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1-2023

Sidelined: Sports, Culture, and Being a Woman in America

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Recommended Citation

Behrens, Kailey, "Sidelined: Sports, Culture, and Being a Woman in America" (2023). *Sport Management Capstone Projects*. 6.

<https://pillars.taylor.edu/sport-management-capstones/6>

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Sport Management Seminar

Professor Stucky

26 January 2023

Sidelined: Sports, Culture, and Being a Women in America

The book that I read that I think really helped me learn more about the sport management industry was *Sidelined* by Julie DiCaro. One of the main topics in this book is how women are discriminated against in the sports industry, specifically the sports media industry. There were many points in this book that I really resonated with and didn't know how to put into words until I read what DiCaro had to say. One thing that really stood out to me was when DiCaro said "Though 'stick to sports' is the current rallying cry to silence those who see sports as a means to achieving social justice, sports have always been a microcosm of society and a lens through which to view gender inequity." (DiCaro 5) This was interesting to me because I have been able to see over time how gender plays a role within sports. Whether that be through watching professional sports, being an athlete or being in sport management classes, I have been able to see the clear differences between men and women. Although I had experienced many differences, there were even things that I learned while reading this book.

One thing DiCaro really talked about was how female reporters were denied access to the locker rooms post-game to conduct interviews while their male colleagues were able to. Because of this, women were not getting as many reporting jobs because they couldn't get the same coverage as their male counterparts. With all the hysteria that came up about women demanding that they get the same rights as their male counterparts, many people were complaining that the females wanted to be in the male locker rooms. DiCaro states that, "In truth, though, women never asked to go into locker rooms—they simply asked to have the same access to players that their male colleagues did." (DiCaro 19) The individual leagues were the ones who decided that the

interviews would happen in the locker rooms. Even though women eventually got access to the locker rooms for interviews, the problem wasn't immediately fixed. DiCaro wrote that, "Women still feel uncomfortable in locker rooms. And oh, by the way, women are still struggling to be taken seriously." (DiCaro 24) Just by having interviews in the locker rooms brought up a whole boatload of issues that women are still facing today in the reporting industry.

Something else that this book talked a lot about was how women are underappreciated in the sports industry. One thing that was interesting to me was how when men are the minority in a setting it instills the 'glass escalator' effect. But when women are the minority in a setting they are not given that same benefit and instead need to act like men to fit in. (DiCaro 25) Men can get ahead when they are the only male in the room, but women are just pushed so far back when they are the only female in the room. This is something that I think most females know to be all too true, but DiCaro says it in a way that makes you really realize what is going on. DiCaro also talks about how women are not respected especially on sports radio. When Beth Mowins had her debut on Monday Night Football she was criticized extremely. Many other females within the broadcasting community were not shocked about her criticism. NFL reporter Andrea Kremer said that "I have no doubt that 'hating the sound of her voice' is code for 'I hate that there was a woman announcing football,'" Kremer said. 'Remember, as a woman in high-profile sports broadcasting jobs, we get criticized from head—and hair! —to toe. We are in a most subjective business, but the haters are always going to find something they don't like about us because they don't want us there.'" (DiCaro 34) This whole statement is all too true for females within the sports industry. I, myself, have

even noticed how my voice doesn't seem to be heard as loud when I am in some of my classes or jobs. Being a woman in sports is hard and it is even harder to be taken seriously and be respected. Something that I have noticed that I have done that DiCaro mentions is that "one of the side effects of being the only woman in a male-dominated workplace is that you start to adopt the 'I'm just lucky to be here' attitude." (DiCaro 45) Having this sort of attitude is something that females have adapted to in this space because normally when they walk into a room, they are the only female in that room. Take this class even for example. If we had a male professor, I would be the only female in that room. And even with a female professor, I still feel the weight of being the only girl student.

As a female in the sport industry, we almost must train ourselves to act in a different way to fit in with our male peers. For myself, I must put away my girly tendencies and keep up with more sports news than I would normally so that I can contribute to conversations. It has been a stark contrast this j-term going from my sport management classes and then back to Olson and the two different identities that I hold in each of those places. DiCaro remarks that "women in sports learn quickly that men will allow us into their little corner of the world as long as we play by their rules." (DiCaro 33) This is very true from what I have experienced. If you act like how they act, and do what they want you to do, the men in our industry will respect you and you will have opportunities. If you don't do this, then you will be on the outs and never really know what is going on in the 'man world'. Even if we play by the rules, women are so often put into a place where they can't really share what they are thinking. DiCaro explains this as self-censorship; "this tension that women in media are forced to live in results in

a lot of self-censorship, meaning women simply censor their own thoughts and opinions online out of fear of harassment and reprisals.” (DiCaro 112) As females we all too often put ourselves into the background and don't really say what we are wanting to say.

Something that struck me was how Serena Williams got angry at a referee in one game and got largely ridiculed for it when the male tennis players were doing the same thing and getting no slander. DiCaro writes, “even Serena Williams, arguably the greatest female athlete of all time, can't get away with being angry at work if that anger is directed at a man in a place of authority. And while this revelation isn't news to the millions of women who have been labeled ‘hysterical,’ or ‘difficult’ for exhibiting the same emotions as their male colleagues, it is devastating. Because if Serena Williams is punished for standing up for herself at work, what chance do the rest of us women have?” (DiCaro 166) This really is a good question. What chance do all women have for standing up for us at work when even Serena Williams can't?

A big thing that people say when talking about women's sports is that people don't care about women's sports. I don't want to come across as saying that the NBA, NFL, MLB aren't important; but I do want to make it clear that people care about female sports, they just aren't as largely represented in the media. For example, “the 2019 World Cup final between the United States and the Netherlands pulled in more than 20 million viewers inside the United States. For comparison, the finale of *Game of Thrones* had 19.3 million viewers, and the first two episodes of *The Last Dance*...averaged 6.1 million viewers. We certainly wouldn't say that no one cares about *Game of Thrones* or Michael Jordan.” (DiCaro 190) When looking at the amount of people that watched that game, it would be crazy to say that nobody cares about female sports. But we also

know that certain female sports receive just a small fraction of what their male counterparts receive in viewership. Mass media plays a big role in how female sports are portrayed and about how people perceive them.

Making female sports more visible is a big way to move female sports forward in society. One of the stars of the US Women's hockey team, Kendall Coyne, says that "The first thing that comes to my mind is 'If you build it, they will come.' I challenge those organizations and those people who would say, 'Well they don't bring in as much money,' My question is, have they put in the same amount of marketing dollars? Do they put in the same amount of energy to promote that women's event as they did the men's event?" (DiCaro 194) Every big professional sport does a large amount of marketing but, when thinking about it, you generally only see male sports marketed. Female and male sports need to be given the same amount of energy when it comes to promoting. And when people say that female sports don't bring in as much of a profit as male sports, I think we can respond by saying that the organizations don't maximize the profits that female sports could be having. DiCaro also states that "to really raise women's sports to be on par with men's maybe we all need to care more, be louder, and demand that women's pro sports be seen." (DiCaro 208) People who care about women's sports need to be vocal about it. If more people are seeing female sports and females working in sport daily, then a lot of this discrimination that we talked about earlier wouldn't happen.

In that same vein, women's sports equality in pay has been something that has been debated for many years. With professional leagues such as U.S. Women's Soccer and the WNBA demanding better pay, it has been something that I have followed

closely. When looking at the WNBA, the Player Association (WNBPA) inked a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA) that secured long-sought provisions to prioritize the women's game in the United States in 2020. (DiCaro 200) "Prior to the new CBA, the average WNBA player made around \$75,000 per year." Many players sit out or miss reporting deadlines for their WNBA seasons for their far-more-lucrative overseas teams. (DiCaro 201) Not only is it ridiculous that WNBA players sit out seasons to play overseas, but it is also ridiculous that they even must play overseas to be able to make a livable income in the big cities that their WNBA teams are located. If Steph Curry and LeBron James played overseas while also playing in the NBA everybody would be upset. But the best WNBA play overseas with nobody even batting an eye.

Female representation in sports is so important because not only does it help little girls want to play sports in the future, but it also gives them opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise. DiCaro talks in her book about her time in Pakistan helping the girls in sports organizations and seeing how young girls view sports in such a conservative country. DiCaro writes, "while girls and women in Pakistan are slowly gaining a foothold through clubs like Karachi United, women's sports get little serious consideration in the media, and female athletes are largely ignored. Representation matters to young girls of all nations, and the lack of athletic role models appears to be due to a lack of imagination everywhere as well as good old-fashioned sexism." (DiCaro 214) DiCaro noticed how even though all these organizations are coming in to get girls into sports, once they become a teenager, and even more so an adult, they have no representation and therefore no future to look for in sports. While DiCaro reflected on her time in Pakistan she also mentioned Billie Jean King's Women's Sports Foundation.

This foundation “reports that high school girls who play sports are less likely to experience teen pregnancy and more likely to get good grades. Girls in sports also have a higher level of self-esteem and a more positive body image than those who don’t take part in sports.” (DiCaro 220) Participating in sports is good for young girls. It teaches them so much more than anything else could teach them. I believe I am a lot more rounded individual because I have participated in sports for 20 out of my 22 years being alive. Participating in sports is good for girls, and we should want to open as many doors as possible for young girls.

As we discuss all that DiCaro had to say in *Sidelined*, she has a bias about women’s sports. But that that bias is something that allows her to write freely about what she has experienced in her time as a sports broadcaster. DiCaro talks about the benefits of women’s sports and how we should all pay close attention to it. She understands the good and the bad of the sports industry today and explains how women play a role in that. She has also explained things that I feel like a lot of women in sports have been feeling for a long time in a way that makes us feel heard.

Bibliography

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