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Finding Balance: A Content Analysis of how Newspaper Authors Framed Simone Biles Before, During, and After the 2020 Olympic Games

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Finding Balance: A Content Analysis of how Newspaper Authors Framed Simone Biles
Before, During, and After the 2020 Olympic Games

by

Hadley Howell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Media and Communication
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Simone Biles was considered the GOAT, Greatest of All Time, going into the 2020 Olympic Games. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Larry Nassar trial, and the weight of the world on her shoulders, Biles would withdraw from the women's gymnastics team final competition for mental health reasons. Thus, the following study examines how Biles was framed in the ten most circulated newspapers in the United States before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games. Results show that an author's race and gender, topic of the article, type of article, and if an article contained an image or not ultimately influenced how Biles was framed during this time period. However, the most dramatic finding in this study is that Biles' decision to withdraw from the 2020 Olympic Games brought the topic of mental health to the forefront of sports reporting as only five articles mentioned mental health before Biles' withdrawal from the Olympic Games, but 241 articles mentioned mental health after her decision to withdraw from the Olympic Games. Biles would have to find the perfect balance of being a Black, female athlete while taking a stand for mental health on the world's biggest stage.

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There are many people that I would like to thank for leading and guiding me through the process of writing a thesis. I would first like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lindsey Maxwell, for taking me under her wing and being there for me every step of the way through this process. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. John Meyer and Dr. Laura Stengrim, for all of their help and support. I would also like to thank my fellow scholar, Melissa Williams, for being my second coder for my thesis. Each of these professors and scholars has been such a blessing to my life, and I would not be where I am today without them. Lastly, I would like to thank The University of Southern Mississippi for all of the opportunities it has given me and for always challenging me to reach to the top.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my Master's thesis to my friends and family who have taught me how to find balance in my life. From my dance teacher, Mrs. Nancy Wingo Caffey, helping me find balance on pointe to my grandfather, Big Daddy, showing me the importance of balance between a family and work, I hope to balance life as they have. However, if one loses their balance, may they make it part of their dance.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USM The University of Southern Mississippi

GOAT Greatest of All Time

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

“I’m not the next Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps. I’m the first Simone Biles.”

-Simone Biles

Throughout history, elite athletes have used their platforms to bring awareness to issues around our world, but more recently, minority athletes have begun using their actions to bring light to certain situations such as racial injustice, police brutality, and mental health awareness (Associated Press, 2016; Calvario, 2020; Denyer, 2020). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines minority as, “a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). A few minority athletes who have used their platforms to bring awareness to certain situations include Colin Kaepernick as he protested racial inequality and police brutality by kneeling for the American National Anthem at the beginning of an NFL football game, Naomi Osaka who wore different masks bearing different names of Black victims of violence at the 2020 U.S. Open, and LeBron James who wore a Black Lives Matter shirt before tip-off at an NBA game to bring awareness to social injustice. From these instances, some questions arise such as: Are there limits to how athletes express their views; do elite athletes have a responsibility to speak up on controversial topics? No matter how one answers these questions, the media ultimately frames the information audiences use to come to a decision. How the media framed Kaepernick’s, Osaka’s, and James’ stories and images determined how we, the audience, received their messages, but did the media construct their messages differently as they are all minority athletes?

While these athletes may have set the stage for protest and messaging in sport, in the summer of 2021 gymnast Simone Biles found herself at the center of a controversy

involving her mental health. Using existing research on sports media and a quantitative content analysis, this study will examine how the 10 most circulated newspapers in the United States framed Simone Biles, an African American female gymnast, before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games by using the framing theory as she brought awareness to mental health issues through her actions.

Simone Biles tumbled into the world on March 14, 1997, and in 2003 at the age of six, she fell in love with the sport of gymnastics (Wetzel & Baez, 2020). Twenty-four years later, she would be considered the GOAT, Greatest Of All Time, as she became the most decorated American gymnast in history (Wetzel & Baez, 2020). She currently has 32 medals (19 from the World Championship and seven Olympic medals- four of those being gold medals). She has also won seven national all-around titles and was a three-time recipient of the Laureus Sports Award for Sportswoman of the Year (Wetzel & Baez, 2020). These are just a few of her many accolades, but what stands out about Biles, even more, is her success in a historically white sport. The sport of gymnastics is largely based on expensive finances and white conceptions of femininity (Asiegbu, 2021). For instance, during the 2012 Olympic Games, Gabby Douglas became the first Black gymnast in Olympic history to be crowned the individual All-Around Champion as she won the gold medal in the All-Around competition (Asiegbu, 2021). However, the media did not emphasize her victory but rather they highlighted her hair as unkept and nappy in a sport characterized by diamonds and slick-back hairstyles (Asiegbu, 2021). Recently, Black women have made strides in the field of gymnastics, but sports media still primarily focuses on the narratives of Black women in sports such as track/field and basketball (Asiegbu, 2021). However, Simone Biles would soon change that forever.

It was evident that Biles was physically prepared for the 2020 Olympic Games, but the world would soon learn that she was not mentally prepared. In order to prepare for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, Biles trained close to 35 hours a week at the World Champions Centre, but the Olympic Games would ultimately be postponed for a year as the Coronavirus (COVID-19) spread across the world (About, n.d.), meaning the 2020 Olympic Games took place in the summer of 2021. When COVID-19 protocols and restrictions loosened, Biles began to reclaim her status as the “GOAT” and bedazzled her gymnastic leotards with a rhinestone goat that she named Goldie (Lakritz, 2021). Biles would later tell the media that Goldie the goat was a message to those who criticized her for owning her skill, and she hoped this would encourage kids to not be ashamed to compete (Lakritz, 2021). American audiences couldn’t have been more excited about the “GOAT” representing their country as Biles was favored to lead the American Gymnastic team to another gold medal and also defend her Olympic titles from the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

However, Biles would shock the world in Tokyo as she would do the unthinkable; she would withdraw from the team final for women’s artistic gymnastics without having a physical injury (What Simone’s Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). During her warm-up on vault on July 27, 2021, Biles got lost in the air and only completed one and a half twists instead of the planned two and a half twists (What Simone’s Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). She had hoped to shake it off, but the same thing happened again on her next attempt. She would then walk out of the arena and tell her coach, “I don’t trust myself” (What Simone’s Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). After the team final, Biles told the media that she didn’t want to be dumb and hurt herself, so she knew she needed to take a step

back (What Simone's Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). Biles later informed the media that she was experiencing "the twisties" which is a psychological phenomenon where a gymnast loses their air awareness and control of their body (Giambalvo, 2021; Kowalski, 2021; USA Today, 2021; What Simone's Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). Biles would later withdraw from the All-Around final, but she would compete in the individual beam competition in which she would earn a bronze medal (Simone Biles has changed what it means to be an elite gymnast, 2021). After Biles' withdrawal from the Olympics, many spectators from around the world called her selfish and a quitter; Piers Morgan even criticized her on Twitter and said that her mental health issue was just a go-to excuse for her poor performance (Wolfe, 2021). Olympic athletes such as Michael Phelps and Naomi Osaka and other American celebrities such as Hoda Kotb, Michelle Obama, and Janet Jackson supported Biles' actions as the public often is blind to the invisible battles that occur in elite athletes' minds (Bengel, 2021; Cho, 2021, What Simone's Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). Simone Biles was already breaking barriers as she competed as a Black, female athlete in a historically White sport, but now she was using her platform just as Colin Kaepernick, Naomi Osaka, LeBron James, and so many other Black athletes had done before her. Biles was going to have to find the perfect balance as an African American female athlete in taking a stand for mental health.

The following study will explore the history of the Olympics, the 2020 Olympic Games, the modern Olympics and the media, Framing Theory, how authors' characteristics influence framing, the sport of gymnastics, sports and race, sports and gender, gender and the Olympic Games, and mental health and stigma. By better understanding these topics, I will uncover not only how monumental Biles' decision was

to withdraw from the 2020 Olympic Games but also how the media framed her as a Black, female athlete in taking a stand for mental health.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Every four years, over 10,000 athletes from over 200 countries come together to compete in the Olympic Games (Toohey & Veal, 2007). Hundreds of thousands of spectators gather together for a little over two weeks and watch the world's most talented athletes compete against each other, and billions of people around the world keep track of the games on television, through the newspaper, and other various forms of media. Following the Summer Olympics each year are the Summer Paralympic games which involve over 4,000 adults with disabilities, and two years after the Summer Olympic Games are the Winter Olympic Games followed by the Winter Paralympic games (Toohey & Veal, 2007). The Olympics are the world's biggest peacetime event, and they are a time when national and international heroes emerge (Toohey & Veal, 2007).

The Olympic Games began in Ancient Greece as a five-day-long event between 776 BCE and CE 261 (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). The games' primary focus was for religious purposes while they highlighted the physical excellence of competitors (Toohey & Veal, 2007). Competitions for running, horse racing, chariot racing, wrestling, and the pentathlon all took place during the first Olympic games (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). However, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937) is credited for the revival of the modern Olympic games which took place in Athens in 1896 (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). Coubertin desired that the modern Olympic games would go beyond being a pure sports event, as he wanted them to have a sense of culture and belief (Liao & Pitts, 2006). He had three principles and objectives for the games that he wanted to implement: (One) foster the goals of competitive sports, (Two) build facilities that would encourage athletic development which would not have been possible with inferior facilities, and (Three)

strengthen the profile of sports by constructing better opportunities for training and better sites for national and international competition (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). Thus, since the revival of the Olympic games, they have become the world's greatest sporting event (Chalkley & Essex, 1999).

The modern Olympic games attract people from all places, races, ages, and social positions, and the games demonstrate how the entire planet can come together to the same place and celebrate peace, youth, and talent (Pop, 2013). The Olympic games are funded by taxpayers, sponsors, television companies, and advertisers as the game amount to a large sum of money (Toohey & Veal, 2007). The Olympic games include universally recognized symbols such as the Olympic rings, the Olympic flag, the Olympic anthem and oath, and the Olympic flame which are all presented in solemn moments during the games just as they were done when the ancient Olympic games were dedicated to the Greek gods (Pop, 2013). Through all of these events, the subtle energy of the games unites ordinary people and sportspeople to strive for Olympic glory.

2020 Olympic Games

Tokyo, Japan would become the center of global attention during the 2020 Olympic Games as it would be the host city for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic games (Holthus et al., 2021). It was Tokyo's second time hosting the Olympic games in 56 years, but it was technically its third time to host the games due to the forfeited 1940 Tokyo "Phantom Olympics" that never came to be (Holthus et al., 2021). However, the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games would be record-breaking in many ways. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic games had the most Olympic events spread across the widest geographical area in Olympic history including 33 different sports and disciplines with 339 events held in

42 venues up to 1,300 kilometers apart (Holthus et al., 2021). It also was the fifth time that an Asian city had been selected to host the Summer Olympic Games, and Tokyo had been preparing for these games for 15 years (Holthus et al., 2021). There was no doubt that all of Tokyo's preparation for the games was going to create memories that would last a lifetime for spectators and athletes all around the world.

Tokyo 2020 was constructed as a moment of redefinition for the nation and its people. Tokyo first hosted the Olympic games in 1964 in which the games symbolized Japan's recovery from World War II (Holthus et al., 2021). However, the 2020 Olympic games symbolized Japan's recovery from the so-called two lost decades of the 1990s-2000s and their recovery from the devastation of the March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in northwestern Japan that took place (Holthus et al., 2021). Thus, Tokyo 2020 was seen as a moment for reflecting and reimagining the nation.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games were eagerly anticipated by the people of Tokyo and by people from all around the world. However, the 2020 Olympic Games were postponed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Murcakami et al., 2021). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Japanese government announced on March 30, 2020, that the 2020 Tokyo Olympics would be rescheduled to July 2021; however, the games would still be called the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (Boykoff & Gaffney, 2020). The postponement of the games had a huge impact on the world of sports and the athletes due to periods of home quarantine, bans against public gatherings, travel restrictions, and canceled or postponed sporting events such as the 2020 Olympic games

(Hakansson et al., 2021). Olympic athletes had to continue training for the Olympic games even though they did not take place until 2021, and they had to alter how they trained to align with COVID-19 protocols. Thus, COVID-19 caused psychological consequences, prolonged distress, uncertainty, and mental health issues for athletes planning to compete in the 2020 Olympic games (Hakansson et al., 2021).

The 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic games would begin on July 23, 2021, indicating the first time in history that the Olympic games were postponed (International Olympic Committee, 2020). The 2020 Tokyo Olympic games became a time for the people of Tokyo to reflect and reimagine their nation's past, and it was a time for Tokyo to share its culture and history with the world. However, the 2020 Olympic games would symbolize much more than the Asian culture as athletes came together to compete in their sports after a year of isolation and battle with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Modern Olympic Games and the Media

The media became a vital part of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games as on July 8, 2021, all spectators were banned from the Tokyo Olympic venues after the government declared a state of emergency for Tokyo due to COVID-19 (Yanagawa et al., 2022). Thus, there would not be any spectators at the events, and the world would have to keep up with the games through the use of news and social media. It is important to note that three prefectures did hold events within the three cycling categories of mountain biking, road cycling, and track cycling which allowed spectators, but these were the only prefectures that had spectators and fans in attendance during the 2020 Olympic games (Yanagawa et al., 2022). Thus, parents of athletes, family, friends, fans, and spectators would have to rely on the media to cheer their team to gold.

According to Holthus et al., (2020), “the Olympic games are the greatest media spectacle of modernity, providing a powerful platform for the host nation to communicate ideas about itself and future visions with domestic and global audiences” (p. 8). In terms of media reach, nothing else compares to the number of people the Olympic games reach globally as the games bring the world together for the celebration of excellence and respect under agreed-upon rules and regulations which creates worldwide interest in athletics based on medal counts and nationalist ambitions. This generates a huge scope of media coverage (Holthus et al., 2020).

In regards to digital, modern media, satellite technology was first used in the Tokyo 1964 Olympics, and the liberalization of national media systems in the 1980s laid the foundation for the Olympic business model (Holthus et al., 2020). In turn, television has been the most significant factor for commercial growth of the Olympic games (Holthus et al., 2020). In 2001, the IOC established the OBS (Olympic Broadcasting Services) which televised the Olympic games, and in 2016, the IOC launched the Olympic Channel to keep up with the year-round interest in the Olympics (Holthus et al., 2020). According to the IOC Marketing Report, 2.6 billion people watched part of the Rio 2016 Olympic games, and there were over seven billion video views of official content on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube which showed that digital media coverage exceeded conventional TV rates for the first time in history (Holthus et al., 2020). Thus, the media’s impact on the 2020 Olympic games would be much greater than its impact on any other Olympic games in history, but did the media affect how the audience viewed and experienced the 2020 Olympic games back home?

Framing Theory

Erving Goffman (1974) first theorized framing as a form of communication that enabled audiences to process life experiences. According to Goffman (1974), the way an image is presented or framed can influence how the audience processes the image and its message. Framing provides researchers with a theoretical framework for understanding how issues are presented to audiences of traditional media and how the presentation of the media influences their perception (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2002; Hardin et al., 2004; Mishra, 2014). For example, visual framing in sports media often focuses on the subject's race and gender (Hardin et al., 2002; Hardin et al., 2004; Kinnick, 1998). However, in this study, the race and gender of the newspaper article's author are the two predictors (independent variables) in the study as the authors of the study will examine how the newspaper author's race and gender influence how he or she frames Simone Biles.

After Goffman first theorized framing, he published his ninth book titled *Frame Analysis* in 1974 (Persson, 2018). He had two goals that he wanted to illustrate through his book. The first goal was to illustrate what frame analysis was, and his second goal was to show that reality can be made the subject of framing because it is not as solid as it is sometimes claimed to be (Persson, 2018). Goffman defines 'frame' as, "a situational definition that follows certain principles of organization, and as such, it controls both the events and the subjective commitment of the individual within the situation in question" (Goffman, 1974, p.10f). Thus, variations in framing turn one thing into something else, and frame is a context that can also be something else depending on how the reader defines what is included in the context (Persson, 2018).

Entman (1993) would note that frames can have several locations such as the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Thus, communication is not static but rather a dynamic process that involves frame-building and frame-setting (De Vreese, 2005). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) defined frame-building as the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames, and they determine how organizations frame issues. On the other hand, frame-setting refers to an individual's prior knowledge and predispositions in reaction to the media frame (De Vreese, 2005). Entman (1993) also believed that media frames can serve four key functions for their readers: defining problems, making moral judgments, diagnosing causes, and suggesting solutions to such problems. However, it is important to note that framing is not always the intention of media producers as framing is a key part of the journalistic process (Nelson, 1997; Nicely, 2007). For example, journalists use frames to describe events to those who were not present at an event. From the way the journalist presents the topic of the article to the title of the headline to the pictures used in an article, journalists frame the story from their understanding (Funderburk, 2019). In turn, past historical research demonstrates that the framing in newspapers shows the reality of the time that the newspaper was written (Funderburk, 2019). Thus, the media frames that the reader experiences from reading the newspaper become reality to them as they did not experience the actual, live event themselves (Goffman, 1974).

Another important aspect of the framing theory is its contribution to the unequal distribution of power (Cissel 2012; Entman, 1993). Entman (1993) believed that incorporating media framing with agenda-setting, priming, and bias would promote one-sided conflicts over the use of government power. However, as agenda-setting is similar

to framing, it is different as agenda setting suggests, “what topics to think about rather than what to think on a topic” (Funderburk, 2019, p. 22). Overall, how the media frames an issue will affect the reader’s judgment of the issue, and once an issue is defined, it is hard to redefine (Bronstein, 2005; Kian, 2009; Lane, 1998; Lind & Salo, 2022).

According to Goffman (1974), researchers theorize that framing occurs through discriminatory selection, emphasis, and exclusion of certain visual content. In this case, such framing techniques may manipulate the audiences’ attitudes and perceptions toward a specific athlete (Goffman, 1974). In Billings’ (2008) research on the Olympic media, he believed that television producers, editors of newspapers, and editors of magazines are responsible for the content about these athletes that is distributed to the viewer and readers.

As the news media has often been accused of failing to cover minority groups and as Black athletes are often not well represented on the sports pages of the newspapers, magazines, and in televised sports coverage (Hardin et al., 2004), this study will use Goffman’s (1974) Framing Theory to examine how the race and gender of newspaper authors influenced how Simone Biles, a Black female gymnast, was framed during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games. As there were not any spectators allowed at the 2020 Olympic games due to COVID-19, the world would be relying on the media to tell them what happened; thus, the power was in the media’s hands, and they would ultimately frame Biles’ withdrawal from the 2020 Olympic games.

How Authors’ Characteristics Affect How They Frame the News

As Goffman’s (1974) Framing Theory is evident in sports media today and as past research shows that sports media focuses on an athlete’s race and gender, it is important

that scholars take a step back and better understand how the author's race and gender of a sports media piece influence how he or she frames an athlete (Hardin et al., 2002; Hardin et al, 2004; Kinnick, 1998). Campbell (1995) believed that newsrooms and news organizations are not involved in any kind of purposeful American racism, and many news organizations have taken steps to address issues of cultural diversity by hiring journalists of color and making their employees more sensitive to issues of race. However, sensitivity can be easily misplaced in a news process that produces short, visual stories (Campbell, 1995). On the other hand, it is important to note that news does not write itself (Moy et al., 2016). Thus, journalists choose the elements of a situation that best convey an event which results in them selecting the frame of an event (Moy et al., 2016). In turn, frames have the potential to exert substantial influence on public opinion (Moy et al., 2016). For example, Love and Maxwell (2020) found that most of the articles written about Serena Williams during a controversial time for her in 2018 were written by white, male authors rather than female authors or authors of other races. They also found that female authors were likely to be critical of Williams in their writing (Love & Maxwell, 2020). Other research on Black female athletes shows that they often receive less coverage than White women, and they are often scrutinized when they are in the spotlight (Cooky et al., 2010). Thus, in the following study, the authors hope to better understand how the author of a newspaper article's characteristics such as race and gender influenced how he or she framed Simone Biles. It is evident that Black female athletes have been absent in sports history, and it is evident that journalists frame what their viewers read, see, and hear; thus, understanding why authors frame athletes in different ways is a valuable piece of the following study.

Sports and Gymnastics

The sport of gymnastics was one of the nine sports that took place during the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, and photographs show that women demonstrated their gymnastic routines as early as the 1906 Olympics in Athens (Cervin, 2021). However, women's artistic gymnastics did not make its debut until the 1952 Olympic games (Cervin, 2021; Kerr et al, 2020). Gymnastics was first created predominantly for white men, and men's gymnastics across Europe was used to prepare young men for military duty (Cervin, 2021; Kerr et al., 2020). Bergman-Osterberg would later alter her form of gymnastics for women as she believed that it was "the best training for motherhood" (Cervin, 2021, p. 20). Women's gymnastics began as only a team event in which the team competition was composed of the vault apparatuses and the team drill (Cervin, 2021). Gymnastics also took place outdoors, but it was moved indoors in 1948 at the London Olympic games (Cervin, 2021). In the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, women's artistic gymnastics consisted of the vault, uneven bars, balance beam, and floor exercises that women individually competed in (Barker-Ruchti & Tinning, 2010; Cervin, 2021). Since 1952, medals have been awarded individually for all-around and for each apparatus, and the individual scores are calculated together to form the team score (Cervin, 2021). This is considered the beginning of women's artistic gymnastics as we know it today.

Women's artistic gymnastics played a significant role in the Olympic movement as it set out to prove that women could compete in sports while maintaining their femininity (Cervin, 2021). Thus, the sport of gymnastics promotes the health of women's bodies and their ability to bear children for their nation (Cervin, 2021; Kerr et al., 2020).

Women's artistic gymnastics was also shaped by the patriotic duties that women were expected to fulfill, and gymnastics taught them etiquette and grace which were femininity characteristics that would aid them as wives and mothers (Cervin, 2021). The sport of women's artistic gymnastics was created to promote women's health and their service to their nation (Cervin, 2021). Thus, gymnastics became a popular sport in the United States of America but never fully approached the status of a national sport (Cervin, 2021). However, the domination of Soviet women athletes in the Olympic games would later cause a reassessment of sports, femininity, and women in the United States (Barker-Ruchti, 2009; Cervin, 2021).

Sports and Race

Scholars have noted that "race in the United States is our most intractable social issue," (Brummett & Ishak, 2013, p. 20). However, sports allow us as Americans to explore racial issues that we seem to avoid talking about (McDonald, 2005). Take for example the number of Black men playing quarterback in the National Football League (NFL). Ninety percent of the skill positions are occupied by Black players, but only twenty percent of quarterbacks are Black in the NFL. The quarterback calls all of the plays in the huddle, is the only player who passes the ball in what is now a pass-dominated game, and is usually the face of the franchise which makes him the highest-paid player on the field. This disparity highlights some implications that we assume about race. If Black players have proven that they can dominate every other position on the field, why are there so few of them playing quarterback in the NFL (Brummett & Ishak, 2013)?

Another example that shows the parallel between sports and race is Gabby Douglas competing in the 2012 Olympic Games. Douglas became the first Black gymnast in Olympic history to be crowned an all-around champion, and she became the first American gymnast to ever win gold in both the individual all-around competition and the team competition (Asiegbu, 2021). Unfortunately, when she was crowned champion, the main conversation was not about her accomplishments, but it was about her hair (Asiegbu, 2021). Even though this highlights the fact that Black women have come a long way in sports, they still have a long way to go in sports such as gymnastics and figure skating which are considered “feminine” sports (Asiegbu, 2021). There are many examples that I could examine that highlight the success of Black athletes, and sports allow us to address many racial topics that our country struggles talking about. However, more certain is how Black athletes seek help for and communicate about their mental health in regards to both the stressors of being an athlete and the stigmas of mental health and their race that they face.

When looking at sports and race and understanding how Black athletes communicate about or seek help for their mental health, it is important to note that Black people have been historically discriminated against, and many mental health issues for Black people are linked to healthcare discrimination (Gee et al., 2006). Throughout history, Black families’ mental health needs have been looked over and have not been taken care of by the American health care system (Biegel et al., 1997). Thus, Black individuals who have encountered racism, discrimination, and oppression have a higher chance of experiencing a mental health issue (Pieterse et al., 2012), and previous research (Williams et al., 2003) found that racism and discrimination have the biggest effect on

one's mental and physical health. However, the prevalence of mental health issues decreases as Black student-athletes develop self-confidence and a strong belief in their culture (Mandara et al., 2009). Overall, there are cultural differences in how the Black community regards the way that mental health is perceived, accepted, and acknowledged (Arday, 2018).

Race and Olympic Gymnastics

The Olympic games are a global sporting event framed in popular culture as promoting diversity and equal opportunity (Hardin et al., 2004). However, sport is a contested racial terrain, a place for struggles against sport's reflection of white male hegemony in the larger culture (Brown et al., 2003). For example, the sport of women's artistic gymnastics in the Olympic games has historically created barriers to including diverse participation (Cervin, 2021). Gymnastics clubs require a large training space and specialized, expensive equipment thus must gymnastic clubs/training facilities are located outside the densely populated urban areas where most Black people live (Cervin, 2021). Olympic gymnasts must also train extensively at such an elite level, so their families must pay for thirty to forty hours of tuition for practices per week (Cervin, 2021). Thus, this economic factor constrains the participation of many Black individuals as families cannot afford such expenses (Cervin, 2021). In turn, Black American Olympic athletes and their families sacrifice a lot in order for them to stand on the top of the Olympic podium.

In 2012, Gabby Douglas, an African-American USA gymnast, became the first gymnast of African descent to win the Olympic all-around gold medal, and she became the first Black gymnast to win both the individual all-around and team competitions

(Asiegbu, 2021). However, the main conversation surrounding Douglas' victory was not about her achievement but about her hair as it was labeled "unkempt", "embarrassing", and "nappy" (Asiegbu, 2021). This is just one example of how an Olympic athlete's race has altered the way the media portrays them. However, Gabby Douglas, Simone Biles, and other competitive Black gymnasts are constantly pushing the boundaries and refusing to conform to the predominantly white world of gymnastics (Asiegbu, 2021).

Sports and Gender

Thus far, the authors have examined the history of the Olympic Games, the sport of gymnastics, and sports and race, but gender also has had a huge impact on the world of sports over the years. Thus, it is important to remember that sports have been the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, and men's sports have allowed men to demonstrate their superiority over females (Toohey & Veal, 2007). There has not always been such a thing as 'girl power' in sports.

Jennifer Ring claims that "women are still not Americans if playing baseball is what it takes to be one" (2009, p. 30). During the 20th century, many people thought that women were "simply too fragile to engage in strenuous physical contests" (Olson, 1990, p. 109). Thus, women were to only take part in physical activity that allowed them to exercise without misbalancing their delicate physiques (Olson, 1990). In the early 1970s, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women was founded, and in 1972, Title IX was passed (Olson, 1990). However, Wendy Olson (1990) held that Title IX "had done little to address the diverse needs and problems... of women of color..." (Mathewson, 1995, p. 241). Thus, Mathewson (1995) believes that women of color are caught in a world that Title IX does not fully address. In turn, opportunities for women

to participate in sports have increased since the passage of Title IX; however, racial inequalities still persist for Black female athletes as they remain largely marginalized in both educational and sports contexts due to the interaction of their race and gender (Simien, 2019).

As one can tell, Black women and women of color are uniquely positioned between racialization and gender socialization in sports (Asiegbu, 2021), but as highlighted earlier, two female athletes who have broken the barrier of race and gender in sports are Naomi Osaka and Serena Williams. Osaka identifies herself as a woman of color who plays tennis, a historically white, upper-class sport (Leppard, 2022). Serena Williams identifies herself as a Black, African American female tennis player (Douglas, 2005). These two women are not only breaking the boundaries of what it means to be a Black, female athlete at the highest level of sports, but they are also using their personal platforms as professional athletes to share their message with the world.

Serena Williams' femininity and sexuality are frequently criticized and questioned by the media, and she has a status of an "uncommon tennis player" as she is a Black, female playing in a white-dominated sport (Frisby, 2017, p. 265; Litchfield et al., 2018, p. 8). Thus, her femininity and sexuality are often questioned not only because of her physique but because of her skin color. However, Williams is the most successful woman tennis player still playing the game, and she is one of the most recognizable athletes in the world (Litchfield et al., 2018). Williams is more than a tennis star though, as she is also a mother (Love & Maxwell, 2020). Thus, Serena Williams is a role model and inspiration to people all over the world as she does not let racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination hold her back from the sport that she loves.

Naomi Osaka is another female athlete of color that is also competing at the highest level of tennis. Osaka is of Haitian and Japanese heritage, and she was born in Japan; however, at the age of three, she was sent to the United States for training (Razack & Joseph, 2021). She represents Japan on the tennis court making her a Nikkei (Japanese migrant) and jasporea (Haitian diaspora) celebrity of global renown (Razack & Joseph, 2021). As she is often associated with both the Japanese and Haitian diasporas and as she grew up in America, the media often misinterprets her race as Asian, white, mixed, and sometimes Black (Razack & Joseph, 2021). Consequently, Osaka was unnoticed by the mainstream media until she competed against Serena Williams in the US Open Women's singles finals (Razack & Joseph, 2021). Osaka won the match; she was then put into the media spotlight, but it was not her talent that made the headlines.

As Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka are both women of color, they have both battled many stereotypes and misconceptions of what it means to be an elite athlete. However, they are role models and inspirations for all women in the world of sports, and they are steadily demonstrating how powerful women of color female athletes can be.

Gender and the Olympic Games

As women's participation in the Olympic games has increased over the years, it is important to understand how women got to where they are today in the Olympics and what they still have to accomplish in the future. Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) identified three phases of women's participation in the modern Olympic games:

1. 1896-1928: It was marked by the exclusion of women and efforts on the part of some of them to resist this dismissal.

2. 1928-1952: It was a time of consolidation and struggles for women in the Olympics, where their events were confined to those that met the criteria of acceptability.

3. 1952-the present: It is a time of challenge to masculine hegemony. This span was triggered by the entry of the Soviet bloc into the games and the resulting influence of their political medal agenda, wherein it was immaterial to their national governments whether their nation's medals were won by male or female athletes (Toohey, 2007, p. 198).

In 1900 at the Paris Olympic Games, Charlotte Cooper became the first female modern Olympic victor as she beat Helene Prerost of France, six-one in ladies' singles tennis (Toohey, 2007). Thus, in the 1900 Paris Olympic Games, there were a total of two sports for women to compete in, three events that they could participate in, and five countries sent female athletes to compete in the games which totaled 19 females participating in the Paris Olympic Games, and there were a total of 1330 participants in the Paris Olympic Games (Toohey, 2007). Tennis and golf were the two sports that women could compete in at the Paris Games, and women's gymnastics was not included in the Olympic games until 1928 (Toohey, 2007). It is important to note that women's participation in the Olympic games has increased since they first participated in 1900. However, women have still not achieved their Olympic potential (Toohey, 2007). Many Olympic sports are considered 'inappropriate pastimes' for girls and women in their countries, and some cultures do not allow women to participate in sporting events in front of men (Toohey, 2007). Thus, cultural differences have slowed the acceptance of all countries adapting women's sports, but women all around the world are constantly

making strides for all women to have the opportunity to compete for Olympic gold in the future.

Mental Health and Stigma

Mental health is comprised of our social and emotional well-being (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), and mental health disorders are greatest among younger people between the ages of 16-24 compared to any other time in their life (Gulliver et al., 2010). However, 57 percent of individuals who deal with mental health illnesses never seek or receive any professional help regarding their mental health (National Institute of Mental Health; NIMH, 2017).

Scholars have found out more about why athletes may not pursue help with mental health. Mojtabai (2009) suggested that people (including athletes) do not seek help for their mental health due to concern about the cost of seeking help, transportation, confidentiality, feeling like they can handle the problem on their own, and being scared of others finding out. The media also creates barriers for those seeking mental health treatments as the media portrays athletes as invincible human beings (Gulliver et al., 2010). This became evident when Naomi Osaka, a Japanese tennis player, withdrew from the Wimbledon Tennis Tournament in 2021 and when Simone Biles, USA Olympic gymnast, withdrew from the all-around team competition during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games for mental health reasons. Furthermore, Gulliver et al. (2010), found that the top three barriers for elite athletes seeking help for their mental health are: (One) not knowing how to recognize or identify their mental health symptoms, (Two) not knowing when to seek help, and (Three) not wanting others to know about their mental health condition. Thus, does stigma play a large role in preventing athletes from seeking help?

Stigma can be defined as, “the discrediting or ‘blemishing’ of one’s behavior, identity, or status” (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). Corrigan and Watson (2002) said that stigma can also be defined as a construct that comprises three elements: stereotypes (negative beliefs about a social group), prejudice (hostile feelings toward a group), and discrimination (negative reactions/beliefs towards members of a particular group). Thus, mental health stigma is a barrier that influences basic human needs such as interpersonal relationships, physical health, mental health treatment-seeking, and even employment opportunities (Sickel et al., 2014).

When looking at stigma and mental health, research shows that boys are less willing to seek help for their mental health as the stigma associated with mental health problems is a stronger threat to their identity (MacLean et al., 2013). Likewise, students of all ages (kindergarten to graduate school) anticipate stigma to be a barrier regarding seeking mental health services (Smith & Applegate, 2018). Stigma affects people’s willingness to seek help, but minority athletes may be even less likely to seek help due to the added stigma of their race as it is something that they cannot change. Wilkerson et al., (2020) found that weakness and silence were two main themes that prevented Division One college football players from seeking help for their mental health. Weakness is a stigma as utilizing mental health services symbolized instability, and silence is considered a stigma as mental health was never discussed or promoted amongst the athletes (Wilkerson et al., 2020). This is especially true for Black athletes as mental health concerns decrease as Black athletes gain self-confidence and develop a strong belief in their culture (Mandara et al., 2009). Thus, Biles would have to find the ‘right

balance' between being a Black, female athlete and advocating for mental health where the media would share her story with the rest of the world.

CHAPTER III - RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

Based on the review of literature, framing theory helps us understand how audiences process life experiences based on how the media frames content, news, and information in all forms of media (Goffman, 1974). Thus, by understanding the significance of the Olympic Games in history, the sport of women's artistic gymnastics, race's role in sports, gender inequalities in sports, and mental health and stigma, I can better understand how the ten most circulated newspapers framed Biles before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games. From my knowledge of this information, I hope to answer the following research questions.

As the framing of mental health is a key focus of my study, I asked the following research question to better understand how mental health was framed before and after Biles withdrew from the team competition. Through the findings of this question, I hope to also uncover more about the stigmatization of mental health.

RQ1: Does the framing of mental health change after Biles reveals her mental health issue on July 27th?

I can also better understand how race and gender impact how Biles was presented throughout the articles by examining the gender and race of each article's author. In turn, the following research question was asked.

RQ2: Does the author's race influence how Biles is framed?

Similar to the author's race, the author's gender might affect how he/she frames Biles. Thus, the following research question was proposed.

RQ3: Does the author's gender influence how Biles is framed?

Besides the author's gender and race having a possible impact on how Biles is framed, the time of the article's publication could have a bearing on how she is framed. The authors examined articles between July 1, 2021, and August 31, 2021, but Biles did not withdraw from the Olympic team competition until July 27, 2021. Thus, how she was framed before her withdrawal could be different from how she was framed after her withdrawal. In turn, the following research question was proposed.

RQ4: Does the topic of the article influence how Biles is framed?

Each newspaper article can be categorized as a feature article, news article, or column based on how the article was written. The following research question was proposed.

RQ5: Does the type of article influence how Biles is framed?

Because not all newspaper articles include images, the authors were curious about the following question as Campbell et al., 2015 state, "visuals are an enthymematic, efficient, and emotional form of evidence" (p. 97).

RQ6: Do articles with images frame, Biles, differently than articles without images?

CHAPTER IV – METHODS

The following study examines how the top 10 most circulated newspapers in the United States portrayed USA gymnast, Simone Biles, in newspaper articles leading up to and after the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. This is similar to the structure of Love and Maxwell's (2020) study on Serena Williams. The top 10 most circulated newspapers in the United States that were analyzed in the following study were selected based on PressGazette's 2021 data regarding the United States' newspaper circulation. A full list of the top 25 USA newspapers based on circulation can be found at pressgazette.co.uk.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the following study was a single article written in one of the 10 most circulated newspapers in the United States. The researcher had access to the 10 newspapers through her university library's ProQuest database. A single newspaper article was considered one unit of analysis, and the articles that were analyzed were selected from a keyword search of Simone Biles on the ProQuest database. Newspaper articles were chosen as the primary source of the following study due to their availability and due to their prominence and long-tenured success in the United States. Articles could be published in a newspaper's printed edition or a newspaper's digital subscription as many United States newspapers are read on electronic devices in today's era. All articles also had to be published in one of the 10 newspapers between July 1, 2021, through August 31, 2021, as the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games took place from July 23, 2021, through August 8, 2021.

Sampling

According to PressGazette, the following, in order from most circulated to least circulated, were the most circulated newspapers in the United States as of 2021: *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Tampa Bay Times*, *New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Star Tribune*, and *Newsday*.

However, the ProQuest database did not have access to the *New York Post*, so those articles were collected from the New York Post website's archives. As stated earlier, newspaper articles were analyzed if they appeared in a keyword search of Simone Biles and if they were published between July 1, 2021, through August 31, 2021. The following are the number of articles that each newspaper published based on our criteria:

The Wall Street Journal (25), *The New York Times* (119), *USA Today* (47), *Washington Post* (72), *Los Angeles Times* (46), *Tampa Bay Times* (1), *New York Post* (75), *Chicago Tribune* (11), *Star Tribune* (37), and *Newsday* (7) for a total of 440 newspaper articles.

All articles were coded in a nonchronological order, and each article was coded based on the newspaper it was published in.

Coding

Each newspaper article was coded for the newspaper it was published in, the date of the publication, the gender and race of the author of the article, the type of article it was: feature article, news article, or column; whether the article contained a photo or not, and each topic that was present in the article was coded for a positive, negative, or neutral tone. To determine the gender and race of each author, information was gathered outside of the content of the article by doing a Google search on each author and determining their gender and race based on their official biography on the newspaper platform's

official website. For the following study, feature articles were defined as articles that specifically addressed Simone Biles or her life. News articles were defined as articles that gave an account or analyzed Bile's performance after an event, and columns were defined as articles where the author gave his/her opinion of Biles or openly commented on her performance (Funderburk, 2019). The ProQuest Database also identified the type of article each article was.

After each article was coded for the items above, the content of the article was coded in terms of what each article was about and the tone of the topic's content in each article. Thus, each article could contain more than one type of content creating a much more nuanced study. The coding categories of the content of the article were created by the author based on articles about Simone Biles from July 1, 2021, through August 31, 2021, that were published in a less circulated newspaper outside the sample of this study titled *The Clarion Ledger*, which is published in Jackson, MS. Based on articles in *The Clarion Ledger* during the allotted time frame, the author used deductive reasoning to construct nine categories for the content of the articles for the coders to use. However, after the first round of coding, the author decided to remove the two categories, 2020 Olympic Games and USA Gymnastics, and replace those categories with Biles' gender and Biles' race to better fulfill the purpose of the study and to increase intercoder reliability. Thus, the coders used the following categories for the content of the sample's articles: mental health, GOAT, the "twisties", Covid-19, Larry Nassar, Jonathan Owens, Bile's gender, Bile's race, and other. Each article was coded for any of the nine categories that were present in the article, and each category that was present in the

article was then coded as positive, negative, or neutral in terms of how it was presented in the article.

Studies such as Hasenboehler et al., (2007), Collins et al., (2006), and McIntyre and Gibson (2016), have examined how positive, negative, and neutral tones of news media impact the audience. For example, Hasenboehler et al., (2007) found that there were more articles reporting positive results of surgical procedures published in surgical literature compared to articles with negative results thus creating a publication bias that could affect the quality of care of patients undergoing surgical procedures. The authors of the study defined positive articles as favorable clinical outcomes, positive data, and identification of risks of variables that could contribute to a more favorable clinical outcome (Hasenboehler et al., 2007). They defined negative articles as adverse clinical outcomes and negative data derived from other basic science studies, and they defined neutral articles as those articles with no significant differences between the study groups and no clear conclusions or recommendations (Hasenboehler et al., 2007). Gieber (1995) defined positive news as, “those items reflecting social cohesion and cooperation” (p. 312), and he defined negative news as, “those items that report social conflicts and disorganization” (pp. 311-312). Hartung and Stone (1980) defined positive news as, “one for which the majority of the local paper’s readers would be satisfied or pleased that the event had happened”, and they defined a negative news story as the opposite (p. 21). Harcup and O’Neil (2001) gave examples of positive news which include acts of heroism, miracle recoveries, and triumphs over adversity. Contrarily, negative news included topics that involve internal conflict, disasters, and accidents (Riffe, 1993). Thus, to determine if the tone of the topic was positive, negative, or neutral, the authors

defined a topic as positive if it focused on the benefits of the event which would be Biles' withdrawal from the 2020 Olympic Games (McIntyre & Gibson, 2016). This could include an author of a newspaper article praising Biles for her decision or how an organization is supporting Biles. The authors defined a topic as negative if it focused on the harmful outcomes of the event or issue (McIntyre & Gibson, 2016), and they defined a topic as neutral if it was simply informative information about Biles. For example, mental health would be framed positively if the author of the article talked about Biles overcoming her mental health struggle. On the other hand, mental health would be framed negatively if the author believed that mental health caused her downfall, and it would be framed neutrally if the author of the article simply stated that Biles withdrew from the competition for mental health reasons and thus did not elaborate on it anymore.

Coder Training

For the following study, two trained researchers were selected as coders for the study. After the coding scheme was developed by the author based on less circulated newspaper articles regarding Simone Biles during the allotted time frame, the two coders trained to code the following study by examining and coding newspaper articles about Biles that fell outside of the sample. Next, the two coders coded the same sample of 90 articles that were a part of the research sample, which was about 20.4 percent of the final sample (*Newsday*, *Star Tribune*, and *Los Angeles Times* were coded by both coders). After the analysis was complete for the same articles that both authors coded, a test for intercoder reliability was performed using Cronbach's alpha. After the first round of testing to improve reliability, the coding categories, Olympic Games and USA Gymnastics, were removed as they were not relevant to the six research questions of the

study. Subsequently, the two researchers reached intercoder reliability of 0.76. Next, the main coder coded the remaining 352 articles in the sample.

CHAPTER V – RESULTS

After all 440 newspaper articles had been coded using the coding scheme described above and found in Appendix A, the data collected from the codes was analyzed in a program called SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Of the 440 newspaper articles, 163 (about 37 percent) were written by men, 211 (about 48 percent) were written by women, and the remainder of the articles (15 percent) were co-authored by men and women or the author was unidentifiable. In regards to the race of the author, 326 (about 76 percent) were written by White or Caucasian authors, 20 (about four percent) were written by Black or African American authors, 23 (about five percent) were written by Asian or Asian American Authors, none were written by Hawaiian or Pacific Islander authors, none were written by Alaskan or Native American authors, 5 (about one percent) were written by Non-white Hispanic authors, and 66 (about 15 percent) were written by multiple authors who were of different races thus classified as other. Of the 440 articles, none were Feature Articles, 393 (about 89 percent) were News Articles, and 47 (about 11 percent) were Column Articles. Lastly, 238 (about 54 percent) articles contained an image, and 202 (about 46 percent) articles did not contain an image.

RQ1 asked whether the framing of mental health changed after Biles revealed her mental health issue on July 27th. Because the independent variable (time) was categorical (Before July 27th or July 27th and later) and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was used. There was not significance between the framing of mental health before and after July 27th, $X^2(2, N = 246) = 3.16, p = 0.21$. Before July 27th, only five articles mentioned mental health. However, all five articles framed mental health neutrally. On the other hand, 241 articles mentioned mental health after

July 27th. Of those 241 articles, 65 (about 26 percent) were framed positively, 29 (about 12 percent) were framed negatively, and 147 (about 60 percent) were framed neutrally. Thus, there was not significance in the framing of mental health before and after July 27th, but it is important to note that only five articles mentioned mental health before July 27th. However, mental health was ultimately not framed differently in newspapers before and after Biles revealed her mental health issue. Although the framing did not change, the number of articles from before and after did. By running a chi-square test, there is significance in the number of articles that mentioned mental health before and after Biles' withdrawal from the Olympic Games on July 27th, $X^2 (1, N = 123) = 226.41$, $p < .001$. Five (about two percent) of the articles mentioned mental health before July 27th, and 241 (about 98 percent) of the articles mentioned mental health after July 27th. Thus, there was not significance in the framing of mental health before and after July 27th, but there was significance in the number of articles that mentioned mental health before and after July 27th.

RQ2 asked whether the author's race influenced how Biles was framed. Since the independent variable (author's race) was categorical and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was used. There was significance between the author's race and how they framed the article for the categories of mental health, $X^2 (12, N = 440) = 21.55$, $p = 0.04$; GOAT, $X^2 (12, N = 440) = 25.51$, $p = 0.01$; COVID, $X^2 (12, N = 440) = 24.13$, $p = 0.02$; and race, $X^2 (12, N = 440) = 41.04$, $p < .001$. Thus, an author's race does influence how they frame the categories mentioned above as an author's race influenced how they framed mental health, GOAT, COVID, and race in regards to Simone Biles.

In regards to the categories that showed significance between an author's race and framing, Asian/Asian American authors (13 or about 57 percent) were most likely to not include mental health in their articles, Black/African American authors (nine or about 45 percent) were the most likely to frame mental health in a positive frame, authors that were defined as other (five or about eight percent) were most likely to frame mental health negatively, and Asian/Asian American authors (nine or about 39 percent) were most likely to frame mental health neutrally. The author's race also influenced how Biles was framed as the GOAT. Non-white/Hispanic authors (five or one percent) were most likely not to include GOAT in their articles, Asian/Asian American authors (one or about four percent) were most likely to frame GOAT positively, White/Caucasian authors (seven or about two percent) were most likely to frame GOAT negatively, and White/Caucasian authors (33 or about 10 percent) were also most likely to frame GOAT neutrally. However, White/Caucasian authors were more likely to frame GOAT neutrally than negatively. In regards to COVID, authors that were categorized as other (48 or about 73 percent) were most likely to not include COVID in their articles, Asian/Asian Americans (one or about four percent) were most likely to frame COVID positively, Non-white/Hispanic authors (two or about 40 percent) were most likely to frame COVID negatively. and Black/African American authors (two or about 10 percent) were most likely to frame COVID neutrally. Lastly in regards to the framing of race, Non-white/Hispanic authors (five or one percent) were most likely not to include race in their articles, Black/African Americans authors (five or about 25 percent) framed race positively, Black/African American authors (one or about five percent) were also most likely to frame race negatively, and White/Caucasian authors (six or about one percent)

were most likely to frame race neutrally. Even though Black/African American authors were most likely to frame race positively and negatively, they were more likely to frame race positively than negatively. Table one displays these results more in detail.

RQ3 asked if the author's gender influenced how Biles was framed. Because the independent variable (author's gender) was categorical and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was performed. There was significance between the author's gender and framing for the following categories: Larry, $X^2(2, N = 440) = 7.59, p = 0.02$; Owens, $X^2(4, N = 440) = 12.92, p = 0.01$; and Gender, $X^2(6, N = 440) = 8.77, p = 0.01$. Thus, the author's gender does influence how Biles was framed in regard to the categories listed above. When looking at the category of Larry, the authors defined as other (61 or about 92 percent) were most likely to not include Larry in their articles, men (zero), women (zero), and other (zero) equally framed Larry positively, women (38 or about 18 percent) were most likely to frame Larry negatively, and men (zero), women (zero), and other (zero) all evenly framed Larry neutrally. When looking at Owens, men (162 or about 99 percent) were most likely to not include Owens in their articles, women (12 or about five percent) were most likely to frame Owens positively, men (zero), women (zero), and other (zero) all evenly framed Owens negatively, and women (2 or about one percent) were most likely to frame Owens neutrally. Lastly, authors categorized as other (66 or one percent) were most likely to not include gender in their articles, women (59 or about 28 percent) were most likely to frame gender positively, women (four or about two percent) were most likely to frame gender negatively, and men (22 or about 13 percent) were most likely to frame gender neutrally. As women were the most likely to frame gender as positive and negative, they were more

likely to frame gender as positive rather than negative. Thus, an author's gender influences how he or she frames Larry Nassar, Jonathan Owens, and gender in regards to Simone Biles. Table two displays these results in more detail.

RQ4 asked if the topic of the article influenced how Biles was framed. Because the independent variable (topic) was categorical and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was performed. The following are the results for each topic of the articles: mental health, $X^2(2, N = 82) = 97.54, p < .001$; GOAT, $X^2(2, N = 67) = 22.06, p < .001$; twisties, $X^2(2, N = 62) = 28.29, p < .001$; COVID, $X^2(2, N = 140) = 130.56, p < .001$; Owens, $X^2(1, N = 15) = 8.07, p = .005$; gender, $X^2(2, N = 145) = 71.35, p < .001$; and Race, $X^2(2, N = 26) = 5.15, p = .08$. Thus, the topics of mental health, GOAT, twisties, COVID, Owens, and gender all had significance which shows that these topics did influence how Biles was framed. However, the topic of, Larry, was consistent as it had a total of 59 articles which were all negative. In regards to the topics that had significance between them and framing, mental health (152 or about 49 percent) was most likely to be framed neutrally, COVID (108 or about 43 percent) was most likely to be framed negatively, and gender (89 or about 45 percent) was most likely to be framed positively. However, in regards to each individual topic of an article, mental health (152 or about 62 percent) was most likely to be framed neutrally, GOAT (40 or about 60 percent) was most likely to be framed neutrally, twisties (32 or about 51 percent) were most likely to be framed negatively, COVID (108 or about 77 percent) was most likely to be framed negatively, Owens (13 or about 87 percent) was most likely to be framed positively, and gender (89 or about 61 percent) was most likely to be framed positively. Table three displays all of these results in more detail.

RQ5 asked if the type of article influenced how Biles was framed. Since the independent variable (type of article) was categorical and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was performed. There was significance between the type of article and how it was framed for the following categories: mental health, $X^2 (3, N = 440) = 36.30, p < .001$ and GOAT, $X^2 (3, N = 440) = 12.36, p = .01$. Thus, the type of article does influence how Biles is framed in regards to mental health and being the GOAT. In regards to mental health, news articles (181 or about 46 percent) were most likely not to include mental health, column articles (18 or about 38 percent) were most likely to frame mental health positively, column articles (eight or about 17 percent) were also most likely to frame mental health negatively, and news articles (144 or about 37 percent) were most like to frame mental health neutrally. As column articles were most likely to frame mental health as positive and negative, column articles were more likely to frame mental health as positive rather than negative. When looking at GOAT, news articles (341 or about 87 percent) were most likely to not include GOAT in the article, column articles (three or about six percent) were most likely to frame GOAT positively, column articles (three or about six percent) were also most likely to frame GOAT negatively, and news articles (31 or about seven percent) were most likely to frame GOAT neutrally. Table four displays these results in more detail.

RQ6 asked if articles with images framed Biles differently than articles without images. Because the independent variable (images) was categorical and the dependent variable (frame) was categorical, a chi-square test was used. There was significance between an article containing an image or not and how the article was framed for the following categories: mental health, $X^2 (3, N = 440) = 17.54, p < .001$; twisties, $X^2 (3, N =$

440) = 9.78, $p = .02$; and Owens, $X^2(2, N = 440) = 2.76, p = .001$. Thus, for articles about mental health, twisties, or Owens, these articles with images framed Biles differently than those articles without images. In regards to mental health, articles with images (106 or about 45 percent) were more likely to not include mental health in the article, articles with images (22 or about nine percent) were more likely to frame mental health positively, articles without images (16 or about eight percent) were more likely to frame mental health negatively, and articles with images (97 or about 40 percent) were more likely to frame mental health neutrally. When looking at twisties, articles with images (205 or about 86 percent) were more likely to not include twisties, articles with images (one or about 0.004 percent) were more likely to frame twisties as positive, articles without images (21 or about 10 percent) were more likely to frame twisties as negative, and articles with images (21 or about nine percent) were more likely to frame twisties as neutral. Lastly, in regards to Owens, articles without images (202 or one percent) were more likely to not include Owens, articles with images (13 or about five percent) were more likely to frame Owens positively, articles with images (zero) and articles without images (zero) equally framed Owens as negative, and articles with images (two or about 0.01 percent) were more likely to frame Owens as neutral. Table five displays these results in more detail.

CHAPTER VI – DISCUSSION

Simone Biles, known as the GOAT of gymnastics, was not only breaking barriers as a Black, female athlete in a historically White sport, but she was bringing awareness to mental health on a worldwide platform during the 2020 Olympic Games (Wetzel & Baez, 2020). Her decision to withdraw from the team final without having a physical injury would shock audiences, fans, and supporters around the world; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the media in Tokyo would be the only ones to convey Biles' message to the rest of the world since spectators were not allowed at the events (What Simone's Step Back Teaches Us, 2021). Because of the huge media reach during the Olympic Games, it is important to understand how Biles was framed during this time especially because of her gender, race, and the subject matter for which she was taking a stand for (Holthus et al., 2020). Thus, the current study analyzed the top ten most circulated newspapers in the United States to uncover how the media framed Biles as a Black, female athlete taking a stand for mental health before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games.

In order to better understand how Biles was framed during the 2020 Olympic Games, it is important that one understands Erving Goffman's (1974) Framing Theory and understand that how Biles was framed during the Olympic Games influenced how the audience processed her actions and her message (Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2002; Hardin et al., 2004; Mishra, 2014). By understanding how the race and gender of newspaper article authors influenced how the author framed Biles will allow readers to better understand how Biles was framed and why Biles was framed the way she was. It is important to remember that authors describe events to people who

were not present at the live event and in-turn frame the story from their personal understanding (Funderburk, 2019). Thus, according to Goffman's (1974) Framing Theory, how the newspaper authors framed Biles would influence how the rest of the world perceived Biles' actions and decisions during the 2020 Olympic Games.

To begin, it is important to note that of all the newspaper articles analyzed in this study, more than half were written by women. Additionally, the greatest number of articles were written by White/Caucasian authors. Thus, the majority of the articles in this study were written by White women which is interesting as women's participation in the Olympic Games has increased over the years; however, women have still not achieved their Olympic potential (Toohey, 2007). It is also important to note that many Black individuals do not seek help for issues such as mental health as they have been historically discriminated against (Gee et al., 2006); thus, the majority of the authors that wrote about Biles were White, other, or Asian/Asian American. In turn, these findings are interesting as sports journalism has historically been composed of a male enterprise, and White men's perspectives were the primary and often only voice in sports reporting (Bryant & Holt, 2006; Abisaid & Li, 2020). In a study by the Women's Media Center in 2017, they found, that at the time, only 11.4 percent of sports stories' bylines were written by women (Women's Media Center, 2017), and Franks and O'Neill (2016) found that at the 2012 Summer Olympic Games, only three percent of articles that were published on national sports pages were written by female journalists. Thus, it is interesting that even though there are fewer female sports journalists, females made up the majority of the authors talking and writing about Biles and mental health.

In regards to research question one, the data in this study showed that the framing of mental health did not change after Biles revealed her mental health issue on July 27th. However, of all of the articles that mentioned mental health, only five of those articles mentioned mental health before July 27th. Thus, as the media portrays athletes as invincible human beings (Gulliver et al., 2010), there was barely any mention of mental health before July 27th as Biles was the GOAT of gymnastics and the center of attention for Team USA (Wetzed & Baez, 2020). Potentially the most dramatic finding in this study is that Biles' revelation brought mental health to the forefront of sports reporting during the Olympics; it went from almost not being discussed at all to being one of the most relevant topics. Although there was no difference in the framing of mental health, the way it was written about did indeed change. Mental health cannot be framed differently if it is never mentioned or talked about which aligns with why 57 percent of individuals who deal with a mental health issue never seek help: it remains a taboo topic (National Institute of Mental Health; NIMH, 2017). Coverage like that of Simone Biles' mental health revelation can help shine a spotlight on mental health issues and could potentially make people more willing to discuss it.

When looking at how an author's race influenced how Biles was framed, it is important to note that an author's race did influence how Biles was framed in regard to the topics of mental health, GOAT, COVID, and race. Surprisingly though, Black/African American authors were most likely to frame mental health in regards to Biles in a positive frame even though Arday (2018) found that cultural differences in the Black community impact the way mental health is perceived, accepted, and acknowledged. It is also fascinating to note that even though the majority of the articles were written by

White individuals, White authors and authors classified as other were the most likely to not include mental health in their articles. In regards to an author's race and COVID, Asian/Asian Americans were the most likely to frame COVID as positive which is interesting as the 2020 Olympic Games were held in Tokyo, an Asian country. Lastly, as scholars have found that "race in the United States is the most intractable issue" (Brummett & Ishak, 2013, p. 20), in this study Hispanic authors were the most likely to not include race or to frame race negatively in their articles while Black authors were most likely to frame race as positive. This may be because Black individuals have historically faced discrimination (Gee et al., 2006), and were happy to see a Black American athlete succeeding and being the most recognizable in her sport.

In examining how an author's gender influenced how Biles was framed, the study showed that an author's gender does influence the framing of Larry Nassar, the former doctor of the United States' women's national gymnastics team who was recently convicted for rape; Owens, Biles' boyfriend: and gender in regards to their gender. When looking at Nassar, it is important to note that not a single author framed him in a positive light while women were the most likely to frame him negatively. Thus, Jennifer Hargreave's (1994) phases of women's participation in the modern Olympic Games still hold true today as women still battle with masculine hegemony on and off the playing field. However, when looking at Owens, Biles' boyfriend at the time, the results of the study show that none of the authors framed him negatively, but women were more likely to frame him neutrally. With this in mind, female authors seem to be more cautious when it comes to writing about Owens, and this is most likely due to how Larry Nassar treated

her as a female athlete. Female authors are also more likely to take Biles seriously as an athlete, and in turn, report on her performance rather than her personal life.

One of the study's most valuable findings is how the topic of an article influenced how it was framed. The topics of mental health, GOAT, twisties, COVID, Owens, and gender all showed significance in how Biles was framed. With that in mind, the majority of the articles that talked about mental health framed mental health neutrally. This is surprising as mental health is often stigmatized which means that it is discrediting or blemishing of one's identity (Goffman, 1963); however, mental health was largely framed neutrally in this study. Which raises the question as to if mental health is starting to become more normalized in our society, and if Biles' actions allowed for the mental health conversation to open up?

When looking at if the type of article influenced how the article was framed, the study's results align to how Funderburk (2019) defined feature, news, and column articles. Mental health and GOAT were the two categories where there was significance between the type of article and framing of the article, and for both of these categories, column articles were more likely to be framed positively or negatively while news articles were more likely to not include or be neutral towards a topic. It is surprising that of all of the articles in the study, none of the articles were feature articles; however, this shows just how focused the authors were about Biles in the moment rather than her life in general.

The study also found that articles about mental health, twisties, and Owens framed Biles differently based in if the article included or did not include an image. With mental health being an "invisible" injury and twisties being an unknown term to so many,

images helped the reader better understand and visualize what was taking place. For mental health and twisties, articles that did not include an image framed these topics more negatively which highlights Goffman's (1974) framing theory as he believed that the way an image is presented will influence how the author processes its message.

Simone Biles was framed differently before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games, and the gender and race of the authors largely influenced how she was framed. Also, certain topics were discussed more positively or negatively depending on the author's race and gender, the type of article, and if the article contained an image or not. Overall, the majority of the results in this study found that articles about Biles during this specific time period were written as news articles by White females in which they were neutral or did not include mental health in the article while the majority of the articles included an image.

CHAPTER VII – LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As this study successfully revealed how Simone Biles was framed before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games, this study also had a few limitations. To begin, the study only examined one athlete, Simone Biles, so understanding how her race and gender affected how she was framed was not possible. However, by examining the authors' race and gender, we were able to see how their race and gender influenced how they framed her. Another limitation was that the researcher and coder had to determine an author's race and gender based on information gathered outside of the content of the article by doing a Google search on each author and determining their gender and race based on their official biography on the newspaper platform's official website. However, these outside platforms never specifically addressed an author's race and gender. Thus, we had to ultimately determine their race and gender based off of the author's bio and picture on their newspaper's official platform. Lastly, this study was elaborate as the authors not only identified topics that were discussed in the articles but how these topics were framed. Thus, reaching intercoder reliability was challenging as a coder's past effected how they viewed a specific situation in some circumstances; however, after intercoder reliability was reached, the main coder coded the remainder of the articles to keep the results more consistent.

Conclusions

In conclusion, Simone Biles was framed differently before, during, and after the 2020 Olympic Games, and an author's gender and race ultimately influenced how she was framed in regards to certain topics. An author's race influenced how Biles was framed in regards to mental health, GOAT, COVID, and race; an author's gender

influenced how Biles was framed in regards to Larry, Owens, and gender; the topic of an article influenced how it was framed in regards to mental health, GOAT, twisties, COVID, Owens, and gender; the type of article influenced how the topics of mental health and GOAT were framed; and if an article contained an image or not influenced how mental health, twisties, and Owens were framed. However, one of the most surprising findings that was found was that mental health was not framed differently before and after Biles revealed her mental health struggle, but this study shows that mental health was barely mentioned before Biles revealed her mental health struggle which highlights the stigma surrounding mental health which causes people to not want to talk about it. Thus, stigma not only affects people's willingness to seek help, but minority athletes may be even less likely to seek help due to the added stigma of their race as it is something that they cannot change. By Biles opening up about her mental health, we hope it will begin to be more openly talked about not only amongst athletes but amongst people all around the world. Even though mental health was barely talked about before Biles revealed her mental health struggle at the 2020 Olympic Games, it does not mean that we have to go back to not talking about it. Just like athletes before her such as Colin Kaepernick, Naomi Osaka, and LeBron James, Biles was standing up for what she believed in, and she was especially highlighting her courage as a Black, female athlete. Biles was having to balance being a Black, female athlete in a predominately White sport while also having to balance her mental health struggle which the media would ultimately narrate to the rest of the world.

APPENDIX A – Coding Sheet

Newspaper

1. The Wall Street Journal
2. The New York Times
3. USA Today
4. Washington Post
5. Los Angeles Times
6. Tampa Bay Times
7. New York Post
8. Chicago Tribune
9. Star Tribune
10. Newsday

Date of Publication

(Enter as mm/dd/yy.)

Gender of the Author

1. Male
2. Female
3. Other

Race of the Author

1. White or Caucasian
2. Black or African American
3. Asian or Asian American
4. Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

5. Alaskan or Native American
6. Non-white Hispanic
7. Other

Type of Article

1. Feature Article
2. News Article
3. Column

Contained Picture or Not

1. Yes, contained a picture
2. No, did not contain a picture, just text

Content, Topic, and Tone of the Article

1. Mental Health (Mental Health, in general, /Not referencing the “twisties”)

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

2. GOAT (Greatest Of All Time)

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

3. The “Twisties” (Specifically highlights the “twisties”)

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

4. Covid-19

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

5. Larry Nassar (Sex Scandal)

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

6. Jonathan Owens (Dating)

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

7. Gender

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

8. Race

1. NOT included in the article

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

9. Other (Not one of the above eight topics. This may include the children's book that was written about her, her upcoming tour, "Gold Over America" presented by Athleta. Or maybe an article about her family.)

1. The article did NOT contain anything else (One will be selected if nothing else was included in the article besides any of the eight topics above.)

2. Positive

3. Negative

4. Neutral

APPENDIX B –Tables

Table A1. *Table 1*

Author's Race and Framing

Frame	Race					Total
	White/ Caucasian	Black/African American	Asian/ Asian American	Non- white Hispanic	Other	
*Mental Health						
Not Included	142	7	13	3	29	194
Positive	45	9	1	0	10	65
Negative	24	0	0	0	5	29
Neutral	115	4	9	2	22	152
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
*GOAT						
Not Included	276	12	22	5	58	373
Positive	10	4	1	0	2	17
Negative	7	2	0	0	1	10
Neutral	33	2	0	0	5	40
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
Twisties						
Not Included	274	19	21	5	59	378
Positive	1	0	0	0	0	1
Negative	28	0	1	0	3	32
Neutral	23	1	1	0	4	29
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
*COVID						
Not Included	224	13	12	3	48	300
Positive	0	0	1	0	0	1
Negative	80	5	9	2	12	108
Neutral	22	2	1	0	6	31
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
Larry						
Not Included	279	15	22	4	61	381
Positive	0	0	0	0	0	0
Negative	47	5	1	1	5	59
Neutral	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440

Owens						
Not Included	312	19	23	5	66	425
Positive	12	1	0	0	0	13
Negative	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neutral	2	0	0	0	0	2
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
Gender						
Not Included	218	11	15	2	49	295
Positive	65	9	4	2	9	89
Negative	6	0	0	0	0	6
Neutral	37	0	4	1	8	50
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440
*Race						
Not Included	308	14	22	5	65	414
Positive	9	5	0	0	0	14
Negative	3	1	1	0	0	5
Neutral	6	0	0	0	1	7
Total	326	20	23	5	66	440

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level.

Table A2. Table 2

Author's Gender and Framing

Frame	Gender			Total
	Men	Women	Other	
Mental Health				
Not Included	74	91	29	194
Positive	21	34	10	65
Negative	11	13	5	29
Neutral	57	73	22	152
Total	163	211	66	440
GOAT				
Not Included	141	174	58	373
Positive	4	11	2	17
Negative	4	5	1	10
Neutral	14	21	5	40
Total	163	211	66	440
Twisties				
Not Included	142	177	59	378
Positive	1	0	0	1

Negative	8	21	3	32
Neutral	12	13	4	29
Total	163	211	66	440
COVID				
Not Included	105	147	48	300
Positive	0	1	0	1
Negative	50	46	3	108
Neutral	8	17	4	31
Total	163	211	66	440
*Larry				
Not Included	147	173	61	381
Positive	0	0	0	0
Negative	16	38	5	59
Neutral	0	0	0	0
Total	163	211	66	440
*Owens				
Not Included	162	197	66	425
Positive	1	12	0	13
Negative	0	0	0	0
Neutral	0	2	0	2
Total	163	211	66	440
*Gender				
Not Included	118	128	66	425
Positive	21	59	0	13
Negative	2	4	0	0
Neutral	22	20	0	2
Total	163	211	66	440
Race				
Not Included	153	196	65	414
Positive	3	11	0	14
Negative	3	2	0	5
Neutral	4	2	1	7
Total	163	211	66	440

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level.

Table A3. *Table 3*

Topic of Article and Framing

Topic	Frame			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral	
*Mental Health	65	29	152	246
*GOAT	17	10	40	67
*Twisties	1	32	29	62
*COVID	1	108	31	140
Larry	0	59	0	59
*Owens	13	0	2	15
*Gender	89	6	50	145
Race	14	5	7	26

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level.

Table A4. *Table 4*

Type of Article and Framing

Framing	Type of Article			Total
	Feature Articles	New Articles	Column Articles	
*Mental Health				
Not Included	0	181	13	194
Positive	0	47	188	65
Negative	0	21	8	29
Neutral	0	144	8	152
Total	0	393	47	440
*GOAT				
Not Included	0	341	32	373
Positive	0	14	3	17
Negative	0	7	3	10
Neutral	0	31	9	40
Total	0	393	47	440
Twisties				
Not Included	0	337	41	378
Positive	0	1	0	1
Negative	0	29	3	32
Neutral	0	26	3	29
Total	0	393	47	440
COVID				
Not Included	0	264	36	300

Positive	0	1	0	1
Negative	0	102	6	108
Neutral	0	26	5	31
Total	0	393	47	440
Larry				
Not Included	0	343	38	381
Positive	0	0	0	0
Negative	0	50	9	59
Neutral	0	0	0	0
Total	0	393	47	440
Owens				
Not Included	0	378	47	425
Positive	0	13	0	13
Negative	0	0	0	0
Neutral	0	2	0	2
Total	0	393	47	440
Gender				
Not Included	0	256	39	295
Positive	0	82	7	89
Negative	0	6	0	6
Neutral	0	49	1	50
Total	0	393	47	440
Race				
Not Included	0	372	42	414
Positive	0	12	2	14
Negative	0	4	1	5
Neutral	0	5	2	7
Total	0	393	47	440

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level.

Table A5. Table 5

Image and Framing

Framing	Image or No Image		Total
	Images	No Image	
*Mental Health			
Not Included	106	88	194
Positive	22	43	65
Negative	13	16	29
Neutral	97	55	152
Total	238	202	440
GOAT			

Not Included	203	170	373
Positive	7	10	17
Negative	6	4	10
Neutral	22	18	40
Total	238	202	440
*Twisties			
Not Included	205	173	378
Positive	1	0	1
Negative	11	21	32
Neutral	21	8	29
Total	238	202	440
COVID			
Not Included	161	139	300
Positive	1	0	1
Negative	65	43	108
Neutral	11	20	31
Total	238	202	440
Larry			
Not Included	212	169	381
Positive	0	0	0
Negative	26	33	59
Neutral	0	0	0
Total	238	169	440
*Owens			
Not Included	223	202	425
Positive	13	0	13
Negative	0	0	0
Neutral	2	0	2
Total	238	202	440
Gender			
Not Included	157	138	295
Positive	45	44	89
Negative	3	3	6
Neutral	33	17	50
Total	238	202	440
Race			
Not Included	229	185	414
Positive	4	10	14
Negative	1	4	5
Neutral	4	3	7
Total	238	202	440

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ level.

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