on the planet and maximum legacy for people". Such hyperbole is at odds with the profligacy that is built into the Olympic ethos and its value as a broadcasting, sponsorship and city-marketing spectacle.

Tokyo 2020 offered platitudes, symbolism, and feel-good distraction for national audiences during a worldwide pandemic. But there is no sign that Olympic officials are willing to confront the fundamental contradiction between a rapidly heating world and a carbon-intensive global media spectacle that glorifies commercial and human excess.

The rise of critical consciousness in Japan: an intangible and unintended legacy of the Games

The level of public opposition against the hosting of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games was unprecedented. The critical voices have been heard through a range of channels including polls, online petitions and withdrawals from involvement in volunteering and torch relay. In the nation where the moral codes of Confucianism are still largely preserved, such values as obedience, conformity and discipline are upheld as righteous qualities of 'good citizens', and those who deviate from these social norms are often condemned as a nuisance of society. Unlike Tokyo 1964 which was similarly received with public anxiety and concerns in the pre-event polls but then turned into an incontestable narrative of national triumphalism after the event, the narrative of Tokyo 2020 is varied and contested despite the record number of medals for the host nation. According to the post-event poll by Asahi Shimbun, the approval rating of the government plummeted to 29% – the lowest for incumbent Suga administration and lower than the pre-event rating (31%). The COVID-19 pandemic certainly played a major role in inflicting a deep scar in the legacy of the event. What is not so apparent on the surface is that the event – or more precisely the public reactions towards the event – challenged the long-held social norms in Japan and awakened critical consciousness of its citizens.

A series of mishandling in management of the Games gradually yet firmly revealed the ad hoc nature of the government's decision making, the lack of transparency on how these decisions were made and the absence of adequate crisis management and contingency planning. It began in 2015 with the cancellation of initially chosen design of the Olympic Stadium, followed by the allegation of copyright infringement over the initial design of the Games' official logo. In 2019, then JOC president Tsunekazu Takada had to resign after being accused of sanctioning bribes to secure Tokyo's bid for the Games. Within a year of the event originally scheduled, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike publicly criticized the IOC over its decision to move marathon and race-walking events to a northern city, Sapporo, over concerns of high temperature and humidity during summer. However, these incidents were perhaps all too familiar to the Japanese citizens who are generally tolerant of, or indifferent to, this sort of political blunders. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent postponement of the Games. As early as in December 2020, the public poll indicated that a majority (63%) of respondents preferred the event to be either cancelled or postponed again. The mistrust in the organizing bodies grew with the rise in cases of infection, especially in and around Tokyo, and the recurrent issuing of the state of emergency. The organizers then became vulnerable to any criticisms as the pressure mounted not just domestically but also internationally. In February 2021, then president of the Local Organizing Committee Yoshiro Mori resigned over his discriminatory remark on women. This was followed by resignation of three senior officials and figures involved in staging of the Olympic ceremony over inappropriate comments or behavior with respect to women, the Holocaust and people with disabilities. Although high-profile scandals in domestic affairs like these would have been swept under the rug previously, what made the difference this time was that the insularity of 'politics as usual' was subjected to the international attention and scrutiny, and Japan's reputation was at risk on the world stage.

Unintendedly from the view of the organizers, Tokyo 2020 offered a wake-up call for the nation to recognize and address latent social injustice with respect to gender, sexuality, disability and human rights. In the interview by Yomiuri Shimbun, Mori revealed that he initially secured an agreement from Saburo Kawabuchi to succeed his position only to be rejected later by Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga who suggested "someone quite different from the predecessors if possible" and "someone who is young and female", which led to the appointment of female politician and Olympian Seiko Hashimoto. According to Asahi Shimbun, it was then Hashimoto who pushed through the idea of selecting Naomi Osaka to light the cauldron at the opening ceremony and represent the theme of diversity and inclusion. It is a fair critique that having a female Olympian as the head of the organizing committee and a globally-renowned multi-ethnic female sport celebrity as the final torchbearer is merely a symbolic gesture for social change. However, these new – and surely powerful – representations do matter because, to quote Stuart Hall, any representation "can be *made* 'true' because people act on them believing that they are true, and so their actions have real consequences" (p. 293, emphasis in original). In this sense, Tokyo 2020 may have marked a new dawn of critical consciousness in Japan – a potential legacy that is actually (and ironically) consistent with a mission of the Olympism in promoting social responsibility and ethical principles.

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Host city and mega-events: Olympic legacy in Japan

Prof John Horne

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In this brief commentary I will refer to two distinctions with respect to legacies – that they can be *tangible* and *intangible*, but also *universal* and *selective*. It is well established that legacies can be tangible, that is related to, for example, changes in some way to the material or physical infrastructure or economic performance, and intangible, that is related to, for example, emotional responses to a mega-event whether individual or collective. Tangible legacies refer to substantial and long-standing changes to the urban infrastructure – the building of iconic stadia being one of the most notable when it comes to the Olympics. The intangible legacies of the Olympics refer predominantly to popular memories, evocations and analyses of specific events and incidents associated with the Games. Tokyo 2020 may have supplied both kinds of legacy – from the (re-) built stadium in the Heritage Zone and newly built facilities in the Bay Zone to memorable moments of sporting excellence on the track, in the stadia and various arenas - but a central issue with the Olympic Games is whether legacy can ever match the often lofty legacy objectives and rhetoric that has become prominent in promotional discourse associated with it. The philosophical underpinning of the Olympic Games, 'Olympism', and associated talk of an Olympic 'movement' means that the Games has a self-imposed challenge to meet the ideals of the promotion of universal values and associated liberal social programmes.

A second distinction I want to suggest when thinking about legacy is that legacies can be *selective* and *universal*. By this distinction I mean the following. *Selective legacies* are particular, individualist, and elitist, and tend to serve the interests of those dominating powerful political and economic positions in society. In the case of the Olympics, alongside national and city governments, this would include sponsors, broadcasters, and specific economic sectors such as security associated with the Games. *Universal legacies* are communal, collectivist, and inherently democratic, available to all by virtue of being made freely accessible. A problem for sports mega-events is that they largely generate *tangible legacies* that are *selective* and *intangible legacies* that are *universal*.

For many observers of the Olympic Games and other sports mega-events, legacy is an essentially contested concept and practice. It is a political notion through and through, whilst at the same time appearing simple, common sense, and therefore attractive and seductive. The promise of legacy is that something good, beneficial and welcome will emerge from the undertaking, hosting or staging of a large-scale project or sports mega-event. It has been suggested that legacy usually comes with a golden halo in that it was assumed to invariably be positive. Yet this language masks developments associated with sports mega-events affecting, usually poor, less mobile, people most directly involved. This includes the compulsory purchase of homes and property, familial relocation and displacement before an event and through other means such as gentrification after an event has taken place.

The positive vision of the Olympics fits well with the urban strategy of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) launched in December 2014, *Creating the Future: The long-term vision for Tokyo 2014-2024*. The TMG has been looking to use event-led regeneration as a catalyst to develop the transportation network, a more disaster-resilient infrastructure, open up more green spaces, and brand the city as a cosmopolitan capital city. In July 2021 it published a document identifying a total of 24 legacies from the Games that it sought to build on 'beyond 2020', including a more inclusive society, developing a new volunteer culture in Japan, and support for the area impacted by the triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami and nuclear reactor leak) of 2011 in north-east Japan. How this is to be achieved in the midst of a pandemic, without spectators requiring the assistance of volunteers, and several hundred kilometres from the epicentre of the 2011 disaster, remains to be seen.

There is a clear difficulty with indiscriminate use of the legacy concept. It creates a tension between the IOC and the local organizing committee (LOC) over who will be responsible for acknowledging that there can be *negative* legacies emerging from a mega-event. Equally widespread use of the term in bid documents and in publicity for an Olympics can amount to 'overkill' and raise local host and national population expectations too much.

To return to the distinction between selective and universal legacies mentioned at the outset, *selective legacies* are of benefit, enjoyed, and delivered to specific individuals or interests, rather than all, and exclude those considered not eligible to receive them. Selectivism serves to facilitate the sovereignty of the market. *Universal legacies* on the other hand are those that affect, reach and are shared by all rather than specific individuals or communities. Legacies established universally to serve everybody might need to be financed by governments, philanthropic organizations or exceptionally private enterprises. Prioritising universal legacies would mean that organisers of sports mega-events would be obligated to deliver them to all without constraints. Rather than vague claims regarding legacy they would have to demonstrate a properly funded legacy management programme that continued for some years after the event. For sports mega-events to live up to the promotional claims made for them the legacies associated with them should follow the principle of universalism and this would require greater control and regulation over the IOC and LOCOGs by independent regulatory authorities.

Lessons from Tokyo: the impact of the Paralympics in Japan

In Tokyo's bid to become the first in the world to host the Paralympics twice, its candidature file declared that Tokyo would "deliver a Paralympic Games which will show how inclusion and non-discrimination, and full consideration of the needs and interests of people with a disability, can create a better world and provide a brighter future for the entire community." As preparations for the Games proceeded, athletes, organizers, and politicians in Japan repeatedly expressed expectations that the Paralympics would raise awareness and improve the lives of those with disabilities. In 2017, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike cited the Games as a chance "to make the city fully accessible to people with disabilities or other special needs," proclaiming that "putting weight on hosting a successful Paralympics is more important than a successful Olympics." Even as the pandemic continued to rage, the delayed Tokyo Paralympics moved forward, opening with more athletes than ever before, but imposing tough restrictions, in largely spectator-less venues. Yet hopes remained high that the Games would foster changes in Japan and beyond.

The conclusion of the Paralympics presents an opportunity to explore the differences between the lofty rhetoric and the actual effects of these Games. Although long-term impacts remain to be seen, it is already clear that the Tokyo Paralympics sparked important changes in Japan. However, it is equally important to consider these developments in a broader context to counter misleading assumptions about the transformative power of the Paralympics.

The most important Paralympic Games ever

Days before they opened, International Paralympic Committee (IPC) President Andrew Parsons, characterized Tokyo's Paralympics as "the most important Paralympic Games ever" since they were giving the world's 1.2 billion people with disabilities "a voice in a time when they need their voice to be heard the most." Whatever we make of Parson's claim, Tokyo's Games have indeed offered the IPC a model for the awareness-raising potential of the Paralympics. Japanese media outlets regularly complemented their growing coverage of disability sports with stories about the experiences of average citizens living in Japan with disabilities. Discussions about disability policies, language usage, discrimination, and accessibility occurred in the media and school classrooms. From Toyota's conversion of its office lobby into a boccia court to the social media fascination with service animals at the Opening Ceremony, responses to disability-related issues associated with the Paralympics have been hard to miss in Japanese society for the past eight years.

Tokyo's commitment to improving accessibility also provided the IPC with an exemplary case for demonstrating the positive impact that the Paralympics have on host countries. Organizers' spelled out their progressive approaches to accessibility in bid materials and have generally lived up to their promises. Beyond the organizing committee, both the Tokyo metropolitan government and the national government instituted new "barrier-free" action plans aimed at eliminating social, physical, and communication barriers in Japan. Governmental changes like new barrier-free building bylaws and revised national lodging standards have been complemented by non-governmental initiatives such as accessibility upgrades to Japan's famous train network or Toyota's development of "universal design" JPN Taxis that can accommodate wheelchairs.

The real transformative power of the Games

Even this limited sampling of awareness-raising and accessibility efforts associated with Tokyo's Paralympics makes it clear that the Games have contributed to changes in Japan. Yet it is imperative to look below the surface when assessing such impacts, because the situation in Tokyo is more complex than it initially might appear.

For one, changes in Japan have been driven by years of disability activism largely unrelated to sports. Fueled by its demographic dilemma of a rapidly aging and shrinking population, Japan has been actively discussing the need for "barrier-free" environments since the 1980s. Moreover, Japan's achievements in accessibility and inclusivity in connection with the Paralympics stem from more than the efforts of Tokyo-based organizers or IPC officials active for the last eight years. They are the cumulative result of *six decades* of work on the part of many throughout Japan. Japan's rich, but overlooked, history of engagement with the Paralympic Movement is also a reminder that the country is no stranger to the idea of using sporting events to promote change. Japan had already hosted two previous Paralympics (1964, 1998), two Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (1975, 1989), an international wheelchair marathon every year since 1981, and countless other international, national, and local disability sports events. If these events are as transformative as they claim to be, why has Japan not already become more inclusive and accessible?

While the IPC President has dubbed the Paralympics "the most transformative sport event on earth," such phrasing seems to obscure a key element necessary to understand the impact of the Games: the people. Whether or not the increased exposure to disability-related issues generated by the Paralympics leads to long-term changes ultimately hinges not on the Games themselves or their inherent transformative powers, but on how people in Japan (or elsewhere) chose to respond to them. Creating a better world through accessibility, inclusivity, and nondiscrimination takes years of commitment and hard work. The Paralympics can certainly help, but they do not deserve all the credit.

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Let´s play! Inspiring an inclusive mindset with a hands-on Paralympic experience for Japanese youth

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One of the main characters of the Opening Ceremony of the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games was 13-year-old Yui Wago, performing the role of a single-winged tiny airplane. Initial fear of flying gave way to celebration of beauty in differences with a group of friends with various health conditions. The emotional story featuring a girl in a wheelchair is a powerful metaphor of the engagement in the Paralympic experience of the younger generation in Japan as a relevant part of the legacy of the 2020 Tokyo Games.

The Paralympic movement plays an important catalyst role in promoting understanding and firsthand experience of disability for children and young people. The invisibility, and the representation of disability as a lack ability or personal failure lead to social marginalization and exclusion of people with disabilities from the public sphere. Physical signs of difference related to disability result in prejudice, labelling, and discrimination as personal appearance and individual autonomy have an influence on the presupposed inferiority of functional capacities of people with disabilities. Cultural schemas sustaining non-disabled people in privileged positions and people with disabilities in the subordinate position were also identified among non-disabled children.

Since the designation of Tokyo as the host city of the 2020 Games, a series of meaningful projects aimed at raising awareness and understanding of disability among kids and teenagers have been launched in Japan. The "Yoi, Don!" program involved a combination of educational tools and experiential fun activities fostering knowledge and personal engagement of the younger generation in Olympic & Paralympic experience through the discovery and practice of Paralympic sports, informal meetings with elite para-athletes to share their personal experience, fun group activities, and celebration of entertaining Olympic & Paralympic social events for families and kids.

The Olympic and Paralympic mascot selection process became a relevant milestone in the engagement of schoolchildren in their firsthand experience of the 2020 Games. The most charming characters of the Tokyo Games, Miraitowa and Someity, were selected by children from over 14,000 schools in Japan through classroom debates and a collective voting process. Children with visual impairment were provided specific 3D models of each mascot to ensure their touch and feel review.

In parallel, the Agitos Foundation of the International Paralympic Committee launched I´mPOSSIBLE, an educational program aimed at inspiring the younger generation with Paralympic values, promoting social inclusion, and influencing perceptions about people with disabilities. The first five winners of the I'mPOSSIBLE award were recognized at the Closing Ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, acknowledging the outstanding achievements in inclusion practice made by schools and para-athletes in Japan and overseas.

Another meaningful action aimed at enabling a fun and entertaining experience of the challenges and features of para-sports, was launched by the national Japanese broadcaster NHK three years before the Games. The series Animation x Paralympic: Who is your Hero? introduced Japanese anonymous and famous para-athletes of 11 Paralympic sports categories with anime-style narrative and including popular anime characters from the most famous Japanese series. The contribution of famous Japanese manga artists and pop-singers to the depiction of para-athletes as manga and anime iconic characters offered kids and teenagers a fresh and disruptive perspective on para-sports and disability as personal identity and community empowerment. The iconic manga narrative featuring Japanese para-athletes was also used in the promotional campaigns Find your Hero and Be the Hero launched by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for its Team Beyond project to support the Paralympic movement.

The Paralympic Games are a powerful global platform bringing under the spotlight the most straightforward human experience of disability, as well as its underlying challenges, limitations, and achievements. The increasing presence of young athletes among the Olympic and Paralympic stars (13-year-old Nishiya Momiji, gold in the women's skateboarding street; 14-year-old Miyuki Yamada, silver in the women's 100m backstroke S2 class, or the 12-year-old table tennis player Hend Zaza, to name just a few) makes the global Olympic and Paralympic experience more challenging, relatable and fun to kids and teenagers. A direct involvement and critical engagement of children and young people in the Paralympic movement have a transformative impact on the social perception of people with disability. The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games have become an important milestone in raising awareness and understanding of disability among the younger generation in Japan, building an inclusive society with a barrier-free mindset.

The Olympic & Paralympic sponsorship without category exclusivity

Background of sponsorship exclusivity in Olympic and Paralympic Games (OPG)
There are four different sponsorship levels in OPG – Worldwide partners, gold partners, official partners, and official supports. Worldwide partners directly sign the contract with International Olympic Committee (IOC), while national federations, including the Japan Olympic and Paralympic Committees (JOPC), conclude the contract with the lower-level partners. Sponsorship benefits that companies can derive from OPG differ depending on which levels of contracts they sign with. Developing the optimal sponsorship portfolio has been a long-discussed topic.

Back in 1984, the International Olympic Committee established a sponsorship policy – Category exclusivity – to maximize the sponsorship fee and the value for sponsoring companies. Specifically, category exclusivity is a policy that selects only one sponsor within its product or service category. Based on this policy, Coke and Pepsi for example, cannot be the sponsor of OPG at the same time. Since then, OPG has received tremendous financial investments from sponsoring companies in various product and service categories. National federations, including the Japan Olympic and Paralympic Committees, followed the category exclusivity policy until Tokyo 2020.

What's happening in Tokyo 2020?
Tokyo 2020 is considered unique from the sponsorship perspective. IOC allowed JOPC to implement the sponsorship acquisition policy, which contradicted the category exclusivity. For example, NEC and Fujitsu from the electronics category co-exist in the gold partner list. Mizuho financial group and Mitsui Sumitomo financial group are considered the same case. Such instances are more prominent at the official partner level. Surprisingly, the overlaps among official partners are observed in eight product and service categories (i.e., tourism, security services, printing, airline, railroads, mailing services, foods, and newspapers).

The collapse of category exclusivity may generate various outcomes. Interestingly, eliminating the category exclusivity policy opened the door for multiple companies to raise their hands to be selected as JOPC sponsors, which led to the highest amount in the history of OPG sponsorship money from domestic companies. While this could be considered a positive outcome from the point of view of OPG, I would like to raise some questions as to whether it can generate positive outcomes for society. My scholarly concerns are mainly related to (1) sponsorship marketing and (2) media influence.

Potential detrimental impact of category exclusivity policy abolition
As a sport marketing scholar, the collapse of category exclusivity contradicts the basic premise of consumer psychology. The primary aim of OPG sponsorship is to develop brand recognition and a positive attitude by utilizing advertising effects and showcasing CSR activities. However, it could be challenging for companies to differentiate their sponsorship marketing activities from competitors in the same product and service category because OPG sponsorship model has heavily relied on granting sponsoring companies to use somewhat homogenous rights (e.g., emblem, logo, mascot). It may not be a good idea to allow various sponsoring companies to utilize such license rights because consumers cannot associate sponsoring companies with OPG easily.

Another potential detrimental outcome is media sponsors' freedom of speech. As mentioned above, sponsoring companies are overlapped in eight product and service categories. In particular, four major companies crowd each other (i.e., Yomiuri, Asahi, Nikkei, and Mainichi) in the newspaper category. The media has an important responsibility to contribute to the right to know of all people so that each citizen should be able to judge things, form opinions, and discuss them freely. To do so, freedom of collecting materials and reporting them must be protected. Scholars should exercise caution to observe whether there are abnormal tendencies regarding the news contents. For example, how OPG legacies are portrayed in media sponsors of OPG could be an exciting research endeavor.

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Power sharing: Olympic sponsorship and the athlete's personal brand

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Let me be perfectly clear, I do not believe that sponsoring is threatened. We are, however, at an inflection point where personal brand power is forcing change in the ways sponsoring is undertaken. What was witnessed during the Tokyo Olympics epitomizes this change. There are three aspects of shift: engagement, measurement and the power delivered by the first two. This is not heralding the end of event sponsoring, but sponsors will have to power share in the future.

Engagement

Sponsorship, or partnering, between global brands and the Olympics is a funding source for the event and at the same time, a marketing platform for brands. This exchange is built on people and their connectivity to audiences, and in the case of the Olympics and Paralympics, athletes, because they bring life to brands. In the past, sport, arts, and events have been viewed as a context where advertising could be communicated, but this "sponsorship as advertising" view has given way to authentic engagement through sponsoring. Olympic athletes deliver authentic engagement. From swimmer, Caeleb Dressel's moment with his family, to gymnast, Oksana Chusovitina's farewell, to Cedric Dubler's support of his teammate in the decathlon, this emotional connection to audiences is what sponsoring brands seek to share.

Measurement

Sponsorship measurement has always been challenging. It is difficult to draw a line from an advertisement embedded in a program, a logo in the background, or the announcement of a brand in a context to brand sales. Social media has changed at least a portion of this game in that posts, likes and shares are trackable. Unfortunately for brands, people on social media tend to follow other people, not brands. As an illustration, before the Tokyo Olympics began, "a list of Olympians to follow on social media" was posted by the Associated Press; however, no such list was made for Olympic sponsors. Athletes' social media posts as brand ambassadors, endorsers, or in their role as sponsored athletes provide a trace that can be measured and evaluated. For example, swimmer Katie Ledecky posted before the Olympics began for #TeamReeses peanut butter cups on Twitter. We can measure the amounts of comments, retweets and likes, and so does the sponsor.

Power

Combining the athlete's potential to engage audiences and to measure this engagement on social media has increased their personal brand power. The International Olympic Committee, following years of pushback from athletes unable to promote their personal brands during the time of their peak performance, altered Rule 40 of the Olympic Charter. Rule 40 had protected Olympic TOP and national sponsors by preventing sponsor-related communications from Olympic athletes. The key principles of Rule 40 now detail commercial opportunities for participants. Athletes could, for example, thank personal sponsors that stood by them over the years and receive messages of support and congratulations from them. Allowances like this, even though still restrictive, afford more brand value that stays with, and may be managed by the athlete.

In the future, we can expect some US athletes to have stronger personal brands, by the time they reach the Olympics, due to legislative changes. In June of 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association changed their policy to allow student athletes the opportunity to benefit from their name, image and likeness. This means that student athletes can earn money related to personal brand activities and remain eligible to play in college. Early sponsorships, endorsements, speaking engagements will further develop their personal brand power. For example, Louisiana State University gymnast Oliva Dunne, with millions of followers on TikTok and Instagram, will benefit from her name, image and likeness while in college and holds potential to be an Olympic competitor with a powerful personal brand.

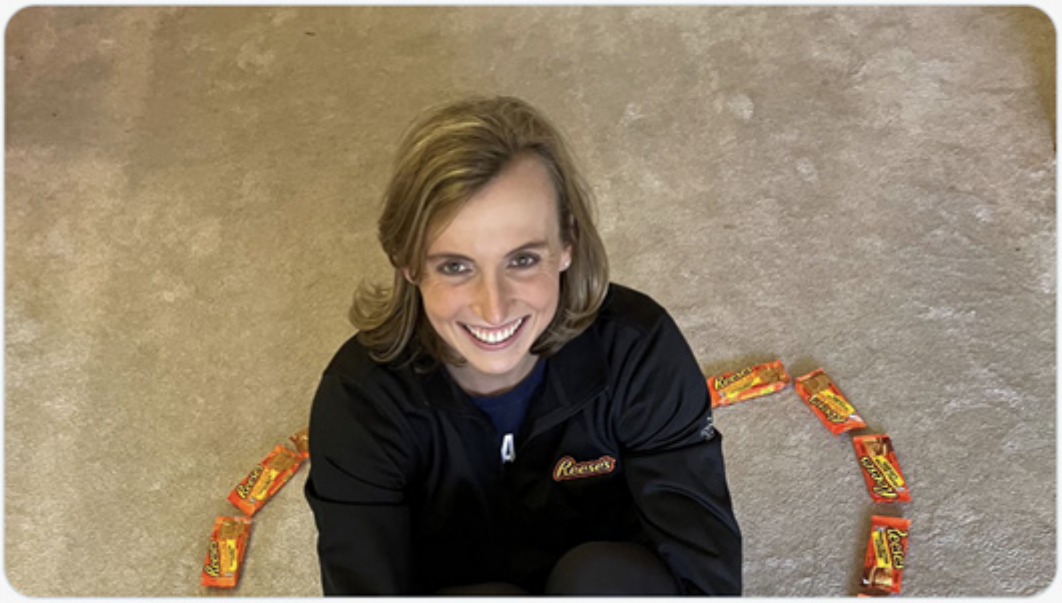
Symmetry

Brands that embrace the humanness of their athletes that will gain the authentic engagement that athletes uniquely bring to partnerships. Event organizers and sponsors will need learn how to share the stage with athletes in a more equitable fashion. These are not bad things.

Athletes may utilize their personal brand power to make decisions for themselves that would not have been entertained in the past. Preceding the Olympics, tennis player and Olympic torch bearer, Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open in support of her own mental health and cited the stress of contractually mandated interviews following matches as part of the problem. Her sponsors did not abandon her. Gymnast Simone Biles decided not to compete in some events at the Tokyo Olympics and sports apparel brand, Athleta and financial services brand, Visa stood with her in her choice. Power sharing is the future of sponsoring.

Katie Ledecky @katieledecky · Jul 16

#ad The countdown continues. Nothing but peanut butter smiles with @TeamUSA at the #TokyoOlympics. #TeamReeses



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What happened to Rule 40 at Tokyo 2020?

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At each Olympic Games, one of the most controversial marketing and sponsorship issues is how Rule 40 will be applied to athletes' personal sponsors. Starting with the London 2012 Games, Olympic athletes have long complained about the unfairness of a rule which essentially limits their marketing and sponsorship opportunities to official partner brands and gives limited exceptions for personal sponsor brands to mention athlete's accomplishments in "generic" ways during the Games period. By creating the Olympic "blackout" period, Rule 40 helps protect the sponsor exclusivity which serves as the financial backbone of the IOC's funding model. What it doesn't do for the competing athletes, however, is allow the athletes to maximize their commercial success when their value is at its peak, if their personal sponsors are not also official Olympic sponsors. In line with the ongoing mantra to curb the evil practice that is ambush marketing, Rule 40 has become a pernicious tool in the Olympic organizers' toolkit to help to ensure the sponsorship rights they've sold can (mostly) be delivered.

At Tokyo 2020, the typically complex maze of complying with Rule 40 was much less of a top-line concern for Olympic athletes and personal sponsor brands, causing many observers to ask why? A few contextual clues and observations may help to explain the phenomenon that was Rule 40 at Tokyo 2020. First, the Olympic ambush marketing "game" has moved largely online. With the proliferation of so-called "social ambush", non-sponsor brands who want to make connections with their athletes competing in the Games can now do so in a carefully planned tweet, or an Instagram congrats post, making the traditional methods of on-site ambush unnecessary. At Tokyo 2020, digital advertising predominated and, in the absence of Olympic spectators on-site in Tokyo, the game on "social" was the only game in town!

While Rule 40 was relaxed even farther to favor athletes, the Tokyo 2020 version of the Rule promised even greater endorsement opportunities for Olympic athletes seeking new sponsorships. According to *Forbes*, "[h]owever, a key caveat of the new rules for Tokyo is that non-Olympic sponsors can't mention the Games in their brand advertising, so as to maintain Olympic sponsor exclusivity and minimize ambush marketing." The goal to increase sponsorship opportunities for all Olympic athletes wasn't equal across the board, and mirrored the limited marketing and sponsorship of lesser-known Olympians at previous Games. According to Grady, "[i]t hasn't really worked out as intended for the lower-profile athletes. But it has worked out tremendously for people like Simone Biles, Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky."

There has also been a notable shift in public opinion given recent societal changes, where protecting individual rights is preferred over defending corporate rights and protecting the rights of global sponsor brands in the context of the Olympics. In fact, continued corporate allegiance to the Olympic partner brands would be hard for the IOC or USOPC to defend now, given even loosened restrictions placed on athletes' marketing and advertising under Rule 40. Limiting endorsement and compensation opportunities for athletes, especially in the wake of Name, Image, and Likeness developments in the United States for college athletes, seems to be a non-starter given current public discourse, at least within the United States. Furthermore, from a public policy perspective, it signals that any future iterations of Rule 40 must promote athletes' increased rights to share in the economic profits of the Games. There has also been a gradual evolution in sponsorship, especially as related to athletes' rights to seek new sponsorships. Global and domestic brands must be more cognizant that the individual rights of athletes who are essentially the "talent" at these global events should no longer be restricted at the expense of honoring official sponsorship agreements. This notable shift in public opinion and corporate response favors finding new ways, whether through technological advances or evolving consumer preferences, to highlight the personal connection these athletes have with the Games, while still protecting the exclusive rights of official sponsors. It should cause marketers and event organizers to re-think the right to co-exist in the Olympic marketing space during the Games and adjust how personal sponsor brands of competing athletes can participate and comply with Rule 40. As Tokyo 2020 comes to a close over a year belated and still in the grips of a global pandemic, maybe finding creative ways for brands to associate with the Olympic rings wasn't the coolest thing to do this summer?

The Olympic Games and ambush marketing via social media

In modern sport history, arguably beginning with the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, ambush marketing practice has evolved and become sophisticated. The practice is an organization's efforts to "capitalize on the awareness, attention, goodwill, and other benefits, generated by having an association with an event or property, without the organization having an official or direct connection to that event or property" (Chadwick & Burton, 2011, p. 714). In its latest Tokyo 2020 brand protection guideline, the IOC characterizes ambush marketing as any intentional or unintentional attempt to create an unauthorized commercial association with the Games that is available only to official sponsors. Whether ambush marketing is an intentional or unintentional attempt to create an unauthorized association, the practice is considered by organizing committees of the 2020 Games as a threat to both the delivery of the Games as well as the official sponsors. It states, ambush marketing activities "result not only in a transgression of Olympic and Paralympic-related intellectual properties, but also in the reduction of sponsorship income" (pp.5).

Several scholars, who have conducted their research on the topic of ambush marketing, reported that the practice has the potential of diminishing property owners' power to command higher fees and, in the long-term, has a damaging effect on sponsorship investment. In response to such concerns, host country governments enacted special legislations prohibiting ambush marketing and protecting the goodwill associated with the Games since the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. Similar legislations have been witnessed in countries such as Greece, China, Canada, United Kingdom, Russia, Brazil, South Korea and Japan. While legislations (i.e., laws to punish parties found involved in ambushing practice) might have greatly helped reduce ambush marketing, they did not, however, fully eliminate the practice. Communication (increasing public awareness about event properties including trademarks) and surveillance (identifying intellectual property infringement of the property owner rights) have been implemented as additional approaches to control ambush marketing.

Today, the practice has become more sophisticated and subtle. For example, the features of social media make the ambushing protection efforts challenging such as speed of information flow, no border restrictions, no time barrier, public forum, global reach, ease of access to the platforms, etc. With these features, as Meenaghan et al. noted, social media has brought a largely uncontrolled, fragmented audience, and a diverse range of new ambushing opportunities. During and around the most recent Olympic Games, the practice of ambushing has been prevalent on social media platforms among the rivals of Olympic sponsors. In fact, the IOC began formulating social media guidelines and policies for competing athletes and other credentialed officials prior to the 2008 Beijing Games. Subsequent guidelines have been released for the 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 Games.

With these guidelines in place, Abeza et al. (2021), examined the practices and strategies of ambush marketing via social media during the 2014 Sochi, the 2016 Rio, and the 2018 Pyeong-Chang Olympic Games. The authors gathered data from the official Twitter accounts of 15 direct industry competitors of The Olympic Partners (TOP) over the three Games (e.g., Coca Cola vs Pepsi, Samsung vs Sony, Visa vs Mastercard). Despite a series of social media guidelines released by IOC, the study reported that the practice of ambush marketing via social media was evident during each of these three Games. The direct industry competitors were found employing four specific ambush strategies, namely, associative (the use of imagery or terminology to create a suggestion that an organization has links to the event), values (the use of an event or property's central value or theme to imply an association), coattail (attempting to directly associate itself with a property using a legitimate link, such as participating athletes), and property infringement (the intentional unauthorized use of protected intellectual property, such as a logo, a name, and words). It has been observed, ambushing practice on SM is moving away from direct attack and breaching rules to more indirect and sophisticated practice. For instance, the direct ambushing practices (i.e., coattail and property infringement) observed during the 2014 and 2016 Games were not observed during the 2018 Games. The focus has shifted more to indirect ambush marketing strategies (i.e., associative and values) which are challenging to track and flag (e.g., tracing the use of terms that refer to the Olympic properties).

In the case of Tokyo 2020 Games, the postponement of the 2020 Games greatly impacted the TOP. With the limited in-person engagement and restricted hospitality opportunity at the Games, there has also been uncertainty surrounding the execution of activation plans. Having been staged in the absence of spectators, the Games heavily relied on the traditional and digital media to reach consumers. Social media being an established medium today, it makes the Tokyo 2020 Games a unique case to investigate ambushing practice online. In fact, the presence of a certain degree of ambushing practice would be detrimental to the TOP. On one hand, the TOP have not been able to fully commit their resources for activation due to COVID-19, and on the other hand, it will be damaging if direct industry competitors of the TOP are ambushing the game to either promote themselves as being an official sponsor or attempt to create confusion and diminish the communication effectiveness of the sponsors.

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The soft power of the Olympics in the age of Covid 19

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The Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics Games was a Sport Mega Event (SME) like no other. The tensions evident in holding the world's largest sporting event in one of the world's most densely populated cities in the age of Covid raises pointed questions with respect to the values of hosting SME's. Jules Boykoff's *NOlympians* ably demonstrates historical and contemporary opposition to Olympic hosting. Nonetheless, the benefits of hosting SME's - promoted by the International Olympic Committee and other governing bodies in sport - are often considered in terms of the perceived soft power benefits that accrue to the hosts. Soft power - the power of attraction and trust in relations amongst different polities, is a much debated term, but one that has proved remarkably durable since it was first coined by scholar Joseph Nye Jr in the early 1990s. Supposed soft power benefits have been typically measured in terms of visitor numbers to a city, hotel beds filled, cultural exchange events, and tickets sold to the games themselves, alongside increased GDP – a harder power measure. Covid corrupted these criteria. The impact on the athletes and administrators was huge – medals were ultimately won and lost on the basis of what the impact a year's delay meant to athletic performance. Similarly, the impact on the hosts affords an opportunity to reappraise a soft power typography for hosting SMEs away from previous attempts to classify soft power success in terms of physical footfall – tickets sales et al. The soft power impact of Tokyo 2020 needs to be considered in its own right.

The first aspect of Tokyo which needs to be stated plainly is that the Olympic Games took place. This is no little achievement as a huge range of sporting events have since March 2020 been severely impacted by Covid; season declared null and void, postponements a plenty, and witness during the Games themselves the postponement of the UK's hosting of the Rugby League World Cup 2021, after the two leading nations pulled out over Covid concerns. In Tokyo the Games took place; and did so without huge controversies - the event was not a super spreader of Covid itself; demonstrating competence gets a large tick in any soft power typography. It serves to reinforce rather than revolutionise: an important dimension of soft power – it is about accrual. Japan's reputation of past hosting success stretching back to Tokyo's hosting of the 1964 Summer Games - a post-war coming out party, through success in hosting the Winter Games of Sapporo 1972 and Nagano 1998, co-hosting the 2002 World Cup with South Korea, and then the 2019 Rugby World Cup, meant Japan had soft power capital to 'spend' in working through Covid's challenges

Beyond that, the soft power impacts of Tokyo 2020 are less clear. Simon Anholt, founder of the Good Country Index, warns of the transient effect of hosting SMEs but recognises the 'Olympics can mean something as part of a bigger plan'. For host committee in Tokyo, and Japanese society more broadly, the opportunity for the world's gaze to rest on their city was particularly important as part of the nation's recover from the devastating effects of the March 11th 2011 earthquake and tsunami which triggered the Fukushima nuclear meltdown. The 'bigger plan' was therefore to demonstrate Japan's competencies to recover and sit amongst the world's top nations which the successful dénouement of the games on 8th August demonstrated. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe 2012-2019 brand Japan, modelled on the United Kingdom's GREAT campaign, made the most of local cultural capital with Hello Kitty, tea ceremonies, technological innovation and the antecedent of martial arts shared broadly. That Japan had established these tropes amongst overseas audiences long before Covid compensated in those minds' Japanese values in the absence concentrated cultural exchange that would typically coincide with the Games themselves.

Relatedly, and most obviously to the digital viewer of the Games was a lack of spectators in the stadia; and many of them would have been overseas visitors. Their absence prevented the most telling cultural exchanges that travel provides – what Kadir Ayhan – captures as 'people to people diplomacy'.These absences extended to athletes, journalists and administrators, who did not have the opportunity to mingle with locals, or each other, as they lived in hermetically sealed bubbles before flying home. The lack of freedom meant they were fewer interactions and opportunities for cultural exchange and for Japanese soft power to be earnt and shared. Nonetheless, iconic symbols of Japan were skilfully woven into the Games narrative: Hokusai's Great Wave being incorporated into fences at the show jumping, for example.

Equally, it is important to note that not all soft power enhances its subject: it is hard to gauge any meaningful progress on Japanese gender politics, because of Tokyo's hosting, though history may look back on the removal of Yoshiro Mori as head of the organising committee for remarks about women as a significant step in greater gender equality.

What can be said of Tokyo 2020 in its immediate aftermath is that it is clear demonstration of Sports Diplomacy – the 'strategic use of sport to build relationships and amplify profile, policy and attractiveness as a place to invest or study in, trade with, or visit' (Murray and Price). All of these dimensions were compromised by Covid for hosts in Tokyo, and therefore require a re-evaluation of the soft power of hosting sports mega events.

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, nationalism, identity and soft power

Everyone has opinion on the Olympic Games: from host cities, governments, world press and citizens who want to be part of the media frenzy that it brings with it, whether in favour or not. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were fuelled by mixed emotions and unpopular opinions about whether the games should go ahead because of the Covid-19. Japan found itself hosting the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games that few of its citizens wanted, and with the world media watching; it was not exactly the position they imagined they would be in. Traditionally, host nations use the Olympic Games to increase their image, economic wealth and sense of national pride and with that usually comes an increased global soft power ranking! It was Japan's second time in showcasing their Olympic standing to the world, in terms of sporting prowess, values, cultural attraction and trading power but also importantly and uniquely their national pride and identity. The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games became a soft power tool for Japan and its former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought to use them to further his vision to make Japan a first-tier nation. His principle of Abenomics, an economic policy tied to his name, and his role in the bid to host the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games focussing on the values of Olympics to the values of Japan - excellence, friendship and respect. Abe's government and policies were on the verge of successfully utilizing effective hard power and soft power resources; a combination called a smart power strategy in making Japan a top tier country before stepping down as Prime Minister. The idea of making Japan a top-tier country stems from issues regarding Japan's article 9 in its constitution, which made Japan a pacifist country and represented a key part of their national identity. Using the games as a soft power tool they expected to create global visibility, presenting Japan's image and identity to the world. Japan had dipped recently in the global soft power rankings, from 5th in 2018 to 7th in 2019 and Japan sought to use the Games to catapult itself back up the rankings. Japan's recent resumption of commercial whaling in 30 years did little for its identity and image abroad. That said hosting the Rugby world Cup 2019 and the Tokyo Olympic Games did see it rise in the culture sub-index of the global soft power rankings in 2019.

Thus, Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games became a strategy for Japan to salvage its reputation after facing pressure from its citizens, with more than 80% seeking further extension of the Games by another year. Furthermore, other issues, such as the sexist claim made by the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee President Yoshiro Mori, which led to his resignation, revealed the structural and gender issues in Japan's cultural identity. The occurrence of these issues meant that Japan had to fight for its reputation by appointing its first female Olympic Committee president, Seiko Hashimoto who has appeared in seven Olympics. It is important that we begin to ask questions of what really the importance of the Olympic Games to Japan's image and identity is; the opening and closing ceremonies served as a reminder of the peaceful nation that Japan portrays and is. So, in a post Games analysis has Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games been a successful soft power tool for improving Japan's global standing? The latest data from 2021 suggests Japan has surged to top performing Asian nation and second overall but this is a brand soft power index.

The emergence of the Covid-19 became an issue for Japan, threatening Japan's image, which led to other issues such as low public support from its citizens concerning the Games and then the sexist remark from Japan's Olympic committee, all threatened to dent Japan's image in using the Games as a soft power tool. The economic benefit of the Olympics is a major reason for hosting. It is projected that hosting the Tokyo Olympic Games without spectators will result in a financial loss of up to 2.4 trillion yen. Severe cost overrun has become the norm of any Olympic city, it was estimated that the 2020 Olympic postponement alone cost Japan $2.8 billion dollars two-thirds of that was paid with public funds. The Covid-19 pandemic created a difficulty for Japan and in terms of its soft power standing. Instead of hosting and displaying its image positively to the global audience, the Olympic Games, even before it started, became a platform where Japan fought to salvage and repair its image in the eyes of the world. Notwithstanding the problems in Tokyo, Japan remains a great country, and in normal times with spectators and visitors, Tokyo would have been a perfect host. For Japan, hosting the Games successfully behind closed doors with the Olympic message of stronger together is in itself a soft power tool. Japan prided itself on how it supported the Belarus athlete to seek protection, again showing its prominence as a peaceful nation and values such as social justice, honour and peace. Japan has, in the face of adversity, delivered a successful Olympic Games, largely keeping athletes safe, eventually engaging home support when there was opposition and presenting a unified national message of a resilient peaceful nation to the world, no doubt ensuring a future rise in the global soft power rankings.

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Tokyo 2020, East Asian geopolitics and Olympic diplomacy

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Few sports mega-events were immune to political controversies. Not only were the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo held during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the event also took place amid the East Asian relations in flux. This brief report reviews a few notable inter-Asian issues mirrored through this Olympics: the relationship between Japan and South Korea, the tensions between Japan and China, and North Korea's perception of Tokyo's Olympic campaign.

A Japan-South Korea summit

The Olympic Games, especially the opening and closing ceremonies, often function as a semi-diplomatic conference where the head of the host nation receives international VIPs and holds a series of bilateral talks with visiting world leaders. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of foreign guests at the Olympic ceremonies in Tokyo was smaller than usual.

Today, the relationship between Japan and South Korea was at the lowest since the normalization of the diplomatic connection in 1965. The main causes of the conflict include the contentious history of Japanese colonialism and the recent trade disputes. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, despite or because of the diplomatic impasse, planned to attend the opening ceremony. In March 2021, Moon expected that the Olympics in Tokyo would reopen a communication channel between the two sides and announced that he was prepared to convene a meeting with his Japanese counterpart during the Games. Japan remained unmoved. As the summer Olympics drew closer, the two governments discussed the feasibility of holding a Japan-Korea summit. Seoul wanted to put the current diplomatic agendas on the table while Tokyo only intended to receive the South Korean leader as an Olympic guest. As the discussion made little progress, Moon finally decided not to travel to Tokyo. With the general and presidential primary election scheduled to take place in Japan and South Korea a few months after the Olympics, nationalist populism in the two countries showed no sign of abating. This situation rendered an amicable encounter between the two leaders at the sport mega-event nearly impossible.

Taiwan questions

China supported Japan's effort to deliver the summer Olympics during the pandemic but only superficially. Recently, the relations between Japan and China turned uneasy mainly because Japan actively participates in the United States' India-Pacific strategy which chiefly aims to curtail Chinese expansionism in Asia. The Taiwan questions, particularly concerning the recognition of the entity as a sovereign state, lie at the center of the Sino-American contention. A few weeks before the Olympics, Japan vowed to dispatch its self-defense forces to Taiwan if communist China attacks the territory militarily. Not unrelated to this geopolitical friction, China did not send high-level officials to the opening ceremonies even though Beijing will stage the next Olympic Winter Games in less than 7 months.

In the live broadcasting of the opening ceremony, an *NHK* narrator called the Chinese Taipei Olympic team the Taiwanese delegations when they were marching into the stadium. As China regards Taiwan as part of its province, the IOC only approves Chinese Taipei as the official collective name for Olympic athletes from the island. However, many Taiwanese people campaigned for reinstating their status at the international competition, and this movement put an additional strain on Taiwan-China relations. The use of the term Taiwan by the Japanese media infuriated China. The *Global Times*, the Chinese Communist Party's flagship English newspaper, vehemently criticized this incident asserting that 'a joint effort is needed to combat Japanese forces who are attempting to take advantage of the Olympics to engage in political conspiracies.' Such a sensitive reaction demonstrates Beijing's antipathy towards Tokyo's alliance with Washington over the defense of Taiwan.

Voice of North Korea

North Korea skipped this Olympics amid concerns about the spread of Covid-19 in the secret state. Yet, they were by no means less vocal in their criticism over the politicization of the Olympic Games in Tokyo. Communist Korea claimed that Japan was attempting to romanticize its colonial past and to revive its militarism by hosting the event. Pyongyang also raised issues of the display of the Rising Sun flag at the Olympic venues and the description of the Korean controlled small islets as a Japanese territory on the official website of Tokyo 2020. North Korea considered these matters Japanese conspiracy to realize their international ambition panning that 'this Olympics in Tokyo would leave the most humiliating mark in the history of the Olympic Games.' Generally, North Korean propaganda tends to be overtly hostile and aggressive, and this anti-Olympic rhetoric was no exception. That said, their denunciation was not completely groundless but was, to some extent, the reflection of the escalating geopolitical tensions between Japan and its neighbors in East Asia.

Peace was one of the major themes of Tokyo 2020. Nevertheless, underneath the image of harmony and solidarity, arguably the hottest Olympics ever revealed the cold political climate in the region.

Cultural programming at Tokyo 2020: the impossible Olympic festival city?

The Tokyo 2020 Games will be remembered as the 'Covid Games' that were forced to exclude spectators.The sporting competition field was protected to the best of the organisers' ability – and it looked good on the screen - but, what about the cultural exchange field? And what about the Olympic city? Did it manifest?

As every previous Olympics since 1912, Tokyo had a mandate to present a cultural programme and this was launched straight after Rio in 2016, with ambitions to show 21st Japan beyond outdated clichés. The Olympic Organising Committee presented the Nippon Festival and a four-year 'participation programme' – involving contributions from around the country.

Most of the participation programme has been delivered in Japanese exclusively so it is a programme difficult to understand abroad – despite it delivering symbolic value and opportunities for engagement at a local and regional level. The Nippon Festival, however, aimed to make a mark internationally and was designed to address the main Tokyo 2020 bid themes.

The "reconstruction Games" was a key dimension of Tokyo's vision, using the Olympics as a platform to help rebuild the areas affected by the earthquake disaster of 2011. This translated into the community-conceived giant puppet Mocco, which journeyed symbolically from the devastated Tohoku region into Tokyo in 2021.

'Diversity and Inclusion' was also a leading concept, in a country where cultural diversity is not as normalised as in other developed countries, with low visibility for disabled and queer communities within mainstream environments. ONE is the segment of the Nippon Festival dedicated to celebrating diversity, bridging the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The above have been strands of a Festival which has remained true to its original vision but has failed to inspire and stand out within the Games narrative, due to limited – or old fashioned – communication strategies, lack of branding integration within the leading Games platforms and insufficient social media output. Despite the beautiful concept behind the Festival's visual identity (a variation of the central Tokyo 2020 logo which demonstrates the coherence and quality of Tokyo's graphic design identity) the Nippon Festival has not stood out sufficiently during Games.

Beyond the Organising Committee, the Japanese contemporary arts world also wanted to partake in the Cultural Olympiad. The complexities of Olympic branding and approval processes, however, led to what is a common missed opportunity: a separation of Olympic cultural programming strands with little narrative connectors and no joint branding.

Regardless, a new art festival inspired by the Games was put together by the local authority: the TokyoTokyo Festival presented the city's contemporary art scene and, despite its disconnect from Olympic branding, it has been successful attracting arts media coverage and public attention. It is a good example of a Games-time festival celebrating its host city: from buildings, to public baths and gardens.

An unprecedented cultural strand in these Games has been the contribution by the IOC itself, which for the first time presented its take on how 'culture meets sport', showcasing the official version of what is meant by 'Olympic spirit' and 'Olympic art'. The Olympic Agora opened as a large physical site in Tokyo at the end of June 2021 and combined presential and digital spaces for Olympic culture throughout the Games.

Commentators note that there has been little opportunity for residents and Games delegations to experience the Olympic city in 2021. Interventions such as the intriguing floating head presented by the TokyoTokyo Festival just before the Opening Ceremony raised eyebrows and encouraged conversation; the Olympic Agora presented eye-catching public artworks; finally, the Nippon Festival and participation programme presented locally sensitive works throughout Japan and materialised Tokyo's Olympic bid vision. However, crowds were not allowed into any of these interventions – and the international Games narrative did not include sufficient reference to the rich diversity of these activities combined.

The future of cultural programming at the Games requires further thinking. There should be less fragmentation, more cross-referencing when promoting activities, and more effective ways of adapting brands and visual identities so that it is possible to appreciate the many dimensions of Olympic arts and culture.

Reconstruction, recovery, inclusion and togetherness were the Tokyo Olympic keywords. They were meaningful at the time of the bid and even more poignant during a pandemic. The Opening and Closing ceremonies presented this message loud and clear. The associated cultural programmes explored these concepts even further but failed to align sufficiently to make as meaningful a mark as they should have.

Future Olympics need to keep opening-up their understanding of what cultural programming can do, not just as an Olympic Charter requirement but as a platform to address difficulties and turning material challenges into inspirational narratives. The official Games cultural programme should be an opportunity for fun and celebration, connected with the unique characteristics of respective Games hosts as well as the diverse centenary heritage of the Olympic movement. The Cultural Olympiads of the future need to keep working towards a clearer interrelation between organising committee mandates, city-led arts expressions and IOC-hosted Agoras.

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Anti-sex beds? Fake news! : why this video went massively viral?

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A video posted on Twitter of the Irish gymnast Rhys Macclenaghan jumping on his bed in the Olympic Village insisting that the news that the cardboard bed is an anti-sex bed is fake instantly attracted the attention of tens of millions of people. The intimacy and sexual activities of athletes within the Olympic Village have always been a subject of great interest to many people. In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, 8,500 condoms were first distributed in the Olympic Village. Since then, Olympians have been assumed to engage in sexual activities in the Village, and the distribution of condoms in large numbers has been a major discussion topic in most of the Olympic Games. Moreover, the media have been diligent in exposing the athletes' secretive Olympic Village stories.

However, people's interest in the sex life of athletes within the Village is much higher this time compared to all earlier Olympics Games. The following paragraphs present the background for this phenomenon.

In Tokyo 2020, athletes posted lively videos depicting village life and their opinions on various topics on social media, many through their own channels, for the first time, and these videos attracted considerable attention. Rhys's video became much more viral than the text posted by Paul Chelimo, which was the first to claim that the village bed was an anti-sex bed, probably because the visual medium is more attractive than the text medium.

Further, Rhys seems to train shirtless; however, if he had jumped on the bed wearing a shirt—similar to the videos posted by some other athletes—his video might have attracted less attention. The movement of his beautiful, trained, and shirtless body on the bed probably helped the audience to easily imagine Olympians' behavior on the bed.

However, apart from these factors, the strong interest of people in the sex life of athletes in the Village is undoubtedly the result of the long and complex changes that have occurred in their own sex lives during the year and a half long COVID-19 pandemic.

Pandemics have had complex impacts on the sexual desires, relationships, and behaviors of people worldwide. First, many people reduced their sexual activities significantly. The survey in March-April 2020 in the U.S. found that many participants (43.5%) reported a decline in the quality of their sex life.

Second, the changes in people were extremely diverse. The survey in Austria and Germany in April 2020 found that the increase and decrease in the rate of the people who reported a desire to masturbate and the desire to have sex with a partner were about the same (21-25%).

In a survey by my own team in Japan in June 2020 and January 2021, more women were found to decrease sexual desire than men, and this gap caused disagreement among some couples.

Moreover, worldwide, most people have tried to accept monogamy. Many people recognize the value of deepening their relationships with a single partner, whereas others experience disagreements in the couple on various points. Further, the long duration of the pandemic caused many couples to stay together for long periods, which resulted in reduced interest in the partner. In as early as June 2020, the NYC-DOH recommended the adoption of a safe method to conduct online dating and sex parties; once vaccination became widespread, the hurdles for new encounters lowered. However, even today, competition exists between variants and vaccines, and many people remain vulnerable to the infection. Toward the beginning of the Tokyo Games, the people who had experienced various changes seemed uncertain about whether they should continue in monogamous relationships or move toward sexual liberation.

The Olympics athletes were asked to refrain from having any physical contact with each other and given 160,000 condoms just as souvenirs. They were required to leave the Village in 48 hours from the end of their final competition; therefore, they had very limited time to indulge in sexual activities. However, the athletes who had been dealing with much bigger concerns compared to those in previous Olympic Games probably had a great desire to release their tension at the end of their competitions. This made the Olympic Village a place where sexual encounters could occur at the largest scale and with the strongest desire ever, despite the limitations mentioned above.

Hence, Rhys's jumps on the bed and the message the "Anti-sex bed is fake" might have awakened the sleeping desires of those experiencing a loss of desire or diminished satisfaction. His message might have made people anticipate a huge Olympic orgy. Moreover, the jumps seem to have amplified people's indecision regarding whether to remain in monogamous relationships or rebel against it. Therefore, we should carefully monitor the pandemic's impact on monogamous relationships during and after the pandemic period.

Counting cases, counting medals: containing the Olympic contagion during the Tokyo Games

As of this writing, more than four million people worldwide have died from the COVID-19 virus and over 200 million more have been infected during this pandemic. In documenting the toll of this crisis, the Spanish influenza pandemic (1918-1920) is frequently cited in comparison to the current moment, given the Spanish flu claimed the lives of an estimated 50 million people as the world also reeled from the effects of World War I. The two pandemics share another parallel – the insistence on staging the Olympic Games amid international devastation. Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike invoked the 1920 Antwerp Games as an event that "brought hope" to the masses and aligned the Tokyo Games with a similar mission, even as Japan announced a state of emergency and over 80% of Japanese citizens wanted the Games postponed or cancelled.

The 1920 Games in Antwerp are but one example of how global flows of sport and sickness interact. We need only look at the H1N1 flu's impact during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, the Zika virus in 2016 at the Olympics in Rio, or most recently, the norovirus at Pyeongchang's 2018 Games. Given this context, the Tokyo Games emerge as the new normal; that is, the expectation that a global event of this magnitude might lay bare the vulnerabilities that so easily permeate borders and bodies.

What these Games actually reveal is the state of constant contagion transmitted via Olympism (the ideals and values offered through the history of the Olympics and its charter) where every two years, summer and winter, this mega-event reveals the debris of a crumbling global civil society, covered in the residue of what sport communication scholar Lawrence Wenner calls "sport dirt" – where the cultural logics and values of sport "rub off" onto broader corporate, communal, and cultural formations. Before the Games started, I recall seeing consistent tweets from folks who could not comprehend why the Olympics would occur during a global pandemic that showed no end in sight. However, once athletes entered the field of play, the disdain for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) evaporated for many and the medal count emerged as the only numerical marker that mattered.

Tucked behind the podiums, medals, and world-class facilities are the 430 people – primarily Japanese officials and contractors – who contracted the virus and the greater Tokyo community rendered vulnerable at the hands of the IOC and Japanese government. Nestled between the heart-warming moments of triumph and the human interest stories that allow us into the lives of the world's best athletes are the nearly 300 Olympians who tested positive for the virus leading up to and during the Games. On August 5, 2021, in the midst of the Olympics, Tokyo reached 5,042 new COVID-19 cases – a pandemic-high – a number that the IOC denies is linked to the Olympics.

In an op-ed published by The New York Times, professor of political science and former Olympian Jules Boykoff writes, "The IOC oversees the most pervasive yet least accountable sport infrastructure of the world. The group appears to have fallen under the spell of its own congenital impunity. Pressing ahead with the Olympics risks drinking poison to quench our thirst for sport." In many ways, the Olympics and the interconnected governing bodies are not unlike other sporting institutions that resumed play before full assurance that sport could operate safely. However, the global reach of the Games set new hegemonic norms that trickle down to other leagues and federations, seemingly for years to come. Our thirst for athletic spectacle, along with the billions of dollars spent for the Tokyo Games, transcends the dire conditions of a global pandemic.

In an article for Deadspin, Spike Friedman writes, "What's often missed in mainstream critiques of the Olympics is *how the various forms of rot* they bring to individual cities can grow and mutate in the years and decades that follow" (emphasis mine).

Rot. Poison. Contagion.

As cases in Japan continue to surge in the aftermath of the Olympics – and in preparation for the upcoming Paralympic Games – the metaphor of mutation is an apt one. Whether considering the public health consequences of the Games or the myriad of political, economic, and environmental costs of hosting this particular sporting mega-event every two years (detailed throughout this report), the murmuring of anti-Olympic resistance grows louder and louder. The virality of epic sporting moments is rivaled only by the looming fear of pandemic in perpetuity.

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Public Relations as the key in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games

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With an undeniable decrease in public support for hosting and organizing of mega-sport events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the further economic and social pressures due to the unexpected and devastating Covid-19 pandemic, the value of Public Relations as a tool for organizers during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games cannot be understated. We argue that the current circumstances and the pressures experienced during the digital era call for a more sophisticated PR policies that appear to be better suited, if not required, throughout and beyond Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Throughout the theoretical development of PR theory, there has been a general consensus among scholars that the central value of PR lies in organization-public relationships. Since the first time that the necessity of relationships as a pivotal part of public relation communication was stressed, the paradigm of existing public relations research shifted from disseminating information to relationship management. Although questions are still being raised on the feasibility of organization-public relationships in real-life contexts and the disparity of power that exists in society, understanding the value of building and fostering relationships between an organization and its publics as the focus of PR is, in fact, what distinguishes PR from other types of marketing communication. Indeed, PR is different from marketing communication as it focuses on two-way communication, whereas marketing communication is initiated by the organization.

The importance of this relationship is further highlighted in today's era of digital communication, where open, democratic and un-censored channels of communication exist between all stakeholders. In the case of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, such stakeholders would include the organizing and hosting committee, the local and national Governments, the local residents, the fans, volunteers and athletes of the Games, as well as national and international media and the wider international audience with a keen interest in the Games. The use of PR in this context would thus aim for a two-way communication or a wider dialogue between the stakeholders, allowing not only for key messages to be promoted by the organizers, but also for all stakeholders to be heard, voicing any concerns they might have regarding the event. This in turn would redefine the purpose of such PR communication from the more traditional information dissemination or public persuasion, to a mutual understanding of the Games, their perceived benefits and impacts, as well as the value and even potential risks associated with hosting the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is worth noting that through the use of social media, some attempts have been made for such a dialogue to be initiated with the publics, such as the Make the Beat campaign ran exclusively on social media, aiming primarily at the local Tokyo residents, and suggesting that the use of PR is gaining ground in the context of the Games. Hopefully, such efforts will intensify as the Games progress and conclude in order to ensure that the publics' support contributes to their legacy.

If such a focus on PR policy is to be achieved, aiming at mutually beneficial relationships between the organizers and the publics, then the latter should not be viewed as a mere audience or receiver of a message, but instead, as a key member of the decision-making process, before, throughout and after the Games. Indeed, in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, noteworthy attempts were made for relationships to be built with the public and for them to be incorporated in the decision-making process in order to secure the publics' support. An interesting and entertaining example of this was the selection of the official mascots for the Games. The local organising committee launched a ballot, inviting school children to select the most representative mascots for the Games. Even though the selection of the two mascots is a relatively small aspect in the overall process of hosting the Games, it still demonstrates how small steps were taken to incorporate the public in the hosting, which paired with the social importance placed on the mascots, can better indicate progress towards relationship building with the public. While there is ample room for progress to be made in considering the public an active stakeholder in the hosting and organizing the Olympic and Paralympic Games, signs of appreciation of the publics' true value for the success of the Games are already visible, supporting the long argued theory that benefits can be gained through the development of a favorable long-term relationship with key stakeholders built through a proper reciprocal interaction with them. It is our hope that future mega-sport events' organizers will further show their appreciation and utilize PR as a key to gaining and maintaining publics' support before, throughout and after such events.

The Organizing Committee's veil of effective PR to help save itself and the start of the Games

Three days before the opening ceremonies of the 2020 Olympics, Reuters reported that the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee would consider a last-minute cancellation if Japan's COVID-19 cases continued to rise. The statement contradicted the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) repeated claims that canceling was not an option. Nevertheless, the organizing committee's suggestion that public health could prevail garnered positive international publicity for a potential exercise of caution and prudence. The IOC ought to have heartily thanked the organizing committee for the last second image boost for, up until that point, very little had been done to reassure the public that the Olympic Games should proceed.

Polls repeatedly suggested that Japanese citizens wanted the games called off, and depending on how the question was worded, 50-80% of Japanese people were opposed to the games being hosted in Tokyo. Several regional papers echoed the call for a cancellation, including the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, a leading Japanese media outlet. As critics became more vocal, and case numbers rose, even a former Olympian medalist spoke up. Kaori Yamaguchi, an executive member of the Japanese Olympic Committee and a judo medalist, said that Japan had been "cornered" into hosting during the pandemic, asking, "What will these Olympics be for, and for whom? The Games have already lost meaning and are being held just for the sake of it." Public opinion, even among the most devoted, was at a low point.

Then came the expert public relations feint. On July 20, mere days before the 2020 Olympic games started, Toshiro Muto, the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee's chief, and Seiko Hashimoto, the organizing committee's president, registered their measured, thoughtful concern. Asked whether the games could still be canceled, Muto did not rule it out and noted that the committee would "continue discussions if there [was] a spike in cases." Hashimoto acknowledged the public's anxiety and emphasized safety and security. Their comments were picked up by global media outlets such as the BBC, CNBC, Forbes, Kyodo News, CBS News, National Public Radio, CNN, the Wall Street Journal, Bleacher Report, the Associated Press, ESPN, the Indian Express, and others. Headlines like "Tokyo 2020 chief Muto does not rule out 11th-hour cancellation of Games" created goodwill that had been hard to come by in the controversial lead-up to the games.

The organizing committee's messaging, compared to the IOC's insistence that the games would go on no matter what, achieved two things. First, the organizing committee's messaging offered an appropriately framed message that afforded a deft strategic public relations touch. The dissemination of such openness to canceling the Games primed publics by exhibiting leadership with careful prudence. The organizing committee's comments gave the illusion of an appropriate public relations response by portraying the Olympic governing structure as an organization ready to adjust depending on public health and community concern.

Second, it allowed the organizing committee to distance itself from the IOC. When the Games left town, how would the local organizers who remained deal with the fall out and nurture damaged relationships with Japanese residents? For months the organizing committee had to negotiate as a middle group between an adamant IOC and a fearful, frustrated public. A common crisis communication strategy is to distance an organization from a nefarious act or employee. Distancing attempts to focus more attribution and blame on a different party. In this case, the IOC repeatedly downplayed health and safety concerns in the lead up to the Games and emphasized that public opinion would not force a cancellation. The IOC president, Thomas Bach, stated there was zero risk of athletes passing on the virus to Japanese residents, even as cases in Tokyo hit a six-month high.

Conversely, Muto's comments and his perceived openness to canceling the Games set up a contradiction with the inflexible IOC, helping to distance the committee from the IOC and connect them more closely with their stakeholders. These moves could help alleviate discord with Japanese residents after the Games end as well, as they prioritized concern for Japan, their most immediate stakeholders, over the IOC.

The organizing committee showed an ethic of care and made a valiant public relations effort. One cannot assess whether the organizing committee's efforts were a phony measure to conceal that the games would go on or an honest attempt to listen to stakeholders and prioritize public health. Regardless, the public relations effort succeeded with a final message before the opening ceremonies started by soliciting international attention. If but for a brief moment, it really seemed as though the Olympics were responsive to public opinion.

The quick 181 day turnaround from Tokyo to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics presents another large-scale logistical, financial, and, most likely, public health conundrum. Tokyo's organizing committee, however, shows there is a space for effective public relations strategies. Their efforts to listen to stakeholders, maintain an ethic of care, and consider public opinion are foundational and efficacious public relations tactics. The IOC would be smart to consider using these, but if they do not, then the Beijing organizing committee can find a way to distance itself from the larger governing structure and help nurture relationships with their local stakeholders as the lead up to the next Olympics begins.

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Environmental leadership showcased in the Olympic Games

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The International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognizes its sphere of influence and responsibilities to be a leader in the international sport landscape. Their three areas of recognized influence include itself as an organization, as the leader of the Olympic Movement, and as the owner of the Olympic Games. Environmental sustainability stands as the third pillar of the Olympic Movement and is a prominent focus of the Olympic Agenda 2020+5. Overall, the IOC's Sustainability Strategy primarily serves environmental sustainability and how the Committee's operations, organization, and production of Olympic Games can catalyze the global sport sector to advance the environmental sustainability movement in and through sport. The IOC's Sustainability Reports and their recently completed new headquarters building (Olympic House) ranks as one of the most environmentally sustainable buildings globally with a LEED Platinum v4 certification and Platinum level certification from the Swiss Sustainable Construction Standard.

As the leader of the Olympic Movement, the IOC has taken instrumental and continued leadership in the creation and promotion of the United Nation's Sport for Climate Action Framework. The Framework is designed to align the global sport sector with the Paris Climate Agreement's targets and engage sport fans in climate awareness and climate action while they consume sport and in their everyday lives. Specifically, the Framework has five principles. First, signatories ought to engage in systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility. Second, signatories commit to reducing their overall climate impact. Third, they will educate for climate action within their organization. Fourth, they will promote sustainable and responsible consumption. Fifth, advocate for climate action through communication to external stakeholders (e.g., fans, vendors, etc.). As of August 2021, there are 256 signatories, including sport federations, associations, and individual clubs/teams.

However, the IOC's ownership of the Olympic Games garners the most attention and, not surprisingly, has the most significant environmental impact of their three areas of influence. For the Games, the host planning committee and the IOC are presented with a dual challenge regarding sport's interaction with the natural environment. This bidirectional relationship, known as sport ecology, recognizes that sport impacts the natural environment and, conversely, the natural environment impacts sport. Consequently, the predominant focus of the IOC's environmental sustainability is to minimize sport's impact on the natural environment.

The environmental impacts of preparing for and hosting the Games include production and consumption of the Games. The direct impacts of production result from the construction and operation of facilities, the planning and production of events, and staffing the events across all venues and operations. Tokyo 2020 significantly reduced its possible environmental impact by using existing and temporary facilities and minimizing the need to build new and permanent venues, a strategy replicated and advanced in the next two Summer Games (i.e., Paris 2024, Los Angeles 2028). The environmental impact of the production of the 2020 Games has taken center stage because of the restriction on attendance which reduces the direct impacts of consumption. The environmental impacts of the consumption of the games through fans' transportation to and from the Games, on-site purchasing, and the increased consumption of apparel and concessions have been minimal as a result of spectator restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second challenge is to acknowledge and adapt to the ways the natural environment impacts sport. Throughout Tokyo 2020, there are many examples of this aspect of sport ecology. For example, outdoor matches in archery, rowing, surfing, and women's triathlon were affected by a tropical storm. Further, despite the recognized possibility of extreme heat and humidity in the bidding documents for the Games, athletes competed in extreme heat and humidity, which impacted their performance and wellbeing. Matches were delayed due to the heat – most notably the women's football final between Canada and Sweden.

The bidirectional relationship between sport and the natural environment, especially how the natural environment impacts sport, is an important reminder to consider how our actions adversely impact how we can enjoy sport as a participant or spectator. That is, the ways we have seen the natural environment impact sport at Tokyo 2020 stress the importance of immediate climate action to reduce humankind's contribution to climate change and global warming. The best way to do that is by leading through example.

The IOC requires prospective host nations to outline their environmental sustainability plan in their bid. Unfortunately, researchers have found a gradual decline in the Olympic Games across all areas of sustainability (i.e., economic, social, environmental). Despite this trend, encouraging internal reports and external analyses indicate Tokyo 2020's commitment to a net-zero energy goal and a circular economy approach to reduce consumption and waste will be met.

Tokyo may very well have one of the better environmentally performing Games in recent memory due to the forethought in planning and a matter of circumstance of fans not traveling to and attending events. Regardless, this Olympic accomplishment fulfills the IOC's desire to be a global sport environmental movement leader. Ideally, this positive trend continues with the 2022 Beijing Winter and the 2024 Paris Summer Games.

Simone Biles and prioritizing athlete well-being

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics introduced many sports fans to the "twisties," a term that gymnasts use to describe a disconnect between mind and body that occurs when they lose the ability to tell where they are in the air. This phenomenon became one of the biggest stories of the Games when it led star U.S. gymnast Simone Biles to withdraw from multiple Olympic events. Biles's decision advanced recent efforts among elite athletes to openly discuss mental health issues and highlighted the importance of pushing for structural changes in sports in order to prioritize athlete well-being.

Although news outlets primarily emphasized the mental health aspects of the story, an athlete's loss of "air sense" is not only psychologically distressing, but also physically dangerous. As Biles told a reporter, "I don't think you realize how dangerous this is on hard/competition surface. Nor do I have to explain why I put health first. Physical health is mental health." Gymnasts who train or compete in unsafe conditions can be catastrophically injured, and mental health struggles are among the many factors that can place an athlete in harm's way.

In addition to spotlighting the connections between athletes' mental health and physical safety, Biles's high-profile decision to protect herself emerged out of several influential trends in competitive athletics. One key dynamic has been early specialization in single sports at younger ages, driven in part by the privatization and commercialization of youth sports. While this development is evident across a wide range of sports in the United States, in gymnastics a combination of factors—including gender norms, a lack of material support for adult women athletes, and the assumption that female athletes "peak" in their teen years—have all contributed to particularly early specialization that dates back decades. The average age for American women's Olympic gymnastics teams declined from nearly 28 in 1952 to only 17.5 years by 1976.

With many gymnasts' careers expected to end shortly after athletes reach adulthood, both the pressure to "play through" risks and the resulting health consequences are especially pronounced for these child athletes. Early specialization poses higher risks of physical harm, notably overuse injuries associated with repetitive body movements and inadequate recovery times. Psychological risks include burnout, anxiety and eating disorders.

Yet young gymnasts have historically been expected to continue competing through such hazards and celebrated for doing so. Perhaps most famously, at the 1996 Olympics American gymnast Kerri Strug was widely cheered for landing a vault on an injured ankle; she subsequently fell to the floor in pain. Her teammate, then 14-year-old Dominique Moceneau, similarly recalled that "I was not allowed to say I was in pain until I collapsed." Such widespread pressures to ignore or conceal health concerns have typically been imposed on children, given that the majority of Olympic training takes place while gymnasts are minors.

Coupled with a lack of independent oversight, the expectation that young athletes routinely endure pain to succeed fostered an environment conducive to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Widespread media coverage of the trial of Larry Nassar, a trainer who was found guilty of abusing hundreds of young American gymnasts for decades, brought increased attention to the systematic nature of the problem. The abuse was not simply a matter of individual perpetrators or "bad apples," but stemmed from profound institutional failures. High-profile gymnasts such as McKayla Maroney gave victim impact statements demanding that the leadership of USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic Committee be held accountable for enabling the abuse of athletes in their care. In April 2021, Biles told a reporter that a key reason she chose to return to the sport as a survivor of Nassar's abuse was to continue pushing for change: "Because I feel like if there weren't a remaining survivor in the sport, they would've just brushed it to the side."

In many ways, then, Biles's withdrawal from Olympic events represents part of a broader trend to challenge systemic disregard for young athletes' physical and mental well-being. Many observers rightly celebrated Biles's courage in breaking with longstanding norms of "playing through" health issues, praising her decision as "a welcome example of an athlete setting her own limits." But beyond Biles's heroism as an individual, her withdrawal from Olympic events points to the importance of more fundamental institutional reforms. Although her example will hopefully inspire younger and less decorated athletes to similarly make decisions that prioritize their health and safety, the responsibility to protect young athletes ultimately belongs to sports leaders and institutions.

Biles's remarkable achievements will gain even greater power through contributing to a broader push for structural changes that ensure meaningful accountability for sports authorities and organizations that fail to protect athletes. Reforms must also provide for enforcement of safety codes and training protocols, and build the trust necessary for young athletes to feel assured of support when they must step back from training or competition. In the first Olympics postponed due to the public health risks of a global pandemic, insisting on placing athlete well-being first may be the most important legacy.

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Pride and burden of striving for perfection at the Olympics

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The 32nd Olympiad has been unique in many ways due, in large part, to the lasting effects of Covid-19 that forced the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and hosts, Japan, to move the Games from 2020 to 2021. Apart from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics being held a year later, the Games were also held without spectators as well as family members of the athletes at competition venues. These Games were also held in an atmosphere of renewed activism pertaining to race relations, athlete-labour migration, performance enhancing drugs and testosterone levels in female athletes, gender identity issues as well as mental health of the participants. Despite the initial challenges, the Games have shown that they have a strong international appeal, and their successful completion is an affirmation of their social, economic, and political significance in society.

For many countries around the world, winning a medal at the Olympic Games is an explicit endorsement of their national ethos. It is an affirmation that what they are doing as a nation is working. Citizens also, put their cultural, religious, and political differences aside, and rally together to cheer their fellow citizens. On many occasions, athletes experience a strong sense of emotional pride as the national anthem of their home country is played as the medal is put around their neck. They gladly wrap themselves in their national flag as they celebrate their hard-won victory. Tears flow freely as the world stands still to acknowledge their accomplishment as the very cream of their craft. Their fellow citizenry cheer and hug unreservedly as the athletes lift the brand of their Nation atop the world. It is a time of national and patriotic pride. The striving, application and triumph of athletes has a powerful connection with the fans as the latter feel inspired by the former.

The positive effects of the Olympic Games to individual athletes, teams, nations, and hosts are indescribable. The Games provide a platform where positive nationalism is put on display and differences are put aside to witness and cheer on some of the best talented individuals from the whole world. It is a time when the spirit of competition and sportsmanship become paramount, and there were days in the past where there was no overt hate.

However, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were held at a time when the social media brings to the fore unfiltered feelings both positive and negative. In the USA for example, defeats at the Games were cheered and people representing the country and the national flag were incidentally not celebrated. Ridiculing athletic accomplishments may set in a risk of individuals starting to prioritize achievement for the self and family rather than the nation. After all, it is the family that supports and witnesses the sacrifices that athletes make to reach the top of their game.

At the 32nd Olympiad, some athletes who went to the Games at the very top of their game and expected to win gold medals, fell short, while some underdogs showed up and stole the show. For example, Simona Biles, one of the greatest gymnasts for the USA, arrived at the Games and swiftly qualified for a shot at the gold medal in six different events. Unfortunately, things fell apart and she made a bold decision to sacrifice her ambitions for the good of the team citing mental health issues. The chasm between the expected and the reality of her gymnastic accomplishments drew sharp affirmations and criticism. This incident is a microcosm of the struggles of athletes as they strive to actualize the supernatural level at which the public elevates and views them. When athletes are at their very best and winning effortlessly, they are gods; when they fail, even marginally, they are failures. The media and the critics lose their minds when athletes with a proven winning record fail to accomplish the goal of earning a gold medal. In some cases, winning a bronze medal is viewed as a failure, not the accomplishment that it should have been.

What the casual fan does not realize is that athletes are human beings. These are people who dedicate their time and work hard to even compete at that level, let alone medal in an event. It is sad when the world thinks about accomplishment only in terms of wins and gold medals. It is unfortunate that this cultural striving for perfection at the Olympics means that a gold medal is practically the ONLY acceptable accomplishment in the Olympics (for some).

Yet, behind that medal is a human being that suffers failure, self-doubt, criticism and heart-breaks, social disengagement during training as they focus on perfecting their athletic talent. The burden rests with the media to share the stories of the Olympians so that people may empathize with their struggles and triumphs in life.

Deliver a medal or apologize: a daunting task imposed on Japanese Olympians

The Tokyo 2020 Games was an Olympiad without precedent. Japanese athletes had to maximize not only their athletic performance but also their public commentary to win the hearts of Japanese people and justify the controversial decision to hold the Olympic Games amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

More than 80% of the Japanese population opposed hosting the virus-postponed Olympics. As the Japanese government failed to gain people's support for holding the Games, the baton of this critical task was tacitly passed on to the nation's Olympians. They had to deliver medals or otherwise apologize for failing to do so. In either case, they were careful to acknowledge the deep understanding of the Japanese people who kindly let them compete in the Olympics. For example, Naomi Osaka, who lit the Olympic cauldron, expressed her appreciation for those involved in the Games, medical staff, and all the supporters, and apologized for failing to live up to the expectations. Kohei Uchimura, a seven-time Olympic medalist, fell from the horizontal bar and said, "I would like to get down on my hands and knees with my forehead on the ground to apologize." Kenichiro Fumita, a Greco-Roman wrestler, sobbed throughout the interview, saying he could not repay a debt of gratitude by winning the gold to all those who endeavored to hold the Games and who cheered him in spite of the unfavorable views of the Olympics. He even called his result shameful, and said he was truly sorry. Make no mistake, he did deliver a silver medal. The list of Japanese medalists with similar remarks and behaviors goes on and on. Even though some research shows that Japanese have a tendency to apologize too much, and that Japanese Olympians are likely to make negative remarks on their performance, these remarks by Japanese competitors reflected how hefty the burden was of winning both medals and people's hearts in the pandemic-ridden host country.

Of course, athletes from other countries expressed their disappointment about not being able to win the medal of their favorite color, but they rarely apologize for failing to win gold for their nation unlike the Japanese athletes illustrated above. Noah Lyles, for instance, guaranteed gold, saying, "I just know. There are some people who just know they're going to win. And I'm one of those people." After finishing third, he called bronze boring before he put things in perspective and said, "Wow, I was able to grab one (a medal)." Some disappointment and relief was felt in his statement, but not the obligation toward the American people.

Such a sense of duty stems from the unique history of sports in Japan. Before the late 19th century, the European concept of sports did not exist in Japan. The few similar events such as Sumo, Judo, and Karate were originally for military training, not for pleasure. Knowing this origin, it is easier to understand why some of the Japanese medalists of Japanese martial arts behaved in the following manner. Shohei Ohno, the captain of the Japanese judo mixed team, expressed his regret that they could not make his team manager "a man," as they only won a silver medal, meaning "they fought for the honor of the manager but failed." This sentiment has something in common with the spirit of Japanese soldiers in the Imperial Japanese Army who fought for the Emperor. Ryo Kiyuna, when he won the gold medal in the Men's Karate Kata, did not show any expression of joy but sat on the tatami mat calmly and bowed deeply, as he believes Karate is about gratitude and respect. These examples show there still remains in the concept of Japanese sports some elements different from those in Western sports: sports is for discipline, not for fun. No wonder Japanese language had to borrow the word sports to create a new Japanese concept and word *supottsu*.

Polls after the Games demonstrated that Japanese "soldiers" fulfilled both the task of winning medals and favorable public opinion: athletes won a record haul of 27 gold medals with a record number of 58 medals in total. Meanwhile, 64% of Japanese people answered that they were glad to have hosted the Olympics, far rise from any of the polls given before the Games. Japanese Olympians deserve medals from the government for lulling once riled Japanese people's minds.

Sapporo, where I live, is bidding for the 2030 Winter Olympics. If that happens, it will be interesting to see how Japan's Olympians will be liberated from public scrutiny, and whether they can focus on themselves and enjoy the Games.

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2

Media Coverage & Representation

What place is this? Tokyo's made-for-television Olympics

Global sport festivals like the Olympics (and the Paralympics, to which the following analysis applies) are super-spreader events. While hosted at a specific planetary location they are designed, via the media, to overcome earthly restrictions of time and space to be received anywhere.

This communicative exchange is essential to the political economy of the Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) sells, at great expense and with onerous contractual conditions, the opportunity to host an Olympiad. The buyer tries to project an image of capability in mega-event staging on which it hopes to capitalise by attracting investment. Most importantly, the successful Olympic host (for sceptics an oxymoron) seeks to mark out their spatial, social, cultural and historical uniqueness, a tangible difference with tourist appeal that projects intangible positive 'vibes' for local consumption and the global gaze. So, 'winning' the Games requires constructing or enhancing a wide range of image production sets with many moving parts, both in and outside Olympic venues.

During the Handover Ceremony at Rio 2016, ten minutes of distilled signification of Japan were broadcast, heavily featuring the Shibuya Scramble Crossing that, as it would transpire, could not become the Olympic tourist bucket list equivalent of the Abbey Road Zebra Crossing of London 2012. In 1964, Tokyo was the first host city to take the Olympics to the world via live TV. In 2021, it could only be seen via a screen. Looking for an upbeat reprise over half a century later, Japan aspired to revive its flagging image as ageing, economically sclerotic, disaster-prone and regionally outmanoeuvred. The intervention of Covid-19 did not just delay the Games and raise the cost, it created the most media dependent Olympics ever held. Strict enforcement of a series of sporting bubbles stripped much of what could be seen, felt and heard of Tokyo from the heart of its own Games.

The tone was set by an unusually sombre Opening Ceremony in the Japan National Stadium, a cavernous cathedral of sport searching for its principal purpose of congregation. It dialled back on big-statement celebrations of Japanese history and culture in deference to pandemic *tristesse* and appeals to global unity. Coverage of the much-reduced athlete procession couldn't even bounce off crowd reaction shots because there was no crowd. Not for the Olympics the artifice of cardboard cut-outs of spectators, giant screens of supporters at home and digitally-assembled onlookers. Media coverage usually switches freely between the mostly-generic sports action and its specific spatial context. Covid-19 quite deliberately narrowed the focus to the sport, severely attenuating the 'Japaneseness' of its Olympic setting.

Tokyo obscure

The interplay of text and context is integral to establishing a sense of place. There are usually many opportunities to do so, many neither timetabled nor staged. Before the sport action commences, journalists generally roam the Olympic city and its *environs*, producing so-called 'colour stories' about place and people. Largely robbed of such exchanges in a Tokyo under a State of Emergency, many journalists arrived later than usual, entering the country only after much virus testing and re-testing, undergoing periods of quarantine, masking up and keeping their distance from others.

The press and broadcasters were guided by 68-page Playbooks produced by Olympic authorities. For reasons of public health and safety, once 'At the Games' accredited overseas media and other workers were hermetically sealed off, forbidden for the first 14 days from using public transport or to "walk around the city or visit tourist areas, shops, restaurants or bars, gyms, etc."

Fluidity of movement between Olympic venues and the spaces of the city being impossible, enclosed Olympic sites functioned as fortresses. Journalists reported some sports but could convey little about conditions beyond their bubbles. Those outside, including resident foreign correspondents fluent in the local language, searched for angles and interviewees to communicate the experiential textures of a host city whose citizens could only watch from a distance.

Glimpses of urban action could be caught, for example, in the on-water events, which provided views of the Tokyo Gate Bridge and, further afield in cooler climes, Sapporo's Odori Park during the marathon and race walking. Sometimes, street spectators were spotted observing varying degrees of physical distance.

But nothing could be captured and relayed of the carnivalesque buzz of an Olympic city with its parties, cultural events, pavement theatre and encounters with strangers in *faux* folk-national garb. Even Live and Public Viewing Sites, accessible free-zones for watching live screen sport and for sociality beyond the stadium, were discouraged among other "countermeasures against the COVID-19".

From vantage points across the globe, it could be discerned that an Olympics was taking place in Japan, but any 'topophilic' screen memories were largely incidental. A made-for-television sport mega event can work efficiently with little sense of anchorage in place. But for what will Tokyo 2020/1 be remembered and savoured, apart from a clutch of sporting highlights?

Some people of conscience may have more troubling Tokyo 2020/1 images in their memory banks. They will remember that a huge risk to public health was taken principally in the interests of Olympic finances, national pride and our viewing pleasure. And that it happened in a Tokyo that was largely unseen.

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How do we truly interpret the Tokyo Olympic ratings?

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Desiderius Erasmus once opined: "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king." If ever there were the embodiment of a one-eyed man in modern media, the Olympic broadcast would be it. The 2021 NBC broadcast of Tokyo 2020 was lamented as a major disappointment and, by any other recent benchmark, that sentiment could be corroborated, as ratings plunged 52.4% from the Rio 2016 Games. Still, the ratings more than tripled the next highest-rated program offered during the time period, and NBC often outperformed the next eight highest-rated channels combined. The Opening Ceremonies drew virtually the same ratings as Oprah's televised chat with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, yet the ratings for the Olympics (17 million) "sucked so bad" while the ratings for the Harry and Meghan interview (17.1 million) were hailed as a "staggering… cultural earthquake." Ratings dipped slightly (to 15.5 million) for the entire Games, yet it's useful to note that these encompassed over 60 hours of primetime; Harry and Meghan's interview? Just one.

Many reasons pervaded for why such a drop in ratings could be justified, including the lingering pandemic, troubling time zones, and the general fragmentation of modern television via streaming options. However, such ratings signal larger realities as media continues to transform. Some of the realities are more specific to the U.S., but others harken at global changes. Those include:

The uses and gratifications problem. Unlike a Netflix, HBO Max, or Apple+ program that is released and then can be consumed in any manner at any time on any device (as long as you're a subscriber), megasporting events function differently. Most sports fans want to watch a contest as it unfolds live, but also wish for it to be offered at an ideal time–preferably right after dinner. This proves to be an impossible prospect in most cases where events occur outside one's home continent, particularly for a global event like the Olympics.

Live sports is still the magic bullet for the streaming wars. When FOX debuted as a network in the 1980s, it had many buzzworthy programs (including, but not limited to, "The Simpsons"). But what led to the emergence of nationwide FOX affiliates was the securing of NFL broadcast rights in 1993. The same is likely to happen in the streaming world. Plentiful reasons exist for this, but think of it this way: when Amazon starts streaming Thursday Night Football games exclusively in 2022, it will not only add value to its Prime subscription, but will also reap the advertising benefits. For scripted programming, the majority of viewers now skip commercials or have a streaming service that deletes them from the start. Live sports? That percentage of skipped commercials drops to the low single digits.

The HBO model is the future. Since its inception and for decades, HBO has been built on an advertiser-free model, which largely equates to a ratings-free model. Sure, HBO would like you to regularly consume their content as it cements their role as a central part of a viewer's media diet. However, all they really needed was one program that people couldn't live without. Over the years, that might have been The Sopranos, Sex and the City, Real Time with Bill Maher, or Game of Thrones. As long as you're THAT interested in a show that you're willing to spend the $15 per month for HBO's product, the company is set. Transition to the sports world and you see a streaming opportunity in the form of a magic bullet: a decent share of sports fans consider key games to be the must-see programming. Thus, streaming companies can take advantage of this while building their scripted content libraries; after all, if the key game is only available on a single streaming service, many will pay the fee only for that game, even if they have little interest in anything else the service offers. The same is certainly true for hard-core Olympic fans, of which they are legion.

And that leaves us at an intriguing crossroads post-Tokyo. The Olympics remain the biggest show on television, even if half the size they originally were. Paris will present a more North American-friendly time zone in 2024 while (hopefully) filling the stands in a post-pandemic context. The re-emergence of Olympic media narratives will resume, even if the real game is no longer about evening ratings. Ratings still matter, but they represent the battle. Streaming represents the war.

‘A Games like no other’: the demise of FTA live Olympic sport?

‘A Games like no other’ appeared to be the mantra surrounding the Tokyo Olympics. In terms of media coverage, it was for the BBC certainly an Olympics like no other in terms of the restrictions in live broadcasting. For those viewers who had grown accustomed to the plethora of choice regarding accessing live sport across the BBC’s digital platforms in 2012 and 2016, these Games differed significantly. The complex rights deal with Discovery meant that for the first time the BBC only carried two live events at any one time (one on television, the other online via the iPlayer), with catch up content being available via the red button and the iPlayer.

Perhaps fortuitously for the Corporation the time difference between the UK and Japan negated some of the impact of this, unless you were a diehard who were happy to stay up all night to catch live action, rather than snack on the catch-up programmes available during the hours of UK daylight.

Yet a new generation of sports fans has grown up with an expectation that sport only really matters if its live. This lack of live coverage of so many Olympic sports on the BBC, played out in some distinctive ways.

For example, watching the Games in Northern Ireland on the BBC meant that while the ubiquitous team GB coverage was extensive, indeed at times it felt like the Team GB Channel rather than one covering a multi-national, multi-sports event, coverage of Team Ireland was only available via catch up. Given the cultural complexity of Northern Ireland, around thirty athletes travelled to Tokyo from here representing Team GB, but others such as Rory McIlroy in golf, Eilish Flanaghan in track and field and Mark Downey in cycling all represented Team Ireland. Previous BBC Olympic coverage since Beijing 2008 has allowed access to live sports and hence highlighting Irish competitors was part of the digital service.

This time around, with only two live sports at any one time and an unrelenting focus on Team GB athletes, it was more difficult to follow Team Ireland. Indeed, such was the nature of the rights issues that unless you had access to RTE coverage (the Republic of Ireland Olympic broadcaster whose signal spills into Northern Ireland’s border counties) or you paid your subscription to Discovery, following Team Ireland live in Northern Ireland was impossible via the BBC. Those viewers in Northern Ireland that access RTE via subscription services such as Sky, also found RTE’s Olympic coverage geo-blocked, as part of the very particular IOC rights regime which mean they only cover those regions that enter the Games. Hence, RTE get the 26-county coverage for the Republic of Ireland and the BBC get GB and Northern Ireland coverage (including the 6 counties in Northern Ireland). I hope you are keeping up.

In short, not for the first time, catering for the needs of the Northern Ireland population, did not appear to be very high up the broadcasting agenda when the rights to these Games were being thought through.

The restrictions on live coverage also meant we had the tension between the BBC’s news drive to report live sporting results, while lagging in terms of its ability to show the actual event live. So, BBC sport tweets the result of the Team GB Taekwondo contest with Bradley Sinden, ten minutes before the end of the contest being watched on BBC television, prompting some consternation on Twitter.

Another consequence of the rights regime was the focus on Team GB, that at times felt like it was squeezing out the wider sporting culture and the non-GB stories that are always part of the rich tapestry of the Games. With less live sport to show, naturally the BBC were going to hone this to Team GB related events and stories, but for some older viewers such as myself (my first TV Olympics was Montreal 1976) the Games were also about discovering all these athletes, and sports, that I would know little about, but have their stories revealed by the television coverage.

Of course, in those days a British gold medal at the Games was a rarity, lest we forget that the medal glut for Team GB is a relatively recent phenomenon.

For some these Games seemed to signal the end of the free-to-air unlimited access to the Games that audiences across the UK had become accustomed to enjoying via the BBC. As reduced live coverage of the next summer Games in Paris in 2024 also looms, we ended these Games in the UK with a call from Ofcom (the UK regulator) for the government to update the legislation protecting free-to-air major international events in its proposed new broadcasting bill.

The danger is that ‘these Games like no other’ may become, in terms of access to live Olympic sports the norm for future UK viewers unwilling to pay extra for the privilege.

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The fleeting nature of an Olympic meme: virality and IOC TV rights

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It was billed as one of the top competitions of the Games, the showdown between America's Katie Ledecky and Australia's Ariane Titmus in the women's 400m freestyle at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. In a perfectly executed play, Titmus came from behind in the final lap to take the gold – but suddenly she found herself sidelined in the coverage.

In the stands her coach Dean Boxall had let loose with an unbridled celebration. Ripping off his mask and running from his designated area, he thrusted against the glass and threw up his hands, in moves he later said were inspired WWE wrestler The Ultimate Warrior.

In the next 24 hours, the moment went viral. Boxall's exuberant celebration was the latest reaction meme. NBC Olympics, the broadcaster in the US, tweeted the video with the caption 'when the pre-workout kicks in' and others followed.

But in the few days after this the impact was dulled, as one by one viral tweets had copyright infringements put up and the vision disappeared. For example a tweet by Australian journalist Josh Butler that had 11.7k likes now has a message – 'this content has been disabled by the copyright owner'. Instead, the only accounts that could use it were Olympics rights-holders and only for users in the geographical location.

It was a stark reminder how in the digital age the Olympics has never had more potential reach, but that the IOC's reliance on TV rights agreements for cash significantly limits that digital reach during the Games.

The reason for this is not surprising, television rights still make up 73% of the International Olympic Committee's revenue. It's no wonder that Tokyo went ahead, without crowds in a city locked down in a state of emergency, when the main aim was to produce a broadcast product to fulfill the commitment to its rights-holders.

Given the amount paid for these rights, it's also unsurprising that broadcasters try to protect these by lodging copyright infringement notices, and attempt to push the public to their own TV and social channels for impact. After all, they also bought digital rights in their packages.

But the lack of quick sports highlights on social platforms was clear from Tokyo. The official Olympics account could only post images after medal events, like this one. It's a stark difference to most of the world's professional sports leagues. The NBA's approach for example is all about sharing social media highlights widely and quickly to a global audience.

This leaves Olympics fans to find content through their own national broadcaster, which may or may not have made them available. In Australia in 2016 broadcaster Channel 7 made Australian viewers pay for premium access through an app. In the UK in 2021, the BBC on-sold some events to pay-TV channel Discovery.

Fundamentally in an era where the IOC is simultaneously trying to win over younger viewers by adding in sports like climbing and skateboarding, to limit the availability of Games footage to television broadcasters that are not favored by the younger generations seems like a challenge.

One answer may potentially be the over the top streaming services that have started to edge their way into the sports rights market dominated by traditional broadcasters, but they haven't yet been able to do so in a major way.

In the end, Dean Boxall's moment of fame managed to escape the grip of rights-restrictions, as it lived on in images and screenshots. For example, when the Australian state of Victoria reached a day of zero Covid-19 cases in August 2021, Victoria's Chief Health Officer posted the image of Boxall against the glass in response to the official government tweet.

Whether the Olympics can similarly escape its lucrative but restrictive TV rights agreements to maximize its digital impact remains to be seen.

Tokyo 2021: the TV Olympics

Since the emergence of television the Olympics have been made for the small screen, but for sports journalists and commentators Tokyo really was the TV Games. Covid, of course, was the main reason for the smaller journalistic presence in Japan, with reporting off the box necessary due to travel restrictions and health complications.

Journalists at previous Olympics have often had the safety net of television for covering – or not missing – key events. At Tokyo 2021, the screen was vital for both the fewer correspondents in Japan, and those watching remotely for publications across the world. As the Olympics began, it appeared to viewers and readers that the reporters and hosts were actually at the events, but as the Games wore on they were more public – or at least less private – in revealing their real locations.

In a series of tweets, Eurosport highlighted its green-screen technique for transporting medal-winning athletes from Tokyo to interviews in Munich and London. The BBC's studio was in Salford, near Manchester, more than 9000kms from the Games.

Australia's event commentators for Seven were in Melbourne, describing races off televisions considered tiny in many lounge rooms, instead of sitting live in mostly-empty stands. There were also a small number of reporters across venues for interviews, or color stories, which are usually a major feature of Olympics coverage.

In print and online, the reporting situation was similar to previous Games for reporters in Tokyo inside the 'media bubble'. But on top of the 'Olympic bingo' of stories on medal success, doping accusations and athletes misbehaving – as well as standard security checks – there were daily Covid spit tests, health monitoring and a GPS tracking app.

However, media packs were smaller, with News Corp Australia sending around 30 reporters for its national, state and community publications. *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, two of Australia's major mastheads, had only five people in Tokyo. *The Guardian* assigned five writers and a desk editor from London, a decrease of four staff from Rio, and were supported by a Tokyo correspondent and reporters focusing specifically on US and Australian markets. India's red-list status as a Covid hotspot reduced the number of journalists from the nation, and the daily health protocols increased the difficulty of coverage.

In Australia, many senior sports journalists did not travel. *The Sydney Morning Herald* ran a column from its chief sports reporter titled 'From the futon', and journalists in Tokyo noted there were many more people working remotely than in previous Olympics.

Another major change was limits to how many reporters could attend the mixed zone, where athletes pass through the media for interviews. In previous Games, Australian news organizations sent up to six journalists to ask questions, but this time were restricted to two ticket holders. Interviews did not occur face-to-face, but across a two-meter gap. While these interactions are usually brief, the conditions provided another barrier for gaining insight into events or moments. Instead, there was a greater reliance on televised quotes from the host broadcasters, rather than a team of reporters requesting extra details from athletes. In Australia, quotes attributed to Seven were frequent in reports and live updates.

Writing off television was essential for the many who could not attend, including for Australian reporters who required two weeks in quarantine when returning home. The Olympic News Service, which provides transcripts of interviews, had previously been limited to journalists at the Olympics, but was opened to news organizations covering the Games, providing access for the many reporters not based in Japan.

Live blogs have become a feature of modern reporting and were a daily staple, both because of the demands of rolling coverage, but also as the cheapest and safest seats in the house. *The Guardian's* 'Minute-by-minute' blog, building on the style of its popular football and cricket posts, combined online commentary from watching events on television with input from staff writers in Japan. Daily coverage began in Sydney then passed to London and, when required, New York.

For the casual fan, there may not have been a lot different about the coverage compared with Rio 2016. But the smaller on-the-ground reporting pool meant audiences received fewer details, more homogenous content and a reliance on updates from the carefully curated social media feeds of athletes or sports organizations. Competitor comments away from their heavy-breathing post-event interviews were more difficult and highlighted the obstacles of breaking news solely off the television.

Covid has changed the way many sports have been covered, and there is danger in newsrooms and sports organizations thinking this television-centric model can work in the future. By Paris 2024, it is hoped many things will have returned to normal, including more journalists in stadia and mixed zones, and greater access to athletes and events.

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The Olympic Channel: insights on its distinctive role in Tokyo 2020

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The Olympic Channel was launched after the Rio 2016 Olympics Closing Ceremony to deliver "a continuous exposure of Olympic sports and athletes beyond the Olympic Games period and help create anticipation while providing opportunities to 're-live the experience' after the Games." For nearly five years, the Olympic Channel has functioned as a multiplatform destination, featuring its own website and mobile app, as well as multiple social media handles. Following the eighth recommendation of the Olympic Agenda 2020+5 ("Grow digital engagement with people"), the Olympic Channel became a section of the Olympics.com website, which currently serves as a comprehensive digital destination for Olympic-themed content and news. In light of this recent development, it is worth investigating the role and output of the Olympic Channel in Tokyo 2020.

A diverse menu aimed at supplementing and enriching viewers' experience

Before the start of the Games, the Olympic Channel provided global audiences with live coverage of the torch relay, which traveled through 859 municipalities across all 47 prefectures before it arrived at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo on July 23. Given that during the Olympic Games, live broadcasts of competitions are available from Rights-Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), the Olympic Channel has focused on offering fans a 24/7 stream of distinctive content aimed at supplementing their viewing experience.

During the 17 days of the Games, the Olympic Channel delivered 408 hours of original content, drawn from an extensive library of original programming that comprises series and documentaries. This library has experienced remarkable growth since the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. In March 2018, the Olympic Channel offered 50 series (with a total of 653 episodes). In Tokyo 2020, the number of original series had increased to 107, featuring a total of 1,062 episodes. Beyond offering a regular programming schedule, a redesigned interface allows users to freely browse content in 11 different categories: #StrongerTogether, Films, Road to Tokyo, Inspired by Friendship, In Pursuit of Excellence, Never Give Up, With Respect, Olympic Memory Lane, Together As One, Around the Globe, and Through the Years.

The Olympic Channel's original content capitalizes on creative storytelling, in-depth research, and unique perspectives regarding Olympic sports. Through its extensive portfolio, the Olympic Channel offers many opportunities to transcend the nationalized approach and lacking diversity often found in sports media.

Beyond showcasing high-profile sports, the Olympic Channel provides wider visibility to minority sports, which usually remain off the radar in mainstream media, such as rowing, fencing, climbing, table tennis, pentathlon, or weightlifting. Series such as *By Her Rules*, Shakti: India's Super Women, or *Her Game* present empowering stories of female athletes, both focusing on their lives and challenges on and off the field. Alongside different series, the documentary *The Invisible Bond* lends space to the inspiring achievements of athletes with disabilities. The profiles of refugee sportsmen and sportswomen are also raised through productions such as *Camps to Champs* and *Taking Refuge: Target Tokyo 2020*. Overall, by embodying diversity and inclusiveness, the channel is instrumental in advancing the bye-law to Rule 48 of the Olympic Charter, which states that "the media coverage of the Olympic Games should spread and promote the principles and values of Olympism."

The Olympic Channel's productions also help relate the past and present. By blending contemporary and archival footage, originals such as *Time Machine*, *Legends Live On*, and the recently released *The Distance* allow audiences to revisit iconic moments in Olympic history, such as Naoko Takahashi's journey to gold in Sydney 2000. A nod to Japan's past and present is also accomplished by highlighting the rising Japanese Olympic hopefuls (*Heroes of the future*), the traditional festivals in the country (*Matsuri Japan*), and providing a daily behind-the-scenes look at the current Games (*Hello Tokyo*).

After August 9, the Olympic Channel turned its attention to Tokyo 2020 Replays. Confirming the Olympic Channel's position as a place "Where the Games Never End", the day after the Olympic flame extinguished, audiences were able to engage with content from 16 different sports, including taekwondo, shooting, archery, synchronized swimming and equestrian.

Concluding thoughts

As shown in Tokyo 2020, the Olympic Channel plays a distinctive role within the Olympic media ecosystem. This section of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'s website allows audiences to engage with a broad range of Olympic-themed content that is non-rivalrous with the live, deferred, and on-demand coverage offered by RHBs. By lending additional opportunities for nourishing citizens' understanding and appreciation of the Olympics, the platform contributes to "strengthening the uniqueness and universality of the Olympic Games," highlighted as the first recommendation of the Olympic Agenda 2020+5. To sustain and reinforce its position, the Olympic Channel should further create high-quality content to relive the best moments of Tokyo 2020, engage with users in the run-up to the forthcoming events and experiment with innovative formats. Additional opportunities to expand the already wider lens of the Olympic Channel include enhancing collaboration with National Organizing Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs).

Reshaping the Olympics media coverage through innovation

Tokyo 2020 confirmed again how technology changed forever the ways legacy sports outlets report about the Games and how we follow and interact around the mega event.

In the age of mobile devices and social platforms, celebrity athletes and the so-called 'attention economy', legacy and digital native sports media battle for relevancy in a very contested race for building communities and generating more revenue. In this context, traditional sports news outlets usually seize every mega event celebration as an unbeatable opportunity to develop a more innovative coverage that help them stand out, promote themselves as media brands and better reach their target audiences.

A few decades after sports journalism was underrated as 'toy department', this field has become a real testing ground of digital formats, technology-enhanced news storytelling, and creative initiatives and solutions to engage audiences. In so many ways sports media are nowadays at the forefront of the innovation in journalism, which is more evident every time the Olympics take place.

The Games represent a chance for sports media outlets to do something different, reshape their coverage and diversify the agenda. Journalists may dive into stories and protagonists they normally can't find time for during the regular season, and develop a more explanatory and data-driven approach to help audiences understand the keys around non-mainstream disciplines and know about what happens on the ground beyond results and post-event quotes from athletes. It is ages since the coverage of sport mega events has changed forever and so did the ways we follow the action and interact around the Games. Tokyo 2020 just came to confirm all this.

Apart from several technological innovations carried out on TV via OBS during last Olympics such as multi-camera replays, virtual 3D graphics or live and on-demand 180° stereoscopic and 360° panoramic images, legacy media adapted again their journalism to digital platforms and mobile screens, and exhibited outstanding interactive pieces, immersive features as well as sophisticated data visualizations and gamified content. This wide range of innovative workflow was mainly produced by larger newsrooms with deep-rooted graphics and visual journalism departments like *Financial Times*, *O Globo*, *El País*, *L'Équipe*, and, above all, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.

As these legacy media had already demonstrated in 2016 Rio and 2018 PyeongChang Olympics coverage, immersive storytelling can be captivating and effective for feature stories where the viewer can go deeper into a topic, familiar or not, and feel closer to the atmosphere of the event at the same time. For these reporting purposes, *The Post* published an interactive supported by videos and augmented reality to explain three new Olympic sports at Tokyo (climbing, skateboarding and surf). Meanwhile, *NYTimes* launched a series of interactive articles visualizing the extraordinary techniques of four athletes by using video and motion capture data during training sessions to create virtual and animated models. Both cases were produced by a multidisciplinary team of reporters, videographers, developers and animators who worked closely for months and even years. This means that innovation in journalism requires a plan.

Some of those new forms of digital narrative exhibited during the Tokyo Olympics were explainers that integrated infographics and full-screen video formats into responsive scrollytelling stories to help audiences understand the challenges that athletes face and get insight into what elements can make the difference to achieve a gold medal. The Frech sports outlet *L'Équipe* displayed an interactive 3D animated video to decode the most difficult acrobatic figures performed by the gymnast Simone Biles, while *NYTimes* took readers to a locomotor performance lab to reveal why speed and distance dictate the way Olympians run. Even *The Post* produced an interactive feature to examine Katie Ledecky's key strenghts in swimming. In all these beautifully-wrapped pieces, however, the starting point was gathering information from interviews to expert sources. This means that innovation does not come to substitute but to enhance traditional reporting.

Tokyo Olympics coverage also illustrated that data-driven and interpretative visualizations may offer new approaches around the event and give added value to audiences. *NYtimes* elaborated composite images to show positions of medalists at several moments in track and field races in order to visualize the speed of athletes and examine their perfomance throughout the finals. Or *Financial Times* created an alternative medal table that ranked countries by the difference to the tally they were expected to achieve, according to a mathematical model that took into account their economic, social and political characteristics.

Once more during the Games, innovation proved to be a steady workflow for multi-platform digital storytelling in which legacy sports media have become leading performers.

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Temporality of emotionalizing athletes

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Sports commentators do not "just" comment. Through delivering commentary, they may negotiate their areas of expertise, construct dramatic events, or construct/reconstruct stereotypes. What follows are my preliminary, micro-ethnographic observations of one such activity that sports commentators engage: discovering and/or constructing emotions in athletes. The following 3 examples are from the Judo matches of the Japanese Abe siblings, aired during the BBC's 2020 Olympics coverage, Day 2: BBC One 12:15-15:00. Two live commentators narrated the matches, who I refer to as C1 and C2. In performing conversation analysis, I apply Paul ten Have's transcript conventions.

Generally speaking, live, play-by-play sports commentators provide backstory, observations, and accordingly, interpret an athlete/team's inner state in real-time. See, for instance, how C1 contextualizes Uta Abe's facial expression at the time of her victory (found at 2:35.25 in the abovementioned clip): **See Fig 1.**

During this comment, Abe's mixed (smiling/crying) facial expression appears twice on the screen (where the transcript is bolded). When it first appears, C1 speeds up by connecting her two sentences without pause ("her=you"), emotionalizing Abe's real-time actions while the visual reference is still fresh among viewers (or accessible, as it ends up appearing again).

However, C1's comment is not only about this particular moment; it packages the larger scale of Abe's emotional journey — "so much pressure" that she must have experienced in her past few years — into this momentary facial expression. Indeed, the work of emotionalizing may connect the audience to multiple points of emotional states that athletes supposedly go through.

Going back to a moment before Abe wins, there is a scene where her competitor, Amandine Buchard, comes out of a tackle made by Abe. The camera briefly catches Buchard's facial expression that may indicate concern or nervousness (2:30.02). Nine seconds later (2:30.11), C1 labels it as a state of being "startled": **See Fig 2.**

C2 had been talking during the 9 seconds prior, so it is natural that C1's observation was offered in a later turn. Yet, this "delay" achieves something else. It is precisely 9 seconds later — where the referred expression disappears and Buchard has re-oriented herself to the game — that it becomes possible for C1 to retrospectively interpret the expression and contextualize it around her current state of having "calmed down"; being "startled" is no longer a negative affair, but acts as the evidence for the claim that "she is mentally very tough". Buchard's process of composing herself would not have been embodied in the same way had C1 commented on the initial "startled" expression separately, as it was happening.

The athlete's (constructed) emotional state can also be prolonged with live commentary. Immediately after the above mentioned match was the gold medal contest of Uta Abe's brother, Hifumi Abe and Vazha Margvelashvili. The already-crowned Olympic champion sister watches from the sidelines, and the camera catches her smile in the middle of it (2:38.15 & 2:38.17).

A few seconds after the smile was on the screen, C1 emotionalizes it (2:38.19): **See Fig 3.**

Abe's smile is long gone from the viewers by the time C1 finishes her comment, and C1 slows her delivery and uses a falling intonation at the end, which could suggest the topic closure. However, C2 immediately latches on and re-topicalizes the smile (2:38.33): **See Fig 4.**

C2 not only revives Abe's constructed emotion, but upgrades it with the adjective, "massive". This renewed assessment creates room for C1 to react to and revisit its meaning (Abe is not just relaxed, she is "so" relaxed), which is picked up by C2, who adjusts it by emphasizing the "now"-ness of Abe's relaxed state (in further contrast to her previous state). While these additional comments could well be a way of filling time while waiting for next "comment-able" moment, the prolonged topicalization gives space for the commentators to co-develop the meaning: from a smile of a relaxing sister, to a massive smile, to the kind of smile we viewers can only witness after someone has won an Olympic gold medal.

In one hand, emotionalizing athletes is about "what", e.g. interpreting — or creating — emotions in athletes (which begs the question for another discussion: just how do live commentators socialize audience with what athletes ought to feel or not?). On the other hand, it is also about "when". Emotionalization may be done on the spot, delayed, prolonged or revived, often packing multiple time-scales into a momentary action, such as a glimpse of a facial expression of an athlete. Such embodied temporalities provide audiences with various sense-making tools to experience the athletes' emotional journey — regardless of it being discovered or constructed.

Figure 1

C1: she is (.) a world champion at the age of eighteen and at the age of twenty-one (.) she is no:w (0.2) the Olympic champion. (0.5) **there's been so** much pressure on her=you can see **it on her face**.

Figure 2

C1: when she came out of that=you could just see a little bit of (0.3) a startled face?=but she immediately calmed herself down, she is mentally very tough, Buchard.

Figure 3

C1: his sister is smiling=his sister is watching on,=she: (.) can re-h-la-hh-x because she already (0.3) h-kno-h-ws that she is the Olympic champion (0.6) can they get <a second (.) family (.) gold medal (0.5) in this session.>

Figure 4

C2: >°yea°<, mA:ssive smile fr[om um, (.) Uta there, and um (.)
C1: [hehehehehehe
C2: she is ([ )
C1: [she is so relaxed
C2: oh y[eah-hh she is now
C1: [hehehehe what a difference a gold medal makes
C2: she is now

New Olympic Sports: the mediatization of action sports through the Olympic Games 2020 Tokyo

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One of the most remarkable moments of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics occurred very early in the first week inside the Ariake Urban Sports Park. Maybe it was not the most important moment, but a moment symbolizing an upcoming future of the games nonetheless. With just a combined 42 years between the three medal winners, the podium of women's skateboarding competition was the youngest group of medalists ever in Olympic history. Thirteen year-old Japanese Momiji Nishiya as the first gold medalist in skateboarding, followed by 13 year old Rayssa Leal from Brazil, and the second Japanese athlete Funa Nakayama, being the oldest medalist at 16 years of age.

This scenario showcases both challenges and solutions for the future of the Olympics and for the sport itself in one Olympic moment. Skateboarding was one of five new sports in Tokyo, presenting the inclusion of the next action sport into the Olympic program. The mega-event has been searching intensively for a younger audience for several decades to generate new ways of attention and sponsorship to freshen up the look and feel of a competition getting older every four years. The question arises, what does this Olympic blood replacement do with action sports?

Olympic mediatization

Thorpe and Wheaton (2011) used a post-subcultural studies approach defining the intersections and problems between the lifestyle or sports and corporations like the IOC or media conglomerates with the inclusion of windsurfing into the Olympics in 1984, snowboarding in 1998, and bicycle motocross (BMX) in Beijing in 2008. Thorpe and Wheaton concluded, "in particular, the reactions to and effects of, the inclusion of each action sport into the Olympic model are influenced by the cultural status and economic power of the action sport culture and industry during the incorporation process" (p. 13).

Five new sports for 2020 Tokyo were announced by the IOC on August 3, 2016 (olympics.com, 2016) - skateboarding, surfing, climbing, karate and soft-/baseball. In a five-year process, these sports became part of the Olympic program after adapting IOC's rules and regulations, attracting new sponsorships and athletes, generating media focus, and getting attention and professionalization on different levels. This process can be defined as a mediatization of sport (Frandsen, 2020). We conducted several in-depth interviews with athletes, coaches, and media persons of these action sports in Germany in a research project in May and June of 2021. In this contribution, I will present some results pertaining to skateboarding.

Skateboarding entering the Olympic program

The idea of skateboarding as riding on asphalt waves was invented in the 1950s. Schwier and Kilberth (2018) described skateboarding as an extraordinary way for (sporting) life and an element of lifestyle for individuals. Looking to the Tokyo Olympics, the skateboarding scene was divided with one part hoping for higher recognition and more memberships, bigger financial resources and attention by mass media, and another part fearing the impact of the Olympic mega-event, professionalization, and a form of disempowerment for athletes. While the influence of contests like the X games has already changed the sport, skateboarding seems much more important for the Olympics than the Olympics for skateboarding.

The former German and European champion, Alex Mizurov, stated in one of the interviews conducted for this research project, "We skaters will profit from new sponsors through the Olympics…By being included in the Olympics, we hope for money, support and recognition of different areas." The 33 year-old professional athlete is looking into a bright future: "Skateboarding will adjust to media and grow on different levels. By 2030, the membership will double worldwide. For this new Olympic generation, the sport will be bigger and more organized with the addition of new skater parcs and professional federations." In opposition, the member of a German regional skateboard federation, Daniel Schindler, mentioned in another research interview: "Skateboarding will never be highlighted by mass media, even if it becomes an Olympic sport. We skaters wanted a new organizational structure, and the games turned skateboarding into a commercial event." The interviews presented distinguish developments of the mediatization of skateboarding on a societal, institutional, and structural level (Horky, 2009). The sport seems to be losing its lifestyle attitude, while transforming into a regulated professional sport. A deeper analysis will be prepared.

Digital conclusion

"Skateboarding is more than a sport, it's art," US-skater Jagger Eaton stated, going live on Instagram seconds after winning the bronze medal in Tokyo. One Olympic goal has already been reached: "These Games are expected to be the most digitally engaged Games ever," said Christopher Carroll, Director of Digital Engagement and Marketing for the IOC. Fans at home were particularly interested by the new action sports added to the Olympic program in Tokyo. The top tweet within the first week was about Rayssa Leal, the 13-year-old Brazilian silver medalist, which attracted 460,000 likes (olympics.com 2021).

Media wins medal for coverage of athletes as people, instead of entertainers

Over the past two decades, sports reporters and media outlets have shifted from the viewpoint of athletes as entertainment and mythologizing their sports prowess—the "sportainment" model of sports coverage—to presenting athletes as people with inherent human qualities and issues. That trend of humanization was front and center in coverage of some of the biggest stories coming out of the 2020 Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The best example is the coverage of Simone Biles, who withdrew from the women's gymnastics team competition after her first rotation on the vault. Biles explained she had a case of the "twisties" and needed time to focus on her mental well-being. American sprinter Noah Lyles and Japan's Naomi Osaka were also open and honest about their own internal struggles.

Media coverage of the stories of these athletes has been mostly positive and focused on them as people, with the exception of some conservative commentators who attacked Biles as selfish and saying she quit on her team. But many lauded Biles, Lyles, and Osaka for their courage to put their own health first over the competitions that rely on their star power for ticket sales and ratings. These athletes were also praised for bringing to light a topic in mental health that has historically been an issue that people avoided, especially in the sports sections of daily newspapers. Simultaneously, sports reporters should be commended for their humanizing coverage of these athletes, as opposed to what happened in the past when reporters may have denigrated the athletes for putting themselves first. The coverage mostly focused on Biles, Lyles and Osaka as people first and athletes second, which is the way it should be.

This coverage is essential for changing the societal dichotomy between athletes on the field of play and athletes off the field. Some fans still view sports as an escape from their daily doldrums and view athletes as entities that exist for their entertainment—people who are to be seen and not heard. Athletes who give their opinions on issues of social or political importance, like other people in other fields do all the time, are shouted down by corners of society that do not care what that athlete has to say. By humanizing athletes, especially in this era of increased emphasis placed on social issues, sports journalists can possibly accomplish two goals: break down the view of athletes as simply entertainers and continue moving sports journalism away from its history of mostly substandard coverage on social issues related to sports.

Sports journalism's history as the "toy department" of the newsroom—a place of fun and frivolity—is well documented, but that label may be anachronistic in today's sports journalism field. As my research shows, sports journalists today want to be seen as more than just sports reporters. They want to show their peers and the public that they can handle any stories that occur on their beat besides the customary game stories, practice reports, and transaction coverage.

Some of today's best sports reporters *want* to write about a former multimillionaire athlete who lost everything and lives in a studio apartment in the middle of nowhere. They *embrace* the challenge of discussing the mental trauma some athletes went through as children and teenagers, and how that trauma impacts who they are today. Some media outlets are cutting through the noise of routine sports coverage by focusing on humanity stories, underrepresented people in sports, and the impact of sports on society, as one sports editor told me in an interview.

And as these types of stories become more accepted as the norm, more space opens in the sports journalism field for other sports reporters to cover these issues. In terms of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, a "space of possibles" opens and grows as more sports reporters move toward coverage of athletes that is more humanistic than it has historically been.

In the heat of the moment after Biles withdrew from the competition, coverage focused on what this meant for the medal hopes of a U.S. team minus the most dominant athlete in the history of the sport. But after those heat-of-the-moment reactions and after Biles explained her situation, many sports reporters focused on Biles the human, which is the way it should be.

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Reporting at a distance: Stricter working conditions and demands on sports journalists during the Olympics

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The scene had something unreal about it: from outside, we can only surmise that the German cyclist, Simon Geschke, is actually behind a window on the upper floors of the quarantine hotel in Tokyo. From down below on the street, the camera of the German tv broadcaster, ZDF, has to zoom right up close – entering the building is not allowed. The games were over for Geschke before they even began. A positive Covid-test meant isolation instead of competition.

This Olympic Games led not only to stricter conditions on the athletes, but also radically altered working conditions for sports journalists. Mixed zones and press conferences were subject to stringent hygiene conditions, and the distance from those involved in the Games was spatially visible. Athletes could more easily avoid probing questions, while superficial and brief appearances by sportspeople could be justified by citing the COVID-19 precautions. In times like these, journalists trailing athletes was an impossibility - untrammelled encounters on the Olympic grounds or in the facilities ceased to exist, and spontaneous interviews scarcely happened.

For journalist, it meant working at a distance and denying consumers of media their demand for closeness to athletes, coaches, and events. Yet even before the pandemic, exchanges between representatives of the media and sportspeople were already occurring through filters. Spokespeople have a decisive role today in getting topics aired, dealing with media enquiries and catering to the relevant target-audiences. When things are "normal", press offices already obstruct direct access and any authentic image of high-performance sport and its protagonists. COVID-19 exacerbated the situation further.

A research project from the Ansbach University of Applied Sciences analysed changes in the working relationship between spokespersons from national leagues and associations (like German Football Association or German Athletic Federation) and journalists covering this high-performance sport during the COVID-19 crisis in Germany. More than half of all the spokespersons reported experiencing greater distance from journalists. Forty-six percent of the spokespersons also indicated an increase in journalists' expectations during the pandemic.

Increased expectations were due to constant changes coupled with requests for ever more rapid responses. Therefore, the function of spokespeople has become more significant gatekeepers in times of reduced access. Journalists' attitude of expecting more signals an increasing dependence on the output from clubs and associations, which are themselves developing into their own media operations. The function of the gatekeeper selecting topics is likely to shift more and more to clubs and associations – and to sportspeople who are producing their own media images for their clubs.

The Olympics highlighted this new relationship. A "playbook" outlined how journalists had to behave on site. Normally, an Olympic accreditation is the most important door-opener for reporting. With it, one gains access to the arenas, to the mixed-zones, the press conferences, and the Olympic village. However, during the first fourteen days of the Games, journalists were only allowed to visit hotels, media buses, contest locations, and restaurants prescribed by the organisers. Additionally, journalists had to submit a schedule of their movements in advance in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. A lot of journalists viewed these restrictions as constraints on their press freedoms.

However, smaller media companies who could not afford to arrive 14 days in advance of the Olympic Games were concerned about these new restrictions. It is no surprise that many media representatives did not want to make the trip to Tokyo at all. We can, therefore, presume restrictions rendered reporting of these Olympic Games more superficial and less balanced. The distance from the protagonists and the dependence on official spokespersons may have proven to be too much for journalists.

This scenario benefited the organizers and sportspeople. The circumstances scarcely allowed asking unpleasant questions about conditions on the ground or about fantastical world records. Celebrated athletes, who are always the focus of attention, could avoid tedious press commitments.

Journalist and sportspeople can at least see one opportunity – the rise of digital options. The pandemic brought about the precedent of video interviews in sports journalism, allowing for more flexible in location and timing. Computers create proximity, as was in the case of the cyclist, Geschke: the interview between journalist and sportsperson at the Olympics took place digitally via video-call. The cyclist's laptop-camera made it possible to view a sparse hotel room – and allowed the tv viewers to share the bleakness of isolation right up close.

Nigeria: Olympic Games a mystery for rural dwellers in Lagos

While the rest of the world celebrated the 2020 Olympics for a fortnight in August, some parts of the world went about their business unperturbed. Nigeria is a great example of this phenomenon. In the West, it may be that there is a perception that everyone else in the world is tuned to the Olympics. However, as those in rural areas in Nigeria demonstrate, millions of people may not even know what the Olympic Games are all about.

The above is especially a mystery given that it is widely believed that the Olympics is watched by most of the world. At least, television ratings and number of televisions tuned to the Games create a sense of the world's eyes fixated on watching the games. When Nigeria won the 1996 soccer gold medal, the country celebrated and it reached deep into the rural areas. But that was football. For most of those Nigerians, what they were aware of was that Nigeria had just beaten soccer powers, Brazil and Argentina, to win the gold in 1996. Few cared about the name of the competition and even fewer were aware that other sports had been part of that mega event in 1996. It underlines the popularity of football in the country.

At the 2020 Olympics, none of Nigeria's football teams – men and women – qualified for a trip to Tokyo and it is understandable, then, that most Nigerians were not interested. But was it just about the fact that the national soccer teams did not qualify?

Well, I interviewed some Nigerians in four rural regions in Lagos (Epe, Ibeju-Lekki, Badagry and Ikorodu) as well as media staff at two radio stations (Bond FM and Radio Lagos) that serve the larger metropolitan area of Lagos as well as the four rural regions nearby. Radio is the communication medium of choice for most rural dwellers in Africa. The stations were created to serve rural dwellers in Lagos who do not understand the conventional English language. The radio stations use Yoruba, and not English, for programming and, thus, are effective in reaching those rural dwellers.

The two Yoruba language radio stations failed to introduce a special segment or program to create awareness concerning the Games. The radio station staff note that, at the station; "we don't see the need to dedicate a whole program or airtime just to talk about the Olympics. We can always do this inside our sports programs or sports news." Other sportscasters share the same opinion. Therefore, while the radio stations shared infrequent news about the Games (given Nigeria's poor performance at the Games), they failed to highlight them as part of an important ongoing megaevent.

The effect of this lack of special attention to a mega event like the Olympics is telling. Those who reside in the local areas consequently were unaware of the 2020 Olympics. This lack of media attention and the absence of Nigeria's most popular sports teams had adverse effect on interest in watching the Games. A rural inhabitant in Badagry knew nothing about the Games. Instead, he asked: "What is the meaning of Olympig (sic)?" It was a genuine mispronunciation of Olympics. When corrected, he retorted: "Oh my brother, I hear them say Olympig on Radio Lagos, of late, but I don't know what that means." Other rural dwellers also lacked the knowledge of what the Olympic Games really was about.

To have followed the Olympics closely in rural Nigeria requires someone to be avidly interested in sport and not just interested in football. Importantly, it also requires that the person is literate in English language. These requirements are hard to come by in rural Nigeria where close to 100 million Nigerians reside. Thus, while Nigerians in the urban centers in Lagos and other cities across the country may have tuned in to watch the Olympics, there are millions of Nigerians that were largely unaware of the Olympic Games.

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Tokyo 2020: a look through the screen of Brazilian television

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The COVID-19 pandemic altered, for the first time in history, the Olympic calendar, extending the four-year cycle to five. One of the factors that weighed most against the cancellation of the Games was precisely the investment made by television stations worldwide. These stations disbursed billions of dollars for the broadcasting rights. With the pandemic increasing, there was apprehension until the final moments, forcing broadcasters to prepare new plans.

In Brazil, Grupo Globo purchased open TV broadcasting rights. Despite not having paid for the exclusivity, the broadcaster's proposal was the only one. There was competition, however, in cable TV with SporTV channels, linked to Grupo Globo, with four different signals and Bandsports, which maintained one channel. In addition to broadcasts on open and closed TV, the Globo group made available 40 streaming signals, without narration, for access by the Brazilian public. This analysis restricts itself to broadcasters that had broadcasting rights to the event.

With the need to reduce costs and logistical difficulties, one of the alternatives adopted was to increase the volume of off-tube transmissions, thus reducing the number of professionals in Japan. However, in one instance, the stations showed behind-the-scenes moments in which narrators appeared on video.

There was also a preference for employing, as commentators, former athletes or athletes who are not participating at the Games. The discussion about the roles played by journalists and athletes is intense in journalism schools across Brazil. It is undeniable that athletes, by experiencing the sport and often having personal contact with the competitors, have access to details difficult for journalists to approach. On the other hand, the presence of these professionals only works alongside good communicators, and the narrators play a crucial role in translating technical terms and bringing the language of specialists close to the public. The evidence is seen in sports, like skateboarding, that are popular among the Brazilian public but are not frequently broadcast in the country. However, the presence of former athletes often leads to controversial discourses on refereeing decisions and nationalism. This is evident in sports such as surfing, skateboarding, boxing, and judo. Although relevant, the insistence of some athletes and narrators in blaming judges for the Brazilian defeats give some broadcasts an excessively nationalistic tone.

The narrators also had, on many occasions, to demonstrate eclecticism by being challenged in the same broadcast to move through different modalities due to the downsizing of the teams and the holding of several simultaneous events in which the Brazilian public could be interested.

It should also be noted that the holding of an Olympic edition with a time zone of 12 hours between the host country and Brazil caused the competition to be shifted to night, and morning hours in Brazil. This change made it possible for open TV to maintain its usual programming with few changes. On cable TV, the big challenge was to keep the schedule during the day, which was done with reruns and debate programs. Overall, this brought benefits to coverage of the Tokyo Olympic Games in Brazil. The early evening, considered prime time for the audience, was filled with compelling debates. With a certain distance between the time the sporting events took place and the program, more than just commenting on the disputes, important issues were addressed, such as the mental health of the competitors. Sport psychology gained prominence mainly after the withdrawal of the American Simone Biles from some of the gymnastics events. The presence of athletes who defended causes related to the LGBTQIA+ community was also the subject of discussions, as well as some protests carried out by athletes.

It is valuable to point out that such themes (mental health, gender issues, and political protests) have always permeated the Olympic Games, not being a novelty in Tokyo 2020. For the Brazilian public, the big news may have been the "discovery" by the media communication that Olympic coverage can go far beyond medal disputes.

Equestrian sports in media through hundred Olympic years. A roundtrip from focus to shade and back again?

In the Tokyo Olympic Games 2021, the Swedish team in equestrian jumping won a gold medal. The endeavor was praised in Swedish mainstream media and the team was described as "winning an Olympic gold medal for everybody in the sport", a "historic triumph – all sports included" and in terms of that everybody in Sweden now were part of the "equestrian cult". The coverage is possibly not surprising. The team won a gold medal – and research has shown that gold medalists receive extra attention. Even so, it is interesting as contemporary equestrian sports are generally receiving little attention in mainstream media and are often described as a hobby for young girls, rather than sports.

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, horses and riding were associated with masculinity and men's work. Horses and men worked together in agriculture, forestry in the transport sector and in the army. Cavalry officers comprised the majority of those competing at the racetracks and in other equestrian competitions. In Sweden today – and in contrast to many other countries – horse riding is one of the most popular sports for children and young people and the Equestrian Federation is one of the top ten sport federations in terms of activities, the number of membership associations, and individual members. A majority of riders are girls and women. We argue that the development can explain changing media coverage.

In the Stockholm Olympic Games in 1912, the current equestrian disciplines (dressage, show-jumping and eventing) were included for the first time. At that time only "gentlemen" riders, as determined by the equestrian federations in their respective nations, were allowed to compete and women and non-commissioned officers were excluded from the competitions until 1952 (dressage), 1956 (jumping) and 1964 (eventing). In the 1912 games, ten countries competed and Sweden won the gold medal for the team event. The Swedes continued to show their strength and won gold medals in the team event in 1920 and 1924 too. In the media coverage of these early Olympic games the riders, officers in the Swedish army, were proudly presented. The equestrian events were given attention and described in similar ways up until the games in 1956, in which a Swedish non-commissioned officer won a gold medal in eventing.

Over time the number of competing nations has increased in equestrian sports in the Olympics, and so has the number of women athletes. The top nations have been Germany, Sweden, the United States, and France. Despite this, equestrian sports have barely been covered in Swedish media and the question of whether equestrian sports are real sports has been debated. The questioning can be exemplified with a discussion following Rolf-Göran Bengtsson and his horse Ninja La Silla winning a gold medal in the EC in jumping in 2011. The year after he won the Swedish Jerring Award – a prize instigated by the sport section of the Swedish Radio. The award is named after a Swedish radio personality, Sven Jerring, and is given to a Swedish athlete elected by the radio audience. It is counted as the finest sports prize as it is 'the prize of the people'. In the time that followed, a media debate on whether equestrian sports were real sports followed. In a chronicle in the tabloid paper Aftonbladet, the sport journalist Lasse Anrell wrote "Who the heck is Rolf Göran Bengtsson?" and suggested that the prize should be given to the horse instead implying that the award was given to a care taker of the horse rather than a real athlete. Anrell was one of the most prominent sport journalists in Sweden at that time, and had, except numerous articles, written more than 40 books that had been translated to over 15 languages. His articles were often referred to and came to form the agenda for the Swedish sport-discussion. His chronicle about Bengtsson started a discussion about equestrian sports in Sweden. Several other media voices underlined that to ride a horse was a strenuous as sitting in a couch. In addition, journalists suggested that the Jerring Award had been subjected to a 'voice coup' from young girls – not real sport fans. The initial discussion pointed to how sport journalists dismissed equestrian sports as real sports, but riders all over Sweden protested openly and suggested that sport journalists overlooked horse riding for sexist reasons. It was stated that equestrian sports had been marginalized in traditional media, not least by male sports journalists lacking (like many men at this time) experience of horse riding.

Anrell was subsequently challenged to try horse riding on one of the Swedish horse-riding schools. The experience made him change his statement. Arnell's chronicle can be seen as a turning point for media coverage of equestrian sports. Increased appreciation of women's sport and the digital transformation of media are others. There are several social media platforms and influencers covering equestrian sports on elite and grassroot levels reaching riders of all ages. As horse riding is a popular leisure time activity for these readers, the media landscape may be about to change. A sign of this is possibly the headings and articles following the gold winners in Tokyo. The coming years will show us whether the change sustains.

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An Olympic utopia: separating politics and sport

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Olympic media research on Communication and Sport has been very significant among scholars over the past two decades. As Andrea N. Geurin and Michael L. Naraine highlighted in an article published in *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, after examining 221 English-language articles published on this field, a "significant proportion of scholarship focused on the Summer Olympic Games, the United States, newspapers accounts of the Games, and utilized media framing and agenda setting frameworks and the content analysis methodology".

However, due to the context in which the Tokyo 2020 Olympics have been celebrated, within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, these Summer Games can be a fantastic study object to deeply improve Olympic media studies topics and methods. As Arthur L. Caplan and Lee H. Igel suggested in *Forbes* some weeks before the Games started, Olympic media coverage would need to balance "the sport side and the public health particulars".

In order to contrast this hypothesis, a content analysis of the cover pages and the main features of the opening ceremony, published in the mainstream Spanish and Catalan sport press (*As, Marca, Mundo Deportivo, Sport, L'Esportiu de Catalunya*) was conducted. Content analysis can help us to find primary new insights for future multidisciplinary and multiapproach research, as Guerin and Naraine defend in their article. Tables 1 and 2 show the initial results of this analysis.

Although since the foundation of the IOC, in 1894, the Games have been considered no place for politics, this has been more utopia than reality. Regarding media coverage, there are significant differences among the Spanish newspapers edited in Madrid (*As* and *Marca*) and Catalonia (*Mundo Deportivo*, *Sport* and *L'Esportiu de Catalunya*), above all in relation to the prominence given to the Spanish delegation and the Spanish bearers.

While Madrid newspapers situate the Spanish bearers on the cover page, and the composition of the national delegation is one of the central topics of the feature –representing a good example of what Michael Billig identified as "banal nationalism"–, the three newspapers edited in Catalonia (Barcelona and Girona) use other images of the ceremony to illustrate the beginning of the Games on the cover page, and the composition of the national team was blurred within the feature. For example, *Mundo Deportivo* and *L'Esportiu de Catalunya* also highlighted how the ceremony included elements to strengthen the values of diversity and inclusion, which have been included in the Tokyo 2020 Games Vision by IOC, and they also reported on the Japanese protesters against the Games outside the Olympic stadium.

However, the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on Japanese society became one of the main topics of every feature we analyzed. More important even than the words of Thomas Bach, president of the IOC, which only received significant attention in the feature published by *L'Esportiu de Catalunya*. Accordingly, we should imagine that the COVID-19 pandemic might not help Japan to strengthen its country brand during and after the Games, as China did in 2008, or Qatar expects to do in 2022 hosting the FIFA World Cup.

As the primary results of this content analysis suggest, adopting a geopolitical perspective can enrich the analysis of sport media narratives. The geopolitical multiapproach analysis allows researchers to consider all those aspects of the Games that impact on the social, political and economic systems, drawing the main synergies among them and adopting a critical point of view that breaks the traditional and non-real "sport and politics Olympic utopia".

Table 1. Messages and images of the cover pages

Name of newspaper	*Message of the cover page*	*Image of the cover page*
As	"Finally, the Games"	The Spanish flag bearers
Marca	"Hope as a flag"	The Spanish flag bearers
Mundo Deportivo	"Silence, the Games!"	The drones spectacle
Sport	"Tokyo starts the Games without public"	The Olympic cauldron
L'Esportiu de Catalunya	"Hope!"	The entrance of the Olympic flag in the stadium

Table 2. The opening ceremony features: main topics, images and page

Name of newspaper	*Main topics*	*Main images*	*Page*
As	The context of the pandemic in Japan and information on the composition of the Spanish delegation.	The Spanish flag bearers	The cover page (page 1) of a special newspaper supplement
Marca	A description of the opening ceremony and information on the Spanish delegation.	A collage of images with different moments of the ceremony.	Page 4 of the special newspaper supplement.
Mundo Deportivo	The context of the pandemic in Japan, a description of the opening ceremony, the protests outside the stadium and the new values of diversity and inclusion.	A collage of images with different moments of the ceremony, especially the drones spectacle.	Page 2 and 3 of the newspaper.
Sport	The context of the pandemic in Japan and the structure of the ceremony, viewed as a "television spectacle".	A collage of images with different moments of the ceremony.	Page 28 of the newspaper.
L'Esportiu de Catalunya	The context of the pandemic in Japan, the drones spectacle during the ceremony, Thomas Bach's speech and the new values of diversity and inclusion.	A collage of images with different moments of the ceremony, specially the Olympic cauldron.	Pages 2 and 3 of the newspaper.

"Everything seemed very complicated": Journalist experiences of covering the 2020 Paralympic Games

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The Paralympic Games provide an important opportunity to influence public opinion on athletes with a disability. The International Paralympic Committee seeks to raise public awareness of athletes with a disability. Their aim is to help the public to see the sports of the disabled as more than just a therapeutic tool, but as elite sport. However, the Paralympic Games are often the only way for athletes with a disability to enter news channels around the world.

The Tokyo Paralympic Games differed from previous games. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was postponed for a year, and spectators could not be at the venue. The media played a more important role than ever before because only they brought athletes with a disability to the attention of audiences around the world. In Tokyo 2020, 800 foreign journalists and photographers reported directly from the venue, in addition to the 500 local journalists and photographers, and over 1,600 journalists related to broadcasting. Many more did not come to Japan at all due to strict measures against coronavirus. A journalist from the Czech Republic told me: *"I've been to two previous Paralympic Games, but I didn't dare to fly to Tokyo this year. Everything seemed very complicated, and I think it would make it very difficult for me to do a good job."*

I was one of those journalists who covered the 2020 Paralympics from Tokyo, for Czech national media, and also conducted a number of interviews with international journalists in Tokyo. Journalists (regardless of coronavirus vaccination) had to undergo repeated PCR testing, were only allowed to move around sports venues in specific zones, had to keep a two-meter distance from athletes in the mixed zones, and were not allowed to walk the city for 14 days. They were confined to the hotel, the Media Press Centre or individual sports venues. A Spanish television producer regretted the absence of social contact: *"For me, it is so hard because I have to come to Tokyo for the Olympic Games, and then I stayed 14 days in quarantine, and then returned home. And when I arrive to Tokyo, again, I have to spend another 14 days in quarantine."*

A press journalist from Slovakia told me: *"In addition to traditional security measures, health care has been added, and this combination of security and health sterility is killing for journalists."* A French journalist who wrote for the French Paralympic Committee talked about some of the required measures that did not make much sense: *"It is a little bit weird actually because we cannot talk to athletes and be close to them, we cannot go inside the stadium, so I don't think these are very good measures."*

However, most journalists got used to the new work habits very quickly, such as a journalist from Switzerland who told me: *"We can't meet the athletes, do some shots. In the beginning, I found it crazy, but now I think that's okay, and it works anyway."*

How we report about athletes with a disability is changing, but their life stories remain

Dave Arthur described the inequality between Olympians and Paralympians, which he explains by the attractiveness of a sporting event, team, competition, or individual from a commercial perspective. The situation changed significantly before the Paralympic Games in London in 2012, mainly due to media coverage, sponsorship, and media campaigns. The British Paralympic Committee, for example, have published a media guide that describes how to communicate athletes with a disability, what terminology to use, or how to relate an athlete's life story. Paralympic sport is becoming more professional, and journalists are changing the style of their articles and reports. The life stories of athletes with a disability no longer predominate, instead journalists focus on performance. The press officer for Team USA told me: *"I think they are athletes first and, you know, obviously people first as well, but they should be covered the same way as other professional athletes."* In some countries, the whole strategy and presentation of some national teams is changing: *"Actually, in France, we have the approach that we want to put the Paralympics and Olympics at the same level and give to the athletes with a disability more visibility than they had before."*

A Spanish television producer highlighted that the audience's perception has changed, whilst the viewers are paying more attention to athletes with a disability than in previous years. A journalist from the UK also observed a greater journalist interest in Paralympic sport: *"There is definitely more awareness about this sport in journalism now."*

She also sees the attitude of journalists towards the Paralympic athletes has changed: *"I think there is more sensitivity now about not going and just asking people in particular if there is any traumatic reason behind the disability."* But the stories of what happened to athletes, how they came to their disability, how they overcame it, can educate the public on disability-related issues. A journalist from Iran revealed his motivation for writing such stories: *"I put life stories into the articles to inspire other people with a disability."* A Japanese journalist explains why he writes about the life stories. *"I think it is important, and people want to know why they have a disability or why they do not have legs."*

Despite the recent changes, the media coverage of Paralympic sports is going to stay clinched between the reporting about athletes as professionals and the life stories easily accessible to general audiences.

"A ceremony for television": the Tokyo 2020 media ritual

The Olympic Games opening ceremonies are cultural performances that can be understood as a ritual and a spectacle. This performance is characterized by articulating universal messages and values with local cultural meanings. As a ritual, it marks the beginning of a global event and transmits through its symbols (athletes, flag, anthem, oaths and pyre) a set of values of universal aspiration. As a spectacle, it celebrates the culture of the country that organizes the Games. These ceremonies are means of cultural communication and a media spectacle at same time.

The Olympic ceremonies are shaped to meet the television language and to excite a large audience. This has several consequences. The media itself 'constructs' the ceremonies through images and texts that do not portray it in its entirety, but cut and redefine it in some way.

What the public sees at home is not the same event that is seen in the sports arena. You often have access at home to details that are impossible to perceive in the vast space of the stadium. On the hand, the local ambiance cannot be captured by camera lenses. However, if the images provided to the world are the same for everyone, the way in which the ceremony is narrated depends on the emphases, comments and stories that each national television gives according to local meaning. It causes the original content of the ceremony to be filtered by national lenses, and may generate messages in some way different. Let's take as an example some notes on how televisions from Brazil, UK, Portugal and Iran broadcast the opening ceremony of the Tokyo 2020 Games on July 23rd.

In respect of the British context, BBC's broadcasting of the opening ceremony had its mission of "to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which *inform, educate and entertain*" (BBC, 2021, emphases added) clearly apparent. During the 'artistic programme' part of the ceremony (see IOC, 2021) both commentators uttered mostly informative content that sought to explain to the British audience what was taking place. Meanwhile, during 'the parade of the athletes' part of the ceremony, comments focused more on the educative aspect of BBC's mission by providing content in terms of facts and figures of the different countries entering the Tokyo Olympic Stadium. This educative content was not only in respect of current and historical general sporting knowledge, but also more trivia type of knowledge in terms of history, geography and demography of all the different nations.

In Brazil, the broadcast, made by a commercial broadcaster, was fundamentally focused on the search for emotion, identification and entertainment. Comments during the 'artistic programme' emphasized the problems faced by athletes and by the organization of the Games due to the COVID-19 pandemic that transformed Tokyo 2020 into the "Games of overcoming difficulties" or the "Games of hope." The appeal to emotion was also present when the presence of a black Italian woman, daughter of immigrants, among the Olympic flag bearers also turned Tokyo into the "Games of inclusion". On the other hand, the 'parade of the athletes' was filled with many comments about the chances of Brazilian athletes combined with four inserts for live interviews with some athletes who were in Olympic Village. In this part of the ceremony, very little was said about the other participating countries.

In Portugal, the RTP television, a public service broadcasting, focused the opening ceremony with several comments about the Covid-19. The participation of health professionals in the event was very well received by the Portuguese media, which valued the conduction of the Olympic fire by doctors and nurses. There were also comments about the difficulties of athletes who trained alone and at home to participate in the event. The ceremony with minimalist characteristics, according to the Portuguese press, revealed symbols that describe the pandemic moment as the artistic elements, the absence of the public and the participation of athletes wearing masks. In this context, athletes from countries that did not wear masks were harshly criticized. As well as the protests in the streets of Tokyo, they were also evidenced by Portuguese journalists who emphasized that part of the Japanese population was against the holding of the event.

About the coverage in Iran it was marked by a delay for filtering the images. Aspects that violate culture and religion, such as the display of the semi-naked bodies of athletes from Vanuatu or images that symbolize gender equity such as the pairs of flag bearers did not appear in this country's coverage on the IRIB channel VARZESH (national sports TV channel in Iran in Persian Language). During the athletes' parade, Abbas Jadidi, an wrestler athlete who had participated in the Olympics were invited to talk about his experiences in the Olympics interrupting the images of the ceremony.

As we can see, the same ceremony received different emphases according to different interests and cultural demands, becoming rituals that were somehow equally different. This is not necessarily bad, nor does it make the media a villain for intercultural communication. It's just a less visible or negligible part of the system. However, one question remains: How many Olympic ceremonies took place in Tokyo on July 23, 2020?

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The paradox of the parade of nations: a South Korean network's coverage of the opening ceremony

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Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), one of South Korea's national terrestrial broadcasting networks, was heavily criticized for its inappropriate choices of images when reporting the Parade of Nations during the opening ceremony for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The Parade of Nations is intended to promote a spirit of unity and peace through its presentation of the participating countries to the world at large. However, in covering the event, MBC used the image of a salmon to represent Norway, Dracula to represent Romania, a Bitcoin symbol to represent El Salvador, and so on. Even worse was its use of national tragedies to represent some nations, including images of Chernobyl for Ukraine and, for Haiti, of an angry mob with a caption describing the nation's "unstable political situation on account of the assassination of its president." When the Indonesian team entered the parade area, MBC showed a caption describing Indonesia as "the country with a low GDP and a low COVID-19 vaccination rate." These inappropriate and even offensive ways of referring to the countries reinforced national and racial prejudices and stereotypes.

This so-called "MBC incident" immediately went viral on social media, both domestically and internationally, with foreign newspapers and news channels such as BBC, CNN, and The New York Times reporting on the case in detail. Here, I discuss this incident as an example of the paradox of representing nations at the Olympics. First and foremost, this case indicates that the internal editorial decision-making process at MBC is not working properly, for no one within the organization flagged the images and captions as inappropriate before they aired. Especially given that MBC was severely punished by the Korea Communications Commission for using inappropriate captions to introduce some countries when it broadcast the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, it seems obvious that MBC, as a media institution, has a serious oversight problem regarding content. In other words, the MBC incident represents, not a simple mistake, but rather a matter of institutional practice.

Looking beyond MBC's poor editorial decisions, I draw attention to the manner in which a national television broadcaster represents foreign countries. MBC explained in its apology statement following the incident that "The images and captions are intended to make it easier for the viewers to recognize the entering countries quickly during the opening ceremony." Ideally, then, the Parade of Nations during the opening of the Olympics provides a unique opportunity for television broadcasters to promote global unity and public diplomacy while also educating and entertaining audiences with eye-catching visuals that well represent each nation. Television broadcasters have commonly used images of national flags, traditional food and clothing, and iconic figures for this purpose. Michael Billig's well-known concept of banal nationalism describes precisely such mundane, daily consumption of these national symbols and practices. As a global sporting mega-event, the Olympics, and especially the Parade of Nations during the opening ceremony, is among the most prominent events at which banal inter-nationalism – as a container model of the nation – takes place, in the sense that it represents the world in the form of more than 200 national teams as they enter the stadium together, each marching under its flag.

As the premier representation of banal inter-nationalism, then, the Olympics is the place where the tension between the global and the national is particularly intense. Despite the fact that the Olympics is a global sports event for participating athletes as well as audiences worldwide, the event inevitably fuels nationalistic sentiment for the simple reason that the nation-state serves as the fundamental designation of the participating team, though there are, to be sure, exceptions, such as Palestine, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Furthermore, the games are competitions among participating national teams, and the national broadcasters prioritize the airing of games in which their national teams or athletes perform. From all of these perspectives, the Olympics are, by nature, simultaneously global and national.

The MBC incident shows the limits of one media outlet's imagination regarding the nations that participate in the Olympics. To some degree, the incident also, I suggest, represents a Korean way of understanding the world. That is, the use of a simplified image of each nation for quick and easy presentation—an economical way of presenting the nations—and of captions referring to nations' GDPs or political problems captures Korea's economically-focused and developmentalist understanding of the world. In this respect, the MBC incident represents not simply one broadcaster's mistake but rather an opportunity to think deeply about the politics of the representation of nations at mega-events such as the Olympics.

Simone Biles, journalistic authority, and the ideology of sports news

Sport journalism (during the Olympics and at any other moment) shares news from distant playing fields. Sport journalism also neatly packages societal narratives about the important values of a nation, a properly functioning social order, racial and gender differences, or personality traits worthy of admiration. This dual role – the transmission and ritual views of communication – explains how information and values are often fully intertwined. We share information (transmission), but the choice of what and how we share that information communicates social values (ritual).

American conceptions of journalistic authority emerged from obscuring of this link. Journalists claimed jurisdiction over news by asserting they could provide an unvarnished truth. But in sports reporting, the limits of this professional identity have always been clear. As sports journalists renegotiate their professional boundaries, mega-events like the Olympics offer an opportunity to observe evolving practices and public stances that offer ways to track the evolution of the profession in the more open and fractious media environment of the Internet era.

Consider the case of Simone Biles, one the of the highest-profile athletes the United States sent to Tokyo this summer. Her Olympics did not go as planned. She pulled out of several events citing mental health concerns before returning to win individual bronze on the balance beam. Being unable to perform was a major story for an athlete who had seemed unbeatable. Furthermore, an athlete emphasizing self-care over competition arguably is a full departure from American ideological consensus. Indeed, lionizing playing through pain has been part of the sporting ethic, which American sports writers have praised for generations.

Yet an initial survey of Biles' case suggested shifting social currents. Mainstream journalists appeared to focus more on the challenges that Biles faced in her sport. Biles decision to pull out of an in-progress competition appeared to be treated as less a failure of nerve, but rather an admirable assertion of her own power. The sporting press appeared to accept the idea that Biles was wise to know her limits and protect herself. It helped, of course, that Biles received broad support from her sponsors and other athletes, including Kerri Strug, who completed gold-medal winning vault on a broken ankle from 1996. What had once been seen as admirable grit was now reinterpreted as abuse. Mainstream sports journalists appeared to contribute to the moving of the social consideration: Is an ideology of self-care replacing one of achievement at all costs?

The strongest criticism of Biles appeared to come from the ideological fringes. Openly partisan media figures attacked Biles on their various platforms using the language of the sporting ethic. Sport clearly remains a site for negotiating communal identity, but the subtle aspects of this may be giving way to open partisan conflict. We no longer need to dig very far to see the ideological component of sports content. This all matters because soft journalism – such as sports reporting – is often a gateway to other types of consumption. Impressions of the format and profession made here may extend to harder forms of news. The ideological role played by sports journalism speaks to identifying each other as a political community.

And how much of this phenomenon is driven by media architecture? We no longer live in a media system where athletes rely exclusively on sports journalists to convey their side of the story. This position was the ultimate source of professional authority. Biles has a direct line to the public through her nearly 7 million followers on Instagram and 1.7 million on Twitter. She can explain herself without a reporter contextualizing it. Biles feeling free to speak out on mental rigors of elite competition was a safer choice because she had the ability to clarify statements. More voices here enriched our understanding of her story because reporters did not rely on narrativization of fill in blanks. Cultural and political figures building direct lines to the public is not universally positive in sports and beyond. Athletes are echoing politicians in vaccine denialism and politicians use their Twitter feeds to share deliberate misinformation. Perhaps the future of sports journalistic authority is in curation, sifting through athlete-produced content as much as gathering news in traditional ways.

Yet the curation role comes with its own perils. As athletes have become more assertive about their views about issues both on the field and off, simply reporting those statements verbatim has made sports journalism seem more contentious. Ideological enforcement should not necessarily be replaced by credulity. Mental health, and focus seem like an obvious place to draw out an exception; who else has a worthwhile opinion on whether Biles is in the right headspace to compete? But what other exceptions are worth carving out?

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Representing high performance: Philosophies on producing progressive Paralympic coverage in Brazil

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Nearly five years after hosting the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the 2020 Brazilian Paralympic team sent its largest group of athletes and staff to Tokyo — more than 430 people. Despite not participating in the Games until 12 years after the first Paralympics in 1960, Brazil quickly climbed the Paralympic medal count, reaching the 100-gold-medal mark at the 2020 Tokyo Games and finishing seventh in the overall medal count this year. Among the ranks of Brazilian gold medalists stands the most decorated athlete of all time, swimmer Daniel Dias. Also contributing to Brazil's medal count this year was their five-a-side visually impaired soccer team that captured their unprecedented fifth consecutive gold medal.

These legendary athletic performances are matched by the caliber of Paralympic reporters covering the Brazilian Paralympics. We conducted interviews with Renato Peters, Globo's (most popular television network in Brazil) lead Paralympic beat-reporter, as well as Giovana Pinheiro, manager of the website Olimpiada Todo Dia (Olympics Everyday). The reporters shared their experiences covering the Paralympics over the years and during the 2020 Games. Their aim was to emphasize the athletic performance of Brazil's world class athletes by fostering relationships with them, covering lesser-known Paralympians and sports, helping audiences understand the limitations of less visible disabilities, and highlighting their high levels of athleticism.

Connecting with athletes and fostering relationships with them is paramount. Pinheiro's website takes pride in the organization's open communication with athletes. She relies on them to learn about producing accurate, progressive coverage that counters misconceptions about Paralympic athletes as defective versions of their Olympic counterparts or as inspirational superheroes.

In Peters's third year covering the summer Paralympic Games, a key to providing performance-focused coverage has been his friendships with the athletes he covers. He recently posted a photo on Instagram of his emotional, socially-distanced interview with Dias, his shoulders draped in the Brazilian flag, just after winning an unprecedented 27th Paralympic medal, including 14 gold. However, Peters doesn't just interview established Paralympic megastars. He also seeks to draw attention to up-and-coming and lesser known athletes, "We have to cover the big stories because, without an idol you can't build new generations, but we try to tell the stories of more anonymous athletes."

Unfortunately, the limited number of journalists makes coverage of lesser known athletes and sports even less accessible. Pinheiro estimated that Paralympic newsrooms comprised only a tenth of the standard reporter populations of Olympic Games newsrooms.

In addition to making less popular athletes visible, Peters helps illuminate less visible disabilities. He gave the example of swimmers with one shorter leg or an athlete with an intellectual disability. "You can't see the disability. So, you need to inform the audience."

Peters covered the five-a-side soccer team's connections to able-bodied athletes in a way that remains true to his athletic-performance-focused philosophy of Paralympic reporting. In a recent broadcast report about the dynasty's hunt for their fifth consecutive gold medal, Peters broadcasted a feature piece about their practices against sighted opponents to sharpen their skills. This is in contrast to simply comparing them to an athlete who plays the Olympic parallel of the sport.

While Peters attributed the improvements in media coverage to the strengthening and continued growth of Brazil's Paralympic Movement, however it's possible that the progressive coverage has played a role in the movement's growth as well. In a content analysis of Brazilian Paralympic photojournalism, Hilgemberg, Ellis, and Magladry argued that media outlets increased the visibility of different disabilities when covering the 2012 London Games to familiarize their audience with different impairments and Para sport in preparation to host the 2016 Rio Games. Similarly, Peters explained that the Brazilian Paralympic team carried on their legacy built as a host nation in Rio with them into the Tokyo arena.

While progressive, performance-oriented coverage seems to be becoming more widespread, Brazilian Paralympic athletes seem to agree that coverage has a long way to go. Drawing on interviews with 41 Brazilian Paralympians, Kirakosyan's research posited that athletes felt that Brazilian media relied too much on the clichéd overcoming-adversity narrative frame.

Alternatively, Pinhero, Peters and their respective organizations prioritize athletic performance over disability. However, they stop short of completely ignoring the hardships athletes have endured in life, regardless of whether they are Olympic or Paralympic athletes. Peters explains the importance of these stories to the movement, "This man is an athlete. He suffered a lot in life because of his disability, but today he represents Brazil. Look at the difference the sport makes in one's life. Look how big the sport is and what it means to one's life. It really changes some people's lives."

How digital content creators are shaping meanings about world class para-athletes

If anybody wants to see how media producers can shape meanings about 'others', with the potential for changing perceptions in their own societies, a useful place to look is at the Paralympic Games. Camera angles, tone of voice and commentary are just some of the ways that audiences digitally consume subliminal messaging. However, scheduled media saturation or deliberate onscreen invisibility also speak volumes and shape which meanings are made. Because deeply held prejudice has historically often shown disability in a negative light, the representation of Paralympic athletes across onscreen digital content is becoming a very important subject. The competitors' qualifying physical impairments provide a tangible point of difference that potentially mark 'them' out from 'us', but as they are part of our national sports team we actually need to positively identify with them onscreen instead. Therefore, depicting individuals as 'different' without being 'other' is fundamental to successful Paralympic broadcasting, but isn't it a skill that all other media producers should also acquire?

One of the opportunities afforded to each host nation for reframing how society responds to disability, is to capitalise on the compatible live viewing time zone, by saturating their country's broadcasting schedules with unifying mainstream sport media coverage. They can prize the coverage out of the marginal late night and early morning diversity graveyard slots as well as providing access to digital content online. When the Games came to London in 2012, the UK media producers sculpted intended meanings about Paralympians morning, noon and night, with a Breakfast Show, the live sport all day, and a witty banter evening chat show to finish. This normalisation process propelled the competitors into the spotlight as elite athletes on a par with their Olympic counterparts, even making some of them household names. However the public service broadcaster had to borrow meanings associated with other brands to reassure the public and used the biggest marketing budget in its history to do that.

So what story did they market?

For London 2012, we were invited to Meet the Superhumans, a band of athletes you could not feel sorry for, after rather cheekily saying to the Olympians 'thanks for the warm-up' via a London city poster campaign. Then for Rio 2016 we were told other high-achievers; talented musicians, rock-climbers and artists were superhuman too. However, the Tokyo 2020 marketing trailer has a brick firmly through the glass of all that, literally shattering the concept of extraordinary to leave a resoundingly human message, with a salutary application for us all, if we had been watching.

Audience research has shown that the UK's domestic media coverage of the 2012 Games, with its ground-breaking reframing and normalisation of para-athletes, affected not only the mainstream sports audience, but also changed attitudes towards disability for 1 in 3 of the population – roughly 20 million of the UK's citizens. Globally, London 2012 was the first truly social and online Games, with 82.1 million views of the International Paralympic Committee's Facebook pages and over 1.3 million tweets mentioning 'Paralympic' during the course of the Games.

Meanwhile sports personalities more generally have been using their social media feeds to find their own voice, representing themselves and in charge of their own narratives. On 26th August 2021, Channel 4 showed the USA swimmer Anastasia Pagonis' TikTok video on broadcast TV, pronouncing that "blind people aren't hopeless idiots though – just a thought" followed by a studio discussion about lots of other misconceptions around that disability. It was perhaps rather unfortunate, during the opening ceremony, that a UK presenter mentioned 'how good the musicians with impairments were'. The expectation that their difference was a disadvantage clearly remains embedded in those words, as much as they might for a 'female' president or a 'gay' marriage.

Clearly the success of hosting a sports mega event in any city, whether in the Global North or South, is symbiotically linked to the quality and quantity of the media coverage that goes with it. But does it really matter if we depict some people as 'other' and alienate them? At a time when women and music are being banned from a social presence in Afghanistan and black lives are still not mattering in some parts of the digital public sphere, then we really need to take care of our representations of difference when the rest of the world is watching. This is a role that will fall to the upcoming host nations of China, France and Italy shortly, landing crucially on the shoulders of the United States when they host the Olympics and the Paralympics, finally from the same city, in Los Angeles in 2028. Will both the events be covered with parity and, potentially without public service media on board, whose voices might be heard?

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Is the Paralympic Games a second-class event?

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The 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games have brought a new curiosity into the study of Brazilian news media coverage, since it is the first event after Rio 2016, where the viewing records were broken, the TV audience, for example, reached 4.1 billion people in more than 150 countries. However, a quick analysis of media coverage of the Tokyo Games showed that Brazilian media walked backwards, especially in terms of amount of coverage.

SporTV, the Brazilian main channel on paid TV, responsible for broadcasting both events had four different channels completely dedicated to the Olympic Games, and they offered more than 840 hours of broadcast. During the Paralympic Games only one channel was responsible for the transmission, with a little bit more than 100 hours dedicated to live streaming the 20 sports where there were Brazilians competing. Adding to it there was little coverage, and even less live streaming from non-paid TV channels, the print media and several news websites did not give the same importance to both sports events.

The quality of the coverage is also something to look at. When analyzing how Paralympic athletes were portrayed by the media, a category of analysis keeps coming back: the comparison between Paralympic and Olympic athletes. This is not exclusive to the Brazilian media. An analysis of the British media coverage by Thomas and Smith and the study of the Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail by Chang, Crossman, Taylor and Walker, just to name a few, showed the same tendency for newspaper coverage to draw these types of comparisons.

On the Brazilian media, Daniel Dias, one of the most decorated athletes in history, having won 27 Paralympic medals, and who announced his retirement, is compared with Michael Phelps, because of his achievements. In an interviewed Dias stated that he is glad to be compared with a successful athlete, but he wants to be known and recognized as a Paralympic athlete. Petrúcio Ferreira, a Brazilian sprinter, has been called the Paralympian Bolt. A similar name was given to Alan Fonteles, another Brazilian sprinter, in 2012. These are only a few examples.

On the one hand, the comparison between Paralympic and Olympic athletes could seem to be an attempt to emphasize the excellent performance of athletes with disabilities; but, one the other hand making these comparisons could disqualify Paralympians by the need to legitimate their success, giving the idea that they are emulating 'able-bodiedness'.

In many ways sports and physical activities for people with disabilities is a way of dealing with disability as a stigma, aiding the perception that disabled people are not significantly different from non-disabled. And as pointed out by Thomas and Smith, this use of comparisons to non-disabled Olympic athletes by journalists could be founded in this very idea. However, this practice undermines the attempts of athletes with disability to build their own identity.

One example of the Paralympic Games seen as a second-class event in comparison with the Olympic Games is the book Paralympics: where heroes come, by Steadward and Peterson. This title, as explained by the authors on the book preface, was inspired by an advertising slogan for the 1996 Atlanta Paralympic Games, "(...) the Olympics is where heroes are made. The Paralympics is where heroes come". In these sentences lays the idea that an Olympic hero arises from high performance conquered by one's effort, training, and discipline; it is an active process. In contrast, all Paralympic athletes are heroes, generalizing heroism to all, regardless of their accomplishments; it is a passive process. Showing up is all it takes to become a Paralympic hero. This disparity interiorizes Paralympians and the importance of their athleticism, achievements, training, strategy, organization, and resistance.

The tendency to draw comparisons between Olympic and Paralympic athletes targets the legitimacy of Paralympians, that seems to be reached only when media coverage establishes relations between the two events. Paralympic athletes do not want to be compared to others; they want to write their names on sports history through their own achievements.

The importance of media is undeniable, so when the Paralympic Games and athletes received significantly less coverage than their counterparts and this coverage is stereotyped, we can conclude that the Paralympic Games is seen as a second-class event by the media.

Representations of gender in media coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Games are increasingly a good news story for women's sport. Female athletes receive significant attention, and the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games were no exception. Seven gendered findings emerged from my preliminary analysis of Tokyo 2020 media coverage.

First, the growing media and public interest is positive for women's sport. The shift of news coverage from print to online has expanded the number of stories, creating more visibility. New Zealand coverage has increased from only 11 images in 2004, to 31 images in 2008, to 148 in 2012. Since then, my analysis of the thumbnails that promote online stories in just one major digital news outlet identified an increase from 128 images in 2016 to 158 during Tokyo 2020. Increased live coverage also puts female athletes in front of audiences and builds recognition. Tokyo 2020 was broadcast live and free-to-air for 13 hours a day on one channel—a notable improvement on Sydney 2000's limited two-hour daily highlights package. When swimmer Sophie Pascoe—competing in her fourth Paralympic Games and a multiple world champion—became New Zealand's most successful Paralympian ever, her achievement attracted a Facebook shout out from the nation's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern.

Second, sportswomen dominated coverage. They were far more visible than sportsmen, featuring in 65% of photographs promoting Paralympics stories. Men were the focus of less than 30% of photographs, and a small percentage highlighted mixed gender groups. This finding reflects longitudinal growth and increasing acceptance of sportswomen as 'real' athletes who are worthy of attention, from 18% of images in 2004, to 33% in 2008, to 65% during Tokyo 2020. This growth has also generated commentary that focuses on sportswomen's achievements including world and Paralympic records, previous medals and highest placings, as well as their skills, strengths and medal expectations.

Third is the consistent, bifurcated, emphasis on home-nation athletes which tells audiences that our sportswomen matter but their women do not. This pattern continued at Tokyo 2020, with New Zealanders being the main focus of 85% of Paralympic coverage. However, although nationalism plays a vital role in which athletes attract attention, the intensity of that focus is greater for sportswomen. During Tokyo 2020, 95% of female coverage focused on Kiwi sportswomen compared with 78% on Kiwi sportsmen.

Fourth is the strong alignment of coverage with success: 53% of images of New Zealand athletes highlighted those who won medals. Futher, the seven athletes who gained the most coverage all won medals. Sportswomen dominated because they won 10 of New Zealand's 12 medals. All the remaining athletes who received coverage made at least one final, except for the men's wheelchair rugby team, who warranted attention as the first rugby team to qualify for the Paralympics since 2008.

Fifth is how much the importance of winning is still gendered. To gain media attention sportswomen need to win. I previously identified this pattern in Olympic and everyday media coverage but it seems especially relevant for Paralympic sportswomen. For example, in 2004, when Kiwi sportswomen won no medals, they received no photographs and their results were buried at the bottom of other articles. In 2008, when they dominated the medal count, the focus on female medallists was 80%. It rose even higher in Tokyo 2020, with 87% of female images featuring medallists. In stark contrast, a medal focus was only evident in 20% of images of men in Tokyo 2020, whether they were New Zealanders or not. This finding suggests that sportsmen matter no matter what they do, but sportswomen matter primarily if they can be represented as successful *national* citizens rather than as *female athletes*.

Sixth is commentators' discomfort with the word *woman*. Many were comfortable using 'man' to describe male athletes but the use of 'woman' proved more challenging, leading to statements like "the lady in the middle has won the gold", "that lady's among them again" or "the lady on the right". One male commentator frequently introduced male swimmers as "the man who"... "is a gold medallist", "went fastest" or "set that record". In an entire evening swimming session filled with introductions to *men* not a single *woman* was introduced.

Finally, the expression of emotions was highly gendered. Tears were almost expected of winning sportswomen—"and the tears tell a story" or "Sophie Pascoe breaks down in tears". In contrast, male tears needed to be *justified*, as in the male commentator who explained "the tears are flowing—*quite rightly so*—a bronze medal and a lifetime best". Smiles seemed to be the domain of women: 95% of images of smiling athletes were women, although this may partly reflect success, as many smiling images featured Kiwi sportswomen on the medal podium or immediately after a medal-winning performance.

Overall, like the Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020 gets a tick of approval but there are still some areas where gender infuses media coverage in inequitable ways. I look forward to a time when sports*women* are valued and visible, whether they win or not.

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Reshaping the superhuman to the super ordinary: The Tokyo Paralympics in Australian media

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The Tokyo 2020 Paralympics coincided with the increasing impacts from the COVID-19 Delta strain in Australia. By the time the Paralympics began over half over of Australia's population were in lockdown, predominantly in the south-east of the continent affecting the most populous states of New South Wales and Victoria. This created a 'captive' audience for the Paralympic coverage by host broadcaster Channel 7 which broadcast live for over 12 hours per day on free to air TV and another 12 hours streaming per day on 16 channels.

Channel 7 brought a fresh approach to Paralympic broadcasting and commentary across their coverage. Was this intentional from the beginning for the Australian Paralympic Committee, the Australian Paralympic Team along with the Channel 7 broadcasting, or a result of adapting to COVID-19 travel restrictions? To demonstrate, over half the on-air talent were high-profile past Paralympians with strong connections to the current Australian Paralympic Team: co-hosts Kurt Fearnley and Annabelle Williams, with Katrina Webb, Priya Cooper, Tim Matthews, Jessica Gallagher, Nick Morris and Bruce Allman and access to current team members Riley Batt (Australian Paralympic team co-captain), and Curtis McGrath.

There was also extensive profiling of athletes' back-story with an authentic understanding of their lived experience of disability, with the reality of both the challenges and the triumphs. At times the commentary and stories slipped into the supercrip inspiration porn, where 'if only you set your sights on it and train hard enough you will get there'. This belies the 95% of competitors who do not medal. Yet, this was balanced by discussions of the athletes being held up as role models for children with disabilities and striving for an ordinary life like everybody else.

As Kurt Fearnley explained in the lead up to the Paralympics, "'We've loved and celebrated the Olympics together this year, but the Paralympics will bring something else. Conversations about disability. Discussions around access and opportunity. About equality. Dreams of competing in Brisbane 2032 for kids with disability". What ensued for the duration of the coverage was a sometimes raw examination of childhood experiences of bullying, being left out, excluded and othered by their peers and others in society.

This signaling by Fearnley was also echoed on a number of occasions by chef de mission Kate McLoughlin. "They embody the great strength and diversity of our communities and serve as a beacon for the continued advancement towards a fairer and more inclusive society. They also demonstrate the exceptional strength of character that epitomizes Australian Paralympians". While still focusing on their elite athlete status, there was a noted shift to the athlete and disability advocacy throughout the commentary and subsequent interviews of medal winners, coaches and team leaders.

Ellie Cole, four time Paralympian, on her way to becoming Australia's most decorated female Paralympian by achieving her 17th Paralympic medal at this games commented, "everybody wants to have the same opportunity as the person next to them and shouldn't be based on how you were born or if you were in an accident". Then, when Kate McLoughlin informed Ellie that she was to be the flag bearer for the closing ceremony, McLoughlin noted Cole's contributions in the pool over many years, but also emphasized that, ""Ellie has spoken passionately about the value of sport for people with an impairment and the importance of equal opportunities, as well as advocating for better recognition of our elite athletes".

Whether the happenstances of COVID-19 lockdown meant that more Australians were tuning into the Paralympics than otherwise would have or the extent of the coverage meant they could not avoid the Tokyo Paralympic games will be debated. Yet, part of the evidence of a connection between just having an audience or community engagement can be found in a campaign run by Paralympics Australia. Concurrent with the games, Paralympics Australia ran a fundraiser to support the next generation of para-athletes. This was heavily publicized through Channel 7 by the commentary team. Through the virtual seat sale some 94,443 seats were purchased raising $2.36 million to support future Australian Paralympians (as at 8 September 2021). If nothing else, it demonstrated that at least almost 100,000 people were willing to donate during a time of economic disruption. With the undoubted success of the fundraising campaign we look forward to reviewing the broadcasting figures and any empirical research into the impact on the Australian public before, during and after the games by Paralympics Australia.

We could not end the article any better than with an example of reshaping the superhuman to the super ordinary than that of wheelchair athlete Christie Dawes, explaining after completing the marathon in the rain, "Compared to home schooling and lockdown, this is a bloody cakewalk".

Super heroes among us: using the superhero genre to promote Paralympic Games and athletes

Leading up to both Olympic and Paralympic Games, athletes are featured in advertisements via print and television mediums, and their triumphs furthered celebrated during the Games as a way to promote sponsors and the Olympic Movement. For example, advertisements in the United States promoting the Tokyo Games featured both Olympians and Paralympians side-by-side, possibly drawing on the original intent of the Paralympic Movement and meaning of *para*. However, some sponsors and advertisers have paid more attention to the unique Paralympian experience in order to promote the Games, leading to some utilizing the comic and super hero genres to promote the Paralympic games and participants at various points. Form a fan and observer of super heroes rather than an expert on athletes living with disabilities, this commentary focuses on a brief discussion of this approach in promoting Paralympians and the Paralympic Games.

The super hero genre and people with disabilities

Marvel and DC brands are typically the first that come to mind when people hear the words comics and super heroes, and the stories offered by these two companies have helped reach and teach many within our shared society. For example, academics have long studied comics and the superhero genre as ways to teach about philosophy, storytelling, and the social experience. Further, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has been used to various ends, including helping researchers navigate academic writing and students acclimating to college.

The superhero genre, and comics in general, have also been utilized to reach, teach, and inspire readers with disabilities. Brent Moeshlin outlined the importance of using comics to help children with disabilities cope, learn about, and adapt to their surroundings. He pointed out that while DC introduced the first super hero with a recognized disability in 1941, Marvel Comics featured thirteen such characters to DC's five through the 2000's, while also introducing parents of children with disabilities that have produced comics aimed at inspiring readers. Further, more super heroes living with disabilities have been incorporated into current and future storytelling and live-action projects, and Marvel recently profiled a number of children living with disabilities in the Disney+ series *Marvel's Hero Project*. Finally, a joint venture between the Superhero Series and Marvel led to the creation of the Find Your Power Challenge to encourage physical activity to people living with disabilities in the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The super hero genre and promotion of the Paralympic Games

Sponsors, content providers, and organizers have often used the comic and super hero genres to promote the Paralympic Games and para athetes. Leading up to the 2012 London Games, the fantastical character Mandeville, mascot of the Paralympic Games, honored the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement. Additionally, the United Kingdom's Channel 4 utilized the *Meet the Superhumans* advertising campaign to promote the Paralympic Games by portraying Paralympic athletes as individuals with super human or super hero qualities. This campaign has subsequently been updated and used for the 2016 Rio and 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games. In preparation for the 2018 Paralympic Winter Games in Pyeong-Chang, South Korea, sponsor United Airlines produced content where United States Olympic and Paralympic athletes were featured in comic book form alongside individuals from the airline company, and the *Paralympic Jump* was released in Japan in 2017 to prepare fans for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games.

The use of the comic and super hero genres has not come without critique from popular culture writers and academics. For example, the English Federation of Disability in Sport conducted a media survey on the promotion of the Paralympic Games, and found that terms such as *superhuman*, *hero*, and *brave* could serve as offensive to people living with disabilities. Further, in 2021, John Evans of System1 came to a similar conclusion, and actually found that people living with disabilities responded more positively to a Toyota commercial which told the story of United States Paralympic swimmer Jessica Lang than other messages portraying participants in super human or super hero light. Finally, Anoma van der Veere analyzed the promotional discourse in Japan surrounding the Tokyo Paralympic Games and concluded that narratives using the super hero genres may work to individualize rather than focus on larger issues faced by people living with disabilities.

As we move beyond the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, and begin our focus on future Games, how will advertisers work to promote viewership of the events and the Movement? Potentially by way of leagues such as the National Basketball Association and United States College Football using the comic and super hero genres for promotional purposes, sponsors and advertisers believed the same methods would pay tribute to Paralympic athletes and people living with disabilities. However, with data to suggest that such promotion may negatively impact the target audience, it is important to study how stakeholders choose to navigate promotion of future Paralympic Games and athletes.

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”Unity in Diversity” – The varying media representations of female Olympic athletes

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The Tokyo Olympics can be seen as the the first gender equal Games in history when 49 per cent of the participated athletes were women. Before the Games the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee founded the *Gender Equality Promotion Team* and the International Olympic Committee assured that the visibility between women's and men's events would be equal. But how is the Tokyo 2020 official concept 'Unity in Diversity' eventually actualized if we consider the media representations of themfemale athletes during the Games?

Women's sport has suffered from the lack of media coverage for decades with repetitive explanations for marginalization. However, during the big sporting events such as the Olympics female athletes have traditionally suited for the roles of national heroes similarly with men. In the context of Tokyo Olympics some national media broadcasters still followed the outdated policy by objectifying the bodies of female athletes. The Dutch analyst Johan Derksen commented in the sports show *De Oranjezomer* that Brazilian soccer goalkeeper Barbara was overweight. According to Derksen she couldn't catch any balls and was like “a pig with a sweater”. Likewise, when a reporter of the China Central Television interviewed the shot put gold medalist Gong Lijiao after the competition she called her “manly girl” and asked Gong about her potential boyfriend and if she is now going to “return to being a woman”. These trivialized representations received attention in mainstream media internationally and in both cases reactions in social media – notably in Chinese Weibo and Instagram – were overwhelming.

One familiar way of female athletes' trivialization is glorification of their masculine background teams: co-athlete partners, famous fathers, or striking coaches. Even though the Australian male swim coach gained more media attention with his wild winning celebration than the gold medalist Ariarne Titmus herself, the Tokyo Olympics were also stage for more diverse gender representations. Female athletes themselves took the stand for equality on several occasions. Female soccer players were taking a knee before their matches in a gesture to end racism. The new Olympic regulations allowed this expression and at last the IOC cancelled also the prohibition to share photos of athletes taking the knee. Political demonstrations were still banned on the medal stand in Tokyo, but the IOC suspended its investigation into shot putter silver medalist Raven Saunders' (US) podium demonstration after the sudden death of her mother. Black, gay athlete – who attracted attention for her purple and green dyed hair and superhero face masks – crossed her raised arms to form an X when she was on a podium after winning the silver medal to represent “the intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet”. The German gymnastics team took over control of their own clothing and challenged the traditional boundaries as well when they competed wearing full-body unitards instead of revealing leotards. This can be interpreted as a statement against the long-lasting objectification and sexualization of women's sport.

Along with the struggles of the most successful gymnast Simone Biles (US) the mental health issues came to the fore in Tokyo. Biles got huge support from other athletes and her fans on social media. She may have permanently changed the representation of an invincible (female) athlete who can also be vulnerable and concerned about her own well-being. With her decision to withdraw from the Olympic finals Simone Biles offered a humane role model to all the future athletes as well as sports fans who experience massive pressure or sometimes even unrealistic expectations. If Biles as a black female athlete raised awareness about the conflicts behind the appearance of the successful athlete, the other current question awaken was: who can even represent a female athlete?

One of the new sports added in Tokyo was skateboarding in which almost all the female medalists were underage. In the street skateboarding the gold and silver medalists, Momiji Nishiya (Japan) and Rayssa Leal (Brazil), were both 13 years old and in park skateboarding 12 years old Kokona Hiraki (Japan) won silver and 13 years old social media star Sky Brown (U.K.) bronze. The new Olympic sport provoked the public discussion about the age limits in adults' sports although the performances of these “girls”, “teens” and “youth” received a lot of admiration from the audience and sports commentators. After all, over the age question escalated the issue of trans athletes and gender verification of female athletes with testosterone testing. Soccer player Quinn became the first openly transgender athlete to achieve an Olympic medal when the team Canada won gold. She came out on Instagram about a year ago but didn't gain as much media attention in Tokyo than New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard who has underwent medical gender reassignment treatments. When she made history as first trans woman athlete participating in Olympics, the social media showed its toxic dark side which has consequences for many people along with the professional athletes.

Despite that there were more openly LGBTQ athletes competing in Tokyo than ever before in the Olympics and more acknowledged non-normative self-expressions in the media, we will still need much more diverse gender representations which challenge the emphasized femininity and more research about inequalities among sports culture to make the sports world more inclusive and accessible for all of us.

Why we need to see the "ugly" in women's sports

Publicly demonstrating support for women has become increasingly prominent in a variety of contexts, with sports serving as one of the most visible platforms for those declarations. Indeed, prior to the Games, the International Olympic Committee updated its portrayal guidelines for broadcasters, urging them to "steer all Olympic sports and their rights holders toward 'gender-equal and fair' broadcasts of their events." And then there was NBC's promotion of the Olympics, which revolved heavily around Simone Biles -- holding her up not just as a great female athlete, but as one spot dramatically announced: "the greatest of all time." During NBC's broadcast, there were countless examples of the type of coverage long called for by feminist sports scholars. When track phenom Athing Mu hit the final straightaway during the women's 800m final and separated from her competitors in a feat of speed and strength, announcers did the race justice, injecting further excitement into the broadcast, when one shouted into the mic, "[N}ow the superstar is the best in the world!"

These examples, and the overall visible presence of women in much of the United States' coverage during the Olympics beg the question: Is sports media taking a feminist turn? What are we to make of what appears to be positives steps forward?

Feminist media scholar Rosalind Gill has noted the rise of seemingly feminist discourses in the media, and has documented how such discourses are "uneven," and marked by an "entanglement" of both feminist and anti-feminist narratives that define what she calls a postfeminist media culture. Among the postfeminist patterns she has observed over the past decade is the way that meeting a normative feminine aesthetic is now situated as "fun," and a form of "self care," while the actual labor enacted by women through these forms of self-surveillance is, importantly, "never disclosed." By keeping that labor hidden, the disciplining process also remains out of view, and the maintenance of normative gender norms thus remain obscured by the seemingly feminist narratives of empowerment.

Returning to the Olympics coverage, the Games include a number of sports that have the potential to enact forms of normative femininity, including gymnastics, beach volleyball, diving, and artistic swimming. They are non-contact, showcase athletic traits associated with femininity such as flexibility, balance and precision, and importantly, include uniforms that are understood in the context of women's sexualization. In order to break the boundaries of a postfeminist media culture, we must be allowed to see the athleticism of these particular sports in ways that depart from their perceived "beauty" and the related effortless, fun context in which these sports are often cast. Which brings me to an example that I believe accomplished that call. Writing for *The New York Times,* author Gillian Brassil took on the topic of artistic swimming in a piece accompanied by an array of images depicting what many typically think of when it comes to artistic swimming. Among them was a Twitter post by @usaartisticswimming that included an image of a swimmer soaring above her teammates while completing a perfect split in a shimmering silver swimsuit with text calling it "the most difficult lift in history." Brassil's accompanying writing makes visible the work that goes into executing such a lift by showing how the "beauty" of the swimmers smiling and having fun above the water, appearing to effortlessly complete their maneuvers, is only accomplished through an "ugly" kind of athletic labor below it. In doing so, she recasts the sport as "brutal" by describing the furious kicking and dangerous landing techniques that happen out of view, all of which contribute to a high rate of concussions in the sport. She shows the danger of artistic swimming, ultimately calling on health officials to include the sport along with football and sliding sports in their research addressing head injuries.

I call her descriptions "ugly" not as pejorative, but because of their sharp departure from the visible "beauty" of the sport that is so often showcased in coverage. Ultimately, that ugliness is beautiful in that is an important and necessary component for the continual feminist progress of women's sports coverage. Declarations from NBC and other prominent sports media personalities about the accomplishments of women athletes are a significant step forward. The next is to understand their athleticism in ways this disrupt commonsense understandings of gender. Coverage like Brassil's story, which destabilizes the narratives of "beauty" that are produced through coverage of this so-called feminine sport, is one such way to accomplish that task.

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Twitter conversations on Indian female athletes in Tokyo

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The London Olympiad was called the Twitter Olympics (Creedon, 2014). Ever since, Twitter has grown as a space to spotlight issues of gender and social identity in the world of sports. "Sports Twitter" thrives in India, as well, particularly during the Olympics with tweets and hashtags like #Cheer4India and #IndiaAtTokyoOlympics. During the 2020 Tokyo Games, 53 female athletes from India participated in comparison to 68 males, nearly achieving the goal of gender equality. Official handles of the Sports Authority of India, Ministry of Sports and Youth affairs, sports journalists and fans actively used Twitter to discuss women in sports, making it necessary to find patterns in their conversations on female athletes.

Low levels of sports literacy about female athletes

Mirabai Chanu who won silver medal on the first day along with PV Sindhu (Bronze) and Lovlina Borgohaine (Bronze) led the twitter charts with maximum engagement. A closer look, however, reveals that tweets/retweets were largely about the medals, the victories, and the visuals/short videos of the medal winning moments. Twitter users retweeted the victory without much commentary about the player, their style of play, or regional and socio-economic background. Sports Twitter framed these athletes' with little attention to gender, focusing less on "herspective" and more on sports-led nationalism. In some posts, Chanu Saikom Mirabai was likened to her namesake *Meera Bai,* a popular Hindu sage who is revered for her devotion to the male god, Lord Krishna, in an illustration of the preferred gender roles in Indian society. Absence of interest and knowledge about female athletes is not unique to India. Lauren Smith has found, that despite differences in format, female athletes are under-represented much like the mainstream media. To address this absence, the blog network www.womentalksports.com and hashtags like #WomeninSport or #Women-supportingwomen mobilize sports fans to watch, comment, and converse on women's sports in order to promote and empower female athleticism. In the Indian context, the lack of deep conversations on female athletes also stems out of Twitter's obsession with the men's cricket team, whereas other sports do not have strong native fandoms.

Negatively framing the athletes

Feminine, at times sexualized, images of female athletes like Sania Mirza (tennis), world number one Manu Bhaker (shooting), and Manika Batra (table tennis) have been featured by both media and audiences. Owing to their celebrtization, expectations on social media platforms are amplified. Twitter fans readied themselves for medals. Closer to the Olympics, sports authorities and journalists proactively tweeted about their medal winning potential. In Tokyo, when they lost and bowed out without a medal, Twitter turned hostile. Sports Twitter trolled the women with nasty memes, questioned their competence, and framed them as unworthy of attention and commercial standing (see here, here, and here).

It mirrors the media's agenda of diminishing a female athlete's status as a professional player. By contrast, sports writers and reporters on social media were reflective, as they responded by holding conversations on sports performance instead of personalities on platforms like Twitter spaces and clubhouses. Female sports journalists in particular drowned criticism and sexist voices by stating that, "while expressing genuine disappointment is okay the nature of criticism is very harsh."

Reel over Real

While the spirited performance of the Indian women's hockey team was appreciated, a tweet by actor Shah Rukh Khan referring to his role as coach of women's hockey team in his movie Chak De (2007) and the reverent reply by real coach, Sojord Marijne went viral, flooding Twitter with images of actors from the film playing athletes showing a preference for "reel over real," reinforcing India's love for sports-based cinema more than real life athletes.

Resetting the gender agenda

During the Tokyo Games, sports journalists on social media discarded conventional gender frames and pushed for equal stature for male and female athletes. For example, in an August 4 Clubhouse thread, "Talking Tokyo," both PR Sreejesh and Savita Punia, goalkeepers of the men's and women's field hockey teams, were given equal time. On the last day of the Olympics, when India won Gold in men's javelin, a special segment acknowledged the performance of golfer Aditi Ashok, who came fourth. Hashtags like #HamariChoriKisiSeKam-HaiKya (our daughters are no less than our sons), that questioned the hegemony of men in sports, got support from the influencers.

In the nutshell, it is evident that Twitter continues to erase women athletes during Olympics. Therefore, sports influencers such as journalists and former female players will have to lead this open forum of self-expression to spotlight women in sports. We saw that former athletes and sports reporters on Twitter were not adversarial; indeed, they countered the excessive criticism produced by a mostly male audience of fans. Reframing women in sports is possible if more women in the audience participate in listening groups and social networks, which happened too rarely during the 2020 Olympic Games.

Between sexualization and de-sexualization: the representation of female athletes in Tokyo 2020

There is a long tradition of research in sports communication studies on the representation of women in sports, women's empowerment through sports, as well as the issue of sexualization and sexism. Representation of women in sports is lacking compared to men, women generally receive significantly less media attention, less pay, and hardly any positions in federations and clubs.

Three incidents made sexualization and de-sexualization an issue immediately before the Tokyo Games. The German gymnasts did not compete in the classic skimpy gymnastics' suits at the 2021 European Gymnastics Championships, but in full body suits. This action received a broad, international press reaction: From the BBC to the Times of India, the "protest against sexism" was praised as a "revolution in women's gymnastics." The boycott of the German beach volleyball team Karla Borger and Julia Sude ahead of the World Series tournament in Qatar received a similarly positive media response. The players protested against the rules imposed by the Qatari Volleyball Federation, according to which the athletes had to wear T-shirts with short sleeves and knee-length pants. In the summer of 2021, the Norwegian beach handball team was fined €1,500 at the European Championships because they had competed in slightly longer shorts instead of the prescribed bikini bottoms.

Sufficient impetus exists to look at the representation of female athletes in the Olympic Games, namely in beach volleyball and gymnastics. Beach volleyball is considered the prime example of the sexualization of sports due to its clothing regulations and is therefore particularly suitable for reflecting on the development of (de-)sexualization in sports in recent years. Until the 2012 London Olympics, a strict dress code applied exclusively to women. The bikini was allowed to be a maximum of seven centimeters wide at the sides. The world federation hoped that this sexualization would increase marketing opportunities, including media attention, for the sport. For the London Games, the dress code was reformed: shorts and tops with or without sleeves were now allowed. This first de-sexualization was justified with the cooler temperatures in London. At the 2016 Olympic Games, pants with long legs, full-body suits and sports hijabs were also permitted to facilitate access to the Games for nations who opposed the dress code on religious or ethical grounds for the first time, an Egyptian team competed in Rio den Janeiro in turquoise green and black burkinis.

What happened in Tokyo 2021? Even though the Rio regulations were adopted, all teams competed in the classic attire. The reporting did not address the regulations and refrained from sexualization. Occasionally, players justified and defended the classic outfit. There was no talk of a step backwards in terms of emancipation in women's sports. Even if the appearance continues to stand for sexualization in the eyes of many, it is established and part of the marketing strategy.

The action of the four German female gymnasts in Tokyo was a step towards more empowerment. They were the only athletes among the 98 starters of the qualification that competed in full body suits. The comments during and after the competition were exclusively positive. In fact, the quartet has sparked a worldwide debate about how female athletes face the (sometimes sexualized) male gaze. Gymnast Elisabeth Seitz said, "Our message is: wear what you want and when you want, the main thing is to feel comfortable."

These examples show that the sexualization or de-sexualization of women's bodies are two sides of the same coin. The public and often controversial debates have long been about more than just the "correct" clothing for female athletes, but also about women's rights and their restrictions, as well as the signaling effect of professional sport (clothing) rules for non-professional and especially school sports.

What is new in this discourse is that the initiatives to resist the rules established by the official patriarchy come from the female athletes themselves. In this context, these steps towards a cultural change in professional sports are long overdue, because sexism in sports has been ignored in the sports system for a long time. Change has only occurred after allegations of abuse, sexualized and psychological violence became public in many disciplines.

How far-reaching and sustainable this development is must be determined by a close analysis of the coverage of the Tokyo Games and other sporting events. The question of who is allowed to establish the (clothing) regulations of professional sports that apply worldwide and to what extent female athletes must be subjected to cultural or religious rules must be discussed. In view of the development of women's sports, but also of the responsibility and exemplary character of sports, this is a question of great importance.

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Megan Rapinoe: the scary bear for many Americans

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When British-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed published her 2004 book "The Cultural Politics of Emotion," she likely could not comprehend the tidal wave of emotion that would crash upon advanced democratic societies through social media.

But Ahmed was on to something.

She presents a popular example from psychological literature about a child and a bear. The child sees the bear and becomes afraid. "It is not that the bear is fearsome, 'on its own'…. It is fearsome to someone or somebody. So fear is not in the child, let alone the bear, but is a matter of how child and bear come into contact. This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome," Ahmed wrote.

So, how did U.S. women's soccer star Megan Rapinoe become the scary bear for so many Americans?

The answer is sadly simple: Economics and identity politics.

Rapinoe became the public face of a group of 28 USWNT players to sue US Soccer, the national governing organization, to close the pay gap between the considerably more successful women's team and men's team.

In an open relationship with professional basketball star and Olympian Sue Bird, Rapinoe also became a highly visible LGBTQ activist.

When the USWNT advanced out of the group stage at the World Cup in France during the summer of 2019, comments recorded earlier in the year went viral as Rapinoe declared – with some colorful language – that she would not accept an invitation to the White House should the team win as she had publicly criticized then-U.S. president Donald Trump.

In the leadup to the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo in early 2021, the USWNT stopped kneeling for the anthem, but collectively took a knee on the field – usually to be joined by the opposing team — prior to the opening whistle to support Black activism on issues such as police violence, voting rights, and more.

No women's side has ever won the World Cup and Olympics in successive years, but even with the Olympics delayed a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations ran high. The USWNT went 22-0-1 after the World Cup under new coach Vlatko Andonovski. They strutted into Japan with a 502-minute streak of clean sheets.

When the Americans promptly got spanked, 3-0 to Sweden, in the first game of group play, soccer fans were shell-shocked. The USWNT emerged from pool play, but fell to Canada in the semifinal match.

The USWNT beat Australia in the bronze-medal game – a contest in which Rapinoe scored two goals. While the American athletes took solace then pride in their medal, many American citizens expressed glee over Rapinoe's "failure."

The vitriol on social media and the airwaves did not begin with a statement posted to Trump's website with which he concluded: "The woman with purple hair played terribly and spends too much time thinking about Radical Left politics and not doing her job!" but it amplified from there.

A popular author tweeted he hoped the USWNT would lose. A right-wing U.S. newscaster from Newsmax claimed he "took pleasure" in the team's defeat and "Megan Rapinoe and her merry band of America-hating female soccer players… a collection of whiny overpaid social justice warriors are very hard to root for."

Comedian K-von, host of the podcast "The Right Show," spent days during the Olympic soccer tournament to drub Rapinoe, who he dubbed "RapinHo" and "Karen Kaepernick," on Facebook. One of his followers commented that Rapinoe was like "a new STD… Nobody wants her, people are stuck with her, and sadly we have no vaccines for her…."

Resentment, anger, and hatred color the language of modern American political discourse.

Anger can be politically productive, though the uptake of anger for democratic purposes is typically achieved by a member of a privileged group. But, resentment and hatred are dangerous in democracies. Resentment is an emotion that seethes and scapegoats. Hate comes from disgust, which requires a patrolling of social norms and ultimately undermines productive public discourse.

Rapinoe checks all the boxes when it comes to the politics of emotion; She is financially well off, but seeks more. She is politically-outspoken lesbian with a successful, attractive fiancée. She dives full force into issues of race and social justice and has the audience to influence.

Like the bear, Rapinoe strikes fear. As irrational as it may be – and emotions can be, after all, not rational – the purple-haired fire brand with the wicked bend makes a group of Americans feel vulnerable. (If she gets more, they must reason, they get less, maybe?)

Another group of Americans resents and hates her in a manner exclusive to Rapinoe among 2020 Olympians. Nothing productive that comes from that.

Representations of gender in the live broadcast of the Tokyo Olympics

The Olympics represent a rare moment when sportswomen are catapaulted into the public eye and widely celebrated for their sporting achievements. My observations of the live Tokyo Olympics broadcast in New Zealand revealed some interesting shifts in the terrain of gender representation in elite sport.

The first is that gender equality is clearly 'on the agenda'. Hard on the heels of popular movements like #MeToo, news coverage highlighted issues in how media represent sportswomen such as the Tokyo Olympic broadcaster's announcement that it would avoid images that sexualized female bodies. It also highlighted athletes' decisions to challenge sexualisation in women's sport such as the Norwegian women's handball team, who attracted a fine for competing in tight-fitting shorts rather than the required bikinees, and the German gymnastic team who competed in full-length unitards.

The global media coverage of these actions is good news for women's sport—even if it has taken over 40 years of activism for issues of sexualisation to be taken seriously by mainstream media. Sports organisations are also on board. The IOC's 2021 portrayal guidelines promote "gender-equal, fair and inclusive representation in sport." Advice includes "do not focus unnecessarily on looks, clothing or intimate body parts."

However, although coverage of *issues* in representation is important, the risk is that it does not translate into media practices that embed women's sport as an ongoing, normalised part of everyday sports reporting. Historically, teams or individuals became the face of an issue while coverage of their actual sporting events and performances lagged behind. In short, the aim is to normalise sportswomen as *athletes*, rather than as *female athletes*.

We know that real change has happened when regulations and rules changed. The Olympic broadcaster's decision to avoid sexualised images is an example of this, which I saw enacted in practice, especially in beach volleyball. Based on my 'smorgasbord' approach to watching as many sports as possible across 12 different Sky Sport live Olympics channels, it seems that the Olympic broadcasters broadly achieved equal, fair and inclusive representation, with a few longstanding issues still needing attention.

Media researchers are concerned by media coverage that is unequal in amount, or positions sportswomen as different from sportsmen. Yet there was little evidence of sportswomen being presented as inferior, weaker or less able to cope with the emotional and mental pressures of elite competition in the coverage I consumed. Instead, there was greater recognition of the physical and emotional costs of elite sport, such as gymnast Simone Biles' decision to withdraw from some events, and the effects of media and public interest on weightlifter Laurel Hubbard's performance as the first transgender Olympic competitor.

Positively, live coverage of the quadrennial Olympic Games remains a high point in media coverage of women's sport. For 'home country' athletes, the amount of coverage by gender is broadly equal for women and men, especially in smaller countries like New Zealand where every medal is celebrated and women often win more medals than the men. Overall, women and men were represented as serious athletes competing at the pinnacle of their sports, and their hard work, determination and sacrifices were presented in similar ways. Commentators focused on technique, power, skill, style, fitness, mental strength, and ability to overcome pain and injury. Athletes and teams were introduced in terms of their previous successes, current world records or rankings, training disruptions and other factors that might affect their performance. Men and women were validated for expressing emotion, including crying, after winning or losing.

Although diverse patterns emerged between different female and male commentators and sports, overall they appeared comfortable referring to all sportsmen as *men*. In contrast, there were references to *ladies* and *young ladies*—a polite or old-fashioned way of referring to women—but rarely to *gentlemen*. However, the only explicitly unequal construction I heard was a male cycling commentator referring to the *ladies* and the *men*'s events. Some expert analysts—who are more likely to be former elite athletes than trained broadcasters—referred to the *girls* (and less frequently the *boys*), which are terms commonly used by athletes in team sports. So this slippage was not unexpected, even if it remains inappropriate to infantilise adult women as *girls*.

Another positive was the almost complete focus on sportswomen's *athlete* role rather than *gender* role (mom, wife). For example, rather than framing sportswomen with children as unusual *supermoms*, commentators normalised pregnancy as a natural aspect of an elite sportswoman's career by presenting it in the context of past sporting achievements (medals, records), and focusing on how time away from competition affected their Olympic preparation.

Finally, perhaps reflecting the introduction of same sex marriage laws, commentators appeared to normalise same-sex, particularly lesbian, relationships. I heard no references to gay male partners but commentators talked about lesbian couples in substantially similar ways to heterosexual couples. For example, gold medal rower Emma Twigg's thank you to her wife was presented as unremarkable.

Overall, then, the Olympics get a tick of approval. The real challenge is for sports media to show they can achieve this quality of coverage all year round.

Prof Toni Bruce

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“The gender-equal Games” vs “The IOC is failing Black women”: narratives of progress and failure

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In February 2021, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) released a statement indicating the 2020 Tokyo Games as the “first gender-equal Olympic Games.” According to the statement, nearly 49% of Olympic athletes participating at the Games would be female. As the Games neared, media narratives drew on the IOC statement in shaping narratives of progress, albeit in nuanced ways. While many media narratives championed Tokyo 2020 as the “gender-equal” games, narratives of progress were often accompanied by narratives of failure. Issues related to the lack of accommodations for breastfeeding athletes, child care, uniforms and the sexualization of sportswomen complicated the celebratory narratives of progress, raising questions regarding the IOC’s claims. Absent from the IOC’s statement and less visible in media was the “record number of openly LGBTQ athletes” competing at the 2020 Tokyo Games - triple the number of openly out LGBTQ athletes who participated in 2016. Also marginalized in narratives of progress was the “first out trans Olympian” gender non-binary athlete, Canadian Gold medal winner in soccer, Quinn.

This essay is an extension of a larger project (forthcoming book with Peter Lang Publishing, co-authored with Dunja Antunovic), where we examine how feminism itself becomes integrated in sports media narratives. We argue feminist concepts of equality, intersectionality, empowerment, sexism, among others inform the ways in which sports news media tell stories about women’s sport. In this preliminary analysis of the 2020 Tokyo Games, similar patterns in media narratives are observed. Particular feminism is visible in networked sport media and may have political and economic implications for women’s sports.

Various media outlets discussed the “gender equal Olympics” within the context of ongoing examples of sexism. *Vogue* called for a “complete overhaul” as a result of the Games being sexist. This was evidenced by FINA’s ban on swim caps designed for textured hair (more likely the hair type of Black sportswomen), as well as the various controversies regarding uniforms. Paralympian Olivia Breen was told by an official her shorts were too short, all while the Norwegian volleyball team was fined because their shorts were too long. The *Vogue* article asked: What purpose do the Olympic Games serve when their rules seem so profoundly stacked against female athletes and athletes of color?”

Similarly, *New York Times* article explained the Olympics “rely on, but don’t support Black Girl Magic”. Noting the unfair scoring of Simone Biles’ impressive skills and routines, Naomi Osaka’s prioritization of mental health and her refusal to comply with expectations to attend press conferences, and Gwen Berry’s activism and subsequent backlash to conclude, “the structure that wraps around and organizes sports, particularly the Olympic movement, fails in supporting women — distinctly so for Black women.” An article in *The Guardian* blamed the differential treatment of white and Black athletes for Richardson’s exclusion from the Games while USA fencer, Alen Hadzic, who had been accused of “sexual misconduct” by three teammates had been allowed to compete. A *CBC.com* article described the IOC’s testosterone policy as sending, “disturbing messages to female athletes, especially those who are Black.” Two Namibian 400m runners, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi were both barred from competition in Tokyo after test indicated they have too high testosterone. South African runner Caster Semenya was also barred from her main event, the 800m, along with Burundi’s Francine Niyonsaba and Kenya’s Margaret Wambui (notably, all three athletes competed and medaled in the 2016 Rio Olympics). The *CBC.com* article argues the testosterone regulation, “created a toxic space where sexism and racism overlap,” noting how the rule disproportionately affects women of color from the global south.” Additionally, a *bitchmedia* headline read: “Black women athletes are not your performance mules,” a CNN.com article explained how “misogynoir is oppressing Black women athletes,” and an ACLU news and commentary piece explored how the IOC is “failing black women.”

Narratives of failure emerge in networked sport media in part due to athlete activism, and in particular women athletes speaking out and challenging the sexism and racism in the Games. US track and field athlete, Allyson Felix launched “The Power of She” child care grants program, donating $200,000 to support athletes’ child care needs. US gymnast, Simone Biles explained how her return to the Olympics is to give voice to sexual assault survivors. Biles was the only known survivor of Larry Nassar’s abuse to participate in the Games. Synchronized swimmer Ona Carbonell from Spain posted on social media her inability to bring her infant to the Games, who she is currently breast-feeding due to the Olympics’ COVID-19 restrictions. Both the Norwegian beach volleyball team and the German gymnastics team challenged the sexualization of their sports in selecting uniforms that went against the requirements dictated by sports governing bodies. Male fencers on the US team wore pink face masks to show their support for sexual assault victims and to protest the decision to allow teammate Alen Hazdic to participate in the Games. This athlete activism, and the ways in which feminisms inform narratives in networked sport media, bring visibility to issues faced not only by Olympic athletes but issues that impact women’s lives: child care, sexualization and objectification, sexual assault among others.

The male and female sports journalists divide on the Twittersphere during Tokyo 2020

A consistent finding in sport media studies is the different coverage women's sport is given. Any hopes that new media might turn the tide were dashed when empirical studies found that women's sport is equally under-covered on these new platforms. The rise of female journalists in the previously all-male sports section also failed to remedy any inequalities, with studies suggesting that female sport journalists will predominantly mirror their male peers. However, numerous studies have indicated that during the Olympics, media coverage becomes increasingly more gender equal.

That female journalists can have unmediated interactions with sport consumers online has given rise to a new discursive sphere which challenges the patriarchal hegemonic discourse dominating sport. In a previous study we looked at the different ways that Israeli male and female journalists use Twitter. The findings indicated that despite the potential for an alternative discourse, female journalists had fewer interactions with fans; were tweeting about their personal lives; did not maintain the objectivity and provided less analysis and critical comments. We now seek to examine whether, like in traditional sport discourse, social media discourse too changes during the Olympics. To that end, we sampled and analyzed select tweets by prominent male and female Israeli sport journalists during the Tokyo Olympics and indeed, found that tweeting patterns had changed during the Games, with male and female journalists' tweets becoming increasingly similar in several aspects, whilst some differences persisted.

One novel trend refers to female journalists' consistently independent professional commentary that defers to no male authority. Also noteworthy is both male and female journalists' candor as to the limits of their knowledge. With sports they were not as familiar with, journalists tweeted, "I don't know enough to say whether they [the shoes] are responsible for these records," or, "They're claiming fraud and match fixing. Surfing Twitter, what say you?". The Olympic Games, therefore, appear to have pushed journalists, at least in Israel, outside their comfort zone of popular sports, whilst legitimizing their asking for help online.

Another trend is journalists' cross-gender patriotic zeal. During the Olympics, female and male journalists all embraced a patriotic stance. When Israeli athletes started competing, both male and female journalists were tweeting: "Come on! Bring it home!" with wins eliciting ecstatic tweets including, "Yeeeeees!!! What a queen!", complete with Israeli flag emojis galore. And when Israeli athletes underperformed, journalists' disappointed tweets soon followed, including, "Noooo!!! Luna's quit." All journalists were using the first person plural form so as to include themselves in the national community, e.g. "kept us in the running for medals," "we were but dreamers," etc. And so, whilst in normal times patriotic zeal has been declining amongst fans and journalists alike, during the Olympics it became the prevalent sentiment.

One final aspect refers to interactions with Twitter users. Whilst ordinarily, fans were mostly tweeting at male journalists, during the Olympics female sport journalists were not only tweeting at fans about technical matters (competition times, broadcast sync issues), but also on pertinent sport questions about competition rules and professional commentary. Where male and female journalists do differ is in style – whilst female journalists will have polite, measured Twitter interactions, their male peers will take blunt, critical liberties even with fans ("Such farfetched drivel you can hardly take seriously"), colleagues, "shit spawn government mouthpiece, 0 TV knowledge, 0 sports education … ethics of a whore"), and the IOC ("There's zero sporting merit to this run").

Another difference occurs in emotion in the relation to it. When male journalists tweet about emotion, they favor the third person: "Israelis here in the aisles will struggle to have a cynical take," "some moving scenes here." At times, there will be an apologetic undertone to one's excitement, "I've no idea why it's so exciting, but this is insaaaaaane." Female journalists, meanwhile, readily embrace an emotional, first-person tone: "I've got chills. Tears in my eyes," "I'm crying here with her."

The final difference relates to politics. Whilst sampled female journalists avoided tweeting about politics, their male peers criticized politicians who, during the Games, tried to take credit for any sporting triumphs, and even digressed to random political tweeting.

Two elements may account for the gender parallels in tweets during the Olympic Games:

1. The sporting field – the Olympic Games become an increasingly gender equal playing field, notably also on social media. Furthermore, the Olympic Games warrant coverage of sports otherwise viewed as 'unmasculine.' Therefore, female journalists are perceived as greater authorities on them than in normal times when the sport discourse is anchored in the more 'masculine' fields.
2. The media arena – Israeli female sport journalists took center stage in the Olympic Games' television broadcasts, covering both opening and closing ceremonies. Therefore, one might assume that social media authority also comes from the prominence of these female journalists' voices in older media.

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Performance & Identity

"The Games They are a-Changin": notes on the Tokyo Olympics and world athletics in transition"

So, the Games are finally over. Surfing Covid protests and restrictions, petitions for political asylum and meterological conditions able to paralyze events from sailing to tennis, the IOC successfully managed to stage its Japanese Olympiad. While there has been considerable media noise regarding new events – skate-boarding, surfing and sport climbing have been particular favorites – from a classic track and field perspective Tokyo 2020 may be seen in the future as a watershed moment in world athletics for various reasons.

Europe re-emerges
First off, we were presented with a 'Brave New Athletics World' as an Italian sprinter wins the 100m, a Greek wins the long jump, a Norwegian athlete breaks the 400m hurdle world record and Poland has as many gold medals as Jamaica. Europe seems to be (literally) back on track.

Superpower underperformances
The flipside of this sea change is the comparative decline of traditional sports aircraft carriers such as the USA (no sprinting golds, non-qualification for the sprint relay finals), Great Britain (no Golds) or Russia/ROC who came away with just two medals. It should also be remembered that there were no boycotts and no major absences to serve as get-out clauses.

Changing of the guard
At Tokyo 2020/2021 we have paid testimony to the definitive end of the 'Bolt Generation' and a group of elite athletes who lit up track and field in Beijing 2008, London 2012 and Rio 2016. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Price came away with just a silver medal from both 100 and 200m, Allyson Felix – the most decorated woman in track and field history – gave us one final performance to grab a bronze in the 400m, Yohan Blake did not even make the finals and Dutch sprinter Dafne Schippers was a shadow of her former self.

New kids on the starting block
In an exciting turn of events, the Japanese Games have launched a shining new generation of young athletes on to the forefront of the mediasport stage destined to dominate the next decade of world track and field. This post-Covid roster includes pole vault phenomenon Armand Duplantis (21), 400m hurdler star Sydney McLaughlin (22), teenagers such as 800m gold medalist Athing Mu (19) or sprinter Erriyon Knighton who came 4th in the 200m sprint aged just 17 (!). One extra name should be added here: javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra who at 23, became the first track and field athlete to win an Olympic gold medal for India. A sea change indeed.

Game over for male hegemony?
From a gender perspective, the Tokyo Games have also offered a greater sports spectacle and superior sporting performances than their male counterparts. Whether we refer to Venezuelan triple jumper Yulimar Rojas' world record leap, Puerto Rican Olympic record-breaker Jasmine Camacho-Quinn in the 100m hurdles, Sifan Hassan's gold medal exploits at both 10,000m and 5000m, McLaughlin's world record in the 400m hurdles, Elaine Thompson's fabulous sprint double or the 400m 'Dream Team' made up of McLaughlin, Dalilah Muhammad, Felix and Mu Athing which came within a second of the USSR's 1988 world record, the media moments in Tokyo track and field were, maybe for the first time, almost exclusively feminine. The ROC's athletics medals were both in women's events and four of the six Team GB medals were from female competitors. This may lead to shifts in audience perspective on female athletics, Olympic marketing policies and sponsorship positioning and is a trend that should be tracked.

While it is undoubtedly true that, aside from strict individual athletic performance on the track, some structural reasons could be factored in to explain such apparent shifts in the track and field status quo, (poor pre-Games team preparation policies or possible Covid-related adversities have been cited by media sources) there remains no doubt that Tokyo has revealed that change is indeed afoot in Olympic Track and Field and as the epitome of Olympism, it should be embraced by us all.

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Tokyo 2020: athlete welfare and coping with new anxieties

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Athlete welfare arose as a key part of the narrative surrounding the Tokyo 2020 Games; the demand of competing during a global pandemic could not be overlooked. Core themes included the impact of living in performance bubbles, navigating 'new anxieties' and the importance of recognizing mental health as a performance priority.

Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), referred to Tokyo 2020 as "the most restrictive sporting event in the world". While he promised that the Games would be "safe and secure" they did not pass without recorded COVID cases and the need for athletes and support staff to isolate. During the Games, stories of athletes who were placed into isolation became a reminder of the presence of the virus and the risks it posed to participants.

Members of Team GB were forced to isolate after coming into contact with someone with COVID on their flight to Tokyo. In a soon-deleted tweet, Team GB Athlete Zac Seedon stated:

'We've been stuck inside for six days now with 11 negative tests and all double vaccinated. Shocked we're not allowed back into a Covid safe environment. My Olympic experience will be spent alone, bar a few socially-distanced hours a day.'

He wasn't alone. A number of athletes referred to the uncertainty they faced while in isolation and shared the consequent negative impact on their mental health and ability to perform at the Games. For some, positive COVID tests marked the end of their Olympic campaigns.

Even for those who weren't in isolation, the daily COVID measures and medicalization of the event presented significant challenges. It is recognized that living in the secure biosafe 'bubbles,' which have become the 'new normal' at events around the world, result in additional stress and can be detrimental to athletes' mental and physical health. Such restrictions caused new anxieties to emerge in the performance narrative.

Given the one-year delay to the Games, athletes competing at Tokyo 2020 had prepared for five years and aspired to perform while navigating not only established performance-related stresses, but also new anxieties. Playing without crowds, daily testing, fear of contracting COVID, being away from family and support networks are among the emerging anxieties that featured in athlete testimonies.

Team GB Taekwondo athlete Jade Jones, a gold medal prospect, was beaten in her first-round match. Jones told BBC Sport how she was scared and put too much pressure on herself to perform:

"The whole tournament has been so different to what I'm used to. Usually I have my whole family there so when I am scared when I come out, them cheering gives me that extra push to go for it. I got trapped in that fear mode today."

Highlighting the increased pressure on athletes at the Tokyo Games, Team GB's two-time Gold medallist swimmer, Adam Peaty stated that it would take some time to recover from this intense period. He noted:

"the amount of investment that not only goes in over the last 12 years every single day, more so this year with COVID. It wasn't an Olympic year once, it was an Olympic year twice. So what is initially all of your energy once you've gotta find it again. You know some parts this year I went to the deepest darkest holes I've ever been in"

This speaks of the sustained strain athletes felt in order to be ready to compete and peak, two years in succession.

Perhaps gaining the most significant attention, Team USA gymnast, Simone Biles, openly spoke about the pressure she experienced during Tokyo 2020. She withdrew from several events and made an open statement about her mental health and inability to perform at her optimal in Tokyo:

"You know what, I have to do what is right for me and focus on my mental health and not jeopardise my health and my well-being… At the end of the day, we're human, too, so we have to protect our mind and our body rather than just go out there and do what the world wants us to do."

Her decision not to compete raised important conversations surrounding the link between mental health and physical safety in sport. Medal placings at the Tokyo Games were certainly affected by those who were best able to manage the demands of competing during a global pandemic. Further work is needed to understand the extent of the impact on those competing.

Part of being an elite athlete, of course, is the ability to respond to adverse circumstances. Success is often linked to the ability to negotiate and overcome challenges. Athletes competing at Tokyo 2020 nonetheless faced unprecedented fears and new sources of anxiety and while doing so opened up critical dialogue about the importance of mental health and athlete welfare in elite sports performance. By continuing with Tokyo 2020 during a pandemic, the IOC were not able to deliver a Games that was 'safe and secure' for *all* athletes, further putting athletes' mental and physical health at risk.

Athlete health and welfare seems set to have primacy in future Olympic and Paralympic cycles. However, there will need to be a significant cultural shift toward athlete safety and a medals and more approach. There remains a danger that such duties of care are treated as symbolic requirements that when it comes to games time; becoming overshadowed by performance expectations.

simonebiles

simonebiles prelims ☑ now to prepare for finals.

it wasn't an easy day or my best but I got through it. I truly do feel like I have the weight of the world on my shoulders at times. I know I brush it off and make it seem like pressure doesn't affect me but damn sometimes it's hard hahaha! The olympics is no joke! BUT I'm happy my family was able to be with me virtually they mean the world to me!

2d

nastialiukin proud of you, always ❤️

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Tokyo Olympics: when athletes are faced with the impossible.

Dr Dikaia Chatziefstathiou

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Sport is a key driver for economic and social development. Its role is well recognized by governments, including in the Political Declaration of the 2030 Agenda, which reflects on "the contribution sports make to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities, as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives. The global pandemic, with the social distancing me asures and lockdowns, disrupted many aspects of life, including sport.

Some of the key concerns were about elite sport and human rights – how and when will it be safe for major sports tournaments and leagues to "get back to normal"? Is the health and safety of athletes, workers and fans sufficiently taken into account, when making such decisions? Athletes faced an unprecedented crisis of values and identity. Some announced their retirement, e.g. Tom Ransley, a double Olympic medalist on the British rowing team; Eddie Dawkins, the Rio Olympic silver medalist in track cycling. Some others may have seen this as an opportunity to overcome an injury or optimize their training and performance, but what complicates this process is the financial gap created by the suspension of economic and social activity at national level and all over the world.

Athletes could not routinely work around a clock of events, training regimes and fixed schedules. The Games could have been cancelled even hours before the Opening Ceremony:

"We can't predict what will happen with the number of coronavirus cases. So we will continue discussions if there is a spike in cases," said Toshiro Muto, when asked at a news conference if the Games still could be canceled. "

The degree to which such uncertainty influenced athletes is reflected in what British heptathlon athlete Katarina Johnson Thompson said a year and a half ago.

"The IOC advice 'encourages athletes to continue to prepare for the Olympic Games as best as they can' with the Olympics only four months away, but the Government legislation is enforcing isolation at home with tracks, gyms and public spaces closed."

Katarina was badly injured during her 200m race at the Tokyo Olympics and was open again about the many challenges she faces. The Tokyo organisers rightfully paid a special tribute to athletes in their Opening Ceremony. The opening section showed athletes training alone and feeling disheartened as the Games were postponed. The camera focused on one athlete who seemed to be endlessly training on a lonely treadmill. It was then revealed she was Arisa Tsubata, a Japanese boxer whose hopes to compete at Tokyo had been hurt by the pandemic. The IOC cancelled her qualifying event due to Covid-19 concerns, so the 53 places were allocated based on the world rankings since 2017 and Tsubata, who works as a nurse, missed out. "I had been working so hard for a year after the postponement of the Olympics, and it's so frustrating that I don't even have the right to compete" Tsubata told Reuters. Her feeling of frustration is shared by many athletes globally. The head coach of India's national boxing team Santiago Nieva recalls the "heartbreaking moment" when he delivered the news to four boxers. "You feel like you're taking away their dreams" Nieva said. "They became depressed.... they were empty, felt empty in the head and body."

Key questions are raised about elite sport and athletes' human rights. How do public health concerns intersect with the athletes' right to participate in sport? What are the best decisions for the athletes' interests? It is common knowledge that the decision-making processes in sport are complex. However, the pandemic has exposed them to further complexities, especially in relation to human rights, safety and wellbeing.

Tsubata said in relation to Paris 2024, "I can't say I am aiming for the next Olympics in Paris, but what I can do is try to keep working hard step by step, at any competition(s) ahead, small or big". This is reminiscent of a quote from Coubertin about what makes an Olympic athlete:

*"A good fighter pulls back, but does not give up. He [sic] yields, but he never gives in. When faced with the impossible, he [sic] changes course and goes ahead. If his [sic] breath gives out, he [sic] rests and he waits. If he [sic] has been knocked out of the fight, he [sic] encourages his [sic] brothers [sic] with his [sic] words and his [sic] presence. Even when everything comes tumbling down around him [sic], he [sic] never despairs." **

Kudos to athletes who now more than ever face struggles, the impossible, everything tumbling down.

*Source : *DE COUBERTIN Pierre, Olympie, Conférence donnée à Paris, dans la Salle des Fêtes de la Mairie du XVIème arrondissement [1929], Burgi, Genève, 1929, p.8.* / Translation: *Olympism: selected writings / Pierre de Coubertin, IOC, Lausanne, 2000, p. 571.*

Twitter helps normalize discussions on mental health beyond athletes

Dr Yuya Kiuchi

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While the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo made history as the first modern Olympics to see a year-long postponement as well as empty stadia, it will also be remembered as the first Olympics during which athletes' mental health was at the forefront of the global media and fan attention. Leading up to the Olympics, Sha'Carri Richarson (U.S. sprinter), Tom Dumoulin (Dutch cyclist), Liz Cambage (Australian basketball player), and Naomi Osaka (Japanese tennis player), just to name a few, publicly talked about their mental health struggles and made their mental health a priority over their athletic activities and obligations. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) also responded by establishing a 24-hour mental health help line, Athlete365 website, and offered a series of mental health-related stories on its website.

The most prominent mental health-related decision after the start of the quadrennial event came on July 28, when Simone Biles, one of the most decorated gymnasts, decided to withdraw from the individual all-around competition finals after commenting that she was going to put her mental health first. Not all reactions to her decision, either online or offline, were supportive. On Twitter, for example, the Deputy Attorney General of Texas, Aaron, Reitz, tweeted—only to delete the tweet later—characterizing Biles "selfish, childish national embarrassment." However, there were numerous supporting tweets, including ones by Michelle Obama, Mitt Romney, and Sarah Hirshland, the CEO of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee.

With the Olympics being one of the most popular sporting events in the world, athletes' willingness to share their mental health struggles had an impact beyond the Olympic Village. They helped normalize conversations about mental health. This was particularly important because mental health is not a concern only among top athletes. Although almost one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness with young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 having the highest prevalence at nearly 30%, it continues to be a taboo topic and continues to be seen even as a weakness. Some critics of Biles indeed claimed that if she was truly the GOAT (Greatest of All Time), then she would not be so weak to withdraw from the Olympic competition. Amidst these negative comments about Biles's decision, many more tweets supported her decision and connected her experience to mental health in general.

Although associated stigma about mental health continues to exist, athletes' stories were widely shared on social media including Twitter, and other athletes and fans frequently respected their honesty and disclosed that these athletes were not alone. For example, many athletes from Carl Lewis to Nafissatou Thiam (Belgian pole vaulter gold medalist) shared their mental health struggles after Biles's announcement. The tweet that most eloquently encapsulated this connection was by @jornnar1012 who wrote, "Simone Biles may not see your comments about how she is 'playing the mental health card' but your friends who are suffering in silence will." This tweet received slightly over 100 comments after 2 weeks but over 105,000 likes. Based on the empirical assessment of the tweet using the ratio between the comments and likes—with the premise that Twitter users are far more likely to comment to express disagreement with a tweet than to agree, and that they are more likely to simply hit the heart button to share their support than to comment in order to express their support—the tweet was a very well-perceived. This is a stark contrast to Piers Morgan's tweet in which he wrote "Are 'mental health issues' now the go-to excuse for any poor performance in elite sport? What a joke." The tweet received over 1,400 comments with only 19,000 likes.

Such supportive attitudes towards the athletes suffering from mental health concerns are contrary to the traditional norm that athletes have to be tough and strong at all times. These new norms do not only help athletes but also the public in general. When an elite Olympic athlete has mental health issues, then a regular young adult can easily say that they also need help and seek professional help. Furthermore, to have more examples of high-profile individuals admitting their mental health experiences allow people with diverse mental health experiences to find someone similar to them, especially due to a wide range of signs and symptoms that mental health issues can present.

Mental health continues to be a taboo in many instances. A long way still exists to destigmatize mental health illnesses. But the athletes showed that they could help change the perceptions about mental health and bring positive changes to the public who suffer from the stigma of mental health illnesses in their professional and personal lives. The 2020 Olympics, therefore, was memorable not only for its pandemic-related logistical changes but also for being a major event where a big step forward was made with the help of social media.

Communication of athlete risk with head injuries in the 2020 Olympics

Few Olympic athletes know the highs and lows of competition like BMX rider Connor Fields. In 2016, he was an Olympic gold medalist, the first American male to ever earn first in the sport. At the 2020 Olympics, he competed in the same event, but this time left not with a medal, but with a brain injury from his crash in the semifinal. As his supporters encouraged him to make another run for gold at the 2024 Olympics, Fields took to Twitter, reminding them he had brain hemorrhaging and saying in apparent frustration, "Do people realize I nearly died?"

While the Olympics is a time to celebrate the athletes and sports that normally fall outside of mainstream viewing, the increased media exposure should not be solely devoted to positive content. The two-week period is also a rare opportunity to discuss the risks of these sports with a much larger audience. However, it often takes an injury like Fields' to have that conversation. Some media outlets attempt to start that dialogue, such as The New York Times, which published an article during the 2020 Olympics focused on the concussion problem in synchronized swimming, but most coverage of athlete risk was reactive following an injury in the Olympics rather than proactive.

The media has a great ability to shape discourses about health issues as well as public perception of these issues. Thus, there is great importance on providing adequate coverage of these Olympic sports, including their risks. Without such coverage, what may emerge is a fan with a limited understanding of the dangers of sport, and that can have consequences. A 2015 study found that U.S. collegiate athletes who suffered head injuries and experienced pressure to play from multiple sources, including fans, had a lower intention to report symptoms of a future concussion.

While sports like BMX riding and synchronized swimming may be at higher levels of risk than others, all sports push athletes' bodies to the limit, and thus put the athlete at risk for physical injury. Prior research has found that the more often that elite athletes play their sport, the more likely they are to sustain injury. Yet, despite the frequency of athlete injuries, the physical welfare of the athlete is either taken for granted by fans or there is a belief that they should be risking their body. In sports like American football, injuries and the sport's violent nature are viewed as simply part of the game and those athletes who play through pain have been celebrated. Although there has been a sort of awakening of acknowledging athlete mental health concerns over the past few years, physical health preservation is sometimes still met with disagreement. Even leagues themselves have pushed back on the idea of athlete preservation, as the National Basketball Association instituted penalties for resting player due to "load management." Opponents of this resting philosophy claim athletes make millions of dollars and should not be sitting out no matter what the concern is.

Sitting out competition can be both a way to alleviate the everyday wear and tear of competing as well as to avoid catastrophic injury. For Fields, being rushed back from injury can have significant long-term effects. Those who suffer a brain injury and return to sport before fully healing are more susceptible to long-term issues or even death. So, while saying "Paris is in 3 years" to Fields may seem like harmless words of encouragement, anything that rushes an athlete back before he or she is healthy can increase their risk of even worse injury. Understanding such dangers related to sport can keep the fan more informed and the athletes safer.

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Racist slurs, stubborn animals, and colonial fear

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On July 2021, 28, during the Olympic Cycling individual men's time trial, cameras caught the German cyclist Nikias Arndt chasing his competitors Azzedine Lagab from Algeria and Amanuel Ghebreigzabhier from Eritrea. While passing his coach Patrick Moster, the latter tried to motivate Arndt by shouting "Go get the camel drivers! Get the camel drivers! Come on!" clearly audible on live television.

The immediate reactions in traditional and social media in Germany were unanimous: journalists, audiences, and the cyclists from the team (including Arndt himself) said, wrote, and tweeted that they felt "appalled" and "ashamed" about this type of "unacceptable" behavior by one of their representatives. After the race, Moster published a half-apology, citing the "high overall pressure" at the Olympics in Japan as a reason for why "in the heat of the moment" his "word choice" had been a "mistake," for which he was "deeply sorry." A day later, the German Olympic Sports Confederation terminated Moster's participation in the Olympic team and sent him back to Germany.

Insults in context

There exists a consensus that racist slurs should not be repeated, so many media outlets did not reproduce the actual term but instead wrote about a "racist utterance" or "lapse" when reporting about the event. From an academic perspective, however, it helps to take the semantics of slurs seriously, as they provide glimpses at the sociocultural sub-conscious of the insulter and their cultural environments. And in that respect, the "camel driver" incident at the Tokyo Olympics is on the one hand peculiar (because it is a surprisingly archaic word choice), and on the other hand embedded in a long tradition of (mis)representing cultural Others in German sports.

Academic literature shows that "the camel driver" has a long history as a stereotype in Orientalist literature and art, as Edward Said discussed in his influential book *Orientalism* in 1978. He explained that "the camel driver," in line with "the moneychanger" and "the slave trader," has been a recurring character in Orientalist literature since the 19th century. In such depictions, the camel driver usually embodied the "degenerate scoundrel," who posed as a servile minion, but spun clever intrigues and was essentially treacherous and selfish. In combination with an animal that is said to be stubborn and difficult to work with, the camel driver embodied incompetence, failing efforts, and easy defeat over the course of many narratives. Said concluded that such stereotypes about men from "the Orient" helped "European culture [gain] strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."

Only with this background can we understand how and why a German sports coach would opt for this rather old-fashioned term as an insult intended to motivate a cyclist to chase his opponents. This slur is ultimately based on an ideology in which certain people – here, cyclists from African countries – are "unworthy" to beat a white European, and thus a remnant of colonial thinking in competitive sports, where losing is, on the one hand, normal and part of sports, but on the other hand, losing against "inferior" cultures is still considered shameful, at least by some.

Germans vs. men who work with animals

Interestingly, the term "camel driver" describes, on the denotative level, not an ethnicity, religion, or nation, but a very particular, old-fashioned, though in reality not dishonorable profession. Therefore, it is not only a racial-colonial, but also a classist insult directed at people working with animals. And at that, this case is much less unique than most commentators acknowledged. In fact, German athletes and fans have developed a long tradition of using similar job profiles as vehicles for insults. Most prominently, in 2014, after the German national men's soccer team won the FIFA World Cup, the team made negative headlines by mocking their Argentinian opponents after the final game with a song in which "the Gauchos" needed to stoop in front of the mighty Germans who had just beaten them. This followed the exact same pattern as the "camel driver case"—using an existing cultural stereotype of men working with animals to imply German superiority against an allegedly agricultural Other. These parallels are no coincidence, considering that Germany prides itself in its highly industrialized, technologized, post-agricultural economic setup.

In other words, the "camel driver incident" functioned at the intersection of three different but interrelated cultural phenomena. It entails colonial perspectives that imply the backwardness and incompetence of North Africans and is hence clearly racist. Secondly, it is also classist, in that it degrades jobs in the agricultural sector. Thirdly, it provides a glimpse at a central fear in parts of German culture: to not be able to live up to its own arrogance as a highly developed, post-agricultural civilization, and to lose against people from countries that are supposedly less technologized and less efficient, countries in which men supposedly still work with stubborn animals, and who should therefore be easily defeatable. The "colonizer's fear" – to see their claims to superiority shattered by reality – is a well-documented phenomenon, and as old as colonialism itself. Fragments of it remain alive in German competitive sports. Consequently, derogative terms such as "camel drivers" or "gauchos" against international opponents need to be taken seriously beyond the individual "lapse" of one coach, in the context of shifting power patterns among nations and cultures.

Tokyo 2021 and the LGBTQ athlete

According to recent data from the Pew Research Center, while there continues to be a "global divide" on attitudes toward homosexuality, there has still been increasing acceptance in most countries across the world. Perhaps the most obvious example of changing social and legal rights for sexual minorities has been the ever-increasing number of countries who have legalized same-sex unions. Since the Netherlands became the first two decades ago, almost 30 countries have now done the same. Interestingly, however, Japan – the hosts of the Tokyo 202 – is not on this list. This is despite the country's failure to recognize same-sex unions being ruled "unconstitutional," and increasing cultural support for its introduction. Japan is also the only member of the G7 that has not legalized same-sex unions. Moreover, despite a significant shift in cultural attitudes toward homosexuality in Japan – around three-quarters of its population are currently accepting of homosexuality, compared to around half in 2002 – the country ranks second-to-last in LGBTQ rights among wealthiest nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But this does not appear to negatively impact LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) interest in the Games. Fascinatingly, a recent tweet by Outsports – the world's most prominent website dedicated to LGBTQ involvement in sport – declared that its traffic "increases dramatically [during the Olympic Games] because LGBTQ fans are watching the Games. We see the data every two years." Even though recent research has documented that LGBTQ folks are less likely to identify as sports "fans," their experiences remain important. But while this snapshot into LGBTQ sports fandom is in and of itself fascinating, we focus here on an even more staggering statistic: the 2020 Tokyo Games had more "out" LGBTQ athletes – 183 – than any other Olympic Games in history.

Not only that, but this figure – which is still rising (as the above link is continually updated) – is more than three times as many as the previous Olympic Games in Rio (56), and around eight times more than London 2012. And if that wasn't enough, this figure is also more than all other Olympic Games—combined. If competing as a team, Team LGBTQ would have finished 7th in the final medals table—with a total of 32 medals. With these things in mind, Alexandra Topping, in the British newspaper, The Guardian, has described these "Rainbow Olympics" as the "turning point for LGBTQ+ athletes."

In some ways, these figures are astounding; could such an exponential increase of out LGBTQ athletes at the Games be predicted? Probably not, and we must be aware of the lived experiences of those within the LGBTQ community and how progress is achieved at different speeds: trans participants have been permitted to compete at the Olympics since 2004, but none ever had until this year's Games.

Some may argue that an athlete's sexual or gender identity is immaterial to their sporting performance. On the surface, that may be true; but when we examine sport's historical treatment of these folks – combined with the fact that 10 nations competing in the Tokyo Games retain the death penalty for some LGBTQ people – it is clear that an athlete's sexual or gender identity does matter. In fact, some have suggested that their athletic performance has been enhanced when they have come out as "a burden is lifted from their shoulders that they are able to focus more on their sport." This ties in with another high-profile topic at the Games – mental health – and the positive impact coming out can have for athletes in that regard. This has also been documented in scholarly research.

The increase of out LGBTQ athletes at the Games is, however, likely reflective of the broader cultural context in which they operate. For some time now, research in this area – which continues to grow at a rate of knots – has shown that a range of sports have made significant strides and become far more acceptant of sexual minority athletes. As evidenced with the Games, we've also seen a significant increase of elite-level LGBTQ athletes coming out of the closet, too, and – most importantly – being (mostly) welcomed with open arms. This has even been the case with traditionally macho sports, such as American football (and athletes such as Carl Nassib). And we've also seen how heterosexual allies are standing up for LGBTQ athletes in ways like never before; F1 driver Sebastian Vettel, for example, joined several drivers in voicing his support for LGBTQ rights ahead of the recent Grand Prix in Hungary, even wearing a rainbow t-shirt during the country's national anthem.

Even though is an extremely brief snapshot, it is largely indicative of sport's increasing acceptance. This is not universal, of course, and there do remain issues of discrimination, as witnessed with homophobic and transphobic remarks in Russian coverage – including British diver Tom Daley – which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have condemned and are investigating. The overwhelmingly positive reception of the record-number of out LGBTQ athletes in Tokyo is rightfully the focus of this article, with so many athletes not only competing as their authentic selves, but succeeding on this global stage time after time. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the shift in confidence, with more athletes feeling able to discuss their same-sex partners and LGBTQ issues in media coverage throughout the Games. Long may it continue.

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The media coverage of the Tokyo 2021 Paralympic Games: Visibility, progress and politics

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Despite the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games taking place during a global pandemic, this year's Games has been deemed the most successful in history in terms of global viewership and coverage, broadcasting agreements, digital connectivity, and inclusion.

In the last decade there has been increasing amounts of investment by national free-to-air (FTA) broadcasters in the quantity and quality of Paralympic coverage placing demands on the Olympic Broadcasting Service (OBS) to improve the amount of live coverage available across more Paralympic sports. Leading the way is the Japanese Paralympic Broadcaster – NHK – who has provided the most coverage of a Paralympic Games by a host broadcaster to date. The broadcast success of the Tokyo 2021 Paralympics also lies in the fact that it is the first Games to be broadcast (FTA) across many territories in the Global South, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, bringing a new audiences to Paralympic sport. This is an important step forward for the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) who have long been criticised for the uneven distribution of Paralympic coverage that sees wealthier economies in the Global North benefitting from the positive societal benefits the Games can have on disability discourses.

Moreover, and contributing to its success, the Tokyo Paralympic Games have been the most digitally accessible and 'savvy'. Alongside live streaming of Paralympic events on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, the IPC have stayed ahead of the trend when it comes to digital experience and audience interaction – engaging viewers through extra content on social media apps such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok in addition to launching their very own Paralympic mobile app which provided access to live streams with various interactive features.

Arguably, the level of media exposure, connectivity and visibility of the Paralympic Games has made it an important platform for political advocacy - and this was certainly on display in this year's Tokyo Games.

For the first time in the history of the modern Paralympic movement, the Paralympic opening ceremony was the showpiece for the launch of a new global political campaign known as the #wethe15. Bringing together a coalition of International Disability Rights Organisations – including the IPC, the International Disability Alliance, the Valuable 500, and the United Nations (to name just a few) – the campaign intends to raise awareness of disability equality, diversity, and inclusion. Given the evidence pointing toward the positive role the Paralympic Games can have on public perceptions and awareness of disability, it is perhaps unsurprising that the IPC have been at the heart of bringing the campaign to fruition so as to coincide with this year's Paralympic Games opening ceremony, which reached an estimated Global audience of 250 million.

The Tokyo Paralympic Games have also been celebrated as the first Paralympics to include the most female competitors and see the highest representation of LGBQT+ athletes. This year we have witnessed a number of successful para-athletes using their public profile to raise awareness of disability diversity and intersectionality. This includes athletes such as British wheelchair racer, Karé Adenegan and US Wheelchair Basketball player, Brian Bell, both of whom have discussed their experience as black disabled athletes, and British wheelchair Basketball player, Robyn Love, who openly identifies as LGBTQ+.

As with non-disabled sport, the use of social media by athletes to self-represent and (re-)claim the narrative around disability has been crucial in shaping the public 'mainstream' dialogue and dominant media representations. Certainly, discussions concerning disability at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and/or LBQGT+ experience have, until now, been largely absent when it comes to media reporting on the Paralympic Games. It seems we are entering a new era of disability diversity with the visibility and vocality of individuals such as Adenegan, Bell and Love (among many others) having an important and positive influence in Paralympic sport and the wider media sphere.

This year's Tokyo Paralympics can arguably be seen as one that has openly embraced politics and progress as part of its global success. Despite many of the legitimate critiques levelled at the Paralympic movement, at this conjunctural moment, it is difficult not to be somewhat cognisant of the important progress – both in social change, media visibility and political weight – that the Paralympic Games has undergone.

It's complicated: disability media and the Paralympic Games

Australian sportsman Dylan Alcott's profile on the Paralympics Australia website lists his goal as "to be a trailblazer for people with a disability in the media". In addition to be a high profile wheelchair tennis player, Alcott has made a number of interventions in the disability media space space from exposing the lack of disability representation in Australian media in 2019 to highlighting the ways people with disability are continually medicalized in 2020.

During the 2021 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Alcott commented to Tom Decent in the Sydney Morning Herald on the importance of both the Paralympic Games themselves and the opportunity they gave for disabled athletes to participate in media interviews:

I'll tell you what I'm most proud of; all our athletes and what they're saying in their interviews is unbelievable […] They are advocating for not only people with disabilities who play sport, for our whole community in general. Every single interview I watch I'm just hit for six. I'm so proud of our team and what they stand for and how they communicate.

As I argued in my 2016 book Disability and Popular Culture, The Paralympics have had a complicated relationship with the media. In 2021 we saw this relationship changing and a shift from the rehabilitative focus of previous games.

History of the Paralympics

The first Paralympic Games was held in 1948 at Stoke Mandeville Hospital where 26 British veterans undergoing rehabilitation following war injuries competed in wheelchair archery. The rehabilitative origins of the games have continued to shape media reporting of the event.

While Wikipedia describes the 1996 Paralympic Games as the first Paralympics to get mass media sponsorship, athletes have described the way the media did not stick around for the Paralympic Games following the conclusion of the Atlantic Olympic Games. Schell and Duncan's 1999 analysis of the reporting that did take place identified an implication that athletes be 'grateful for the Paralympic experience'.

Broadcasters have traditionally shied away from the Paralympics fearing the classification system too complicated to explain to audiences and that the disabled body would elicit discomfort rather than appreciation. As I noted in my book, this began to change in 2012 when television rights for the Paralympic Games were sold on the Open Market in the UK for the first time. Channel 4 who won the rights embarked on a new era of disability sports with the aim of shifting broader perceptions of disability.

The SuperHumans and spectacularisation of Paralympic sports

Channel 4 embarked on an unapologetically commercial strategy advertising the Games via their Meet The Superhumans campaign. The campaign was an attempt to replace the 'ahh bless' approach taken to previous advertising with a cool factor. While the campaign without a doubt prompted a paradigm shift, unfortunately, the use of the term superhuman has long been criticised in disability studies.

In the successive Games following 2012, host countries and broadcasters have attempted to attract a larger audience via a process of spectacularisation. In the lead up to the 2021 Paralympic Games, the event was heavily advertised on Australian television and was broadcast in prime time in the US for the first time. The Games have gone beyond the initial stages of attracting an audience I wrote about in 2016.

Equal pay

Paralympic athletes were also paid comparably to their Olympic counterparts for the first time in both the US and Australia. While for US athletes this commitment was made prior to the Games itself, in Australia this commitment was not made until Paralympian Chad Perris raised the issue in a podcast. In an interview with ABC news two-time gold medallist Jodi Willis-Roberts added to the conversation:

We're not a sideshow, we're athletes out there doing it every bit as hard as every other athlete, and unfortunately we don't get the same rewards.

The revelation prompted a social media campaign led by a number of high profile Australian athletes and fully embraced by Australians on social media. In response to this grassroots effort and high profile support the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced in Parliament that Australian Paralympians would receive equal pay to their Olympic athletes.

The binary opposition between Paralympic and Olympic athletes accepted as fact in previous years has broken down with athletes claiming disability including for example Michael Phelps whose ADHD diagnosis has been reframed as a strength in media reporting. However, like the superhuman campaign, reporting of previously hidden disability and impairment constructs athletes as superhuman or inspirational.

At the 2020 Olympics a number of athletes, notably Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka, revealed and prioritized their mental health struggles. This was a pivotal moment that blurred the distinction between ability and disability and broke down some boundaries between the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Held in the midst of a pandemic, the Tokyo Games were a defining moment for disability's relationship with the media. In 2021 both Paralympians and Olympians brought attention to disability and the media via their commentary about disability issues and their own experiences of both impairment and social disadvantages such as unequal pay.

Prof Katie Ellis

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Companies escape attention as debate on women's uniform rages

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When it comes to avoiding the spotlight, uniform companies appear to have taken the gold during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. Journalists, pundits and scholars trained their attention on everyone, except uniform companies as controversies arose regarding women's competitive uniforms. News articles scarcely mentioned uniform companies; rather they focused on athletes' decisions regarding notable sartorial choices or provided commentary questioning why certain restrictions exist in the first place (e.g, German female gymnastics team's unitard).

The issue, then, is the role that uniform companies play in changing the narrative regarding female uniforms. Although some companies previously created advertising campaigns celebrating female athletes, these companies said little when the controversy is about their uniform … and little is asked of them.

Generally, companies' best course of action is to be proactive in their communications; however, the circumstances surrounding Olympic uniforms support the decision to largely remain quiet. Despite the growing conversation about regulating female uniforms, one might argue this emerged as a paracrisis for companies. Although it's entirely possible that these conversations may be damaging to the uniform companies, the conversation did not present threats to organizational reputation that would constitute a crisis.

One of the reasons uniform companies escaped unscathed is because of the opaqueness regarding uniform regulations. In short, it's unclear how much power companies have in uniform design and creation processes. According to the France 24 article Tokyo Olympics: Female athletes face double standards over uniforms, the International Olympic Committee says that "it's up to international federations for each individual sport to decide what the appropriate attire for each gender group is." But the same article notes, "International sports federations don't make their criteria for athletic uniform regulations public."

Additionally, the international sports federations were rarely quoted in many news stories. One notable exception was when the International Handball Federation explained its clothing rules after the European Handball Federation fined the Norwegian team "after they wore shorts like their male counterparts instead of bikini bottoms" during the European Beach Handball Championship, which occurred shortly before the Olympics. USA Today quoted International Handball Federation spokeswoman Jessica Rockstroh's reaction to the controversy as, "We would like to emphasize that we are aware of the global discussion surrounding these uniforms and appreciate any feedback from the community." The likely reason for the Handball Federation's public statement could be attributed to pop star Pink who offered to pay the Norwegian team's fine, which also moved the non-Olympics story from news and sports into the consciousness of the wider populace *during* the Olympics.

It appears the choice for companies to be silent may have been driven largely by the athletes' ownership of the decisions being made. For example, U.S. beach volleyball stars "April Ross and Alix Klineman said they prefer the smaller bikinis and could have worn shorts if they had chosen to," according to *USA Today*. Star gymnast Simone Biles similarly explained she prefers traditional leotards but stood with the German team's "decision to wear whatever they please and whatever makes them feel comfortable."

In fact, the *only* uniform company quoted (following a thorough news search) is Biles' and the U.S. Women's Gymnastics Team sponsor, GK Elite. In response to the issue, chief commercial officer Matt Cowan indicated: "Would we do it? Absolutely. We have the capabilities of designing it and doing it, and we have done it. But from a consumer demand perspective, we are not there yet."

Further, while the myriad uniform disputes reached global news and sports media, these problems did not dominate social media. For example, after the Norwegian uniform news was reported, the controversy quickly made its way around social media platforms. A quick analysis of Reddit and Tumblr indicates the issue of athletes' body autonomy is not popular among the internet memes and internet popular culture. It is highly likely that if it wasn't for Pink, popular culture may have remained in the dark about fines associated with uniforms and what constitutes uniform violations.

Overall, not only were apparel companies not called on to make comments regarding the issue of female uniforms, but companies were almost entirely ignored. This suggests that these companies were not at risk of experiencing reputational damage, so making unsolicited comments may have brought attention to issues that were not there.

And so while numerous journalists and sports scholars highlight that men dominate sports institutions, news media missed an opportunity to explore what influence companies have in designing and supporting women sportswear.

Policing the uniforms and sportswear of Tokyo 2020: commercialism in the name of competition

Having analyzed female Olympian and Paralympian outfits seeing how they continue to evolve from Victorian and constricting to more appropriate for athletic competition, it strikes me how sexist and racist official uniforms continue to be.

Of course, beginning at the real beginning, it behooves us to recall that those Ancient Olympic Games of 776 BCE had naked competitors, women banned from even being spectators. When they were opened to both sexes, at 1900 Paris, female athletes were allowed to participate in respectable (read "feminine") sports like lawn tennis and golf, wearing long-sleeved, ankle-length dresses. Victorian modesty prevailed, setting the standard for patriarchal controlling of girls' and women's sport. That policing continues by a number of governing bodies, as evidenced in Tokyo:

- The European Handball Federation recently fined Norway's beach handball team €1,500/$1,700 when its players chose to wear shorts instead of bikini bottoms, which they had described as "uncomfortable and degrading." The International Handball Federation upheld the bikini choice (and singer Pink offered to pay the fine!)
- "Gobsmacked" and speechless is how Paralympian sprinter Olivia Breen reported feeling when she was told by England Athletics that her briefs were "too short" and "inappropriate" at the English Championships, but she nevertheless planned to wear them at Tokyo 2020. "We should be celebrating women's sporting excellence, not limiting them to the size of their knickers," she tweeted.
- FINA, the International Swimming Federation, has banned Soul Cap, a swim cap specially designed for Black hair, denying British swimmer Alice Dearing the chance to use it for her natural afro hair. While the organization claims that the cap does not "fit the natural form of the head," Black swimmers simply say, "We're always policed on what we can wear."
- Sarah Gamal, an Egyptian referee, will make history as the first hijab-wearing basketball referee, a result of the International Basketball Federation's 2017 rule change lifting a ban on the Islamic headscarf. "On the personal level, I'm representing the Arab world and Africa so I want to appear in the best possible shape," she has shared. Badminton players also wore hijab at Tokyo 2020, owing a debt to American fencer Ibtihaj Muhammed.
- German gymnasts have opted for unitards as a statement against "sexualization" and for comfort and, while they are allowable according to the International Gymnastics Federation, this wardrobe revolution may just set a trend.

"Elite female athletes want the right to determine how their bodies move and how they are viewed in their uniforms. But the rules vary," *New York Times* fashion editor Vanessa Friedman has noted. The difference, clearly, is that athletes now are protesting the policing of their bodies. While the International Olympic Committee allows national Olympic committees to dictate rules for their own delegations, it is encouraging that so many athletes of both genders are pointing out double standards—especially when Tokyo 2020 has a record nine trans athletes and 100+ publicly out LGBTQ Olympians and Paralympians.

Some designers for Tokyo 2020 were traditional, like Armani for Italy, Ben Sherman for Britain, Lacoste for France, or Ralph Lauren for Team USA's ceremonies and Nike for its competition, along with Kim Kardashian's Skims undergarments. Joma was responsible for Armenia, Guatemala, Honduras, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Malta, Mauritius, Moldova, Morocco, Portugal, and Spain. Totto outfitted Aruba and Columbia; Asics did Australia, the Philippines, and Uruguay; Erima—Austria; Valour—Bahrain; Tim Yip for Anta—China; Zuzana Osako—the Czech Republic; Rowing Blazers and Zotico—El Salvador; Nuba—Hungary; Raymond—India; Adidas—Ireland; Castro—Israel; Aoki—Japan; Wanja Ngare—Kenya; Fourteen—Kosovo; High Life—Mexico; Michael & Amazonka—Mongolia; Saori Tsuda—Panama; Joseph Da'Ponte—Puerto Rico; ZASPORT—ROC; North Face—South Korea; and Uniqlo—Sweden. Peak Sports was responsible for Brazil and New Zealand, Icepeak for Finland, Nike for the Netherland, Nigeria, and Turkey; and 4F designed outfits for Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia. Much was made of Liberian-American Telfar Clemens' deconstructed, unisex performance gear as well as Mbali Zulu, Nompumlelo Mjadu, Sandile Sikhakhane and Sipho Lushaba's South African designs for Mr. Price Sport.

It cannot be a surprise that organizations aiming to please heterosexual audiences at the Games consider the bottom line of commercialism in their decisions about uniforms. While official uniforms are a must-see for both Olympians and Paralympians, it behooves us to look deeper at their sexist and racist statements. And for Tokyo 2020 there is another item of clothing everyone wears: Masks. The fashion police have been busy.

Prof Linda Fuller

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Despite "Gender Equal Olympics," focus still on what women wear

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Every couple of years, the megaevent of all megaevents takes place - the Olympics. It is one of the few athletic competitions where sportswomen, recently, are given greater television exposure than their male counterparts. Unfortunately, that exposure can entail much more than their athleticism, as the focus often shifts to how they look and what they are or are not wearing.

Before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics started, controversies cropped up over women's apparel. The Norwegian women's beach handball team was fined 1500 euros for wearing shorts, instead of bikini bottoms during their European Championship. League officials cited "improper clothing" as a rationale for the punishment. The team was fined for their action but felt more comfortable performing their sport in shorts since bikini bottoms often ride up. The men get to wear shorts, so why can't they (women) do the same?

Not missing a beat, the International Swimming Federation (FINA) was also in the news for not allowing the use of the Soul Cap at the Olympics. Designed specifically for swimmers with Black hair, FINA originally claimed there was no need for the Soul Cap and that it did not follow "the natural form of the head" but reversed course after facing backlash, including an open letter by 14 U.S. Senators demanding the caps be allowed for use at the Tokyo Olympics. However, the use of the cap is still limited to education and training purposes only. In the predominantly White sport of swimming, having this barrier to competition for minorities means you will see more Katie Ledeckys than Alice Dearings.

Meanwhile, paralympians also face double standards as an official chastised track athlete Olivia Breen at the English Championships for her sport briefs being too revealing despite Breen wearing the official brief by Adidas for competitions. Feeling comfortable is essential for any athlete to perform optimally. When the Olympics finally did start, Germany's women's gymnastics forsook the traditional high-cut leotard that bares the leg in favor of ankle-length unitard, as a response to the sexualization of women's bodies in the sport. A stark reminder of the sexual abuse countless gymnasts face while practicing their sport.

So how did we get here? Sport gives this illusion that everyone is competing on an even playing field but for those who identify as women, that is often not the case. Sportswomen are continually subjected to arbitrary rules by male-dominated governing bodies in regard to their dress. Some sports columnists and academics (mainly women I might add) are pointing out the hypocrisy and the issue of the sexualization of sportswomen during athletic competition. Some athletes have fought back in the way that they know how, by altering their dress and taking to social media, but for many others on the world's biggest stage they have no bodily agency over what they wear. Let there be no doubt about it, this is not about guidelines for performance enhancement or safety in sport, this is about the control of women's bodies and conforming to western ideals of femininity.

The Representation Project's #RespectHerGame study on the media coverage of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics found that athletes in women's sports wear revealing outfits in competition 69.9% of the time compared to 53.5% for men. The increase of prime time coverage of women's sports by NBC means sportswomen are also 10 times more likely to be objectified by camera angles during the broadcast. Women's apparel is still an issue despite the International Olympic Committee the 2020 Olympics the most gender equal games, with 49% of the competitors identifying as women but what equality looks like and actually is are two very different scenarios. Men get to be athletes. PERIOD. FULL STOP. Women continue to be sexualized, infantilized, trivialized, or put on a pedestal as the mother of all mothers by the media but never get to be just athletes. These apparel issues are symbolic of the ongoing systemic issues that women continue to endure and they need to be examined not just when the world's biggest spectacle takes place. Governing bodies need to be actively recruiting women, minorities and LGBTQ+ in efforts to acknowledge the changing sports landscape and to make everyone feel comfortable in whatever uniform THEY choose to wear. Then and only then may we truly have a gender-equal games.

Black women and Tokyo 2020 games: a continued legacy of racial insensitivity and exclusion

The history of black women in the Olympics is fraught with complexities that spun an intersection of gender, race, and bodily integrity. Before and during the Tokyo 2020 games, issues surrounding black women, the International Olympic Committee, and many sporting associations emerged to highlight the continued historical marginalization. This article focuses on various instances where the IOC and affiliated national organizations were involved in controversies that negatively affected the participation of black women in sporting activities. The policing and exclusion of African female bodies from the Olympic games has to be understood within a historical context in which black women have continually fought for their right to exist and be present in sporting spaces. In any case the Olympic International Committee before the games reiterated the ban on Black Lives Matter apparel and symbolic protests, citing IOC Rule 50. Many women's soccer teams however went on to kneel as a symbolic support to the movement.

Naturally occurring testosterone levels, sexuality and womanhood at the Olympics

The stories of African female athletes with naturally occurring testosterone levels builds on historical narratives of bodies that do not just fit into Olympics' (western) neat gender categorizations. Before the Tokyo 2020 games, Caster Semenya, Aminatou Seyni, Margaret Wambui, and Francine Niyonsaba have been barred from competing in their preferred Olympic event because of their natural testosterone levels. Naturally occurring testosterone has been crafted as an unfair advantage, which in isolation would make sense if the whole idea of sport was not built on disparities in natural abilities. Sports scientists such as Ross Tucker however argue that high testosterone alone cannot justify banning athletes for an advantage among elite sportswomen. In June 2021, two more young athletes from Namibia, Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi were banned from running the women's 400-metre race. Both athletes only knew about the condition when they were tested at a training camp in 2021 in Italy. Christine Mboma went on to win the 200 metres race but the 'controversy' of her sexuality and testosterone was only beginning. There have been calls by some European officials to have further tests to prove that she is a 'woman'. The 2018 World Athletics hormone regulations were mainly targeted at intersex athletes who are said to an unfair competitive advantage in track events ranging between 400 metres and 1500 metres. Critics of this rule however believe that it is 'a toxic combination of racism and transphobia', it has also 'the appearance of World Athletics "targeting" African women, based on their supposed masculine features, once they start excelling on the global stage.' A Cameroon official concluded that, 'The majority of athletes affected by the regulations are from the global south and for Africa these regulations remind us of the difficult and dark past of racial segregation.'

Black women's mental health and the Olympics

Another key point before and after the Tokyo 2020 games is the issue concerning mental health of black female athletes. For Simone Biles (probably the best gymnast of her generation), the moment she withdrew citing mental health, the wolves were waiting. Portrayed as a fickle, weak and nervous coward like Sha'Carri Richardson before her who had smoked marijuana dealing with bad news and Naomi Osaka who withdrew from the French Open. How dare they shatter our carefully modelled epitaph of the "strong black woman." An epithet built on stereotypes meant to romanticize and ultimately force acceptance of the historical exclusion, poverty and struggle for women of color, and a history of bearing the multiple burdens of oppressive white racism, capitalist exploitation and patriarchy. The lack of compassion and benefit of doubt was astounding from mainly white and some black commentators without fully understanding the various complexities involved with Biles' struggles with ADHD.

Black hair and the swimming cap controversy

The controversy of the swimming cap was a classical analysis of how "white tradition" in sporting spaces have resisted bodies that do not neatly fit into their narrow categories. It is surprising that in 2021 there are some within global sporting organisations who are racially insensitive to the point of codifying exclusion of people on the basis of hair. The controversy started when swimming caps designed for natural black hair by a company called Soul Cap was banned by International Swimming Federation (FINA). FINA was forced to reconsider the ban after widespread outcry globally. It is this stubbornness built on the privilege of owning these spaces they have seen even white women facing sexist attitudes such as the Norwegian beach volleyball team.

Conclusion

The Tokyo 2020 games highlighted the continued challenges facing black women to achieve respect, inclusivity, and equal participation, particularly the construction of sporting bodies from a narrow, mainly white and partriachial lens. The intersection of racism and sexism within sport has meant an increasing number of black women cannot compete, especially African women like Caster Semenya simply because they do not present their gender in the manner prescribed by largely western partriachial systems that still dominate institutions such as the Olympics.

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Naomi Osaka bearing the torch for a mixed race Japan

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As Naomi Osaka lit the Olympic Cauldron at the Tokyo 2020 Opening Ceremony, her selection as final torch bearer has less to do with her athletic prowess on the tennis court than with what she can symbolize about Japan's racial identity to the world.

As a mixed race Japanese and Haitian woman who has grown up in the U.S., her dark skin and bright red box braids signal a modern Japan desiring to embrace its own multiracial identity. In typical Osaka fashion, she chose to emphasize her identities at the ceremony by braiding her curly hair in a fashion beloved by the Black diaspora rather than using a straight iron to appear more stereotypically Asian. Osaka can be Japanese, American, Black, Asian, or mixed race in different contexts and is marketable globally because of the flexibility of her identities.

The 23-year-old champion has become a branding darling for sponsors, the Olympics, and Japan in the run up to the Tokyo games. However, Osaka's cauldron lighting tells the world more about who Japan *wants to be* on the global stage than who Japan *is* currently. Osaka's selection as penultimate torchbearer reveals how we can understand the Olympic stage as showcasing a nation's aspirations for itself rather than simply a direct representation of reality.

The torch relay

The Olympic Games are an opportunity for nations to deliver a spectacle of nationalism and grandeur in front of a global audience. As scholar David Rowe writes, mega-events like the Olympics carry "profound social, cultural, political and economic significance: constructing, reinforcing and challenging forms of national identity; combining and dividing social groups within and across nations…" Symbols of national identity, belonging, and pride of the host country are spread throughout the games and are concentrated in the Opening Ceremony.

The Torch Relay is one such Opening Ceremony tradition that allows a nation to project who it is unto the world. Originally conceived as a form of Nazi propaganda at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the torch relay visits various locations around the globe and/or the host country in the lead up to the Games. Countries choose athletes, model citizens, and celebrities to represent their homeland and displays key historical and cultural landmarks. Thus, selecting Osaka to finish the relay attaches the nation of Japan to her brand and vice versa.

The Osaka brand

Osaka is young and successful and her racial background makes her brand appealing to several global markets—most notably in North America and Asia. For North American markets, she is young, multicultural, biracial, and a Black Lives Matter activist, all factors that make her appealing to Generation Z because young people currently age 11-25 are more supportive of diversity, globalism, and social justice causes than previous generations.

Japan can claim Osaka's winning record, global marketability, and youthful cultural cache in American and Asian markets as a part of the image it projects globally. Scholar Aihwa Ong explains that cultural logics of transnationality create a form of "flexible citizenship" not bound by geographical borders in ways it once was. She says flexible citizens "benefit from their participation in global capitalism [and] celebrate flexibility and mobility." Osaka is a successful Japanese citizen because of her malleability in the global market--a testament to the cultural and economic clout of Japan.

Mixed race Japan

Osaka's flexible citizenship is both desirable because of her symbolic and economic clout, but also contested as Japan grapples with incorporating mixed identities into the nation. "The Land of the Rising Sun" is indeed becoming more racially diverse; however, children who are born of mixed parentage in Japan are still called "hafu," or half Japanese. The bullying of mixed race children also still occurs (see this controversial Nike advertisement).

Additionally, while mixed race Black athletes bring a sense of sporting prestige for the country, their authenticity as Japanese is always under question. Osaka and Ruy Hachimura (a Black Japanese NBA player) are frequently criticized online for not being "pure Japanese." This means that Osaka's flexible citizenship can never fully escape the reality of Japan's current struggles with incorporating mixed identities as national subjects.

The experience of mixed-race athletes like Osaka in the Japanese public sphere shows something that is often true about Olympic host nations performing before the world: nations show us who they *want* to be and not who they *are*. Spectacles of diversity and inclusion performed for the world should be read as beginning at the symbolic level rather than a reflection of a current reality.

Tokyo 2020 told the world that a multiethnic Japanese identity is possible. Now Japan, like so many other nations, must move beyond celebrating diversity when it benefits their image culturally and economically and do the difficult work of living up to their aspirations.

Bodies of change: women's artistic gymnastics in Tokyo 2021

In 1996, U.S. gymnast Kerri Strug stole the victory headlines for performing the vault on an injured ankle, ceremoniously carried to the podium by her now widely criticized coach, Bela Karolyi. In Tokyo 2021 US gymnast, Simone Biles dominated the headlines for her decision to pull out of several high-profile events to put her mental health first. Likening the two incidents as victory narratives would be a mistake without highlighting the differences between them in what now constitutes heroism. Biles' story is one of independence and choice that puts self-care and well-being above winning, arguably like that of Japanese-American tennis player, Naomi Osaka, who decided to pull out of the French Open earlier this year. The Biles and Osaka incidents serve as a useful indicator of at least some progressive change for athlete voice and welfare in sport more generally; however, in this piece we take a closer look at the significance of this change in a sport long associated with disciplined and controlled bodies at the highest levels of expression. Gymnasts have been passive and compliant with little control over their bodies, even when they are in pain, hungry, or fearful. In this piece, we offer three observations of what we hope is evidence of real change at Tokyo 2021 and foreground a socio-cultural understanding of the gymnast body as central to any discussion on athlete agency, choice, and voice.

Our first observation is that Tokyo 2021 saw female gymnasts that were visibly stronger and more powerful. Biles has arguably raised the bar of athleticism and acrobatic ability needed to win and other gymnasts are following in her wake. Gymnasts' bodies are, overall, now more muscular and acrobatic than they have ever been. Traditionally gymnasts have been pushed by coaches to adopt behaviors that produce the exceptionally thin and child-like ideal of femininity and graceful aesthetics. Eating disorders and injury were commonplace and muscles not desired. Muscular bodies in women's gymnastics are both tangible and symbolic markers of empowerment and progress. Their physicality is noticed in the taking up and claiming of physical space in a sport where women and girls have been taught to be compliant, to occupy less space and to be silent. However, we should not be overly content just yet as legacy of the Nadia Comaneci system is still evident through the representation of some nations.

Our second observation is the visible success of older gymnasts such as silver medalist Italian Vanessa Ferarri (aged 30) and Germany's Kim Bui (aged 32) adding vital weight to the arguments of scholars who challenge the discourse that young female bodies are naturally suited for elite gymnastics. In other sports we marvel at the exceptionally young athlete (British skateboarding bronze medalist Sky Brown is just 13 years of age) but in gymnastics a minimum age of 16 years has been in place since 1997 serving as a stark reminder of the need to protect child gymnasts from injuries and intense training schedules. Reporting on the experiences of gymnasts have revealed a culture that advocates to 'beat' puberty. The visibility of high-performing older gymnastics bodies in this new era are therefore important body narratives for others to draw upon. We hope this reflects a shift to more modern, ethical, and sustainable gymnastics coaching that seeks longevity through welfare.

Our third observation is that Tokyo 2021 saw the German team exercise the choice to wear the unitard to combat sexism. Women's Artistic Gymnastics has been historically important in defining and reproducing traditional and narrowly defined gender ideologies. UN sustainable development goal 5 'gender equality' seeks to end violence against women as well as to empower and address unconscious biases and implicit associations that form unintended and invisible barriers to equal opportunity. Under the wave of the #metoo social movement against sexual abuse and sexual harassment, and in the wake of the Larry Nassar case which saw the abuse of at least 265 young female gymnasts, we find it surprising gymnastics has not come under more scrutiny for the gendered ideals it perpetuates and has not modernized in response to a wider gender equality agenda. It is yet to be seen just how important this first step was and whether we will see more unitards in Paris 2024. We hope so.

In closing, bodies matter. They can (and do) stand for the reproduction of social inequalities and social progress, ethical practice, and malpractice. The Olympics are an important marker for noticing, "seeing" and critically evaluating body politics. Simone Biles had a choice that Kerri Strug did not. We hope the future of gymnastics will be an empowering space that puts gymnast agency and voice at the top of its agenda.

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How the female athletes of the Tokyo Olympics are reframing the way we think about motherhood

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"If we have children, we risk pay cuts from our sponsors during pregnancy and afterward. It is one example of a sports industry where the rules are still mostly made for and by men." Allyson Felix, 11-time Olympic medalist

Allyson Felix, with 11 Olympic medals spread across four Olympic Games, had her pay dropped by 70% by former sponsor Nike following the birth of her daughter and dealt with "tremendous stress" negotiating sponsorship deals. She was in the process of re-negotiating her Nike contract at the end of 2017, pregnant with her daughter Cammy, but faced pushback from Nike because the company was not willing to add language to her contract that would add maternity protections for athletes. Shortly thereafter, Nike asked her to participate in a female empowerment ad (Coleman, 2021). Felix left Nike and signed with Athleta in 2019. Felix wasn't the only athlete to leave Nike as Simone Biles also left the company to work with Athleta in 2021 because she said she felt Athleta supported her as an individual outside of what she did in the sport.

The 2020 Olympic Games have put a spotlight on many issues and challenges that female athletes have dealt with from choosing to be a mother or an athlete to emotional stress to financial burden--all issues beyond training to compete with the world's best. The mental health of athletes has come front and center by recent statements made by Biles and professional tennis player Naomi Osaka, and both athletes made multiple statements about withdrawing from competition to focus on their mental health. These games have, seemingly, opened up a path for athletes to speak out and have their voices heard. Athletes' sources of stress, anxiety, and ultimately mental well-being are rooted in many areas, but ultimately, the result, as Biles noted, won't be an outcome that is expected or hoped for.

Aliphine Tuliamuk, the 1st place finisher in the Olympic Trials for the marathon in February 2020, said that she was being forced to choose between the Games and her baby because at that time, the IOC had announced the ban on foreign spectators including the infant children of female athletes. Tuliamuk began to petition the IOC repeatedly to be given permission to bring her infant daughter--born in January 2021--with her to Tokyo so she could continue to breastfeed her baby. Tuliamuk's situation was not an isolated incident as several high profile female Olympic athletes including Alex Morgan from the USWNT, Allyson Felix, and 11 other female athletes rounding out the 2021 Olympic roster also had babies or young children. Tennis star Serena Williams and winner of four Olympic medals noted that she would opt out of the Tokyo Olympics if forced to leave her three-year-old daughter behind. While pregnancy alone can be challenging, the toughest hurdles, pun intended, often come after having a baby. While Tuliamuk spent time along with other female athletes like Kim Gaucher (U.S. women's basketball team) seeking ways to bring her baby with her to Tokyo, she was also having to log the 100-plus mile weeks to get back into Olympic marathon shape. Tuliamuk noted that when she was given clearance to return to running, not an hour went by when she didn't think about having to make the choice between participating in her first Olympic Games or staying home with her baby.

Decisions related to motherhood aren't the only issues and sources of stress and anxiety elite athletes are having to manage. The Norwegian women's handball team found their bikini bottoms to be too revealing but when they chose to wear shorts, they were fined by the European Handball Federation for a "case of improper clothing" because shorts are too long per the clothing guidelines. Female athletes in an array of sports including handball, volleyball, and gymnastics have been taking a stand against overt sexualization as they challenge existing guidelines for women's uniforms. Supporters such as the Norway Handball Federation have declared that "together we will continue to fight to change the rules for clothing so that players can play in the clothes they are comfortable with!"

These examples highlight just some of the ways female Olympic athletes have had to balance not only the intense training required for competition but the stress and pressure, sometimes not at all related to participation and competition. When Biles withdrew from the gymnastics team event citing mental health and physical safety, the "issue became a defining event for the Games" (Park, 2021). From marathoners to track stars to gymnasts, voices have started to emerge, and maybe we'll start to see a shift from awareness to action. By the actions taken by Biles, Felix, Tuliamuk and so many others, the hope is that the narrative will start to change and the way female athletes are viewed will be reframed.

When women aren't enough to compete

A headline on National Public Radio's website proclaimed, "Canadian soccer player Quinn becomes the first trans and nonbinary gold medalist" (*NPR*, August 6, 2021). Quinn and their team's victory is undoubtedly a milestone worth celebrating, as is the inclusion of transgender athletes Laurel Hubbard, a weightlifter from New Zealand, and Chelsea Wolfe, American BMX cyclist. This progress, however, should not obscure the long, troubling history that the Olympics have had with gender nonconforming athletes or its current policy that excluded several GNC competitors from the 2020 games. For example, while Quinn competed and won gold, American transgender runner CeCe Tefler was barred from running in the women's 400-meter hurdles because she did not meet the IOC's rules regarding testosterone levels. Similarly, gold-medalist Caster Semenya's career ended because her body naturally produces higher levels of testosterone than is expected for women, a condition experienced by some intersex women. Though transgender and intersex are not the same, where sport is concerned the rules restricting their ability to compete are reduced to a single variable: testosterone.

Whereas in the past, the IOC has tried to police women's athletics using physical examinations and later chromosome testing, testosterone is now viewed as the magic ingredient that differentiates male from female—a contention that lacks clear scientific support. Even so, the acceptable levels of testosterone remain ill-defined. The IOC's current policy on transgender competitors, established in 2015, states that transmasculine athletes can compete in men's competitions without restriction. Transfeminine athletes, however, must provide proof that their in-serum testosterone levels have been below 10 nanomoles per liter for 12 months prior to their first women's competition and that testosterone levels remain below 10nmol/L throughout their desired time of eligibility. Where intersex athletes are concerned, the IOC follows World Athletics' 2019 guidelines. World Athletics maintains that female athletes whose testosterone levels surpass 5 nmol/L have an unfair advantage but only in running events between 400 meters and 1500 meters, therefore, they are barred from those competitions.

For both transgender and intersex women, their bodies naturally produce testosterone above the accepted norm for the average cis-gender woman. The rules, however, allow the naturally occurring level of testosterone for an athlete who was given a male sex assignment at birth but identifies as female to be twice that of a woman competitor who, because of her intersex condition, has high T-levels. Even more troubling is the fact that an intersex individual can be deemed a woman when she is running in the sprint events but not when she is running longer distances. That's precisely what happened at the Tokyo games. Namibian runners Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi were barred from competing the 400m competition due to their testosterone levels, though they both competed in the 200m, where Mboma won the silver medal and Masilingi finished in sixth place.

During the Tokyo games, IOC officials acknowledged that its gender-policing rules are problematic. *The Guardian* quoted IOC medical and science director, Dr. Richard Budgett, saying that individual sports federations need to set their own guidelines for transgender athletes. Budgett said,

> *There is some research, but it depends on whether you are coming from the view of inclusion as the first priority or absolute fairness to the nth degree being the priority If you don't want to take any risks at all that anyone might have an advantage, then you just stop everybody. If you are prepared to extrapolate from the evidence there is, and consider the fact there have been no openly transgender women at the top level until now, I think the threat to women's sport has probably been overstated.* (Ingle, July 30, 2021)

Budgett stressed that the IOC cannot take a "one size fits all" approach and instead each sport must find its own "sweet spot." Given that his comments addressed only transgender athletes, it's unclear from his comments what the IOC's new approach will mean for intersex athletes. Will they be held to the same standard as trans athletes or will separate rules still apply?

The Tokyo games will be written into the history books as the first games in which an openly transgender athlete won a gold medal. Quinn deserves all the praise and recognition that they have and will receive for that accomplishment. These games, however, also help to highlight how complicated, inconsistent, and troubling efforts to police gender still are. We should celebrate those who broke barriers this year but should also acknowledge the many women excluded from sport largely because sport has traditionally been an arena reserved for the celebration of men. Women who compete at the highest level have always been scrutinized, critiqued, and excluded for not being woman enough.

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4

Fandom & National Identity

Fans as MVP, or the need for sensuous audiences in sport

Good news for couch potatoes: it turns out fans are a key part of transcendent sport performance! Or so it seems from a variety of cases in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in which the lack of large in-person audiences seemed to significantly impact elite athlete performance. Who knew they needed us so much?

OK, so it's not that these supremely talented athletes "need us" to do their spins, flips, and leaps, but the lack of in-person fans at the Tokyo Games reveals the complex and under-studied means by which bodies connect through non-symbolic means. I argue that many of the ways Olympic athletes experienced the lack of adoring fans echoes arguments made by scholars of rhetoric about the ways speakers and audiences share a complex, affective, embodied connection that is summed up by the quixotic notion of the sensorium. If it's true, as I'd argue, that athletes "speak" to us through their bodies, then fans become "audiences" and not just passive flag waving ones; as the concept of the sensorium suggests, athletes/speakers and fans/audiences are linked in an iterative, sensuous network of feedback that is vital to robust exchanges — of communication or sport.

Speech and rhetoric scholars are, of course, primarily interested in words. But the focus of our field is not, and was not historically, solely occupied with this one mode of communication. As Dr. Debra Hawhee documents in her centennial review of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, the idea of a multi-sensory model of communication dates to our field's founding. She cites Judson & Rodden's (1915) use of electricity metaphors to explain the sensorium and the ways sensory process are vital to "overcome resistance to make the desired connection" with audiences. The term itself traces to Thomas More, who defined it as "an area of sense awareness that precedes knowledge" and thus calls into question whether speech creates knowledge or achieves something closer to symbolization, making manifest what was already brewing amid our sensory processes. More recently Dumit (2006) defines the sensorium as "the sensing package that constitutes our participation in the world." Deprived of sensory input, we struggle to enact our humanity Dumit suggests; deprived of sensory input, do athletes struggle to achieve?

Live sport performance, while not primarily reliant on spoken language, still qualifies as communication in many ways. Certainly the burst of athlete activism that we are currently living in demonstrate how t-shirts, tape wrap, stances and gestures in sport spaces can communicate strong, complex, nuanced, and meaningful messages. Olympic sport performances have been studied for decades for, most often, their expressions of nationalist identity. More recently, scholars have grappled with the sporting body itself, how athletes express rhetorically via their competitive performance, the ways we can see sport as an "agonistic" realm of communication.

What the Tokyo Games revealed, I argue, is the deep connection between athletes and live fan audiences. If, as Hawhee demonstrates, Darwin used the sensorium to describe the ways our senses are a "gateway to bodily action" then how deprived were our Olympians of that key entry point? When Simone Biles includes the lack of fans in her explanation for her remarkable act to step away from the team competition, when U.S. women's soccer players mention lack of live crowds for the teams unprecedented struggles in pool play, when even the street-style skateboarders were playing music in their earbuds to make up for the quiet stadiums — *Skateboarders were stressed out? What is happening?!* — perhaps the lack of human sensory connection is worth scrutiny. It is customary to praise athlete for being "in the zone," taken to mean a hyper-focused state that tunes out all "distractions." But Tokyo athletes admitted to hearing crowds as they took breaths of air, in their pre-event warmups, between rounds — the sensory input of live fans *was* part of their "zone" all along.

Social media, second screens, streaming media — all these changes are undeniable and likely permanent alterations to the "mediasport" landscape. But the Tokyo Games suggest that, perhaps, good old live audiences still matter too. A million silent tweets were not the same to our athletes as hands clapping, voices rising, the swell of energy on the homestretch or final minute. If Woolbert was able to notice in 1915 that "stirred air stirs meaning" in a speech situation, how stagnant was the meaning-making experience in the vacuous, vacant facilities of Tokyo 2020?

Thinking of speech and audience interactions through the concept of the sensorium turns rhetoric into energy, an electricity running through bodies and across spaces. We saw amazing feats of athleticism on our screens, but did we — and, more importantly, did the athletes — fully *feel* the zip and zing of our sensorium circuits in those key moments? Perhaps the athletes need us after all. Paris anyone?

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Home advantage in the Summer Olympic Games: evidence from Tokyo and prospects for Paris 2024

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The prevalence of home advantage, a term used to describe a situation where athletes/teams tend to perform better when competing at their home venues relative to when they compete at away venues, is well-documented in professional and elite sport. Such an effect has also been shown to exist in the Olympic Games. Common factors that are thought to contribute to home advantage include the positive influence of the home crowd on athletes, social pressure by home supporters leading to referee bias, travel fatigue experienced by away teams and home teams' familiarity with their own venues/conditions.

How successful was Japan at Tokyo 2020?
Hosting the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics presented an opportunity for Japan to improve upon its previous performances. As shown in Figure 1, Japan won a total of 58 medals (27 gold, 14 silver plus 17 bronze) at Tokyo 2020, which represents the nation's best ever medal performance in the Games to date. This level of achievement ensured that Japan finished third on the medal table (behind USA and China) – three places higher than at Rio 2016. Japan also doubled the number of sports/disciplines in which it won medals at Tokyo 2020 compared with Rio 2016 (20 versus 10).

The Tokyo 2020 program included five new sports that were not contested at Rio 2016 – baseball/softball, karate, skateboarding, sport climbing and surfing. When considering only those sports that were contested in both editions, Japan won 44 medals at home including 21 golds. The nation's remaining 14 medals at home including 6 golds were won across the portfolio of new sports. What this means is that while Japan still performed better at Tokyo 2020 in the comparable sports, the nation's home performance was amplified by the level of success it achieved in the new sports added to the program.

Sport-specific nuances
At individual sport level, Japan's medal success at Tokyo 2020 relative to its own performance at Rio 2016 can be organized into six clusters, as shown in Figure 2 and described below.

Cluster 1 (green): Japan increased both its gold medal count and total medal count in six sports at Tokyo 2020. Three of these were new sports (e.g. baseball/softball) – hence the increase in these sports was from a zero base.

Cluster 2 (orange): Judo and wrestling were the two sports in which Japan won more gold medals, but the overall number of medals achieved remained the same. In other words, the quality of medals improved even though the quantity of medals was unchanged.

Cluster 3 (blue): There were seven sports in which Japan increased its total medal count but not its gold medal count. Included in this cluster were two new sports (climbing and surfing) where the improvement was from a zero base.

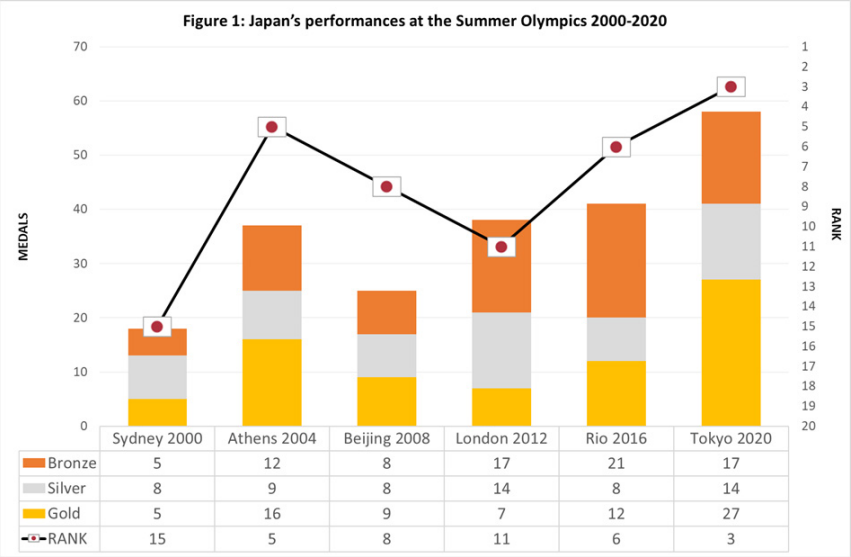
Cluster 4 (grey): The number of gold and total medals won in athletics and weightlifting remained the same.

Cluster 5 (purple): This cluster consists of three sports in which Japan won fewer medals of any colour, notably aquatics in which Japan lost six medals.

Cluster 6 (red): The only sport in which Japan's performance deteriorated in terms of both gold and total medals was badminton.

Japan versus other Olympic hosts?
Table 1 compares Japan's improvement at Tokyo 2020 with that of other recent Summer Olympic hosts. The median improvement in gold medals at home for the previous five Olympic hosts was seven and the corresponding improvement in total medals was 14. These host nations also improved their medal table ranking at home by two places on average. The level of relative success achieved by Japan at its home Games was better than the typical level of improvement demonstrated by other recent hosts. What makes Japan's success as a host nation stand out even more is the absence of spectators from Tokyo 2020 venues due to COVID-19 restrictions, because the home crowd is regarded as a key "game location factor" influencing the occurrence of home advantage.

Looking forward to Paris 2024
France has won the right to host the next Summer Olympics in 2024. At Tokyo 2020, France secured 10 gold medals and 33 medals overall. Revisiting the data presented in Table 1, the median improvement at home for all hosts (including Japan) since 2000 is around nine gold medals and 16 total medals. Hence, it may be reasonable to expect France to increase its overall medal tally at Paris 2024 from 33 to 49 and its gold medal tally from 10 to 19, which (if achieved) could see France finish as high as fifth in the medal table.



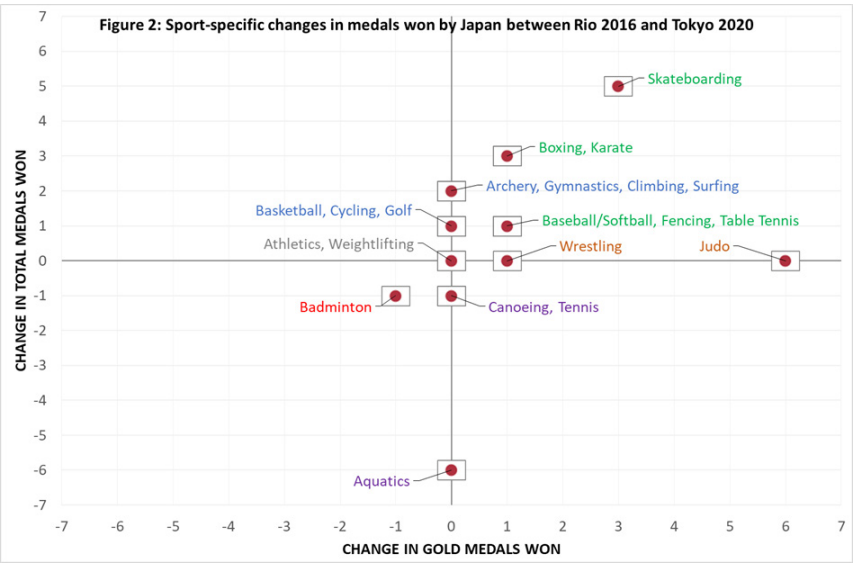


Table 1: Improvement in gold medals / total medals / medal table position between pre-home and home Olympics by recent hosts

Host Nation	Comparison	Gold Medals	Total Medals	Rank
Australia	2000 v 1996	↑ 7	↑ 17	↑ 3
Greece	2004 v 2000	↑ 2	↑ 3	↑ 2
China	2008 v 2004	↑ 16	↑ 37	↑ 1
Great Britain	2012 v 2008	↑ 10	↑ 14	↑ 1
Brazil	2016 v 2012	↑ 4	↑ 2	↑ 9
MEDIAN-1	**2000 - 2016**	**↑ 7**	**↑ 14**	**↑ 2**
Japan	2020 v 2016	↑ 15	↑ 17	↑ 3
MEDIAN-2	**2000 - 2020**	**↑ 9**	**↑ 16**	**↑ 3**

Silence in the stands: does it matter for fans?

Dr Dorothy Collins

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Due to COVID-19, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (held in 2021) was unprecedented in that it occurred without live fans. This brings to question the importance of having live fans at a mega-event for the creation and maintenance of a highly identified fan base. Unlike sport contests put on by local teams, most fans will never attend the Olympics. Because the Olympics does not have a fixed location, it also does not have a hometown fan community. As such, it would seem that traditional ideas about sport attendance which are based on geographic proximity of fans, do not apply particularly well to the modern Olympics.

Some critics of the Olympics have suggested that mega-events cause more harm than good, particularly with relation to environmental, social and economic factors. There is perhaps no better example of these issues than the Tokyo games, which have been particularly fraught with controversy. In fact, the Olympics are a "made-for-TV" event, as evidenced by scheduling decisions such as holding the swimming finals in the morning to cater to American primetime television broadcasting. Further evidence of the fact that the Olympics is a made-for-tv event is demonstrated by the fact that it depends so heavily on viewership that when the Tokyo games failed to deliver the expected viewership, NBC was forced to give advertisers extra advertising spots to make up for it.

One must then ask if it even matters if there is a live viewing audience at the Olympics, or if Tokyo was a test case for a mega-event that does not include a live audience. While the average fan might never attend an Olympics, the modern Olympic games certainly draw a crowd. The five Summer Games held since 2000 have averaged more than six million tickets sold. When the Olympics were postponed in March of 2000, more than 4.5 million tickets had already been sold. Ultimately, when the rescheduled games prohibited fans, roughly $800 million dollars in ticket revenue for local organizers in Japan was lost. The reliance on ticket revenue, however, stems, at least in part, from the massive influx of tourists attending the Olympics. Therefore, one must question if scaling down the size of the live audience, while focusing on providing high tech virtual opportunities that connect to diverse social identities for the rest of the world, is a middle ground that would lower the costs of hosting the Olympics, while creating the necessary level of fan identification to keep the Olympics relevant.

While attending an Olympics is a transformative experience, few fans will ever have this experience. The lack of fans in the stands in Tokyo did negatively impact the athletes, but this concern could be overcome with a smaller audience. Most fans of the Olympics are not much different from the non-local fans of other sports, who in some cases, only consume sport via technological means. Based on what research about fan identification and sport consumption has revealed, several things are known, there are several lessons Olympics stakeholders might consider, in order to make the Olympics more relevant to these non-local fans.

First, highly identified fans demonstrate higher levels of sport consumption. Furthermore, it has long been understood that the more of an individual's identity a sport property attaches to, the more highly identified individuals are likely to become. The Olympics, which features many sports, nationalistic competition, and many athletes with diverse identities and compelling stories, has a unique opportunity to do this.

Second, in order to remain highly identified fans, most individuals must, in some way, participate in a fan community. It is now understood that, at least in some situations, individuals are using technology to create fan communities outside the area in which the event is taking place. These types of communities have sprung up for non-local fans both in person in their geographic locations, and virtually using the internet. In some cases, the communities are strong enough to not only create and preserve a sense of identification, but to produce social capital for these fans. Based on this, it would seem that the Olympics could be more relevant for more individuals, if the various Olympic stakeholders made a decided effort to help foster and support the creation of such groups, not only during Olympic competition, but also during the time periods between Olympics, during which they fade into the background for many individuals.

It is clear that technology has the potential to allow more robust sport experiences without traditional in person attendance; however, this only works if individuals are interested in seeking out these experiences. In Tokyo, viewership numbers plummeted, and thus it is clear that if the Olympics are to remain relevant, it is necessary for Olympic organizers to examine what is known about engaging non-local fans and begin utilizing those ideas to ensure that fans remain highly identified enough to continue consuming the Olympics.

Red, white, and rivalry: a brief discussion of United States rivalry at the Tokyo Olympic Games

Watching the closing ceremonies of the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games, one is told how sport is a catalyst to bring people together from diverse backgrounds for a common bond. Historically, the Olympic Games have been treated by the media as an event that attracts competitors and fans from the world over and celebrates the inspirational nature of sport as something that can bridge divisions and bring the world together. However, not seen by many casual observers is the competition and rivalry among participating nations, and use of the Olympic Games as a way to display the relative importance in the geopolitical landscape. The Games allows fans to show support for their country, and the current commentary focuses on some of the relationships the United States shares with other athletic and political rival nations.

What is rivalry?

Rivalry is a phenomenon that many people can identify and discuss, however is one that can be misinterpreted and misunderstood. Rivalry starts from two groups or individuals engaged in direct or indirect competition, and variables such as proximity, parity, perceived fairness, and cultural differences contribute to its impact. To measure how people view rival groups, Havard, Gray, Gould, Sharp, and Schaffer introduced a scale that allows for conclusions about the phenomenon's influence on consumer and group behavior. For example, consumer and group settings such as online gaming, politics, and sport influence greater negativity toward rival groups than mobile phone, direct-to-consumer streaming, comics, or science fiction consumption.

In sport, gender, identification, competition level, and changes in competition can influence the way people perceive rival teams and supporters. In turn, rivalry can influence consumption such as live game attendance, premium ticket pricing, watching televised games, and wearing merchandise, along with behaviors such as stereotyping, helping others in emergency situations, and consideration of anonymous aggression. Additionally, people can experience schadenfreude or Glory Out of Reflected Failure, and celebrate perceived failures by a rival group. For example, some fans of United States Olympic teams may have rejoiced when the International Olympic Committee ruled Russian athletes would have to compete under a Russian Olympic Committee banner rather than their nation's flag at a number of Olympic Games including Tokyo.

Beyond its impact on fandom, rivalry can influence strategy and decision making among organizations and individuals. For example, rivalry can encourage unethical behavior among decision makers in order to best competitors. Such deviant behavior was on display in the Tokyo Olympics when a runner allegedly spilled water bottles on the course to inhibit following competitor's ability to rehydrate during the men's marathon race.

United States rivalry and the Tokyo Olympic Games

The United States shares rivalries with other nations competing at the Olympic Games. Perhaps the most notable United States rivalry is the one shared with Russia, dating to the intense athletic and political competitions during the Cold War between America and the former USSR. For example, both nations used the Olympic Games as a way to promote their messaging on the international stage, often trying to recruit athletes to defect from their home countries as a way to prove superiority. There also exists the potential that a country such as China is presented as a national rival to the United States that encompasses athletic competition at the Olympics, based on the two nations political stances and athletic comparisons. Within individual sports, the United States shares rivalries with nations that compete for athletic notoriety in the Summer Games. For example, Australia presents an engaging athletic rivalry for America in swimming, while Japan and Canada have both played rival in Women's Soccer, and perhaps persisting from the former Cold War rivals, the United States and Russia also share a rivalry in Women's Gymnastics.

Specific to the Tokyo Summer Games, the United States performed relatively well against sport and political rivals. While the United States finished behind Canada in Women's Soccer, and the Russian Olympic Committee in Women's Gymnastics, the American's fared better in the swimming pool against Australia. Additionally, the United States defeated both China and the Russian Olympic Committee in the total medal count, in addition to the number of gold medals awarded, edging out China on the final day of Olympic competition.

The victories allow supporters of Team USA to rest easy in the comfort of athletic superiority, and engage in selective interpretation for competitions where rivals may have compared more favorably. Future competitions, both athletic and political will help determine which countries represent as rivals to the United States. The Olympic Games provide a platform for national pride and comparison; as such, many fans are along for the ride and already looking forward to February 2021.

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Empty stadiums and the other sites of Olympic fandom

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The Olympic Stadium is the heart of the Games. Thus, when officials decided to hold most of the events for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics behind closed doors due to the resurging pandemic, many were concerned that the empty venues would not provide the usual flair and feel that defined past Olympic events. Moreover, there were more practical concerns about the loss of revenue and the adverse economic impact of hosting the Games on the Japanese economy. There were also concerns about its impact on the athletes who often draw energy from their supporters in the stands. More importantly, there were questions about what the empty venues say about the future of sports and the role of the fans in it.

After more than a year of physical distancing, lockdowns, and moving our lives online, the decision to bar spectators did not receive much opposition; many Japanese even wanted to have the Olympics cancelled. Besides, the stadium is not the only site of Olympic fandom. Despite their capacity to accommodate tens of thousands of spectators, stadiums can only hold a small fraction of Olympic fans. Using the available technology, fans followed the various competitions as well as all the action, drama, and intrigue that goes with them through word of mouth, newspapers, radio, television, and, recently, via smartphones. In fact, most fans have coped with empty stadiums with last year's lockdown European football matches, the NBA Bubble, and a few other closed-door competitions. They have shown that the stadium can serve solely as a stage or as a production set for a "show" that is mainly produced for broadcasting than for live audiences.

Finding fandom

So where did the Olympic fans go? Expectedly, most stayed home and watched the games on television. However, recent surveys showed that even television viewership declined during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics compared to the past Games. According to Reuters, the TV viewership for the Opening Ceremonies "declined by 37% from 2016, when 26.5 million people watched the Rio de Janeiro Games opener, and 59% from 2012, when 40.7 million people watched the London ceremony." Are there links between the empty stadiums and low television viewership? Although fans play an important part of sports spectacles, their absence is compensated by visual (cut-outs, Zoom screens, etc.) and sound effects (recorded cheers, musical backgrounds, etc.). The impact of these sensory augmentations needs further study but in the case of the 2020 Olympics, the decline in television viewership can be attributed to the overall feeling of pessimism about the games. An earlier survey conducted by ZetaPulse revealed that 45.2% of US consumers were not keen on the Tokyo Olympics while 17.5% were undecided.

With the pandemic still raging in different parts of the world, many people thought that the Olympics should be the least of priorities for nations in these challenging times.

Apart from the adverse impact of the pandemic, there are fewer television viewers for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics because most sports fans have already moved online. Reuters also reported that the streaming audience of the Tokyo Olympics opener increased "76% from the 2018 Pyeong-Chang opening ceremony and 72% from the 2016 Rio opener." This data reflects the global shift in viewing habits that saw the decline of television as streaming and social media has become the most popular means of viewing news, entertainment, and sports.

However, "online" is not a venue but a means of access to content: physically people are still "somewhere" while online. Scholars have pointed out the importance of "the third venue" – a site between the stadium and the home – as the emerging site of sports fandom. Recently, the "Deer District" outside the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee is an excellent example of a third venue. Other examples of third venues are sports bars, IMAX Theaters, and other sports-themed venues. Another analytical frame that is more relevant to scaled-down and closed-door sports events is the concept of the "post-venue". I argue that with the ubiquity of digital technology, the portability of viewing devices, and the use of provisional, or even "stealth" sites such as parking lots and public parts will play greater roles as "sites of fandom" in years to come.

Seeking spectators

Unlike television audiences, online fans are not merely recipients of sports broadcasts but are active agents who can react to the content that they receive and even use the information in their own social media posts. Sports media companies are using Twitter or Instagram to connect to fans while a quick search on YouTube or Facebook reveals thousands of influencers and small content creators who are producing their own analysis of the different sports events at the Olympics.

Sports has long been compared to religion. Today, there is a trend where people are increasingly putting more emphasis on spirituality than religiosity. This fundamental social change is often illustrated by the decreasing number of people going to large places of worship ("dwellers") and the growing popularity of small communities of believers and individual spiritual searching ("seekers'). Similarly, the empty stadium marks the shift of Olympics and sports fandom away from large venues and into smaller, multiple sites.

Sports betting and the branded purity of the Olympics

All of NBC's properties were inundated with the Tokyo Olympic Games during the summer of 2021. Its television channels were overrun with Olympic events, news, or commercials. It was used to garner attention for its streaming service, Peacock. It was plastered all over its websites and social media accounts. There was, however, one place that the Olympics were conspicuously lacking: its sports betting resource, NBC Sports Edge. This isn't to say there was no betting coverage of the Olympics, on its website NBC Sports Edge has a page dedicated to Olympic wagering. This, however, was the exception; Olympic betting wasn't mentioned on NBC Sports Edge's social media accounts and mobile application, and the sole webpage dedicated to it was drowned out by coverage of baseball, football, and basketball. Why would the crown jewel of NBC and NBC Sports be missing from its betting resources?

This is especially puzzling given that the Olympics occurred when American sports betting was swelling. When it became federally legalized in 2018, sports media entities rushed to offer gambling content. NBC was not an exception to this; it started NBC Sports Edge and partnered with the betting company PointsBet. NBC created an integrated network in which its broadcasts, online content, partnership with PointsBet, and gaming resources buoy each other by creating a system with many avenues of entry. Interested individuals are conveyed between NBC properties and partnerships. Given that there are Olympic betting options on PointsBet, it seems NBC would have every reason to cover gambling.

Its marked absence affords the opportunity to think about the meanings associated with the Olympics, sports betting, and the interaction between the two. While sports leagues and events often brand themselves as offering competition, Ian Ritchie discusses how the modern Olympics distinguished itself by claiming to offer competition in its purest form. This was used to separate the Olympics from other sporting events that could be viewed as overly commercial and commodified. This juxtaposition between pure competition and commodified sport helps give the context for NBC's suppression of Olympic gambling.

Sports and gaming on sports (and gambling in particular) have always informed and shaped each other. As sports became more organized and commodified, they afforded the uniformity that allows for gaming. In particular, having a regular and consistently available sport provides information crucial to gaming: the rules of the sport, who is playing, when and where it is played, the results of past competitions, and so on. Commodification and gaming are linked.

Betting on the Olympics, therefore, would signify its commerciality and violate the construction of purity that the Olympics and its partners like NBC are cultivating. The ways that betting supposedly pollutes sporting purity are manifold. First, sports gambling often raises concerns about game fixing: that gamblers pay athletes to perform according to their betting interests. Athletes not trying to win is an obvious threat to the construction of pure competition, but it also raises conversations about athlete labor and compensation. Suspicions of fixing poses questions about the economic conditions that led athletes to be swayed by those involved with betting. These discourses about economies and work frame the athletes as commodities and not athletes engaged in sport at its purist.

Second, and maybe more importantly, sports betting is game that essentially involves risking money for profit. It, therefore, imbues sport with discourses about commodification; money management, financial value, and probabilistic reasoning replace purportedly purer narratives about heart, country, skill and hard work. Coverage of sports betting, therefore, would necessarily interject discourses about commodification that the Olympics and NBC attempt to disassociate from the Games.

The explicit way that sports betting inserts these discourses into the competitions themselves separates it from other Olympic associations. A Nike swoosh on a jersey might remind viewers of sponsorship costs, and a VISA commercial could add discourses about finances to an Olympic broadcast, but these are relegated to the periphery of the competition. Sports betting raises questions like: who is the most profitable athlete, or which event yields the most monetary value? In this way, the games themselves become commodities, which contradicts the Olympics' construction of purity explicitly.

This view of the connection between sports and gaming is somewhat retrograde, as betting has been embraced by American sports leagues and media companies after federal legalization. NBC's lack of coverage of Olympic betting speaks to the uniqueness of the Olympic brand in the sports, sports media, and sports gaming landscape, but it also highlights the tenuous nature of the Olympics' obscuring of the commodification that is constantly visible. Sports betting, therefore, exposes the reality that is omnipresent and yet unacknowledged. In this sense, gambling's impurity is that it foregrounds the commercialism that is an essential, and yet obscured, part of the Olympics.

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National and ethnic Chinese identities on the Indonesian badminton court

Dr Friederike Trotier

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During the 2020/21 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Indonesia celebrated one gold medal. Not surprisingly, this victory was in badminton, which is often considered one of Indonesia's national games. Since badminton made its debut at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Indonesia continuously won medals at the Games – except for the 2012 London event. The Thomas and Uber Cups, in addition, have an even longer history of Indonesian successes. Although badminton victories have always reinforced a sense of national pride and have been enthusiastically celebrated by the local population, the media as well as leading politicians; the relationship between badminton and national identity has often been complex. This is mainly due to the role of Indonesian top players of ethnic Chinese descent and shifting political conditions for this specific group.

Indonesia is an ethnically highly diverse country. The governments of Indonesia, however, introduce different political measures that impact ethnic minorities and that play out on the national sporting pitches, in particular on the badminton courts. Since modern competitive sports were introduced under Dutch colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries, groups of different ethnicity or political orientations have practiced different sports. Badminton developed into a particularly popular sport and pastime activity. Due to their favorable conditions in economic, social and sporting terms in the Dutch East Indies, ethnic Chinese were able to establish badminton clubs throughout the archipelago and to train and compete successfully. Even after Indonesia's independence, the dominance of ethnic Chinese continued on the badminton courts.

Indonesian nationalists, who fought for independence and led the first national government, perceived sport in general as a promising tool to shape the bodies and minds of the Indonesian people and to gain international recognition. During the Sukarno administration (1945-1966), this perception of sport as part of identity formation included ethnic Chinese as well as all other ethnic groups as it was based on an inclusive understanding of the nation. The government recognized the importance of successful badminton players of Chinese descent as symbols of Indonesia's international relevance. In spite of instances of discrimination against the Chinese community and athletes in post-independence Indonesia, Sukarno's presidency and its nation-building strategy supported and celebrated ethnic Chinese badminton players.

The rise to power of President Suharto (in office between 1967 to 1998) marked a drastic change for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The military coup in 1965, which lead to Suharto's New Order regime, unleashed civil unrest and large-scale killings of (alleged) communists with ethnic Chinese becoming main targets. In the following decades of the New Order government, ethnic Chinese experienced discrimination, scapegoating and political marginalization. Although several badminton players of Chinese origin left Indonesia in this period, international badminton courts were one of the few places for Indonesian Chinese to gain recognition and admiration. As winners of international tournaments, they were accepted as Indonesians – in contrast to many other members of the community. Yet, even celebrated badminton stars remain politically invisible.

The fall of President Suharto in 1998 opened new possibilities for political participation and expression. Some badminton players of Chinese descent took advantage of the opportunity to make their voices heard and demand a stop to discriminatory regulations and actions. For instance, some demands concern complicated procedures for ethnic Chinese to gain full Indonesian citizenship. Similar to former Indonesian governments, however, the administrations post-Suharto expected all Indonesian badminton stars to represent their country, secure successes, foster national pride and not to interfere in political questions.

The current Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) administration strongly supports narratives about Indonesian unity through sport to counter developments of conflict in the country. Mixed badminton doubles serve particularly well as role models for integrating different sexes, ethnicities and religious groups. One of this success stories displayed was of the badminton players Tontowi Ahmad and Liliyana Natsir, who won the gold medal at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games in the mixed doubles category. The government saw the difference between the two players -- in ethnicity (Liliyana Natsir being of Chinese descent), religion, and origin -- as a celebration of the Indonesian state motto of "unity in diversity." In times of increasing religious radicalism and intolerance in the archipelago state, the Indonesian government takes advantage of the gold medal winners to celebrate national identity and unity beyond ethnic and religious labels. This development contributes to more acceptance of Indonesians of Chinese descent, especially of badminton players, as being "real Indonesians". The successful badminton players of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, once again, provide stories to celebrate the Indonesian nation in times of struggle against Covid-19, ongoing radicalizations and increasing cleavages in the Indonesian society.

How much is too much home-nation focus in Olympic coverage?

What do Michael Phelps, Picabo Street, Marion Jones, and Apolo Anton Ohno have in common? Other than being highly-decorated former Olympians, they also occupy the unique space of being the most-mentioned athlete during an NBC Olympic telecast. They also, of course, are all American athletes. It seemed a foregone conclusion that Simone Biles would eb the leader for the Tokyo 2020 Games. Circumstances may prove to dictate otherwise, but it's a very safe bet that whoever occupies the top spot will be shrouded in red, white, and blue.

The debate over Olympic nationalism has raged for decades. Back in the 1980s, Michael Real advanced a form of nationalism index, which measured the ratios of home to foreign nation coverage in print media. Similar debates have percolated since. Some focus on raw percentages of coverage, while others focus on ratios of home medals won vs. home media coverage rendered. Agreement on any notion of media fairness is thorny at best, yet outlining the parameters and the unintended consequences is key for truly understanding how Olympic media unfolds through nationalized lenses.

In terms of parameters, determining percentages of coverage by nation is inevitably tricky, if not impossible. There were eight finalists in the men's 100-meter track competition in the 2016 Rio Games, yet it would be foolish to claim legendary Usain Bolt received one-eighth of the focus, the same as the other competitors in the final. Similarly, a beach volleyball competition involving a home nation could either be coded as 100% home-focus (as the home team was constantly part of each point) or 50% (as the home team was one of two teams competing).

Focusing on medals as a ratio is equally problematic. Some nations prioritize gold medals; others use medals tables organized by the total number of medals awarded. Even if such an equation can be resolved, it still falls prey to the "medals on an abacus" mindset. A winning women's gymnastics vault lasts mere seconds; the women's basketball competition requires six two-hour games. A nation that excels at swimming can yield dozens of medals in the pool; a nation that dominates futbol/soccer can merely win two.

Moreover, proportions can be deceiving based on a nation's team size and relative medal win rate. The United States won 113 (11%) medals in the Tokyo Games; Portugal won 4 (0.4%) medals. Thus, if strictly determining ratios, a theoretical American telecast focusing the home nation 55% of the time would have a 5:1 index ratio; a theoretical Portuguese broadcast focusing on the home nation 10% of the time would have a 25:1 index ratio. Based on such ratios, an American telecast would seem much more internationally-focused, yet the Portuguese telecast would actually be featuring foreign athletes at twice the rate as the American one.

This naturally leads to the unintended consequences of a national-focus of an Olympic broadcast. Each nation will inevitably show their home nation's athletes proportionally more; it's generally smart programming. However, telecasts differ in terms of whether overtly promoting patriotism ("the home country is good") or nationalism ("the home country is better than other countries"). For instance, China's CCTV telecast frequently uses personal pronouns ("us", "them", "our") to describe athletes; NBC's Olympic telecast labels this a cardinal sin. Still, all published analyses report proportionally larger focus on a home nation than medal winnings would indicate.

The result, as we saw again in Tokyo, is the double-edged sword of nationalized focus. For instance, NBC's primetime coverage of the Summer Games featured women's sports 57% of the time. While cause and effect relationships cannot be established without speaking with NBC personnel, this again closely mirrored the percentage of U.S. medals won by women athletes (58%), a trend consistently found in recent NBC Olympic primetime broadcasts.

In such a model, nationalism's pain is gender's gain, as women find their sports highlighted at more than ten times the frequency as other avenues of sports media. But does watching the Olympics make a person more nationalistic? Studies seem to indicate no. People who like nationalized media products disproportionately seek out Olympic content—and when they do, most national broadcasts provide content wrapped in the national flag...even if there's no "us" or "them" formally acknowledged.

Prof Andrew C. Billings

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The British imperial identity affirmed: Tokyo 2020

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The Tokyo 2021 Olympics reinforced Britain's Imperial identity. Insofar that during the Olympic (and Paralympic) Games the social landscape has been saturated with narratives both attractive and comforting, affirming hegemonic constructions of belonging which revolve around Whiteness, Christianity, heteronormativity and conservative binaries of gender. This national self-image of 'Britishness,' highly visible during Tokyo 2020, dangerously plays with nostalgic visions of nationhood that were forged by the Imperialism under which Britain was engulfed (1815-1914). Resultantly, whilst outwardly Britain has developed into a 'multi-cultural' nation-state, free from the practical structures of its Empire, the ideological functions of Imperialism continue, lingering on in the mundane symbols of nationhood that come to the fore during the Olympic Games. At a time when national community is increasingly being framed through an imagined ethno-racial homogeneity, 'othering' those deemed not to belong, the Olympics serves as a site for academic critique.

Throughout Tokyo 2020, British audiences encountered an Imperial national identity, all of it being played out on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Indeed the media plays a key role in constructing the boundaries of community, given that the vast majority of the messages and images audiences receive were mediated. For example, by repeatedly misgendering non-binary skateboarder Alana Smith, two commentators were denying the existence of transgender identity and establishing the hegemonic gender binaries previously mentioned. In the context of an Imperial identity, it is also significant that to establish itself as a domestic institution, the BBC embraced its role as a tool of Empire that could promote the ideological agendas of Imperialism. The additional dimension here, is that at the height of the British Empire, Sport was embraced by governing institutions as a vehicle to promote 'British' ideals and culture around the globe. It is hardly surprising, then, that the BBC broadcast more than 350 hours of live footage during Tokyo 2020 (having provided 'wall-to-wall' coverage of the last two Olympic Games). Consequentially, even the national broadcaster and the sport being televised itself played a role in affirming British Imperial Identity.

Tokyo 2020 has affirmed the exceptionalism of White, Anglo-Saxon, Christian identity, beliefs and values both directly and indirectly into the very fabric of everyday social existence. Audiences saw the Union Jack almost constantly, either being hoisted up a flagpole or in the colours of athletic wear. The significance of this symbolism should not be ignored, for the flag became a mainstay of British iconography precisely at the point when the Empire and Imperial Ideology existed in its most conscious, most visceral form in the 'home' nations of Great Britain. During this period – and fuelled by the rampant and unrelenting urbanization and industrialization of Britain during the 19th Century – the self-proclaimed exceptionalism of Britain's ruling class was legitimised.

So among other things, the performance of Team GB at the Tokyo Olympic Games was a manifestation of legitimising this exceptionalism. For example, certain items of Team GB kit were adorned with two lions facing each other and there is a longstanding use of the lion in Christianity to represent Jesus. So too does the national anthem, played on 16 occasions, repeatedly proclaim 'God save the Queen'. Additionally, the two lions mimic the royal coat of arms, only cementing further the sense of Britain's inherent strength, bravery and valour. These images are culturally powerful, as the designer of the Rio 2016 kit Stella McCartney rather observantly put, "the coat of arms is all around us in Britain. It's so much a part of us that we barely even notice it, but it is so distinctively British." In making such images an integral part of Team GB merchandise, available to purchase on £24.95 T-Shirts or £74.95 Jackets, Tokyo 2020 has also been an opportunity to 'sell' (materialistically) Imperial Britain. The process is akin to the BBC, whereby as a means of establishing market control, transnational corporations have incorporated the boundaries of community into their products.

Such a 'snap' evaluation cannot sufficiently cover the myriad of instances where audiences were witness to Britain's Imperial identity during Tokyo 2020. What is clear though, is the sheer mundanity of the moments that (re)produce a restrictive nationhood and affirm the principles of Imperialism. So, has it highlighted the intentional manipulation and construction of a palatable identity of Britain to ensure both ideological and material gain by state and transnational corporations. As we continue to witness a nation-state reorganising itself behind pseudo-authoritarian politics that favour elite and populist sentiments, it would be naïve to dismiss the power of the Olympic Games in buttressing these identities.

Communicating corporate social responsibility at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

Corporate social responsibly (CSR) has become a predominant area in sports and sporting organizations over the last decade. Community outreach initiatives have penetrated nearly every sports organization's business model and are integral to the 2020 International Olympic Committees' mission statement. Research asserts that there are several crucial features of corporate social responsibility, described by Kathy Babiak and Richard Wolf as the six pillars of social responsibility in sport: (1) Labor relations, (2) Environmental management and sustainability, (3) Community relations, (4) Philanthropy, (5) Diversity and equity, and (6) Corporate Governance.

The increasing social pressures to implement sustainable and community initiatives have led sports communication scholars to investigate the effect and impact corporate social responsibility has on stakeholders, specifically fans and community members. In mega-sporting events, such as the Olympic games, initiative success depends on correctly matching partnerships with community expectations. When there is a strong alignment between the sporting organization and the collective perception of the partnership, participation, and willingness to donate to the initiative increases. This is mainly due to the popularity of sports providing a reach that partnerships with non-sport institutions cannot. Sports organizations can extend out to communities that are particularly marginalized by traditional development initiatives and can create partnerships among institutions that would not usually work together. These partnerships allow development initiatives to extend to communities where traditional development schemes tend not to reach, especially youth communities.

Research has suggested that communicating initiatives positively impacts fandom and consumer behavior on the "corporate" side of the corporate social responsibility spectrum. Fans that positively perceive their team's community efforts tend to use word-of-mouth recommendations, increasing the recruitment of new fans, and are likely to increase their behavior of purchasing intentions, repeat purchases, and merchandise consumption. By focusing on corporate social responsibility, sports organizations can develop a loyal fan base and improve fan's relationships with the team. Though, organizations face the challenge of communicating and implementing their initiatives to engage with stakeholders and evaluate their effectiveness. The issue is that most teams do not successfully communicate their CSR initiatives to their fanbase, as many fans do not know about their team's CSR activities. This is an issue as for CSR to be effective, fans need to be aware of the initiatives. Devlin and Sheehan declare that social media should be used as a channel to communicate CSR activity, and when done correctly, it can improve reputation, though when done incorrectly has the risks of public scrutinization.

So, then how do the 2020 Olympics practice corporate social responsibility? And are they communicating it effectively? The mission of the IOC falls in line withing the six pillars of corporate social responsibility in sports. In fact, the IOC was developed in 1894 on the ideals that peace and the harmonious development of humanity can be achieved through sport. Their focus in the 2020 Games is on three spheres of sustainability, credibility, and youth. One of their top priorities is to promote gender equality and inclusion by making access to the Olympic Games easier for female athletes (the 2020 Olympics had more women than any games in history) and increasing the number of women in management positions. Demonstrating the importance of sustainability, Marie Sallois, IOC Director for Corporate and Sustainable Development, declared, "The Games are one of the world's most widely televised events, and they offer an excellent chance to demonstrate sustainable solutions." They have achieved sustainability by having 99% of all goods being reused or recycled. For example, the medals that athletes received were made from recycled phones.

However, the problem persists that if something is not communicated, it is not effective to the intended receiver. Social media has become a popular medium for sports fans to engage with, and sharing content on social media at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games is not prohibited. This aligns with the issue that sports organizations are poorly communicating their media relations content with their consumers. If viewers are not aware of what initiatives are in place, there will be no effect on their fandom or identity. Further, the Olympic media team did a poor job promoting their sustainability features and combating skepticism. For example, fake news circulated they the cardboard beds for the Olympic competitors were meant to avert any temptations of *intimacy*. In actuality, the beds were the first time that the bedding in the Olympic Village was made of entirely renewable materials and will be recycled into paper products after the games.

While corporate social responsibility will remain a core feature in sporting organizations, effectively communicating initiatives to stakeholders remains persistent. Communication in sport scholars need to investigate how the lack of social media sharing at the 2020 Olympics impacted the dissemination of community-related information to the masses.

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Americans on ideological left more engaged in Olympics

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In recent years, sports and politics have merged in unprecedented ways – from players kneeling during the national anthem at NFL games to social justice phrases on NBA jerseys. The increased political nature of sports even made its way to the international stage during the 2020 Summer Olympics. Even though Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter bans protests during medal ceremonies, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) announced a few months before the Olympics began that it would not punish such behavior at this year's Games.

Research published by numerous sources including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Yahoo Sports* suggests that the merging of sports and politics has driven political conservatives to watch less sports over the last few years. YouGov recently found that nearly 35% of Americans have started watching less sports because of social justice messaging. According to NBC, viewership for this year's Olympics was the lowest ever for a Summer Olympics and was down 42% compared to 2016. This led us to wonder if a discernable difference existed amongst conservatives and liberals as it related to engagement with the 2020 Summer Olympics.

To answer this question, the Center of Sports Analytics at Samford University collected location data on 14.9 million tweets related to the Summer Olympics during the month of July 2021. Twitter is the idea social platform for this type of analysis since fans uniquely turn to Twitter during live events as their second screen to learn what's happening in real time. According to Twitter Marketing, "Across key live entertainment and sporting events throughout the world, Twitter, on average, sees a +4.1% lift in unique visitors while other social platforms, in aggregate, see no significant change according to comScore." From the data we collected from Twitter we were able to determine which U.S. cities and states had the highest level of social media engagement around the Olympics.

When investigating the level of engagement in each U.S. state it became apparent that blue states were significantly more engaged in the Summer Olympics compared to red states. Out of the top 10 states by percentage of population tweeting about the Olympics, only two are considered red states (Idaho and Kentucky). The top state in the U.S. in terms of percentage of population tweeting about the Olympics was New York which had almost 1 million people tweet about the Olympics during July. Other top states in Olympic social media engagement included Massachusetts, Georgia, Rhode Island, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Colorado. All eight of these states voted for Joe Biden in last year's election. Although both candidates won exactly 25 states in the 2020 Election, Biden's states were more invested in the Olympics compared to Donald Trump's. Indeed, nine of the eleven states that were least engaged in the Summer Olympics (Utah, Arkansas, Kansas, Alabama, Indiana, Oklahoma, Iowa, South Dakota, and South Carolina) all voted for Trump.

Although there is a disparity between states regarding Olympic tweets, some states did not reach the minimum of 300 tweets for inclusion in the dataset. Ten states are not represented in the study due to insufficient Summer Games tweeting. Seven of these ten states are red states, according to the Cook Partisan Voting Index, while only two are blue states. Although most of these states are among the least populated in the U.S, Louisiana, ranked 25th in the country for population, is one of the seven red states that did not make the cut.

When looking at the cities with the most people talking on social media about the Olympics, cities that lean left politically lead the way again. The city with the largest percentage of its population tweeting about the Summer Games, (Forks, Washington), went for Biden in the last election. Nine of the top ten cities most engaged with the Games voted for Biden in 2020. Only Greenville, South Carolina voted for Trump by a margin of 58% to 40%. The blue cities list includes Washington, D.C, the second-highest city in the U.S. with the percentage of its residents talking about the Games on social media, and a city that voted 93% for Biden and only 5% for Trump. Other blue cities in the top ten include Boston (81% Biden), Atlanta (73% Biden), Olympia (58% Biden), Darien (63% Biden), Boulder (77% Biden), Pittsburg (60% Biden), Orlando (61% Biden), Miami (53% Biden) and Cleveland (67% Biden).

Overall, the findings suggest a strong correlation between political affiliation and level of engagement in the 2020 Summer Olympic Games.

South Korea's changing status and perspective on Japan

Over the three Summer Olympic Games in which Tokyo was designated as a host city, Korea's status has changed dramatically. Tokyo's 1940 "phantom Olympics" was exciting news for Koreans expecting many Europeans to visit the Peninsula on their way to Tokyo via the Trans-Siberian Railway. Back then, however, Korea was under strict Japanese colonial rule (1910-45). The 1964 Tokyo Games presented a wide disparity in international status and economic level between the former colonized and the colonizer. Japan, as the host nation, demonstrated its position as a first world economic power and technological leader through the shinkansen and first live color satellite broadcast while Korea, devastated by the Korean War (1950-53), had only begun its economic development plan. Japan's impressive success at the 1964 Olympics (29 medals) was in stark contrast with the pathetic performance of the South Korean team (3 medals). For South Koreans, Japan was a role model and a hard act to follow. What, then, about the 2020 Tokyo Olympics?

The South Korea–Japan relationship has been often rocky, but since the early 2010s, it has plunged toward its nadir, with no sign of recovery in sight. The issue of forced labor and sexual slavery during Japan's colonial rule and a clash over the ownership of islets (Dokdo/Dakeshima) in the sea have been a chronic thorn in Seoul-Tokyo relations. But recently, the fronts of conflict have stretched to the economy and matters of security cooperation. Against this backdrop, the 2020 Olympics were expected to reduce tensions between the two sides. Nonetheless, preparations for a summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga did not proceed smoothly. Ultimately, after Hirohisa Soma, the deputy chief of mission at the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, apparently ridiculed Moon's diplomatic efforts to improve the bilateral relations between South Korea and Japan as tantamount to "masturbation," Moon scrapped his Tokyo trip plan.

Naturally, the 2020 Tokyo Games became "War Minus the Shooting" for both nations. The torch relay route map on the Tokyo Olympics website demonstrated Dokdo/Dakeshima as part of Japan's territory, causing Seoul to consider boycotting the Summer Games. The photo of Sohn Kee-chung, a Korean gold medalist marathoner in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, at the Japan Olympic Museum provoked Korean outcry because Sohn's gold medal represents Korean resistance against Japanese colonial rule. Banners hung at the balconies of South Korean athletes' rooms at the Olympic Athletes' Village were removed after the IOC ruled they were provocative because the reference was borrowed from the words of Korean naval commander Yi Sun-sin, famed for protecting his nation from Japanese invasion during the Imjin War (1592-1598). As a countermeasure, the South Korea Olympic Committee demanded a ban on the "Rising Sun" flag, seen as a reminder of Japan's militaristic past. In response to Japanese anger over South Korea's Olympic food site set up on Fukushima woes, South Korea argued that the site had operated since the 2008 Games and pointed out Japan's silence on the United States airlifting food materials from their home country for their athletes.

A notable change regarding frayed Seoul–Tokyo relations was Korea's perspective on the Japanese management system for mega-sports events. Despite their hostility toward Japan, Koreans had long admired Japan's diligent execution of a detailed administrative system, technological advances, consensus-building, world-class infrastructure and general order and cleanliness. During the 2020 Games, however, Korean mass media and social media were swamped with criticism and even sensational taunts about Japan's incompetent operation. The sharp increase of coronavirus cases in Tokyo, concerns over the cleanliness of the waters of Tokyo Bay and dystopian atmosphere of the opening ceremony symbolized Japan's rusty Games. The crude environment of the Tokyo Olympic Village, including eco-friendly cardboard beds mocked as anti-sex beds, became a main target of derision by Korean news outlets. On the other hand, Korean companies in charge of payment systems, 5G services, and ticketing systems at the Tokyo Olympics were described as symbols of Korea's cutting-edge technology. Overall, 2020 Tokyo was the first sports event where Korean mass media and public disparaged the Japanese administration and facilities in contrast to the innovative and spectacular PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games.

Korea's critical or even sarcastic view of the 2020 Tokyo Games resulted from the narrowing gap between Seoul and Tokyo in international politics, economic and culture. For instance, President Moon's participation in the G7 summit as an observer affirmed Korea's elevated status. The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) data indicate South Korea is projected to surpass Japan in GDP (PPP) per capita by 2023. Korean popular culture has gone global, especially K-pop and Korean films, which have been recognized by Billboard and the Oscar Awards. Among a number of newly independent nations following World War II, South Korea is the first country to win more medals than its former colonizer since the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. Koreans, particularly the younger generation, have finally overcome their inferiority complex vis-à-vis the Japanese to the extent that they do not much care about the medal counts and refuse biased Korean Olympic broadcasting against Japanese athletes. The 2020 Tokyo Games ushered in a new phase of the first equal relationship between Seoul and Tokyo since the "Age of Empire."

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The Men's 1500 metres: not quite erasing the ghosts of history

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The start, as often, was sluggish, prompting Ingebrigtsen (Norway) to take the lead and set a fast pace. After one lap, the out-of-form favourite, Cheruiyot (Kenya), took over. Of course, we cannot know the race plans athletes start with, although we can speculate. It has been said that no military plan survives the first battle, or rather more pithily, the boxer Mike Tyson once said that everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face.

On the athletics circuit, one sees staged record attempts, in which pace-makers set a fast pace for three laps, leaving the star to spring towards hoped-for glory. Tournament running is more tactical, and results in a slower race but the faster runners generally hope the pace will be sufficient to burn out some of the sprinters. Ingebrigtsen may not have known Cheruiyot would take the lead, but it was certainly to his advantage. Consequently, by the last-lap bell, others were being left behind. Ingebrigtsen and Cheruiyot ran neck and neck for the next 200 metres, while behind them Josh Kerr fought to overtake the other Kenyan, Kipsang. Ingebrigtsen won the race for gold in a new Olympic Record, and Cheruiyot held off a fast-finishing Kerr to gain silver. One ghost at the party is El Guerrouj, whose 1998 World Record of 3 minutes 26 seconds has yet to be surpassed.

Ever since the television age matured in the 1970s, the audience of live spectators in the host city (absent on this occasion, due to Covid) has been dwarfed by global television audiences. Being there has its own elan, but the television view is in many ways superior - offering close ups, action replays, and analyses. It also imposes its own maps of meaning - cultural frames of reference, which differ from country to country. These hierarchies are a product of history, tele-visual properties of particular sports, the presence of globally recognised star performers, but above all by patriotism. Events in which your nation has medal chances are invariably given higher profile. Athletics is a major showcase Olympic sport around the world. In the UK, though, it has been challenged and overhauled by rowing and cycling, among others, as more medals are won.

For a British audience, though, the 1500 metres (and its near relative, the mile) are haunted by history. Television re-inscribes mythologized moments, particularly Bannister's sub-four minute mile, in 1954, and the rivalry between Coe and Ovett, who along with Steve Cram, dominated middle distance running between 1978 and 1986. Even myths fade and decline in significance in television's constant re-inscribing of the historical narrative.

At Tokyo Olympics, three British runners made the final for the first time in 37 years. The 1984 final was alluded to with brief clips. but did not feature centrally in the build-up. The contrast between the early 1980s, when three British runners dominated the event, and the present, when three Brits had an outside chance of a medal, would have disrupted the high pitched and rather self-regarding bubbly positivity of the coverage. Drawing attention to the ghosts of 1979-1985, when the mile record was broken six times by the British trio, could have evoked a degree of post-imperial nostalgia, a yearning for those unspecified times when Britain was "Great".

So, the golden age video showreel got brief ex posure, and then Kerr was allowed his moment in the limelight with his bronze. The professional practices of television routinely make these fine judgements, without consciousness of the ideological conjunctures that frame such practices. The Olympic Games has become, among other things, a global stage for symbolic national prowess, celebrated in ritualistic display. It now seems almost compulsory for winners to drape themselves in the national flag. It is one of the contradictions of Olympism that predominantly individual achievements are neatly sutured into the mythology of the nation. Team GB (which, although few have protested, technically excludes Northern Ireland), is a concept from out of public relations, image consultancy and brand management. It provides an identity in which we are all supposedly encapsulated (though a significant proportion regard sport with indifference). As such, it offers a magical resolution of the messier realities of multiple complex identities through which people live their experience. A double consciousness of insider/outsider status is often part of the ambivalence of national identities of those whose background includes Celtic, African, Caribbean, Jewish, Islamic, Indian, or other "outsider" origins. As a half-Scot, do I rejoice more that Josh Kerr is the first Scot to win a middle-distance medal? Perhaps not, otherwise I would check this fact. Best just to enjoy the race as a contest between some highly trained individuals and try and resist the all-engulfing national frame of reference.

Ghana: Poor local organizing, and absence of football team dampens interest

Ghana's media interest in coverage of the 2020 Olympics is surprisingly low and profound. This situation, while surprising, is predictable given a few factors related to the Olympics. Although the Covid-19 is one of those factors, there are others that are particular to Ghana. These factors, at the least, include the lukewarm attitude expressed by the local organizing committee, the absence of Ghana's U-23 team from the Olympic football event and the lack of confidence in Ghana's chances of winning laurels at the Games.

The Ghana Olympic Committee (GOC) dedicated very little publicity to the 2020 Olympic. Despite the GOC launching of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in Ghana in March 2018, few promotional activities of the mega event are evident in the country. This is in contrast to the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympics which the Ghana Olympic Committee (GOC) and media devoted considerable time to publicize. For example, in Rio Olympics of 2016, several companies provided sponsorship packages. The Australian Mining company in Ghana and the 'Cocoa from Ghana' initiative offered an amount of €1.5m annually, which was subject to renewal after signing the letter of intent with the GOC. For the 2020 Olympics, there was little publicity until February 2020 when the GOC secured a sponsorship package from a manufacturing company - Ashfoam Ghana Limited. Ghana Television Plus (GTV Sports Plus) secured the broadcasting rights via Africa United Broadcasting (AUB). Even then, the GOC president was quoted to have said that "there is 'no way' the country will win a medal of any colour at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics." This surprising statement may have dampened any local media interest in the event.

Beyond the GOC's poor effort at publicizing the event, a survey of sports journalists, fans and university students reveal that Ghanaians associate a lack of interest to the absence of Ghana's national football team (U23) at the mega event. In 1992, Ghana's U-23 men soccer team became the first African soccer team to win a medal at the Olympic Games. Soccer, being the country's most popular sport usually leads interest in audience at such a mega event. Therefore, the absence of the U-23 team possibly affected the GOC's attempt to attract sponsors and public interest because football is the passion of the nation.

But fans may have also lacked interest in the country's ability to win laurels at the Olympics. Surprisingly, in the early hours of Tuesday, August 3, 2021, Samuel Takyi's resilience refuted the unwarranted statement of the President of the GOC. Takyi won a bronze. A Ghanaian boxer has not achieved this feat since 1972. His achievement also ended the 29 years medal drought for Ghana at the megaevent since 1992. The boxer's accomplishment shows that leaders should provide inspirational statements that build confidence and motivate athletes. Takyi's bronze was the only medal won by the country at the 2020 Olympics.

A survey of 208 Ghanaians by the University of Winneba in Ghana shows that half (50%) were unaware of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. While 36.5% were aware prior to the Games and 13.5% became aware via various social media platforms during the Games. Clearly, survey responses indicate that most fans are not following the Olympics. Interviews of journalists show that many do not understand technicalities of most Olympics events. They cite improper planning, branding, and absence of community involvement.

What fans are saying

Interactions with the few university students, who watched the 2020 Olympics, reveal that their followership is based on their passion and affiliation. For handball, they followed Denmark and France based on their passion. Affiliation was primary for their followership of Japanese women national team that had two players of African parentage -- Evelyn Mawuli and Monica Okoye. There were, however, others who claim: "I follow the Olympics because I want to know the current trends and practices, tactics as well as new rules introduced."

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Historical disputes, national identity, and the South Korea-Japan summit that did not happen

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Sohn Kee-chung won the marathon in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Sohn was a Korean, yet he competed for Japan under his Japanese name, Son Kitei, because his homeland was subjected to Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). Sohn became a national hero in post-colonial South Korea, yet his gold medal is counted as Japan's. Therefore, a controversy flared up on the eve of the Tokyo Olympics when it became known in South Korea that the Japan Olympic Museum displayed the picture of "Son Kitei" among the "Japanese Gold Medalists."

This was but one in a series of incidents that were reignited by the Olympics and strained South Korea-Japan relations. When the website of the Games featured Dokdo – or Takeshima as the Japanese call it – as Japanese territory, South Koreans were outraged too. Controlled by South Korea but regarded by Japan as its own, the islets constitute one of the most heated issues between the two countries. The South Koreans also expressed deep concern when Japan would not ban the display of the rising sun flag – which for them is a symbol of the imperial and brutal colonizer – during the Games.

On their part, the Japanese had issues with the South Koreans. Japanese far-right groups expressed anger when the South Korean delegation hung banners in the Olympic Village with a paraphrase of a statement attributed to Yi Sun-sin, the admiral who fought the Japanese invaders in the 16th century and a national hero in Korea. The South Koreans took the banners down at the request of the International Olympic Committee, which reportedly also promised to ban the display of the rising sun flag. And, as South Korea organized an independent meal service for its athletes and announced it would also screen food for radiation – expressing concern over contaminated ingredients from Fukushima – Japanese conservative media and Diet members reacted, saying it was a hurtful act.

Tensions occurred, then, around matters that are at the heart of a nation's identity: national history, territory, and national symbols – heroes, flags, and food. In light of the two nations' historical past of colonizer and colonized which is yet to be resolved, these thorny issues were negotiated by a variety of actors, including the respective governments, politicians, Olympic Committees, media, and civic society groups and activists. On the South Korean side, some sought a boycott of the Games due to Japan's approach.

The tension can, thus, be seen in two interrelated contexts. First, some of the tensions that resurfaced on the eve of the Games – namely, the issues of Dokdo, the rising sun flag, and the "Fukushima food" – were matters of contention back in 2019. In fact, relations have deteriorated since late 2018 over historical issues and Japan's export curbs, thus by July 2021 they already hit a low point. Surveys conducted in 2019 and 2020 show that both South Koreans and Japanese view the historical disputes (sexual slavery, wartime labor) and the Dokdo/Takeshima territorial issue (which is also historical), as the most significant problems in the relationship by far. The tensions that resurfaced around the Olympics have, thus, further anchored the deadlock. Second, the governments were dealing with their own respective domestic concerns. Given the centrality of historical issues, both Japan's conservative Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga (and the LDP) and South Korea's progressive President Moon Jae-in (and the Democratic Party), demonstrated how attentive they were to their supporters at home.

In South Korea, Moon represents the political camp which, compared with the country's conservatives, views history and nationalism from a tougher, much more critical approach towards Japan. Accordingly, Moon was highly critical of the 2015 agreement over the "comfort women" (sexual slavery) issue, which his conservative predecessor Park Geun-hye reached with Japan. In effect, the agreement has collapsed under his term.

This does not mean that deterioration was inevitable. Moon was considering the Olympics as an opportunity to visit Tokyo for the opening of the Games and for summit talks to lower the flames. Yet, the gap between the parties seemed wide: while South Korea demanded substantial talks over key issues, Japan was expecting "concrete steps" from South Korea and it was not willing to commit to the meeting's length. Then an incident occurred that scandalized the South Koreans: Hirohisa Soma, deputy chief of mission at Japan's embassy in Seoul, commented that "Moon is masturbating." When Moon announced his decision not to visit Japan, a survey showed that over 65% of South Koreans supported it.

During the Games, Soma was recalled and no tensions occurred related to history and national sentiments. Seemingly, this is a positive setting for a post-Games summit. However, Moon has already set a high bar for a meeting by expecting Japan – the former colonizer – to make meaningful progress on historical issues, while Suga passed the ball to the Koreans – the former colonized – demanding *they* take concrete steps on those issues. This looks like an impasse. Even motivation to collaborate against a North Korean threat is not strong on the part of South Korea's progressive government. Instead, the two Koreas have shown signs of improving relations lately. This time, reignited by the Olympics, matters of history and national identity (once again) demonstrate a critical role in South Korea-Japan relations.

Pop culture diplomacy: Japan's Olympic appeal to youth through videogames and anime

At the end of the Olympic Games in Rio, Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe surprised the world with the promotional video of the Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020. We saw sports combined with beloved characters from one of Japan's most important cultural exports manga, anime, and videogames. This mash represents perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Cool Japan initiative, that uses Japan's creative industry product and pop culture as a diplomatic means to promote the country's image.

The use of Japan's pop culture beloved characters as ambassadors for the Olympic Games resonate with Tokyo's younger audiences that have grown in a highly mediatized environment where manga, anime and videogame consumption are wide spread. This was further applied with the use of references to these media products, for example, the athletes parading with music from different videogames, creating a deeper engagement with the audiences. This promotional strategy takes advantage of the fan culture around these products, where consumers appropriate and remix the cultural products to create new and meaningful products, thus increasing the visibility of both the Olympic Games and Japan's pop culture.

It is also worth noting that athletes can also be fans and engage in the practices of fan culture. Throughout the Olympics, the appropriation and remediation of pop culture was also applied to sporting events. For example, Mexican gymnast Alexa Moreno used the soundtrack from Demon Slayer, a popular anime, for her floor routine, prompting a positive social media response. Other examples include references to anime characters or franchises, like the Uzbekistan gymnastic team wearing uniforms referencing Sailor Moon, Noah Lyles using Goku's famous "Kamehameha" to celebrate his bronze medal, and Payton Otterdahl's imitation of *One Piece* character Franky's super pose that prompted a tweet response from the anime staff. Use of an anime by an athlete attracts media attention, which in turn brings fans of these cultural products to the Olympics and reinforces the engagement loop and increases the visibility of Japan's pop culture to non-connoisseurs.

The visibility of manga, anime and videogames, their relationship with the Tokyo Olympics and the potential to engage with younger demographics that form a fan culture around them; prompt brands to use the aesthetics of these cultural products to create advertising. Brands like Toyota used the general aesthetic of anime to create an ad featuring Mexican gymnast Alexa Moreno. While Google created an Olympic-themed doodle in a videogame that allows players to participate in different sporting events. The videogame uses the classic elements of Japanese Role-Playing Games (JRPGs), a popular genre that includes videogames like Pokémon and Final Fantasy. This branding strategy allows the companies to combine elements that are relevant to their targeted audiences with a global event, attracting both media and fan attention.

Japan's use of their cultural heritage to promote the Tokyo's Olympic Games included not only traditional culture but also all the pop culture products that the country exports. This strategy allowed them to show and promote the nation's cultural identity abroad by directly advertising their creative industries products, via the use of manga, anime, and videogame characters as brand ambassadors or by using references to these products. It also allowed them to harness the fan culture of younger demographics that have emotional attachments to Japan's pop culture products, creating engagement in different social media and expectation for the Olympic Games. Athletes, who are also part of the fan culture, through their references to these products show the importance of Japanese pop culture and its influence around the world. All of these generate media attention solidifying and validating Japan's pop culture with the people that are already engaged with it and creates visibility for these cultural products worldwide; thus, further promoting Japan's cultural image and influence.

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At the intersection of COVID-19 and the Olympics: Vlogs and the expression of Chinese nationalist sentiments

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As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the postponed Tokyo Olympics finally kicked off. Despite the delay, the global event may still encourage the public to temporarily leave the gloominess and the mutual distrust brought about by the pandemic behind them.

At this Olympics, video blog (usually known as vlogs) platforms in China have been performing remarkably. The vlogs we commonly talk about are between 30 seconds and 1 minute long including both user and producer-generated content; they are also known for their sociality and diversity. In May 2021, Kwai, a Chinese social network platform famous for vlog sharing, formally becomes the Rights Holding Broadcasters of Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022, making it the first short-video and livestream platform in the world to broadcast the Olympic Games. In addition to playing every game on demand at the Olympics, Kwai has introduced livestreams and self-produced content, which includes daily event rundowns, Olympic entertainment and athlete interviews. It has attracted a large number of users and viewers.

Meanwhile, vlogs have become an important medium through which the public express their sentiments and opinions as well as form their opinions, driving the communication of nationalism and identity online. The origination of nationalism requires imagination and creativity, and the plain content, all-round view and sense of presence brought by vlogs' sharing and viewing directly strengthen sensory stimulation and the interactive experience, allowing every user to contribute to the discourse of nationalism. Besides, the commercialisation of vlog platforms is to a certain extent tolerant towards irrational nationalist comments, because it brings in users and clout. Given the low production threshold and the pursuit of popularity, vlog comments and sharing are usually based on a superficial understanding of the information but not the authenticity or criticalness. Consequently, vlogs are unable to inspire in-depth and constructive views, nor do the views endure.

Mega-sports events have always been a major stage for the expression and unleashing of China's nationalism. This time, the expression of nationalist sentiments on vlog platforms is taking on some conspicuous forms.

Firstly, nationalist stands may evolve quickly and change easily. Against the background of the raging pandemic, people assume the health perspective and have become rather sensitive towards whether the host country has provided perfect pandemic-prevention services, and whether enough attention has been paid to their athletes. Stories broke about the "stingy" facilities and "unsafe" food provided to athletes, but vlogs countering the rumours were released supporting the frugality and environmentally friendliness of the organising committee. However, videos containing questions continued to be spread frequently and have led to nationalism that is based on 'protectionism'. The Games' slogan of "-Together" and the online call for "allowing athletes to return safely" have on certain occasions come to represent the opposite stances with nationalist bias.

Secondly, the development of the sentiment of nationalism has taken on an entertainment note. The sense of ritual that is common at mega-sports events has never been more sorely missed at this Games. Yet vlogs have made up for the shortfall even on nationalism. For example, based on pandemic-prevention consideration, the organising committee of the Tokyo Olympics has forbidden players of table tennis to blow the ball and wipe the table. After China lost the table-tennis mixed doubles to Japan, Chinese netizens made a humorous vlog comparing Xu Xin, China's table-tennis player, who stopped short of blowing the ball, with his ball-blowing Japanese counterpart, implicitly ridiculing the unfair penalty and the bittered failure. Despite the hostility among nations at the Games, the seriousness of nationalism has to a certain extent been dampened following the re-creations and vanishing with the short vlogs.

Thirdly, the "fan-nationalism" continues to brew on vlog platforms. Back at Rio 2016, netizens created vlogs and emoji based on Fu Yuanhui's (a Chinese competitive swimmer) exaggerated facial expressions, which quickly became a hit online. At the Tokyo Olympics, Chinese netizens also have no shortage of material, such as Hou Zhihui, a Chinese weightlifter, who was holding a thermos while taking a deep inhale of an essential balm, becoming a trustworthy symbol in the viewers' eyes. Athletes may not have won gold medals, but users have discovered their unique charm and zoomed in. Moreover, Olympians represent their countries, which are idolised by the people. The tougher the opponents defeated, the better the people are able to prove their correct choice of idols – their nations. Through viewing and sharing vlogs, boundaries of patriotism, star chasing and personal identities are slowly disappearing, and the fandom becomes the new 'ritual'. Nationalism does not exclusively belong to national politics but has become a part of an individual's daily life, both real and virtual, and both serious and humorous.

National hierarchy in Israeli Olympic discourses

Although some see sport as a mass leisure activity, sometimes even superficial and violent, it is one of the most significant social mechanisms in modern society. Many researchers have pointed to the health, economic, political and educational roles of sport. Few are the institutions that can connect people who have almost nothing in common (and on the other hand, to break up families and deep friendships). From this perspective, there is a deep discourse on the role of sport in shaping identity, especially nationality. Benedict Anderson famously defined nationalism in terms of imagination. After all, there is no chance that a person will know even a tiny percentage of their people, and yet they will feel part of them and will sometimes even be willing to sacrifice their life for them. Indeed, for years countries have been able to develop images and symbols (flag, language, anthem, etc.) that will form a glue between sections of the population and turn the imagination into reality. Sport, not by chance, has over the years become one of the important national symbols. Historian Eric Hobsbaum (1990) put it well when he argued that the imagined community of millions seems more real when as a team of eleven named people. In other words, sport gives the national idea a body and a face and gives the people of the nation a sense that people like them represent them (and compete against the "other").

A compelling example of this lively and emotional discourse took place on social media around the Israeli delegation to the Olympic Games in Tokyo. The size, quality, and diversity of the Israeli delegation have generally received much praise. However, the discussion regarding the authentic identity of the athletes arose in two salient contexts. The first context concerns American Jewish athletes who did not grow up and do not live in Israel, but by virtue of their Jewishness were granted Israeli citizenship and represented Isarel at games. For example, the members of the Israeli baseball team included only 4 players who were born and lived in Israel. A similar phenomenon can also be identified among equestrian riders. The question of whether there is justification for sending non-native Israeli athletes and whether their achievements are really exciting has arisen in many conversations on social media. For example:

"How the hell is it allowed for Israel to "adopt" Americans who grew up in America and do not speak Hebrew so that they can play baseball, which is not played in Israel, with a blue and white flag at the Olympics?" July 29, 2021.

"Can We talk about the fact that we have an "Israeli" baseball team, but in practice they are all American? How do Israelis like to screw up the system, ahh?" August 01, 2021.

"So, the [Israeli] baseball team lost. Who care! A collection of Americans who thought they were at a camp" July 29, 2021.

Other posts talked about embarrassment or surprise that Israel has a baseball team at all.

The second expression of the phenomenon was a little more complex and reflected, more deeply, a hierarchy in the conception of nationalism. In an unprecedented way, Israel won two Olympic gold medals. The first was the gymnast Artem Dolgopyat and the second was the Rhythmic gymnast Linoy Ashram. Unlike Ashram, who was born in Israel, Dolgopyat immigrated with his family to Israel, when he was 12 years old after he was already a two-time national champion in Ukraine. In this case, too, arguments have been made on the social networks (albeit in a minority opinion) that the Ashram medal is more representative and more inspirational since she better embodies Israeliness. For example:

"...Ashram's win [Olympic gold medal] is more exciting than Artem's [Olympic gold medal]. I know that he (despite 16 years in Israel) is still perceived as the one who was educated in the Ukrainian culture. Linoy is completely from here" August 07, 2021.

This is not a coincidence. After all, if the essence of identification with a national team athlete is related to the similarities between them and community members (in appearance, history, etc.), then people who are not "similar" because they grew up elsewhere or may look different may also represent the community a little less.

As part of the commercialization and globalization of sports, a clear erosion in the national status of sport can be seen in recent years. From the discourse that emerges on social media, it seems that even in the ultimate national-sports celebration, cracks are beginning to be revealed in this matter.

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Fandom and digital media during the Games: a Brazilian perspective using @TimeBrasil Twitter data

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The 2020 Olympics were arguably the most disrupted Olympiad of recent times. The novel coronavirus global pandemic has caused important changes to our relationship to sport and our ways of life in both local and global settings. The Olympic calendar was transformed through the postponement of the summer Olympic Games, and ultimately we all had to appreciate the event at distance. Now that the games have concluded, it is important to reflect on how those disruptions materialized themselves in a place that is becoming ever more common in our lives: digital media and, in particular, social media platforms.

To appreciate how we have experienced the disrupted 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, it is key to initially ponder on our historical relationship to media platforms, and specifically how sport mega-events are considered nowadays predominantly as media events. During the last 150 years, advances in information and communication technologies meant that time and space relationship were altered to a level where distances shrank exponentially to a point where now we all - discounting global and local digital divides - can participate together even from afar. In a way, as argued by Mark Deuze, we do not live with media, but in media. And if our existence takes place within media environments, it is not inconceivable to imagine that the summer Olympic Games does not only exist as such because of the global reach of media - or to put in Deuze's terms with media - but most importantly it exists in those mediated spaces that we co-habit and co-create.

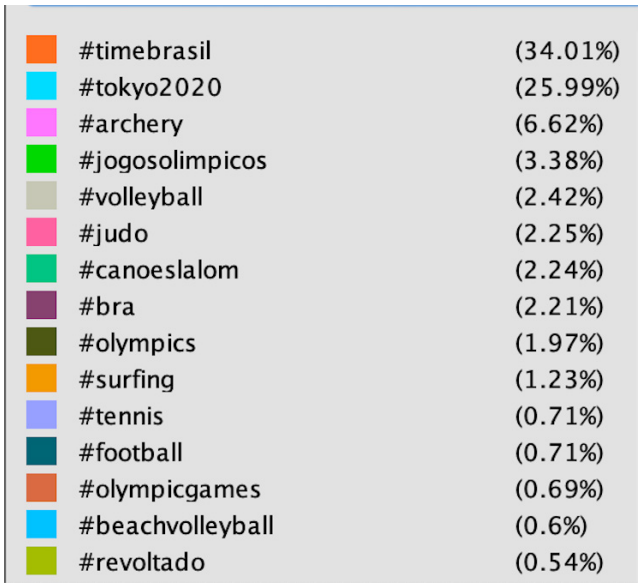
Nevertheless, this existence in media has undergone major disruptions, specifically since the end of the 20th century when digital technologies - the transformation of all forms of content into 0s and 1s - and the wider adoption of Internet protocols around the world meant that a more participatory culture through two-way communication was possible. With this in mind we have automatically scraped data from Twitter to understand how Brazilians interacted with the official fan handle of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (@TimeBrasil) during all the events that took place on the 28th July. Data (Bernardamus projection - network representing user network via hashtags present in tweets) was collected between the beginning of the first event of the day until the end of the last event (see Tokyo 2020 schedule) where Brazil participated in men's archery, men's artistic gymnastics, women's and men's badminton, women's beach volleyball, men's boxing, women's and men's canoe slalom, men's football, men's handball, men's and women's judo, women's and men's sailing, men's and women's swimming, men's table tennis, mixed double's tennis and women's doubles tennis, and men's volleyball. Between those sports in the Olympic Program sport participation in Brazil is divided as follows: football (42.7%), volleyball (8.2%), swimming (4.9%) handball (1.6%), gymnastic (1.5%), judo (0.8%), tennis (0.8%), boxing (0.6%), canoeing (0.1%) (see Brazilian Government, 2013).

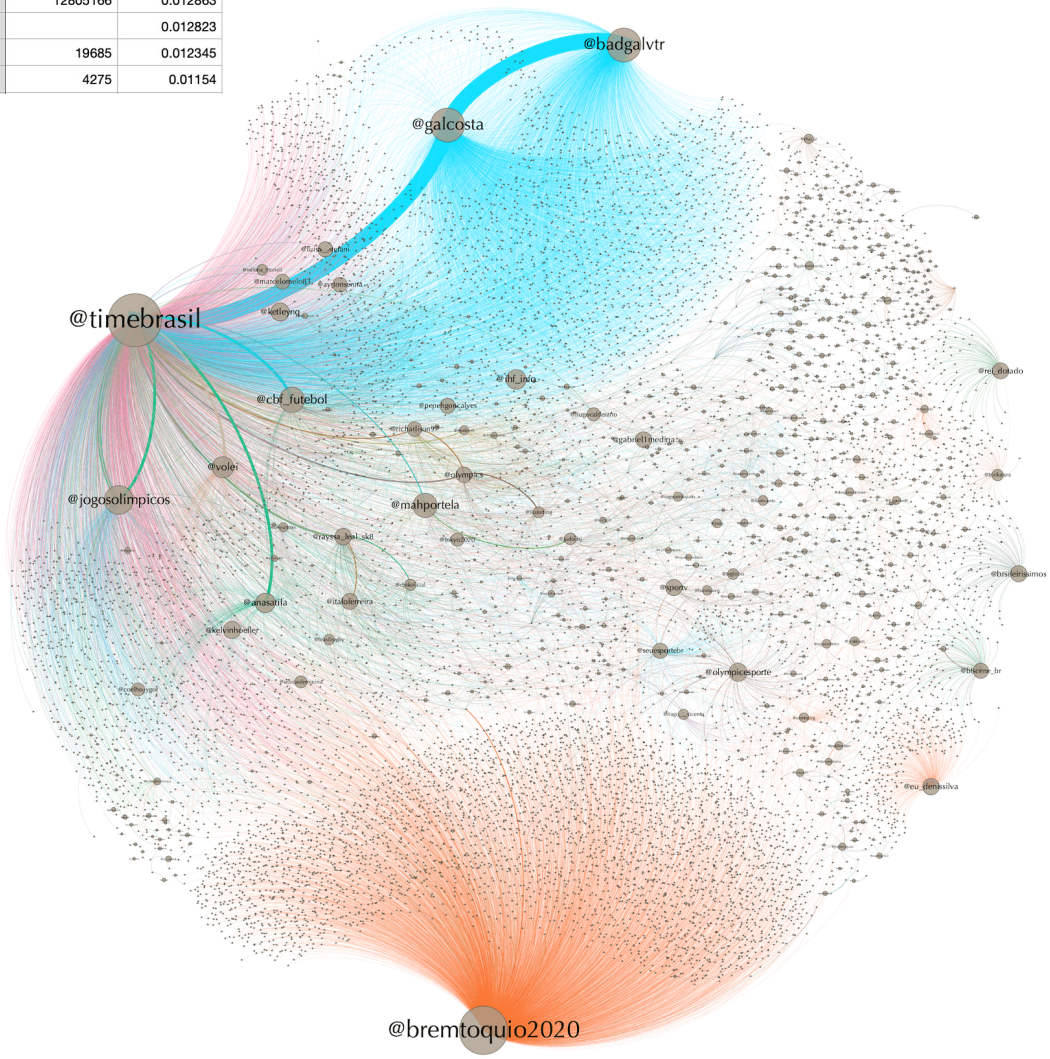
In order to check who were the most influential users in this network we ran an eigenvector centrality analysis (see Borgatti et al, 2018) which unsurprisingly showed that the sport media ecosystem has been disrupted by new digital media affordances such as the capacity for interactivity in an environment where all users become producers and consumers of content. Out of the top 21 users (#21 @olympics) only one was a traditional media outlet (#18 @sportv - pay-tv broadcaster in Brazil) while the majority were athletes (7) from multiple sports such as judo (#7 @mahportela; #12 @ketleynq), canoe slalom (#10 @anasatila), skateboarding (#13 @kelvinhoefler; #15 @rayssa_leal_sk8) and surfing (#19 @italoferreira; #20 @gabriel1medina). Our first surprise was to only encounter the first men's football player (@richarlison97) at #28, and also how the two surfers and skaters were still relevant to this network even though their participation in the Olympic Games had ended in the 27th (surfing) and 26th (skateboarding). This possibly shows how successful the IOC was implementing some of the recommendations of Agenda 2020 and Agenda 2020+5 by incorporating those sports in the summer Olympic Games program and thus reinforcing their connection to a younger audience (see IOC, 2021).

Another analysis we ran was to check the most used hashtags in this network, and to our surprise #archery (#3, 6.62%), #volleyball (#5, 2.42%), #judo (#6, 2.25%), #canoeslalom (#7, 2.24%), #surfing (#10, 1.23%), #tennis (#11, 0.71%) all appeared above #football (#12, 0.71%) which demonstrate how this social media platform provides space for sports that might be considered minority within Brazilian sporting culture.

Although all the above discussion shows how the sport media ecosystem has been disrupted by digital transformations there is one final element that is worth mentioning in terms social media platforms: the power of grassroots intermediaries in shaping the conversations (see Jenkins et al, 2013). The #3 most influential user in this network was an ordinary fan who shared a meme (wordplay between Gal Costa and Guilherme Costa - a swimmer) tagging along the famous Brazilian singer (#4, @galcosta). This tweet alone got over 400 replies, 12,000 retweets, and 100,000 likes.

	Id	Type	followers_count	eigencentrality
1	@timebrasil	Official BOC Fan Twitter	496420	1
2	@bremtoquio2020	News Aggregator (new media)	155896	0.573817
3	@badgalvtr	User	789	0.192979
4	@galcosta	Musician	1155286	0.191258
5	@jogosolimpicos	Official IOC in PT	346841	0.126299
6	@cbf_futebol	National Federation (Football)	4976825	0.090979
7	@mahportela	Athlete (Judo)		0.081788
8	@volei	National Federation (Volleyball)		0.061504
9	@ihf_info	International Federation (Handball)		0.051419
10	@anasatila	Athlete (Canoe Slalom)		0.049367
11	@olympicesporte	News Aggregator (new media)	8303	0.042656
12	@ketleynq	Athlete (Judo)		0.04143
13	@kelvinhoefler	Athlete (Skateboarding)		0.038595
14	@eu_denissilva	User	450	0.034108
15	@rayssa_leal_sk8	Athlete (Skateboarding)	369155	0.033466
16	@brsileirissimos	News Aggregator	90954	0.032826
17	OMITTED		33822	0.032313
18	@sportv	Official Broadcaster (pay-tv)	3580700	0.031871
19	@italoferreira	Athlete (Surfing)	45596	0.031113
20	@gabriel1medina	Athlete (Surfing)		0.030659
21	@olympics	Official IOC	6293147	0.030441
22	@seuesportebr	News Aggregator (new media)	10158	0.028728
23	@btscene_br	Fan Profile (K-pop)	34547	0.027825
24	@luisa__stefani	Athlete (Tennis)		0.027365
25	@pepehgoncalves	Athlete (Canoe Slalom)		0.027093
26	@marcelomelo83	Athlete (Tennis)		0.026853
27	@ayrtonsenna	Former Athlete (F1)		0.025902
28	@richarlison97	Athlete (Football)	598482	0.025078
29	@coelho_ygor	Athlete (Badminton)		0.020228
30	@tokyo2020	Official Tokyo Olympic/Paralympic	438057	0.019584
31	@hugocalderano	Athlete (Table Tennis)		0.0195
32	@selecaofeminina	National Federation (Football)	66648	0.016156
33	@judocbj	National Federation (Judo)	28697	0.015819
34	@trickstans	User	32416	0.014128
35	@cbskoficial	National Federation (Skateboarding)	8914	0.014054
36	@isasurfing	International Federation (Surfing)		0.01358
37	@tvglobo	Official Broadcaster (Free-to-air)	12805166	0.012863
38	@milena_titoneli	Athlete (Taekwondo)		0.012823
39	@brasilrugby	National Federation (Rugby)	19685	0.012345
40	@tiago___vicente	User	4275	0.01154





5

Politics of Sport

At Tokyo Games, athlete activism takes front row seat despite IOC's attempts to silence athletes

In many ways, the Tokyo Games were a sporting event like no other. Aside from the mega event taking place during an unprecedented global health crisis, the Games also coincided with a time that has seen increased attention paid to the role of sport organizations in dehumanizing athletes and perpetuating global injustices — and a time that has elevated the power of athlete activism in promoting positive social change.

The struggle for justice was perhaps most visible in the global discourse surrounding the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) controversial Rule 50 and the International Paralympic Committee's (IPC) corresponding Section 2.2, the former of which states that "no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas." Indeed, in the months leading up to the Games, Rule 50 has become an active battleground between advocates for athlete expression (e.g., the athlete group Global Athlete or the Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice) and the "powers that be" reinforcing the myth of sport as an inherently apolitical and neutral domain. At the center of such debates was the question as to what extent the rule silences athletes' right to freedom of expression and, more broadly, to what extent sport should be utilized as a platform for messages of social justice.

Despite organizational pressures to prevent athletes from taking a stand (see the IOC Athletes' Commission guidelines on athlete expression and its IPC counterpart), athletes have illuminated their power as agents of change by utilizing the platform provided by the Games to engage in what Cooper and colleagues (2019) call "symbolic activism" to promote racial and social justice. Some athletes' symbolic activism was in line with the above mentioned new guidelines — such as the women's soccer teams that knelt prior to kickoff (e.g., Chile, Great Britain, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States) or the Australian women's soccer team displaying an Indigenous flag ahead of their game.

Other athletes utilized loopholes within the guidelines to share activist messages. For example, Germany's gymnasts took on the Olympic stage in unitards with leggings stretching to their ankles in a push "to show bravery in one's own decisions" and "against sexualization" in women's gymnastics. As an artistic element in her floor routine, Costa Rican gymnast Luciana Alvarado knelt with her fist in the air to support Black Lives Matter. Outside of gymnastics, the U.S. men's epee team wore pink face masks in support of survivors of sexual assault (and to protest the presence of their own teammate, Alen Hadzic, who has been accused of sexual assault). In one of the most surprising developments leading up to the Games, the IOC gave permission to German hockey player Nike Lorenz to wear a rainbow armband during competition to show solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community.

The IOC's decision in regards to Lorenz was particularly surprising because it goes against their own Rule 50 guidelines (she was wearing the armband during competition), and a crucial point in the IOC's and IPC's argument has been to "preserve the field of play, official ceremonies and podium." These spaces have become visual artifacts representing the myth of the political neutrality of sport, and the IOC and IPC have historically tried to use their institutional power to keep them free from activism.

Of course, the IOC's/IPC's flawed reasoning regarding the sanctity of the podium did not prevent athletes from using these spaces for what Kluch (2020) terms "public acts of resistance." After winning a silver medal in the shot put, Team USA's Raven Saunders crossed her arms over head as a symbol for "the intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet." Shortly after Raven's protest, U.S. fencer Race Imboden accepted his medal with an X marked on his hand. According to this tweet, Imboden chose the symbol "as a demonstration against Rule 50" and "in support of athletes of color, ending gun violence, and all the athletes … who wish to use their voice on the platform they earned." Imboden also called out "the hypocrisy of the IOC, and all of the organizations who profit so immensely off the athletes and have yet to hear their call for change."

Reflecting larger societal conversations focused on racial and social justice and (re) new(ed) momentum for the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the horrific murders of Black people in the United States, the fight over IOC Rule 50/IPC Section 2.2 illustrates that industry professionals, athletes, and sport scholars must move from the sidelines and use their power to challenge the policies, practices, and procedures that (re)present barriers to equity and justice. In fact, on the eve of the Opening Ceremony to the Olympic Games, we joined more than 150 athletes, experts, and sport organizations to publish an open letter to IOC and IPC leadership calling for amendments to the rule and a more athlete-centered approach to activism in support of racial and social justice. In the new era of Olympic and Paralympic activism, the Tokyo Games have illustrated that, as Dave Zirin and Jules Boykoff stated so poignantly, "Rule 50 belongs in history's dustbin." The time has come for sportspeople and athletes alike to take center stage as leaders for social justice both within and beyond the arena of global sport.

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Transgender participation at the Tokyo Olympics: Laurel Hubbard and a media tempest

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Under the bright lights of the Olympic Weightlifting venue in Tokyo, Aotearoa New Zealander Laurel Hubbard stepped up onto the platform to take her first lifts as an Olympian. Regardless of the amount of weight that she lifted, Hubbard had already made an important mark on history as the first out transgender athlete to compete in an individual sport at the Olympic Games. As we argue here, the disproportionate media and public response to her inclusion are representative of how highly contested challenges to the gender binary in elite sport continue to be.

The announcement: the beginnings of a polarized media furore

On June 21, 2021, the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) announced their Olympic Weightlifting team, including Laurel Hubbard . NZOC CEO Kereyn Smith congratulated all of the athletes, declaring that the team was "committed to a strong culture of manaaki, inclusion and respect for all". The news quickly travelled around the world, yet many media reports did not follow the NZOC's lead in treating the topic, and Hubbard, with respect. An early analysis of articles written on the day of Hubbard's Olympic inclusion showed roughly 30% deliberately used her pre-transition name. Many of the same stories emphasized aspects of her pre-transition life and sporting achievements, and carried alarmist headlines, such as "Disaster for women's sport".

The topic continued to be hotly debated across television, radio, newspapers and social media. Anti-inclusion accounts often ignored that Hubbard had fairly qualified through processes outlined by the International Weightlifting Federation and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), centralized testosterone during puberty as an 'unfair advantage', or framed the discussion in terms of 'fairness versus inclusion' as if the two concepts were mutually exclusive. Anti-trans groups around the world rallied to control the discussion in online chats, wrote to the Minister of Sport in New Zealand demanding that he intervene, submitted petitions, and even protested outside the New Zealand High Commission in London against Hubbard's Olympic status. During this time, transgender health experts noted negative impacts on the transgender community.

Some pointed out a number of inconsistencies in how the IOC and the media responded to Hubbard. Importantly, Hubbard was not the only or the first transgender athlete to compete in the Olympic Games. Quinn, a Canadian football player, became the first out transgender athlete to win a gold medal but received much less media coverage (161 articles). Others highlighted incongruities in IOC regulations that allowed Hubbard to compete but excluded cis-gendered women with naturally-occurring high testosterone levels, such as Namibian 400-meter athletes Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi. As various commentators have clearly pointed out, Black and Brown sports women's bodies are unfairly policed and regulated by such policies. Despite these important issues, Hubbard's inclusion at the Games continued to receive a disproportionate amount of media coverage.

The event: surprising allies and a moment of learning

In the days leading up to Hubbard's event the IOC firmly and consistently expressed their support for her inclusion; both the IOC President Thomas Bach and IOC Medical & Scientific Director Dr. Richard Budgett released media statements addressing accusations of unfairness and biological advantage. The NZOC reiterated their ongoing support and detailed their efforts to protect Hubbard from cyber-bullying.

Despite the IOC and LGBTQI+ organizations producing new media guides to teach reporters how to write respectfully about LGBTQI+ athletes, polarizing media coverage continued on the day of Hubbard's competition. Although Hubbard did not complete any of her lifts, the event prompted a significant media response with 1331 print media articles in the subsequent 24 hours. Whereas some media responded with criticism and critique, others showed support for her commitment, courage and humanity. In so doing, the event prompted some media and audiences to learn more about transgender athletes and the challenges facing the LGBTQI+ community in sport and society more broadly.

Adding to this moment of learning was Hubbard's own voice. Uninterested in fame and seeking to steer clear of controversy, Hubbard avoided media attention. Yet in a small press conference the day after the competition, she quietly articulated her thoughts and reflections on the experience and her hopes for the future. "As we move into a new and more understanding world, people are starting to realize that people like me are just people… All I have ever wanted as an athlete, is to be regarded as an athlete."

While the future of transgender participation in the Olympics is uncertain, the participation of LGBTQI+ athletes at the Tokyo Olympic Games will surely be an important stepping stone as sports organizations, media, athletes and the public continue to discuss and debate this important social issue. While the IOC proclaims sport as a human right and continually located Hubbard's participation within that rhetoric, there is much work still to be done. The challenge for future Olympic Games is to determine how to revise the structures, rules and regulations of sport to recognize gender diversity, to move beyond the gender binary, and to fully support and protect non-binary and transgender athletes. Media representation will play an important role in educating audiences and building towards more gender-inclusive sporting futures.

The sacred space of the Olympics

The Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics occurred at 6:00 am where I live. I was up for some of it with my infant son and watched the spectacle that gives the Olympics that special feeling. However, this year, that emotion didn't just feel different, it was different. During the ceremony, outside Olympic Stadium in Tokyo during a planned demonstration, protesters angry at their city, country, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for holding the games during a surge in COVID-19 infections throughout Japan marched to chants of "Go to hell IOC." Their chants were heard inside the empty space of the stadium where COVID prevented fans from attending. It was well-known athletes would likely protest during these games; not many of us knew Tokyo citizens would start protesting before an anthem was actually played.

Space and place have been theorized by scholars within communication, social science, critical geography, and anthropology, among others. Yi-Fu Tuan explains place as a sense of attachment motivated by experience, while space refers to openness and an ability to move freely. We experience place and move through space. Over the past few years, stadiums have been transformed into highly-visible spaces and places of dissent and contested patriotism. Many people understand the symbolic meaning of stadiums; after all, don't we attend live sports because we experience a sense of attachment to a team, city, country, school, or place? Our experience of sport is being radically altered as a result of athlete activism inside stadiums.

The IOC was prepared for the rise in activism, modifying Rule 50 of their charter (which all participating countries and athletes must abide by) which originally stated "no kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas," but athletes could be disciplined for gestures or disruptions during an anthem. Athletes could make statements and express views during press conferences, interviews, through social media, and during team meetings. The IOC's attempt to protect, or uphold, the venerable nature of sport and competition inside the stadium demonstrates why sports spaces are, for many people, politically-neutral and sacred. In fact, Rule 50 also asserts that it is "a framework to protect the neutrality of sport and the Olympic Games." If sport is considered by the IOC to be apolitical and uphold virtues of international unity and harmony, then it would follow that any acts of athlete dissent or protest should not be allowed within the esteemed space of the Olympic Stadium. However, understood within the current moment, this ideal not only is hotly contested, but maybe unattainable and misguided as well.

Athletes exploited a loophole in Rule 50 that created an opportunity for political demonstrations on the field, but before a match officially began. One of the first acts of athlete protest in Tokyo occurred in women's soccer, between the U.S. and New Zealand, when players from both teams knelt before the opening kickoff. Players from Great Britain and Japan's women soccer teams also knelt before kickoff. Some athletes even included activist messages within their athletic performance, as did Costa Rica gymnast Luciana Alvarado during her floor exercise, kneeling on one knee with her head raised and right hand clenched in a fist above her head. Additionally, American shot putter Raven Saunders raised her arms over her head while crossing them into an X, which she stated was a gesture that represents the "intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet," as she stood on the stand after earning a silver medal. These were not the only instances of athlete activism in Tokyo, but they received international headlines because of how they deployed space/place to communicate a powerful message. Saunders' gesture clearly demonstrates how space can function as an intersectional site of contesting and negotiating various identities.

Space/place gives order to memory and allows rhetoric to be understood by audiences. Perhaps athlete protests in the Olympics are such a sensitive issue because, unlike how the anthem is played before the traditional U.S. game, anthem-playing during the Games is played after a match/game/competition in honor of the winner. The emotions invoked from anthem-playing during medal ceremonies — honor for one's country, respect for your opponents, international unity, and a communal ethos of competition— allow for a gesture that disrupts those preferred emotions and crafts a message perceived by some to violate Olympic decorum while simultaneously threatening a sense of attachment people have to how they experience a sense of place. For others, that disruption is the essence of the Olympic spirit, and the force of their message is amplified and rendered visible when performed within the sacred place of an Olympic stadium.

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Media frames and the "humanity" of athletes

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U.S. gymnast Simone Biles' decision to withdrawal from the women's team final, citing her inability to safely perform her routines stemming from mental stress, ignited an intense period of coverage and debate across media platforms and social media. Initially at the center of these debates was a bevy of larger, intersecting cultural and political issues within sport (and beyond) centered on the prioritizing of mental health and self-care, the demands of sport, and duty to one's team and country. At once Biles was wrapped up in these debates, which positioned her along a continuum from an activist taking a heroic stand against the dehumanizing structures of sport to a selfish complainer who failed her teammates and her country. As the Columbia Journalism Review noted, however, mainstream media coverage was generally supportive of Biles, with NBC Olympics host Mike Tirico concluding the broadcast of the event by saying, "whether or not we see the great Simone Biles compete again, hopefully the next stop on her journey is joy."

Over the course of the Olympics, Biles' withdrawal became intertwined with other moments, such as Irish boxer Kellie Harrington's imploring of the other medalists to come share her gold medal podium and high jumpers' Mutaz Essa Barshim and Gianmarco Tamberi's celebratory realization that they could forego a winner-takes-all jump off and instead share the gold medal. A broader narrative then emerged within mainstream media about the lessons and impact of these Olympics. In articles across ESPN, Sports Illustrated, the New Yorker, the New York Times, the Baltimore Sun, the Minnesota Star-Tribune, and others, frequent mention was made of how these events reminded us of the humanity of these athletes and their support for each other, standing in opposition to the conventional demands of sport put forth by sports media outlets, sporting organizations, and fan cultures. In the words of NBC Sports' Tim Layden, an "evolution" was taking place at the Olympics.

As sports scholars have long detailed, sport has historically been a site where athletes are mythologized within heroic narratives that reinforce the power of the athlete to overcome any amount of pain, injury, stress, or other difficulties through sheer force of will and determination. These myths also celebrate the ultra-competitive, sacrificial expectations of sport that calls for beating down the opponent and the self in single-minded pursuit of victory. Research has further shown the physical and mental harm that can come to athletes as they sacrifice their bodies and minds in the pursuit of adhering to these unsustainable (and often unattainable) physical and mental expectations.

However, despite the laudatory profiles of these moments that celebrate their defiance against sporting norms, much of the framework of these stories produced familiar narratives about athletes that themselves stayed embedded within the conventional storytelling narratives of sport. Particularly with Biles, the most enthusiastic coverage was filled with riveting, dramatic prose that centered on her "victory," with pieces proclaiming her a champion, declaring her withdrawal a greater achievement than a gold medal, comparing it to the historic Men's 400 meter hurdles race, and labeling it as a "haymaker to the chin" of contemporary sporting structures. Her act of resistance, it would seem, fit neatly into the pre-existing scripts of undeniable heroism and singular achievement that her act rejected in the first place.

The acts of Biles, Harrington, Barshim, Tamberi, and others are indeed notable and worthy of applause. However, if these moments are truly actions that stand against the lofty expectations and hyper-competitive pressures of modern sport then they are at least in part a stand against the frames of heroic spectacle and triumphant, dramatic narrative that proliferate across media coverage of sport and reinforce those expectations and pressures. So far, however mainstream media coverage has seen fit to celebrate, or at least legitimize, these moments with limited introspection (as noted by *Slate*). For the future it is worth paying attention to whether mainstream media coverage of sport will also "evolve" to reflect the lessons imparted by these athletes or whether their moments of humanity were just another part of the mythmaking.

We want reform

The intersection of sport and politics has always been a murky, controversial road to navigate. From Muhammad Ali to Serena Williams, athletes have a knack for challenging a society they deem inequitable and discriminatory. Often times, their merits are met with both praise and vitriol. But since movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo have currently dominated the global conversation regarding social justice, we have now seen the emergence of a new generation of athlete activists: those who are informed, empowered, and conscientious advocates for justice that are using their social and traditional media platforms to challenge antiquated policies that impede positive social change. One of the most notable displays of this has been with the recent Olympics Games staged in Tokyo.

The closing ceremony of this year's games was meant to provide a sense of normalcy to a world that has been recovering from one of the worst pandemics in history. But prior to the commencement of the games, the International Olympics Committee (IOC) released a statement emphasizing the necessity to reinforce Rule 50. According to the rule, athletes should refrain from any political protest that would jeopardize the committee's goals of being neutral when it comes to the national interest of individual countries.

The IOC's reasoning behind the rule was supported by the Athletes' Commission, an elected body of global athletes under the guidance of the IOC, who conducted a study which reported that 70% of people who responded to their survey expressed that athlete protests at the Games were not appropriate, while the remaining participants expressed that protesting is and has always been a human right. Questions regarding the legitimacy of the study prompted the IOC to relax the rules. As a result, athletes were limited to political demonstrations prior to competition so long as they are not disruptive to Olympic principles and are not on the podium when receiving medals.

But, it was the late former South African president, Nelson Mandela, who expressed that sport is a disruptive force that is even more powerful than governments in dismantling social injustices. It was even expressed during the opening ceremony by IOC president, Thomas Bach, that global solidarity means more than just basic respect or non-discriminatory acts. Bach would go on to say that solidarity means helping, sharing, and caring. But in speaking in this manner, one could conclude that these sentiments are contradictory to the premise of Rule 50. Despite the convoluted nature of banning protests, athletes decided to take the IOC to task.

Costa Rican gymnast Luciana Alvarado made history as the first gymnast in her country to qualify for the Olympic Games. She also made history as the first athlete to engage in a political demonstration on the global gymnastics stage when she ended her routine with her right fist raised in the air while taking a knee. Alvarado would go on to explain that she wanted to highlight the importance of fighting for equal rights as a show of solidarity towards the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

In another demonstration, U.S. shot putter Raven Saunders became the first athlete during the Games to protest on the podium by crossing her arms to make an X gesture as she received her silver medal. By performing this gesture, Saunders explained that she wanted to use her platform to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves regarding the fight to eradicate social injustice. Specifically, she explained that the X gesture is the intersection where all oppressed people meet.

Perennial Olympic medal winner and gymnast Simon Biles sparked controversy by withdrawing from competition to concentrate on her mental health. Biles was both lauded for demonstrating the need for self-care and criticized for not demonstrating mental toughness as most athletes are expected to show. While her stance for self-care and athletes' mental well-being was not necessarily a political gesture, it did highlight a much-debated topic concerning the well-being for athletes beyond their roles as entertainers.

While sport organizations such as the IOC are having a tough time delineating best political protest practices, one thing is markedly clear: high-profile athletes are calling for organizations to engage in actions that protects their basic human rights and their well-being. Whereas sport organizations used to punish athletes for their political stances, they must now become collaborators in eradicating social injustice. Gone are the days where athletes contend with compartmentalizing their lives as only entertainers without also considering their humanity. As we move forward, the pursuit of justice through the lens of sport has become one of the leading tools to challenge all organizations in reforming policy in the hopes of creating a better society. Shunning away from social issues will develop questions about the IOC's relevancy regarding their notions of global solidarity.

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In search of voice: behind the remarkable lack of protest at the Tokyo Paralympics

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The Tokyo Paralympics concluded with a spectacular ceremony that aptly celebrated the diversity of the human experience. Yet, their significance for disability inclusion, justice, and human rights more broadly remains suspended between good intents and stifling rules. There were no noteworthy athlete demonstrations or statements at Tokyo's Paralympic venues, making these games an even less 'politicized' event than the Olympics, which were largely void of protest despite the organizers' fears of a surge in podium activism. This was somewhat unexpected coming on the heels of global social justice protests supercharged by the pandemic and given the growing intersection of activism and sports in recent years. Why do we not hear more from Paralympic athletes as public figures and how likely is that to change in the near future? This is a complex question that only time will answer definitively, but three issues stand out as indicators of what could change on the road to Paris 2024.

The IPC's ambivalence

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has made some bold moves to support disability rights in recent years. Yet, it also took an ambivalent stance toward athlete activism in Tokyo. The IPC capitalized on the games as the backdrop to launch an ambitious 10-year campaign for disability inclusion called #WeThe15. This is a remarkable initiative on a scale never before attempted in disability advocacy. It has the resources, digital structure, and international partners – including disabled people's organizations – to make a difference on how people around the world see disability. At the same time, however, the IPC also reiterated its longstanding ban on protests in all Paralympic venues. This cut a striking difference with the Olympics, where a similar restriction was retained only for medal ceremonies. The IPC said its decision was informed by a consultation with athletes conducted by the Athletes' Council. This type of participatory overture is laudable. Yet, the way in which that data was interpreted seems to lack appropriate contextualization. Chiefly, these results should be weighed against the fact that a significant proportion of athletes live under repressive regimes that can make protest personally dangerous and quash any desire for expressing dissent. For example, Tamiru Demisse, an Ethiopian runner who protested his government's treatment of the Oromo people at Rio 2016, openly talked about his fear of retaliation and stayed in Brazil after those Games.

Stand out from the 'noise'

Following on from the previous point, there is a disconnect between officially sanctioned opportunities for athlete protest – i.e. when talking to journalists and on social media – and the ways in which protest and media intersect today. In an information environment saturated with content, highly symbolic moments such as medal ceremonies are especially important for standing out from the surrounding 'noise' and attracting an influential audience. This is particularly true for Paralympic athletes who tend to have a smaller following than their Olympic counterparts. Thus, banning protest on the field and on the podium means eliminating the best shot that Paralympians have to exploit the spotlight and create content that can go viral, be shared, and fuel engagement. Another recommendation from the Athletes' Council is to help Paralympic athletes be more effective advocates, particularly on social media. Initiatives like #WeThe15 are a step in this direction, but a broader relaxation of current rules is needed for athlete activists to be truly effective in today's integrated media environment. Culture and politics itself clearly play a role here, with a global organization like the IPC weighing up the different views of its many members. Yet, there are signs of progress from national bodies such as the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee's refusal to discipline athletes for protesting at medal events this year, which may ultimately put pressure on others and create momentum for international officers to change course.

Bridging the gap

Finally, another important issue is the relationship between the Paralympics and the broader disability rights movement. This is a longstanding question that touches on the identity of Paralympic athletes as both disabled people and advocates, as well as the relationship between national Paralympic committees and grassroots activist networks. While it is impossible to do justice to these complex issues in this short piece, there are signs of change in this area. Over the last decade, disability rights activists have capitalized on the Paralympics to campaign on local issues including at the London 2012 games and in Tokyo. More importantly, a new development in 2021 were instances in which disabled Twitter, which has become a powerful political voice in recent years, spontaneously and very forcefully rallied behind Paralympic athletes who faced difficulties. The most emblematic case was arguably that of American deaf-blind swimmer Rebecca Meyers, who had to withdraw from Team USA because she was barred from bringing a personal assistant of her choice to the games. Digital disabled activists rushed to support Meyers and in doing so created an opportunity for many more to share their experiences of discrimination and call for better support. As young people with disabilities increasingly find their political voice online, there must be ways to make these bridging moments between athletes and the grassroots sustainable so as to exploit the many opportunities the Paralympics offer to advance disability inclusion and human rights.

The revolt of the Black athlete continues

In the revised introduction 50th edition of scholar-activist Dr. Harry Edwards' The Revolt of the Black Athlete, he writes that "in sport…Black athletes had the same obligation to fight for change as Black people in other arenas of American life." Contrary to public desire and mainstream discourse, sports have not, nor should they be an apolitical space. So long as athletes remain social actors within the societies in which they live, they have every right to respond to the injustices that impact them as human beings and use their platforms to do so. The 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, like the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, was a site for activism and revolt. Black athletes, and especially Black women (if you've been paying attention) participants, as well as those who have been sidelined by choice (Simone Biles) or due to new rules (Caster Semenya) have been using their platforms to bring awareness to issues which are larger than themselves.

Simone Biles

The most decorated gymnast in the history of the sport, Simone Biles is, no doubt, the G.O.A.T. However, her need to step away from the 2020 Games to protect her mental health was met with as much criticism as it was support. Known for completing skills that other sportswomen don't even attempt, Biles risked severe injury (or worse) if she competed while not being in the right mental state. Her decision to step away should have been met with respect, compassion, and empathy rather than disdain and snark. Yet, athletes in general, and Black athletes in particular, are often regarded as pieces of equipment to be picked up and used until worn down regardless of the consequences. However, athletes do not owe us their physical, mental, or emotional well-being. Biles' decision not to compete in the team all-around event, as well as individual events including the bars, vault, and floor, were her choices to make, not the public's. It was a moment that brought more attention to the importance of mental health to public perception. Arguably, that Biles was able to come back and compete in the individual beam, for herself and for no one else, as was reflected in her smile when she landed and touched her heart, was a greater victory even than the bronze medal she earned. She gave us reason once again to reflect on the importance of prioritizing our mental well-being over the negative reactions of others, a hard lesson especially for Black women who are constantly framed as being unbreakable.

Caster Semenya

Since winning the 800m dash during the World Championships held in Berlin 2009, Caster Semenya has been the target of backlash and criticism over her sex/gender identity. Though being designated female (sex) at birth and identifying as a woman (gender) her whole life, due to a new ruling by the governing body of track, World Athletics (formerly the International Amateur Athletics Federation), Semenya has been unable to defend her title as the women's world champion in the 800m since the Olympics in Rio in 2016. The contradictory discourse often goes something like, "Just look at her, for me she's not a woman, she's a man," with her physique, speed and timber of her voice being called into question and her femininity challenged. The real issue, however, is that she is just too good to be a natural woman and therefore must possess some form of unfair advantage (i.e., some form of masculine edge). Nevertheless, Semenya continues to push back against these seemingly racist/sexist narratives to have her identity recognize and her desire and ability to compete restored. Her efforts are more than for her own sake as two other African women were also barred from this year's Olympic Games for similar reasons. Caster's fight is a revolutionary one, for herself and for others.

Raven Saunders

The 2020 Summer Olympic Games were political for several reasons, and Black women from the U.S. and around the world have been leading the revolt. American silver medalist shot putter Raven Saunders became the latest in a line of Black women, including Gwen Berry, to bring her politics to the podium when she lifted her arms above her head and created an "X" with her wrists to demonstrate "…the intersection of where all people who are oppressed meet." Such a gesture is in line with the Black feminist politics that brought us intersectionality as well as the matrix of domination. Furthermore, the "X" is a clear symbol of the Combahee River Collective's assertation that once Black women are free, everyone will be free, because freeing Black women would mean dismantling all systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia.

Black women have always been at the center of the revolution, and their efforts during the 2020 Olympic games are not new. It is time that we pay close attention, get on board, or get out of the way.

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WeThe15 shines a spotlight on disability activism

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Cementing its strategic shift towards disability-rights advocacy, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) used the Tokyo Paralympic Games 2020 as a platform to launch WeThe15. This strikingly ambitious campaign brings together the largest ever coalition of international organisations with the aim to end discrimination against disabled people within ten years (i.e. 15% of the whole world). One relevant question therefore is - how?

Top-down movements

One aim of WeThe15, notable over the Paralympic Games, is to use high-profile Paralympians as advocates for disability-rights issues. While there has been a rise in Para athletes using their social influence to draw attention to different forms of discrimination, fashioning Para-athletes as 'disability activists' raises some initial thoughts. In one way the campaign gives Para athletes who wish to use their spotlight to highlight forms of discrimination, whether in sport or wider society, a clear and legitimate discourse to do so: #WeThe15. For Para athletes who operate within sports media systems that find disability-rights issues confusing, and therefore time consuming to explain, this is a particularly useful 'signpost'. However, this manufactured approach to athlete activism is confusing too. For example, the IPC is now in a paradox situation where athletes are banned from highlighting discrimination on the basis of race in Paralympic venues (Section 2.2 of the IPC Handbook) but encouraged to highlight discrimination on the basis of disability. All Paralympians, for instance, were given temporary tattoos with the WeThe15 symbol to wear at the Games.

Top-down movements such as WeThe15 inevitably involve some kind of imagination about what disability is, as well as what disability activism is and how it should be performed. This raises questions about whether the identity politics embedded in the WeThe15 campaign will raise consciousness, and if so, for who and in what ways. Will WeThe15 take visibility away from existing grassroots movements? Who is WeThe15's intended audience? Is it aimed primarily to mobilise people with disabilities or is WeThe15 aimed at changing attitudes among 'WeThe85'? Was the mental health awareness performed by Simone Biles, Naomi Osaka and other high-profile athletes over the Olympic and Paralympic Games, 'WeThe15?'

Stay global or connect with grassroots activism?

WeThe15 is about much more than politicising Paralympians and the Tokyo Paralympic Games was just the launch pad for this 10-year campaign bringing together international organisations from the world of sport, human rights, business and culture. The direction of WeThe15 will therefore be interesting to track.

The campaign may operate at a global level and focus attention on single global issues such as barriers to employment or assistive technology. It may use its international power and influence to seek specific global commitments around disability inclusion in order to reform governments or industries, and then measure 'social impact' at a global level. Staying global seems like a logical thing to do for an international coalition, and choosing a focus seems reasonable in terms of directing action; there are no shortage of disability-rights issues to focus on. That said, each choice runs a risk of disconnecting WeThe15 from those who would have gone in a different direction. For example, if WeThe15 assumes that disability rights are generally improving in a gradual linear fashion it might disconnect from those who reject universal notions of progress; those who seek to introduce radical ideas into disability politics. Also, while disability discrimination is universal, forms of discrimination manifest in very different ways at local levels. People with spinal cord injury who live in Switzerland are about three times more likely to be in employment than those who live in Spain, for example.

Another direction of travel for WeThe15 could be connect a global platform to grassroots movements. That might be done by shining a light on stories of disability activism as they occur in different ways and places around the world. Amplifying stories that show how people become politicised in different ways and use different advocacy tools, such as policy rhetoric or artistic expression, relevant to the 'issues of the day' may lead to change as stories are actors; they act on, to, and with people. Stories that showcase the social impact of activism in the context of people's lives, cultures and histories may not be so much 'inspirational' but subtle social reality changes.

What role can academic research play in shaping WeThe15?

One way for researchers to use their power and resources could be to play the role of facilitation and knowledge exchange between existing disability movements and WeThe15.

For instance, just how WeThe15 will be led and controlled by disabled people was a key point raised by disabled people and user led organisations over the Games. It is imperative however that knowledge and understanding is produced *with* those whose lives WeThe15 is purporting to impact upon the most. This means working to shift the power relations in research so that those who are most marginalised by disability have control in what questions are asked, to whom they are asked and in what ways, and how knowledge is disseminated and used.

However WeThe15 takes shape over the coming years, it will be interesting to watch the IPC's commendable commitment to not leave 15% of the world's population behind.

Will #WeThe85 finally include #WeThe15 as a legacy of Tokyo 2020?

For the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), the legacy for people with disabilities to be actively engaged in their communities after the Games has been central to their legacy commitment for some time. A legacy is what remains beyond the life of the event and as a consequence of the event. So far, there has been little evidence to demonstrate what or how social legacies, like sport participation or volunteering, remain. Vancouver 2010 is one example of how strategic planning, and early and ongoing engagement with the organizing committee can leave a legacy for host communities. However, one factor that often limits the legacy potential is the lack of learning, or knowledge transfer, between events.

With the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, the most exciting legacy-related aspect may not be so much about what happened in the sport arena, but what happened outside the arena. In the week before the Paralympics #WeThe15 was launched, which is a global collaboration of disability sport organizations and organizations advocating for the position of people with disability around the world. The IPC's #WeThe15 media release identified that internationally there are 1.2 billion people with disability: 15% of the world's population. Further, there are others who are more disabled by their social and economic context than they are by any physical or cognitive impairment they may have.

Similar to the IPC's legacy vision, #WeThe15 aims to address issues like access to sport, but also to change community perceptions of disability more broadly. The #WeThe15 video certainly portrays the ordinary everyday life of challenges, barriers, and frustrations that all people with disability experience. As Paralympian and Australian broadcast co-host, Kurt Fearnley said 'WeThe15 is about taking the voice of the people with disabilities to an international stage. They don't want to be seen as superhuman, they want to be seen as human, as equal, as being able to get a job, being able to access education". However, we know that for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympians there are major differences in living standards depending upon where they were born.

#WeThe15 is not without its detractors. Since the announcement there has been criticism about the campaign and its connection with the IPC and the launch at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic games. As this article and others point out, the representation of the Paralympic ideal does not represent the full spectrum and complexity of the disability community with the IPC classification system favoring some types of disability and excluding athletes with severe disability. So, with our long involvement in critical Paralympic research from the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic games, that we dubbed the "Benchmark Games", we view this new initiative with some caution.

The Sydney Paralympics was lauded for many improvements, but many of these had little to do with the games themselves. While there were many elements to like about the Sydney 2000 Paralympics there were also problems relating to the politics of disability and access. A contributing factor to this was the lack of engagement with the Sydney and Australian disability community by the Sydney Paralympic Games Organizing Committee and the NSW government of the day. Two decades later the legacy of Sydney 2000 continues to be a topic of interest.

To learn from Sydney 2000, 15 years later one of the authors was invited to Tokyo as part of the Nippon Paralympic Research Foundation visiting scholar program. First steps involved organizing meetings between disability sport organizations and disability advocacy organizations to defining what the Japanese community would like to see as a Tokyo 2020 legacy for the disability community. The process included bringing together disability advocacy groups and disability sport groups who didn't talk to each other and certainly not about the impending Tokyo 2020 Paralympic games. Following the visit an article was written for the Nippon Paralympic Research Group about learning from Sydney 2000 to prepare Tokyo 2020 for a legacy for the community of people with disability attending the games, for visitors to Japan afterwards and, most importantly, for the Japanese disability community. However, with the COVID-19 limitations, the Tokyo 2020 social legacy strategy and planning for the disability community had to be agile. The usual cultural festival was gone (although witnessed in the Paralympic Games opening and closing ceremonies), and the opportunity to activate the event and introduce spectators to adaptive sports had gone. Maybe #WeThe15 will help fill that gap.

Time will tell whether the #WeThe15 coalition will achieve long-needed, tangible improvements for the 1.2 billion people living with disability. Will their global, top-down strategies lead to local initiatives to empower people with disability and to facilitate their access to sport and recreation in their home communities? In part the answer will depend upon what #WeThe85 do to help co-create more accessible and inclusive societies, communities, workplaces, and sporting opportunities where #WeThe15 feel welcomed, equal, and at home.

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Activism starts with representation: IPC Section 2.2 and the Paralympics as a platform for social justice

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In our previous commentary, we argued how the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Rule 50 has become a site for the struggle of justice and increased visibility of athletes' activism during the Tokyo Games – which, as Sharnak and Kluch have put aptly, has made Rule 50 "one of the most prominent battlegrounds for racial justice and human rights in modern sport." Largely absent from global discourses surrounding the role of sport policy in perpetuating social and racial injustice leading up to the 2020 Games, however, has been the Paralympic counterpart to Rule 50: Section 2.2 of the International Paralympic Committee Handbook. Titled "Discrimination and Propaganda," IPC Handbook Section 2.2 states:

No discrimination is allowed on political, religious, economic, disability, racial, gender or sexual orientation or any other grounds against any country or individual. No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Paralympic venues or other areas related to the Paralympic Games.

Participants should act and behave accordingly, and, bodies and relevant authorities involved in the organisation of the Paralympic Games, are encouraged to introduce policies and regulations that prevent discriminatory practices, including disciplinary measures.

What, however, happens if the rule policing such discrimination is, in fact, discriminatory in itself? Much like Rule 50, Section 2.2 uses racially coded language targeting racially minoritized populations ("racial propaganda"). It is attempting to silence those pushed to the margins – those who may most need the global platform provided by the Paralympic Games to call into question a status quo that marginalizes, minoritizes, and dehumanizes them.

Despite attempts to silence activist Paralympic athletes, the activist platform provided by the Paralympic Games is growing. The global reach of the Paralympic Games has increased consistently; Tokyo 2020 was no exception, setting new viewership and broadcasting records. In the U.S. alone, for the first time in history, NBC increased their coverage from 66 hours in Rio to a record breaking 1,200 hours in Tokyo. Using this stage for athlete activism, U.S. rower Charley Nordin took to the podium and unzipped his jacket, revealing a shirt reading "Justice for Oscar Grant" after accepting his silver medal with his team. Following the medal ceremony, USA Rowing declared their support for Nordin and his right to protest in a tweet. The IPC stayed silent.

While the Olympic Games saw several examples of athlete activism, Nordin's podium protest stood out at the Tokyo Paralympic Games (despite the Games having served as a platform for protest before). The absence of athlete protests and demonstrations, besides Nordin's, becomes less surprising when considering the even stricter rules Paralympians face under Section 2.2, compared to Rule 50 applying to Olympians. While the IOC has somewhat opened the door for *some* protests to happen as long as they follow strictly regulated guidelines, the IPC still bans Paralympians from all such demonstrations.

Despite the invisibility of athlete activism in the form of protests, the Paralympic Games were a driving force in pushing for disability representation and rights – an activist act in itself. During the Games, the IPC released its WeThe15 campaign as "sport's biggest ever human rights movement to end discrimination" with the aim to "transform the lives of the world's 1.2 billion persons with disabilities so they can be visible and active members of an inclusive society." The campaign, led by the IPC in coalition with the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Special Olympics, Invictus Games Foundation, and the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (Deaflympics), is supported by various international human and disability rights organizations. It is too early to determine the impact of the WeThe15 campaign, and hopefully it will lead to greater disability inclusion in sport.

It is important to acknowledge that in some places, concrete actions are already taking place to promote inclusion of people with disabilities. For example, a number of international companies are increasingly buying into disability sport. Tokyo 2020 brought increasing marketing and media representation of Paralympians to the broader public. At the forefront has been Toyota's 'Start your Impossible' campaign, a global initiative to provide freedom of mobility for all, featuring the success stories of Paralympians such as Jessica Long (U.S., para swimmer). Other global companies also featured advertisements as part of their larger campaigns. The 'Impossible is Nothing' campaign by Adidas highlighted several Paralympians including Shoko Ota (Japan, Taekwando) and inspired viewers to 'see a world of acceptance'. The representation of Paralympians in these campaigns is a driving force in changing public perception and increasing acceptance and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Long's Toyota commercial, which kicked off at the National Football League's Super Bowl LV, already proved its impact, inspiring the next generation of para athletes (see, for example, the story of two-year-old Myah Schneider born with spina bifida).

Perhaps the activism of Paralympians, then, starts with representation, but it should not end there. As the Paralympic platform becomes bigger, we need to more rigorously scrutinize the practices, procedures, and policies that hinder athletes from turning their visibility into action for systemic change – starting with the IPC's outdated Section 2.2.

The colonization of the athletic body

As an ally for people of European descent, who have expanded their reach throughout the globe and created chaos wherever they have expressed themselves as colonizers, my allyship is to expose oppressive behaviors, and more specifically, behaviors that exhibited white supremacy or the colonizer mindset. Despite the host country's efforts of trying to live down its history as a colonial empire, the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo have given us examples of the colonizer's mentality and colonial footprint that continues to be expressed throughout the globe.

One of the areas we witnessed the colonizer's mentality is with the IOC's stance on not allowing athletes to protest. According to Rule 50, "every kind of demonstration or propaganda, whether political, religious, or racial, in the Olympic areas is forbidden." However, Rule 50 was modified to allow athletes to protest in a non-disruptive demonstration before their competition, but not during their competition or while on the podium. Regardless of the modifications, some U.S. athletes defied this form of "podium" censorship and athletic colonization by staging some form of protest on the podium. Shot putter Raven Saunders and fencer Race Imboden both used the X symbol as a means of protesting. Saunders crossed her raised hands above her head and Imboden revealed a circled X on his hand as a symbol of solidarity. In the words of Saunders, the X is "the intersection where all people who are oppressed meet."

It is important to note that there were a few corporations that took on a social justice orientation during the Olympic broadcast, including Proctor and Gamble (P&G) with Allyson Felix, Comcast with Simone Manuel, or Nike's dynasty ad paying homage to USA Basketball Women's National team 7th straight Olympic Gold Medal. I have mixed emotions about corporations' true commitment to social justice issues when they have a questionable history of identifying with the colonizer's mentality. However, P&G, for over a year now, has been taking a stance to move the conversation on systemic racism forward with their "take on race" campaign. These multi-national corporations need to go beyond the energy of the moment created by murders like that of George Floyd and other hate crimes and energize a movement to eradicate systemic racism and other remnants of the colonizer within their corporate structures and the many countries where they have a footprint.

Regardless, these countries and corporations have colonized athletic bodies to do the exact thing the IOC banned athletes from doing — demonstrate politically, religiously, and promote racial propaganda. The Olympics is undoubtedly an expression of global athletic excellence on display. However, it is also, if not more so, a major commercial spectacle, where countries seek to demonstrate their political dominance, corporations demonstrate the religious propaganda of capitalism/commercialism, and overall, the racial propaganda of white supremacy prevails when we see the overall display of sports that are Eurocentric in conception. The latter undoubtedly demonstrates the footprint of the colonizer, with sports like Equestrian, Sailing, Golf, and other "country club" sports that express economic dominance and reek of colonial rule. It was also demonstrated in NBC's obsession in letting the world know repeatedly that the U.S. dominated the medal count winning more Gold and overall medals than China, which came in second in the medal count.

Another example of the colonization of the athletic body or examples of the impact of colonization on Black and Brown nations is the athletic migration of athletes where Black and Brown bodies have been displaced. Or, more accurately stated, the presence and performance of refugee athletes and the nations they represented. For example, Ethiopian-borne and raised Sifan Hassan, multi-medal winner at the Tokyo Olympics, represented the Netherlands after leaving her native Ethiopia as a refugee at the age of fifteen. Hassan won Gold in the Women's 10000m and her fellow countrywoman, Letesenbet Gidey, won Silver. Abdihakem Abdirahman is another interesting story of a displaced refuge athlete from Somalia who is representing the U.S. He is the oldest American runner to qualify for the U.S. Olympic team. There are hosts of refuge athletes who have been displaced due to political conflict and are now representing European or North American countries. Much of this political conflict is produced by the power vacuum created with the departure of colonial powers or the egocentric intervention of colonial powers.

In conclusion, the themes of the Tokyo Olympics of "United by Emotions" and the "Worlds we Share" sought to drown out global social injustices and the resurgence of a nagging pandemic that refuse to be masked or vaccinated away. Sport, and international sporting spectacles like the Olympics, have that power to help us transcend the moment, if only for a moment, and give us a glimpse of peaceful coexistence, international collaboration, and global athletic excellence. These sporting spectacles also expose us to areas we have yet to overcome in creating a just and peaceful global community.

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Forced hijab and female athletes in postrevolutionary Iran

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From the outset of the Islamic regime of Iran, women were officially discouraged from participating in public life. In the sporting sphere, as in other social domains, political Islamists have redefined gender roles based on shari'ah (Islamic canonical law) and have enforced gender segregation as well as the veiling of women in sports and physical activities. The participation of Iranian women at an international level in sports such as gymnastics, swimming, and water polo has been prohibited due to the lack of appropriate Islamic dress codes. This compels female athletes like the swimmer Maryam Sheikhalizadeh to leave Iran and represent another country (Azerbaijan). Additionally, rulings such as barring women from recreational outdoor activities like cycling as well as building women-only urban parks are among recent attempts of the Islamic regime to isolate women and keep them away from society. These misogynistic orders have not only restricted women's free practice of sports and physical activities but also their attendance at stadiums as spectators.

In the official discourse of the state, women are represented as guardians of Islamic virtue and the moral health of society. This can be seen in the following statement of the Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei:

"In the realm of women's sport, Islamic boundaries [*hudud*] must be precisely observed. The Islamic boundaries are not personalized. Everything must be according to the legislation and the juridical ideas of the leader. Flaunting is prohibited in women's sport because if a society becomes a place for women to flaunt, serious social issues such as those related to family, moral health, modesty and the chastity of the youth will be damaged".

Additionally, the political Islamists have frequently accentuated the reproductive role of women and their duties towards the family as mothers and wives, and have sought to limit the mobility of women and to exclude them from society. For example, following the victories of some female athletes at the 2014 Asian Games, Grand Ayatollah Javadi-e Amoli—a *marja'* and a conservative politician as well as an Islamic scholar—made innuendos about the karate medal winner Hamideh Abassali:

"We incorrectly assume that the integrity of a woman is signified by stretching a leg, hitting someone and gaining a medal for us! The integrity of a woman is signified by her becoming a mother and nurturing her child."

However, there is also a dual-approach of the state towards women's sport at an elite level. For example, mega sport events such as the Olympic Games have provided ideal platforms for the expression and promotion of the state's gender ideology and principles. Being well-aware of the significance of such high-profile events, the Islamic republic of Iran (IRI) has been taking advantage of the participation of female athletes and their potential victories in the Olympics to propagate the Islamic hijab, not only domestically but also internationally.

The case of Iran's first and only female Olympic medalist, Kimia Alizadeh, who won a bronze medal in Taekwondo at the Rio 2016 Olympics, is probably the best example of the state propaganda in the sporting domain. After her victory, almost every broadcast and print media of the state praised her Islamic hijab as she "proved that hijab is not a limitation for the Iranian women."

Ironically, four years after the Rio Olympics, Kimia abruptly fled Iran and sought asylum to Germany. She used her social media channels to connect with people and explained in an Instagram post why she had to leave Iran. As she described herself:

"I'm one of millions of oppressed women in Iran…I wore what they [authorities] told me to wear. I repeated their words. They used my medals to propagate the Islamic hijab. I wasn't important for them. None of us are! We are only their tools…"

Kimia represented the IOC Olympic Refugee Team at the Tokyo Games in 2020. She defeated her ex-teammate at Iran's national team, Nahid Kiyani, in the first round. During their match which was televised in Iran, the reporter avoided mentioning Kimia's name and instead repeatedly called her as "opponent." This hostile report was rebuked by many users on social media.

Kima has not been the only elite female athlete to publicly oppose and resist IRI's propaganda and its gender ideology in the sporting domain. Former national chess players Dorsa Derakhshani and Mitra Hejazipour, as well as the first female boxer after the Islamic Revolution, Sadaf Khadem, who defied the customary Islamic dress-code laws and competed in the international sporting events, are among other examples. In an Instagram post, Mitra Hejazipour denounced the compulsory hijab stating, that it is "a clear symbol of an ideology in which women are the second sex. It creates numerous restrictions for women and deprive them from their basic rights. Is this protection? I say certainly not! It is purely and solely a limitation."

To conclude, although international sporting events such as the Olympic Games have provided easily accessible loci for the state's ideological manipulations, they also become a site of contestation for some female athletes to oppose and resist the state gender ideology and to manifest alternative subjectivities that differ from the hegemonic representation of women by the Islamic regime.

Equal remuneration for a Paralympian

Southeast Asian nations Malaysia and Singapore are increasingly opening up to the Paralympics. In their 11-Country Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games involving China, Iran, Japan, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom, Cheong et al (2020) report that the highest total number of articles and photographs of the Paralympics in Rio 2016 were from Japan, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia. These three countries had an average number of articles as well as photographs per day that ranged from 2.46 to 7.92 and 2.69 to 7.31, respectively. Singapore's most read newspaper, The Straits Times, also had a high average with two or more articles or photographs per day in 2016. These numbers were significantly higher than the 2012 Paralympics coverage demonstrating a significant growth in the visibility of elite disability sport.

What gives the Singaporean media ample motivation to cover the Paralympics is the performances of the great backstroke swimmer Yip Pin Xui. She won double golds in Rio 2016 for the 50m and 100m backstroke; she has just repeated this feat in Tokyo 2020. This brings Yip's tally of gold medals to five, spanning a timeframe of thirteen years. Her first gold was acquired on 15 September 2008, making her the first Singaporean to win a gold medal at the Paralympic Games. Yip also set two world records at those games for both the 50-metre backstroke (57.92 s) and the 50-metre freestyle events (57.04 s), and then set two new records again in the same events in 2016. Yip is a national star in many ways. She was acclaimed "Sportsgirl of the Year" by the Singapore Disability Sports Council for three consecutive years and was awarded a Meritorious Service Medal. In 2010, she was conferred the Singapore Youth Award (Sports and Adventure) for being a role model and an inspiration to other youths. She was also nominated a member of parliament (NMP) to represent the disabled community views.

However, there is a little issue that drags along next to all of the positive outcomes for the Paralympian – the remuneration offered to gold medallists in comparison to that given an Olympian. When Singaporean swimmer Joseph Schooling beat Michal Phelps in the 100-m butterfly event in Rio 2016, he received 1 million Singapore dollars (approximately 738,000 US dollars). Yip Pin Xiu's medal bonus from the Singaporean government was 200,000 Singapore dollars (141,010 US dollars) for each of the gold medals received in Rio 2016. Paralympic silver and bronze medal winners are also paid significantly less. This might be sending the wrong message about the value of the Paralympics. Indeed, this issue over prize money for medals is causing debate in Singapore. Gender equality group, AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research) and disability advocacy group DPA (Disabled People's Association), are calling to provide equal incentives for both Olympic and Paralympic medal winners. In a Facebook post, they state "As we build an inclusive society, we should agree on the objective that Paralympians be afforded the same recognition as our Olympians, and how we honour them should reflect that". Joseph Schooling himself spoke out for the Paralympians after Rio 2016: "They [Paralympians] sacrificed just as much, if not more. What they accomplished was phenomenal".

The more money a government spends to reward, train and send its Paralympic squad, the greater the will and opportunity for success. More Para-athletes might look to sport as a career if the monetary gain is more substantial. This change might also help to increase the growing positive public attitudes towards people with disabilities.

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Pay equity and the Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Prof Ellen Staurowsky

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As the curtain rose on the Games of the XXXII Olympiad, they were described as representing a turning point in the history of the event. An all-male enclave at its founding and slow to include women as equal partners throughout its 125 years, these Games were expected to be, according to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), more gender equal than ever before.

As a symbol of the IOC's commitment to gender equality, many National Olympic Committees (NOCs) appointed a female and male athlete to carry their flags in the Opening Ceremony. Overall, of the roughly 11,090 athletes who competed in Tokyo, 49% were female athletes. According to *The Times of India*, teams from six countries had more women than men.

Even as participation at the Games begins to reach parity, with the Paris Summer Olympics in 2024 expected to have an even number of female and male athletes for the first time, fair and equitable support for female athletes lags behind. A gender equality review conducted by the IOC in 2018 revealed five major areas that needed to be addressed.

Despite a recommendation from the IOC's Women in Sport and Athlete Commissions that NOCs and International Federations (IFs) develop policies to ensure female athletes receive equal prize money, tournament earnings, salaries, sponsorships, and other forms of payment, the landscape is uneven at best and far from the goal.

As evidenced by the comparison below, gaps in salaries and prize money between female and male athletes is substantial.

In Australia, the Male Champions of Change Coalition, which forges strategic partnerships between women leaders and male allies to address gender inequality, launched the Pathway to Pay Equality in 2019. Since the launch, all 18 of the major Australian sport organizations and clubs have expressed an ambition to address pay equity/prize equity to internal and external constituencies. However, only a third reported providing equitable base pay; 22% reported pay equality in terms of total remuneration; and 38% reported distributing prize money equitably.

In some cases, steps have been taken to close the pay gap for elite female athletes. According to the BBC's 2021 Prize Money in Sport Study, 37 sports offered equal prize money to athletes competing in at least one of their sponsored events. Football associations in Australia, Brazil, Great Britain, and Norway have committed in recent years to paying female and male soccer players the same match fees and match bonuses. That said, following several highly publicized legal disputes with the U.S. Soccer Federation over pay equity, members of the acclaimed U.S. Women's National Soccer Team went into the Games being paid .89 on the dollar compared to their male counterparts, who did not qualify to go to Tokyo.

In the U.S., lawmakers have proposed several bills to address the pay equity problem. In June of 2021, Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) introduced the Give Our Athletes Level Salaries (GOALS) Act that would block federal funding from being allocated to host the 2026 World Cup if the U.S. Soccer Federation does not provide equitable compensation to female soccer players. A month later, Cantwell, who is Chair of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee which provides oversight for the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), proposed a bi-partisan bill called the Equal Pay for Team USA 2021 Act. The Act "…would require that all athletes representing the United States in global athletic competitions receive equal compensation, benefits, medical care, travel, and reimbursement of expenses, regardless of gender" and would apply to 50 U.S. national sport governing bodies.

In speaking before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform on Equal Pay Day in March of 2021, U.S. soccer player Megan Rapinoe said, "What we've learned, and what we continue to learn, is that there is no level of status—and there's no accomplishment or power—that will protect you from the clutches of inequity." As a global problem, the issue of pay equity for female elite athletes is a manifestation of the accumulated effect of underinvestment in women's sport, long-standing attitudes that diminish the work women do, and general cultural shifts that need to take place in order for women to be seen as equal partners within the sport industry.

There is no question that these women-centered Olympic Games have a different feel that inspires cautious optimism and hope. And yet, the IOC may be a bit premature in casting the Games as a historic moment. While progress has clearly been made, the IOC and its vast labyrinth of governing bodies still have substantial work to do. And it remains to be seen if the momentary glimpse at a gender equal athletic event translates into something more permanent. The IOC should be credited with elevating women's sport in a way that no other global sporting event has done. In so doing, however, it also shows how difficult of the challenge remains to achieve gender equality.

Tokyo 2020 Teams With More Female Than Male Athletes

Team Name	Percent of Female Athletes	Percent of Male Athletes
China	68.4%	31.6%
Canada	60.8%	39.2%
Russian Olympic Committee (ROC)	55.6%	44.4%
United States	53.6%	46.3%
Great Britain	53.4%	46.5%
Australian	53.4%	46.4%

Comparison of Average Annual Earnings for Select Men's & Women's Sports - 2020/2021

Sport	Men	Women
Baseball/Softball (MLB/NFP)	$3.89 million	$6,250
Basketball (NBA/WNBA)	$8.32 million	$120,648
Golf (PGA/LPGA)	$1.15 million	$311,569
Soccer (MLS/NWSL)	$52,000	$37,500
Tennis (ATP/WTA)	$465,374	$397,993

Rooting for U.S. Olympians: patriotism or polarization?

Prof Amy Bass

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Tokyo saw armchair sports fans discharge judgment and hatred on gymnastics legend Simone Biles when she admitted after a disastrous vault at the start of the women's team competition, that she was not infallible. Biles said she could not continue because of a disconnect between mind and body, what gymnasts call "the twisties," that left her – the one who defies gravity on every apparatus – lost in the air and vulnerable to injury.

While many supported Biles, praising her attention to mental health at the risk of physical injury, the venom was there, including from members of the home crowd who trolled her for failing her team, being "soft," and letting her country down. Days earlier, the U.S. Women's National Team found itself on defense on the soccer pitch. The squad dropped its opening match against longtime rival Sweden, a shocking outcome since they hadn't lost a game since January, 2019 – a 44-match run. Yet the lost winning streak faded in the wake of conservative critics, who eviscerated outspoken team leader Megan Rapinoe and her teammates for taking a knee before the game. The Americans were not alone in this action – Great Britain, Sweden, and Chile also took a knee before the referee's whistle, ensuring that the action at Sapporo Dome worked within the latest IOC guidelines regulating political activism.

Those bent knees created a greenlight, it seems, for some Americans to cheer against American teams. Grant Stinchfield on Newsmax submitted that he was not only rooting against "Megan Rapinoe and her merry band of America-hating female soccer players" but also the "anthem kneelers" on the U.S. men's basketball team, contending that progressive political activism on the playing field lends to athletic failure, proven as "the success of these woke stars diminishes."

Donald Trump agreed. At a Phoenix rally, the former president encouraged the crowd to boo the U.S. women, a move that baffled one Australian writer. "Here's something you don't normally see during the Olympics," wrote Sam Clench. "People cheering for the defeat of their own country's football team."

Perhaps no event is as inherently political as the Olympic Games – a global competition in which entry is based on a flag, a Parade of Nations, and a competitive medal count among world powers. But there is tension over what is considered to be good, patriotic representation and what is not. The U.S. Olympic Team had no problem giving an outspoken athlete a platform when it selected Sue Bird, Rapinoe's fiancée, who came to Tokyo in pursuit of a historic fifth gold medal in basketball, the honor of carrying the American flag alongside Eddy Alvarez into Olympic Stadium. Bird, one of the most outspoken voices in the WNBA, has been an ardent advocate against racism and police brutality, and played a highly visible role in the WNBA's campaign on behalf of Georgia's Raphael Warnock.

Yet the Olympics also continue to provide a window into those who remain shocked when politics overtly rise to the top in sports, spewing rancor at athletes who speak their minds. Before the Winter Olympic Games in 2018, some went as far as to wish harm, not just defeat, on skier Lindsey Vonn after she told CNN that she would not go to Trump's White House if invited, and then took glee in her bronze, rather than gold, medal.

Americans rooting against Americans on the global stage of the Olympics presents a perverse interpretation of the performative patriotism that is part and parcel of global sport. Yet it also has provided a landscape in which the USOPC – the same body that expelled Tommie Smith and John Carlos from the Olympics after their black power demonstration on the medal stand of the men's 200m in Mexico City in 1968 – has emerged as a rare voice of reason. After apologizing to hammer thrower Gwen Berry for her one-year probation after she raised a fist during the medal ceremony of the Pan-Am Games in 2019, the USOPC changed course. Stating that U.S. athletes would not be punished for political demonstrations, which violates Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter, the organization stood by silver medalist shot putter Raven Saunders in Tokyo after she raised her hands in an "X" formation during her medal ceremony.

"Shout out to all my Black people. Shout out to all my LGBTQ community," Saunders said of the protest. "Shout out to all my people dealing with mental health."

The USOPC wrote to the IOC on Saunders behalf, pointing out that her demonstration did not technically occur during the medal ceremony in accordance with new IOC flexibilities about Rule 50. While the IOC paused its investigation of Saunders after her mother, Clarissa, died two days after she won her medal, without question Tokyo has shown how Rule 50 – which gives legitimacy to the trolls that bait athletes like Rapinoe on a daily basis – is having its day of reckoning.

Anti-Olympics activism

During pockets of silence at the opening ceremony for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, people inside the freshly built National Stadium could hear protesters outside chanting, "Go to hell, Olympics!" and "Stop the Opening Ceremony now!" Writing in the Denver Post, Mark Kiszla noted, "All the fireworks in Japan couldn't stop the event from being a dud. The real buzz was outside, in the street, where protesters made the beautiful noise of hearts yearning to be heard."

The "real buzz" was the result of years of transnational anti-Olympics organizing. In July 2019, anti-Olympics activists from around the world convened in Tokyo for the first-ever anti-Olympics summit, designed to coincide with the one-year mark before the original start date of the Tokyo Olympics. The weeklong series of events included strategy-sharing sessions, public talks, and tours of Olympic areas. There was also a large mobilization in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo that attracted around 1,000 participants. Two Tokyo-based anti-Olympics activist groups—Hangorin no Kai and Okotowalink—teamed up with protesters from past Olympic cities (Pyeongchang, Rio de Janeiro, London, Nagano, Seoul), future hosts (Paris, Los Angeles), and potential bidders (Jakarta). The anti-Games group from Los Angeles—NOlympics LA—sent the largest contingent from outside of Japan, nearly twenty people.

Hangorin no Kai translates to "Anti-Olympics Group" and it has worked to live up to the name, engaging in numerous protests in the years leading up to the Tokyo Games. Born in 2013, the group has a core of around a dozen active members, with numbers climbing toward 100 for creative, playful protests and street actions. Okotowalink, which roughly translates to "No Thanks Olympics 2020," is packed with academics and researchers who double as political organizers.

Appearing on Democracy Now! outside the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony, activist and Kansai University professor Satoko Itani said, "The people have been frustrated actually ever since the awarding of the Olympics in 2013 . . . Since then, with the neoliberal policies, people's lives are getting harder and harder. And when it comes to the Olympics, it seems like there are endless resources and money."

The day after the opening-ceremony mobilization, Hangorin no Kai organizer Misako Ichimura told me, "Protests are occurring autonomously" and in decentralized fashion across Japan. A sort of protest domino effect had emerged. She described protest plans for disparate locations—Chofu, Ariake, Yokohama—noting, "Some of these protests were organized by participants in yesterday's demonstration, who were calling for their comrades to protest against Olympic events being held in their local area." Protesters also targeted the five-star hotel in Tokyo where the International Olympic Committee entourage was staying. Protests continued through the end of the Games when activists mobilized during the closing ceremony.

Historically, when it comes to protesting the Olympics, the general trend is that a central entity in the Olympic city steers extant activist groups under a temporary anti-Games umbrella. As such, anti-Olympics activism tends to be an extended moment of movements rather than a movement of movements. Already-existing movements coalesce in what social-movement scholar Sidney Tarrow calls an "event coalition" marked by an upsurge in cooperation around an event—in this case the Olympics—that dissipates once the event happens, at which point dissidents return full-force to their original political focus. However, NOlympics LA, which emerged in May 2017 from the Housing and Homelessness Committee within the Democratic Socialists of America chapter in LA, has played a pivotal role in changing that: creating a transnational movement that transcends a single Olympics.

As Hiroki Ogasawara, an anti-Olympics activist and sociology professor at Kobe University in Japan, put it, no longer should we "see the anti-[Olympics] movements [as] being isolated and divided according to nations and cities because the protest is already worldwide and the Olympics inevitably involve global scale wrongdoings, too."

IOC missteps and gaffes vis-à-vis the Tokyo 2020 Olympics opened up space to mainstream anti-Olympics arguments, as did the IOC's bald pursuit of its own fiscal interests over global public health. Anne Orchier, co-chair of NOlympics LA, told me, "We have always known that Olympic organizers prioritize their profit margins over human life, putting both athletes and residents of host cities at considerable risk in order to squeeze out an extra million here and there. But this goofy postponement process has revealed that they also no longer care about saving face and pretending they're interested in anything other than consolidating wealth and power for themselves, and are willing to put millions of lives at risk to do so."

The Olympics have hit a reckoning point. The Tokyo Games created space to assess whether the Olympics, as currently constituted, should even exist in modern sporting life. Anti-Games groups in Tokyo—and across the world—have an unequivocal answer to that: #NOlympicsAnywhere. And as Mark Kiszla of the Denver Post put it, "For the first time, it feels as if the Olympic movement might not be too big to fail." Orchier was part of the contingent from NOlympics LA that traveled to Tokyo in July 2019 for the inaugural transnational summit. At the event, researcher Cerianne Robertson unveiled "Olympics Watch," an online transnational archive of anti-Games resistance.

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The new kids on the block: action sports at the Tokyo Olympic Games

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Four new youth-focused action sports debuted at the Tokyo Olympic Games: surfing, skateboarding, sport climbing and BMX freestyle. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the inclusion of these new events is part of "the most comprehensive evolution of the Olympic program in modern history". The IOC, the Tokyo Organizing Committee and the relevant International Federations had been working on the inclusion of these sports since 2015, but for many Olympic fans the addition of action sports raises big questions: are they really Olympic sports, and do they deserve to take the place of more established events?

Our research has explored the processes and politics behind this decision which go back over 20 years. The inclusion of these new sports is part of the IOC's big goal of making the Olympics more attractive to younger spectators, as well as efforts to improve gender ratios of the Games and to respond to broader social trends in the urbanization of sport.

The IOC had been responding to the aging demographics of viewers with the inclusion of a range of initiatives. But the arrival of IOC President Thomas Bach in 2013 and introduction of the Agenda 2020 policy accelerated the modernizing process, including the addition of the new sports into the 2020 Games. Following a review to measure the overall performance of all sports, various international federations developed strategies to become more youth-friendly. The International Cycling Union approved BMX freestyle, and the International Basketball Federation added basketball 3x3 for Tokyo.

The inclusion of these new sports helped to meet key IOC criteria around youth, gender and global appeal. Furthermore, these additions are a response to criticisms of the elitism of the Games, an attempt to bring sports 'to the people' in that they typically require little equipment, resources or facilities. They are activities that people - young and old - are participating in their everyday lives at recreational and competitive levels.

With the action sport economy plateauing, many in the industry actively supported Olympic inclusion. Some industry members played key roles in leading the processes of inclusion. But the countercultural heritage of many of these sports has led to tensions. Many participants view them nostalgically as alternative lifestyles rather than conventional sports. The associated value systems they celebrate – self-expression, creativity, fun – are often considered at odds with the disciplinary, hierarchical, nationalistic Olympic ethos. This saw the initial proposals to include surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing in Tokyo hotly contested by many within the wider action sporting cultures, worried about the loss of autonomy and control of 'their' sports.

While the Olympic athletes were enthusiastic ambassadors for their sports (and likely to see significant economic and cultural rewards), there are those within the action sport worlds who continue to view Olympic inclusion as just another money-making stunt — part of a longer process of 'selling out' with little benefit for their sports.

Without spectators, the Tokyo Olympics weren't able to realize the festival environment envisioned pre-COVID, with live music, art and a youth-friendly vibe at both the urban and beach locations. However, the new action sports certainly made their mark on the Games.

Global audiences were fascinated by the domination of young girl skateboarders in the street and park events. Journalists and audiences were wowed when both podium were dominated by teenage skateboarders, including thirteen year olds Nishiya (Japan) and Leal (Brazil) in the street and twelve year old Hiraki (Japan), and thirteen year old Brown (Great Britain) in the park. With Japan winning five of 12 skateboarding medals available (three gold), the country's talent in this urban sport was clearly evidenced. The hegemonic positioning of the USA (or what some have referred to as the 'Californization' of action sports) was being effectively challenged at the games, with Japan, Australia, Brazil and China all showing a depth of talent and potential.

The BMX freestyle riders and sport climbers displayed their athleticism and abilities to read, interpret and respond to the built environment in creative ways. Global audiences saw surfers making the most of the storm swell, with huge emotion on display for both the winners and the upsets in earlier rounds. At the medal ceremonies, International Surfing Association (ISA) President Fernando Aguerre sported his unique style, including a Hawaiian-style shirt, yellow pants, a straw hat, and wristbands. He made a striking contrast to the IOC representative in a suit and tie on the beach. This way, Aguerre was making a statement that surfers could maintain their unique culture and style within the IOC.

While our initial media analysis during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics suggests divided opinions within the global action sport communities, the athletes were clearly committed and valued the opportunity. Mainstream audiences also appeared to have enjoyed the events, even if they didn't fully understand the judging systems or the cultural values on display. Whereas some audiences celebrated the camaraderie on display between the sport climbers and the expressions of friendship and fun at the skateboarding events, others continued to ask whether they are really Olympic worthy sports. Regardless of public opinion, these sports will be joined by breaking and kiteboarding, bringing youth culture to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Is there space on the podium for us all?

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) have cognitive deficits which impact on their daily lives, requiring them to receive additional support. Having ID also means that an individual's ability to compete in sports at an elite level is impaired resulting in potential eligibility to the Paralympics, rather than the Olympics, in a class called "Intellectual Impairment". First entering into the Paralympic in 1992, athletes with ID competed separately, but by Atlanta, 1996 the events were integrated and 54 ID athletes competed alongside everybody else. This rose to 244 ID athletes in Sydney, 2000. However, in a disastrous episode at this event the ID Spanish basketball team, cheated and fielded athletes who did not have ID. There was an investigation and it was found that there was purposeful misrepresentation, but also that the systems in place to check eligibility were not strong enough to prevent such occurrences. The whole impairment group of ID was then suspended from competing in the Paralympics and for the next twelve years elite athletes with ID lost out on Paralympic opportunities.

In London 2012 ID athletes were once again re-included into the Summer Games. A lot of had changed in the intervening years. The organisation which manages elite sport for ID athletes (then called INAS and now called Virtus) was revised and new personnel brought in. Also working with the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) a new robust system to check the eligibility of athletes was established. Paralympic classification had also moved on in the interim, meaning that a new IPC classification code was in place requiring that classification is evidence-based and demonstrates that the impairment has an impact on performance of the sport. An easy example to illustrate the need for this is that of an athlete with a left hand amputation, who is right handed. If their sport is pistol shooting the disability will not impact on the sport (Olympics), if their sport is swimming it will (Paralympics) – same disability, but different impact on the sports. For athletes with ID this is a complex task, but an international research team worked together supported by the IPC and Virtus and established a classification process for three chosen sports athletics, swimming and table tennis. The final element to classification is to group athletes within their impairment group into classes according to their functional level, making competition fair. For athletes with ID there is only one class, and all those with ID, no matter how severe compete together. This is the only impairment group for which there are no functional classes.

In London 2012, 119 ID athletes from 36 countries (total 4,302 and 164 nations) competed, in Rio 130 ID athletes from again 36 nations (total 4,342 and 159 nations) and in Tokyo 120 ID athletes 35 countries (4,537 athletes, 163 nations). In Tokyo out of a possible 539 events athletes with ID could only compete in 21 events (4%) and they represented only 2.6% of all athletes competing at the Games. This raises the question of how representative this is of ID athletes compared to the other two main impairments grouping of physical and visual impairments. The most comprehensive report compiling these sorts of statistics is that of the World Health 2011 report. This report suggests that 15% of the population have some form of disability, and within this figure 2.6% have ID, 3.2% visual impairment and 1% of the world use a wheelchair.

It is clear that ID athletes are disadvantaged in the Paralympics; their representation does not match the size of their global prevalence; only about 20% of nations send ID athletes; they only have access to three sports out of a possible 22, and within these sports less events; less medal opportunities and only one class of competition. Their share of the podium is certainly not equal and it must be questioned why. Certainly, what happened in Sydney 2000, has not helped with both funding and confidence needing to be rebuilt. However, that is now over 20 years and three Paralympic cycles ago and ID elite sport has still not grown to even match the inclusion numbers of Sydney 2000. Certainly the crowded Summer Paralympic timetable cannot be stretched further and the capping of athlete numbers means additional inclusion requires exclusion for others, leading to fierce competition for the existing spaces. However, at the Tokyo Games the IPC, in conjunction with other global organisations, has launched the WeThe15, a global human rights movement wishing to transform the lives of people with disabilities. Creating positive change for people with disabilities and making sure they are included and have equal opportunities are aspirations of this movement. It is hoped that the IPC look towards their own inclusion strategies for a group who need to be enabled to fight for their rightful place within Paralympic competition as a priority.

Prof Jan Burns, MBE

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Softball's field of Olympic dreams

Prof Pamela Creedon

Professor Emerita and former Director of the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. She focused recent research on the MENA region's 2018 Special Olympics while Dean of Zayed University's College of Communication and Media Sciences. Her books include Women, Media and Sport and Women in Mass Communication.

Women's fastpitch softball returned to the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympics after being excluded from the 2012 and 2016 games. Only six nations competed this year—Australia, Canada, Italy, Japan, Mexico and the U.S.—two fewer than softball's last Olympic opportunity in 2008. But its reinstatement in the 2020 games is short-lived as the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics eliminated softball and added a more 'youthful and artistic' sport—break dancing.

In the XXXII Olympic games, softball media coverage benefitted as it was the first and only competition on NBCUniversal's Wednesday, July 21 coverage— two days earlier than the Opening Ceremonies. On Saturday, July 24, television coverage averaged roughly 15.3 million total primetime viewers, citing softball and the Olympic debut of skateboarding leading the competition's viewership. Fifteen seven-inning games led to the medal competition on July 27 that resulted in a repetitive 2008 medal ceremony with former Gold Medal Japan beati ng the former Silver Medal U.S., 2-0. The 2020 Bronze Medal went to Canada with a 3-2 win over Mexico.

Beyond the 2020 games softball's 'Field of Olympic Dreams' future is unknown. Callie Batts Maddox details how its dreams have been filled with the International Olympic Committee's political and misogynistic nightmares. She reports how its formal Olympic inclusio n efforts began in 1952 when the International Softball Federation, which included men's and women's teams, was formed and received IOC recognition. Even with ISF's formal acknowledgement, the IOC refused to accept softball as an exhibition sport in the 1972 Munich Olympics purporting cost concern. The ISF's next Olympic strategy was to remove men's softball asserting softball was a woman's only sport, but again the IOC denied its inclusion in the 1976 Montreal games. In 1985, the ISF's next step was to create a joint proposal with the International Baseball Association for inclusion of men's baseball and women's softball in the 1992 Barcelona games. Baseball hit a 1992 Olympic competition homerun, but softball was struck out by the IOC citing financial and structural burden. It took myriad complaints of IOC gender inequities from multiple countries and sports for women's softball to finally receive inclusion in the 1996 Atlanta, the 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens' games.

But in 2005, political conflict reemerged. By secret ballot the IOC voted to expel softball and baseball claiming a lack of 'universality,' television appeal and drug concerns, which meant their last competition would be the 2008 Beijing games. It distinguished them as the first sports expelled from the Olympics since the 1936 Berlin games when polo was thrown out reportedly because of needed space equivalent to nine football fields. Their expulsion through the 2012 London and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics let the IOC welcome golf and rugby back. In 2013, the next strategy to be reinstated began when the ISF and the IBA held merger talks and joined forces as the World Baseball Softball Confederation. And in 2020, both WBSC sports were reinstated by the IOC reportedly benefitting from new regulations removing a previous limit of 28 sports as well as their popularity and cultural importance in Japan. But they are 'out' of the 2024 Paris games as the new IOC regulation also allows a host country to recommend inclusion or removal of sports. Currently, they are waiting for approval to be up at bat and compete in the 2028 Los Angeles and 2032 Brisbane Olympics.

In part, their exclusion from the Paris games may reflect baseball's Olympic history as an American sport, which the 2020 softball teams' mirror. Aside from Japan and Australia's softball team players, U.S. citizens, residents and students are on the Italian, Canadian and Mexican teams. In fact, at least 14 of the 19 team members listed on Mexico's roster are living in the U.S., Canada's team has many U.S. college alumnae and an infielder born in the U.S., and Italy has a second baseman born in the U.S.

Also, gender equity is not a priority of the WBSC, which is recognized by the IOC as the sport's 'competent authority'. In fact, the WBSC's Home Plate office in Pully, Switzerland—next door to IOC's Lausanne headquarters—reflects its misogynistic authority with only four women on its Executive Board of 17 members and only four women on its 13-member Softball Division. And this year's Olympic softball coaches underline the sport's international patriarchal oversight. Five of six head coaches in the Tokyo games were men— Laing Harrow (Australia), Mark Smith (Canada), Federico Pizzolini (Italy), Carlos Bernaldez (Mexico) and Ken Eriksen (USA). The only woman head coach was Gold Medal Japan's Reika Utsugi.

It is the game's seventh inning again, but despite IOC's politization and WBSF's misogyny, softball's Olympic future may have promise as WBSF has 65 member countries. And if attempted, WBSF's women's baseball might also win an inclusion battle as it is growing faster than softball with more than 300,000 players in 138 member countries.

Now you see them, now you don't: Absent nations at Tokyo Paralympic Games

Across the globe, fans and allies of Paralympic sport celebrated with a mixture of enthusiasm, disbelief and wonder as the Opening Ceremonies of the Tokyo Paralympic Games took place. Informed and persistent speculation regarding postponement of and possible eleventh hour cancellation of the Paralympic Games infused the pre-Games milieu with uncertainty. As covid-19 rates of infection in Japan continued to escalate during the Olympic Games and inside the notoriously porous Olympic 'bubble', a successful 'opening' of the Tokyo Paralympic Games seemed doubtful and fraught with risk.

At the time of writing, the 16th Summer Paralympic Games have closed, after successfully hosting a world-wide celebration of sporting excellence and Paralympic culture. Some 4,403 athletes competed over twelve days of competition in 22 sports, against the backdrop of the global pandemic. A total of 162 nations took part, with the inclusion of the first ever Refugee Paralympic Team. The nations of Bhutan, Guyana, Maldives, Paraguay and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made their historic debuts at the Games.

Conspicuous by their absence are the 21 nations who did not attend these Games, who have previously attended Paralympic Games. Insufficient government support was cited by Brunei, East Timor, Turkmenistan, and North Korea for withdrawal from the Games. These nations were present at the Olympic Games, so we must question why government support was not as forthcoming for Paralympic athletes. Andorra, Antigua, and Barbuda, along with Liechtenstein, San Marino, Macao, and Suriname did not participate having indicated a lack of eligible para sport athletes and athlete reluctance to travel during the pandemic. Myanmar and Trinidad & Tobago were non-specific about their non-participation. Just 3 days prior to Opening Ceremonies, Samoa, Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu were forced to withdraw from the Games, due to pandemic informed travel restrictions. Subsequent to the suspension of their respective National Paralympic Committees (NPC) in 2019, Djibouti, Sudan, Comoros, and Seychelles, were not eligible to participate in Tokyo.

It is not surprising that the shifting covid crisis and global politics impact decision making around high-performance sport, and specifically about who was present and who was absent at these Games. Political upheaval, imposed travel restrictions, uncertainties associated with international travel, suspended NPC's represent real challenges for nations to participate. However, many of these nations sent athletes to the Tokyo Olympic Games, demonstrating that sport is valued by their respective governments. Travel restrictions were also in place for many countries during the Olympic Games, and athletes were often exempted from these restrictions. Paralympic sport and athletes are clearly not valued in the same manner. This may be due to limited resources to support Paralympic sport, fewer sport development opportunities to foster Paralympic performances, or the pervasive social stigma associated with disability that precludes robust para sport participation in many nations around the world.

Examining the context of the nations that are conspicuously absent, and those that fail to make the radar for Paralympic Games participation raises several key issues. First of all, access to high performance sport is elitist – it requires immense amounts of capital- economic, cultural, and social capital. These forms of capital are often inaccessible to persons with disabilities in the absentee nations. Access to Paralympic sport is also ripe with politics and economic uncertainty – the process of classification, technology to support sport performance, and resources to develop para-specific coaching require substantial economic resources. Further, the invisibility of disability, and the social stigma of disability in many of the nations that did not and do not send athletes to Paralympic Games, deserves a much broader conversation about the social change agenda of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). At the Closing Ceremonies in Tokyo, the IPC showcased the I'M Possible education program to demonstrate the ways in which the IPC supports educational advancement around disability. This opportunity becomes moot when political leadership is silent, and grassroot perceptions of disability remain imbued with social stigma. The IPC may be speaking about social change but in many of these countries, no one is listening.

While travel restrictions and NPC's suspensions account for 1/3 of absent Paralympic nations, 2/3 of the nations who were absent from the Paralympic Games, sent sporting delegations to Tokyo to compete in the Olympic Games. The politics of representation is clearly problematic. While there is no easy solution, we encourage scholars to continue to consider what is required to become a high-performance Paralympic athlete in high resource nations. Of greater significance, much scholarly work is required to consider how to identify and address the broader challenges of those nations and athletes who are absent from the Paralympic spotlight.

We know the inequity between developed and developing continues to grow larger. The Paralympic Games are at risk of making absent nations of many small island, low resource, and countries who exist on the geo-political margins.

Now you see them. Now you don't.

Dr Nancy Quinn

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Prof Laura Misener

Professor and Director of the School of Kinesiology at Western University (London, Ontario, Canada). Her research focuses on how sport and events can be use as instruments of social change, with an emphasis how sport for persons with a disability can positively impact community accessibility and social inclusion.

The Tokyo Paralympics as a platform for change? Falling short of sport and media 'opportunities for all'

Prof Gerard Goggin

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Prof Brett Hutchins

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The 2020 (2021) Tokyo Paralympics kicked off with verve and vim. A colourful, vibrant opening ceremony featured dance, theatre, and pumping rock, techno, and house music.

In a flight of fancy, the Tokyo Olympic Stadium was imagined as the "Para Airport": "Welcome to the Para Airport, where you are about to witness the arrival of a variety of unique aircraft carried to us on the three-colour winds of change". It was a fitting trope, given the constraints of mobility and sport occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, the grim backdrop to both the Olympics and Paralympics.

The Japanese organisers conceived the Olympics and Paralympics via an overall concept. The master theme of the Paralympics Opening Ceremony was "diversification": "Change opinion, searching for new possibilities that transcend preconceived ideas by mixing together various elements in new ways".

Woven throughout the ceremony was the story of a "little one-winged plane", beautifully played by the 13-year-old Yui Wago, a novice actor with disability. Striving to take off and overcome her fears, the one-winged plane struggles through various attempts supported by a diverse array of other "planes", encouraged by musicians, dancers, festivals, and other episodes until she finally takes to the skies.

Engagingly executed, the Para Airport and one-winged plane exemplify the paradox at the heart of the Tokyo Paralympics and the limits of how many societies imagine disability. The Para Airport and one-winged plane conceit sails too close to the old, disabling myth of disability: that, if we could choose, and were brave enough, we could transcend the limitations of our bodies.

That said, this undercurrent of stereotyping was challenged by the wide range of bodies, identities, and impressive performances showcased – many by performers with disabilities.

The following twelve days of competition featured a wide variety of sports and athletes whose efforts were followed by media audiences across the world. As well as record-topping coverage from the host broadcaster Japan's NHK, live television coverage in countries such as US, UK, Singapore, and Australia exceeded previous Paralympics in terms of hours, multi-channel and screen options, and the depth of coverage of events and athletes.

The key question is whether the Tokyo Paralympics were a watershed in disability, media, and attitudinal change.

The Paralympics still largely play to much smaller media audiences than the global juggernaut of the Olympics. Nonetheless, coverage of Tokyo 2020 crossed-over to mainstream audiences more often, and in more interesting ways, than previous Games–– taking another step towards establishing the Paralympics as an exciting, if still distinct multi-sport mega-event. This distinctiveness is evident by sports that usually languish in obscurity, including boccia, goalball and sitting volleyball. Despite the constraints and politics of the Paralympic disability classification process, a range of athletes and abilities were represented that show the potential for a fundamental change in how we see sporting bodies, practices and cultures.

Aiming "to put disability at the heart of the inclusion agenda", the International Paralympic Committee nailed its colours to the mast with the release of its #WeThe15 "global human rights movement for the 1.2 billion persons with disabilities" campaign. This aspiration underscores a hopeful yet fraught moment. The Paralympic organisers and media are both keen to put "inspiration porn" behind them, along with the fixation on reporting on Paralympians by focusing on the details of their impairment (especially when due to traumatic accidents or health issues). There is a long way to go.

A big obstacle is what US disability scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have called "ablenationalism" – or the profound role that ideas of 'normal' bodies play in shaping national communities and citizenship.

In this regard, the Tokyo Paralympics clearly contributed to the trend in which elite disability sport attracts increasing attention, visibility, and currency in the symbols and rituals of politics at the national level. In Singapore, where one of us lives, swimmer Yip Pin Xiu won two gold medals at Tokyo with politicians praising her efforts including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long, who posted a message on Facebook saying: "Pin Xiu, Singapore is proud of you, and you inspire all of us!". Media rights and distribution of Paralympic content, always heavily policed, were also decisively shaped by national arrangements, with gatekeeping by national broadcasters.

One of the most interesting moments of the Paralympics coverage was the trending story around the world that reported the disparity between the handsome bonus payments made by national governments to Olympic medallists, compared to the paltry amounts doled out to medal-winning Paralympians. For instance, the opportunistic Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, sought to generate political capital by rectifying this disparity nine days after the Games had commenced. He leads a Federal Government that is, at the same time, undermining the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by cost-cutting and making it harder for Australians with disabilities to qualify for the scheme.

Some national heroes and citizens are still worth more than others, it seems –– which sends a clear message to the rest of us that real social transformation is a fair way off.

Tokyo 2020 Paralympics: inspirations and legacies

Like its Olympic counterpart, the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games took place largely behind closed doors with no spectators present to experience the world's best para-athletes perform on the global stage. However, performing without vast numbers of spectators is unfortunately more common to para-athletes than to their Olympic compatriots. There is no Diamond League for para-athletes and far too few events benefit from the media coverage that elite level able bodied athletes take for granted. Outside of some World Championships and integrated events like the Commonwealth Games, the Paralympic Games remain one of the few opportunities for para-athletes to take their place in the media spotlight and shape their representation to a global audience. While the legacies of the Paralympic Games for host cities and countries is subject to much critique, this mega-spectacle does provide para-athletes representing their nation with the opportunity to become household names and – the theory goes – improve attitudes towards people with disabilities beyond the event itself. In this contribution, I focus on the UK context, with particular focus on Scotland to illustrate the continuing difficulties of translating rhetoric into reality in the sphere of disability and disability sport.

In the UK, Paralympics GB returned home from Tokyo with 124 medals, with 21 of these being won by Scottish para-athletes. Narratives of pride and inspiration were prevalent as the success of the country's para-athletes was lauded by politicians, sport governing bodies and media commentators alike. However, post-Games a degree of caution was also expressed by those responsible for organising disability sport and representing the lives of people with disability more generally, which strikes at the heart of debates about the social impact of major sport events. Scottish Disability Sport, the governing body for many of the Scottish para-athletes who performed in Tokyo 2020, spoke after the event of the athletes' wonderful personal achievements, their increased profile, and the positive effects of the Paralympic Games in inspiring people to consider taking up sport or physical activity. In a radio interview, SDS's Chief Executive, Gavin MacLeod, confirmed that "the opportunities are greater than they've ever been before at the local level and there are pathways right up into international sport {…] in almost every sport now there is a pathway there and opportunities at a local level".

However, recognition of the positive impact of the Paralympics also needs to be tempered with a degree of realism over the continuing inequities in sport participation for people with disabilities. Again, MacLeod talked of the Paralympic Games being "part of the solution to getting more disabled people involved in physical activity and sport", because the Games provide people with disabilities with a visible confirmation that "people like them" can participate in high level sport. However, he also suggested that the incentive or inspiration provided by watching the Games on television is insufficient for many, instead arguing that there is a need for different interventions to help them become more physically active whether that's local provision, 1-2-1 support, transport, or finance. In reality, some of the inequities that existed before the Paralympic Games remain, and many have been exacerbated as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, as recent research from Scotland suggests. For example, despite winning 21 medals and having an extremely successful Paralympic Games, in Scotland (like in other countries) there remains a need for more clubs, coaches, and volunteers to enable people with disabilities to access and enjoy sport and physical activity as close to their homes as possible. Physical and economic barriers associated with transport, equipment and (absence of) employment also persist despite the glow that accompanies national medal success.

While the para-athletes that millions of people in the UK watched break world records and accrue multiple gold medals in Tokyo deserve greater recognition, more needs to be done to translate short-term media spectacle effects into the sustained political will to invest in the sometimes mundane, yet vital, facilities and support services that people with disabilities require if they are to see sport and physical activity as an accessible and rewarding space to enter. In the UK Channel 4 has, quite rightly been lauded for its exceptional coverage of the Paralympic Games since 2012. This coverage generates new conversations about the capabilities of people with disability in homes around the country and in the public sphere. Yet, we know from past experience, that these conversations can quickly lose their efficacy if they only occur once every four years. In our research, Leveraging Disability Sport Events, we have argued that in order to exploit the opportunities presented by major parasport events, clear strategies and policies must be in place in the host environment, supported with resources that help deliver on rhetorical claims. Strengthening structures, networks, programmes and the labour force are crucial if the demonstration effect accruable from watching the Paralympic Games is to be translated into meaningful and sustainable actions that benefit club, recreational or casual participants.

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What online outrage about Sha'Carri Richardson's suspension bodes for the future of anti-doping policies

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Scholars examining the public's online reaction to athlete-related crises often discover that fans engage in crisis communication strategies similar to those the athletes, themselves, employ. Sports fans often utilize social media to amplify the narratives their favorite athlete or coach expresses during press conferences on their own social media accounts. Other times, they will react in ways an athlete, coach, or team that is involved in the crisis cannot—by attacking the accuser or making an excuse for the actions that triggered the incident. Fans comment online, in part, to protect an integral part of their identity that crises threaten—their fandom. For some, speaking out on social media can be cathartic, as they seek to mitigate their identity threat. But what happens when an athlete incident or crisis occurs that prompts fans to question the rules, themselves?

From victory to suspension

On June 19, Sha'Carri Richardson clocked a 10.86 second finishing time in the 100-meter finals of the Olympic trials, placing her as a favorite to medal at the Tokyo Olympics. After her victory, Richardson raced to the stands and tearfully embraced her grandmother, an emotional moment that garnered attention from the sports media, celebrities like Kerry Washington, former First Lady Michelle Obama, and social media users.

However, two weeks later, Richardson ominously tweeted, "I am human," prompting speculation that her Olympic qualification was in jeopardy. On July 2, the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) announced a one-month suspension for Richardson due to a failed drug test resulting from marijuana use. The suspension prevented Richardson from competing in the Tokyo Games. After the announcement, Richardson appeared on the Today Show, where she apologized and accepted responsibility for the suspension. Richardson noted that she used marijuana as a way to cope after finding out about her birth mother's death.

Social media demands to #LetShacarriRun

According to a preliminary analysis using Brandwatch, Richardson's suspension received more social media comments than her victory in the Olympic trials, highlighting social media's role in sports fans' reactions to crises. The online conversation in response to Richardson's suspension varied. Some users debated marijuana's classification as a banned substance, given that several states—Including Richardson's home state of Oregon—have legalized its recreational use. Other users noted that marijuana is not a performance enhancing drug for track and field athletes, a sentiment echoed by celebrities like Seth Rogen. In a sign of collective action, users began tagging their comments with the hashtag #LetShacarriRun to advocate for her suspension to be overturned. While Richardson's suspension was, ultimately, not overturned, this public reaction has the potential to prompt anti-doping policy changes.

WADA will be forced to consider public sentiment

Following Richardson's suspension, many called for the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to reevaluate the policy that defines marijuana as a banned substance, especially since it has been legalized in 19 states and in many countries. According to USADA.org, WADA prohibits substances that meet two of the following three criteria: 1) poses a health risk to athletes, 2) enhances athlete performance, and 3) violates the spirit of the sport. In this instance, fan's reaction to Richardson's suspension signals a shift in public sentiment that can potentially complicate WADA's claim that marijuana use "violates the spirit of the sport." Judging by public sentiment, WADA will need to make a stronger case for how marijuana acts as a performance enhancing drug, especially given that their reasoning (that it can decrease anxiety) is also true of several substances that are not currently banned. Notably, alcohol is not a prohibited substance, as it was removed from the list in 2018.

The increased public awareness and scrutiny of current anti-doping laws spurred by Richardson's suspension highlights why communication scholars and professionals should monitor online reaction to similar incidents. Sport fans are no longer passive media consumers; rather, they are active organizational stakeholders who seek to influence both public discourse and organizational policies. Public pressure, in this instance, garnered the attention of elected officials such as Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Representative Jamie Raskin and United States President Joe Biden. When questioned about Richardson's suspension, Biden stated, "The rules are the rules…whether they should remain the rules is a different issue." According to Reuters, the Biden White House requested a meeting with WADA to discuss current marijuana restrictions. While WADA noted that the United States has traditionally taken a strict approach in advocating against the relaxation of marijuana restrictions, USADA, now, seems more open to reconsidering rules and testing procedures for athletes moving forward. Overall, Sha'Carri Richardson was unable to run in Tokyo, but her suspension and the public's subsequent reaction could alter anti-doping policies for future Olympians.

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