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Media, Sports, and Society

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Abstract
This chapter interrogates a research journey and the trajectory of study on media, sports, and society. Beginning with reflection on both stimulants to and motivations for this journey, the author makes a case for the necessity of interdisciplinarity in the socio-cultural study of mediated sport. Focusing on key theories, methods, and findings interwoven in his research agenda, the author summarizes key considerations in understanding (1) mediasport fan experiences, (2) dirt theory, commodification, and mega-events, (3) mediasport fan narratives, and (4) the mediasport interpellation. Moving to consideration of the larger state of play in media, sport, and society inquiry, the author considers the development of the field by characterizing the evolving agenda through five stages. Tensions and opportunities are revealed in considering the complementary and offset priorities of three distinct scholarly dispositions to studying the communication of sport and sitting debates over studying new media impacts.

Keywords: mediated sports, sport journalism, television sports, sport advertising, mega-events, gender stereotyping

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Media, Sports, and Society

In 1989, my first book-length work on sport, entitled *Media, Sports, and Society* (Wenner, 1989a) was published. As noted in that volume's opening chapter (Wenner, 1989b), and reinforced in thoughtful assessments of the development of the "mediasport" nexus (c.f., Rowe, 2013, 2014; Whannel, 2000, Wenner, 2015b), the topic of sport and its relation to media, while early on recognized as important to the sociology of sport's sorting of the cultural impacts of sport, struggled to gain traction and legitimacy in a mass communication research that was itself looking to build legitimacy in the 1960s and 70s by focusing on seemingly more fundamental questions about how media effects were manifest. Here "serious questions" such as those about media's political influence, socialization effects on children, and role in advancing violent behaviors took precedence. Focus on mediated sport, and other popular forms of media such as contemporary music and television, was nascent. Simply put, "the popular" in media studies was not yet popular.

Some thirty years later, that the title of this chapter mirrors that of a book that announced my intentions of making a case for the importance of studying media in sport and sport in media is no coincidence. While that book coalesced some early dabbling on the topic by myself and others in media studies, this chapter comes at time nearing the close of my academic career when the study of media and sport has both become the dominant area of inquiry in the sociology of sport (Messner & Musto, 2014) and the study of sport has advanced to prominence in both media and communication studies (Wenner, 2015a). To echo an, in hindsight ironic, marketing tagline used by Virginia Slims cigarettes to sponsor the women's professional tennis tour, we've come a long way baby.

On Motivations and the Journey

That "long way baby," both for me and the study of media and sport, has involved a long, strange trip. Perhaps one could have seen my focus on media and sport coming. My father was an avid fan of all balls moving on a television screen. I was a pretty good but not elite-level athlete. I'd early on experienced a cultural clash with the sport system, booted from my high school tennis team (even though their best player) and tossed from the regional junior tennis championships for the "crime" of my hair being too long. This "wake-up call" stimulated my seeing the connection between sport, culture, and power. Growing up in North Hollywood, I switched my focus to a local site of power, media. I aimed for a media career until some "dream factory" experiences, along with education about the powers of media, moved me towards joining the "loyal opposition."

My graduate training at Iowa in the mid-1970s was in mass communication research. Largely it was a classic communication effects education anchored in empirical social science, with a wee bit of rhetorical criticism thrown in for good measure. Mass communication research hadn't yet evolved into media studies and the "critical turn" stimulated by British cultural studies was little seen on US shores. My early research explored audience activity in contradistinction to the then dominant media effects model (c.f., Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985). It focused not on sport, but on audience orientations to political communication and television news. If you will, more "serious stuff." After moving to (and importantly being tenured at) a smaller less research-intensive university where mounting surveys was challenging, I began my "critical turn" in the 1980s. With that came a focus on television criticism (c.f., Vande Berg & Wenner, 1991) that bridged to examining televised sport. Not completely abandoning survey research, a series of studies explored fandom as situated in the uses and gratifications of television sports (c.f., Wenner & Gantz, 1998). Still, as cultural studies penetrated media research, my "critical turn" evolved in tandem with making a case for studying mediated sport.

For me, it didn't seem that this should be a tough case to make. After all, the highest-rated television programs increasingly featured mega-sports events such as the World Cup, Super Bowl, and Olympics. This stimulated the realization that there could be no big-time sport without big-time media. It seemed unavoidable not to recognize the bottom line truism of Gerbner's cultivation theory (c.f., Morgan, 2002), that those people who tell most of the stories most of the time control a culture, was key as well in understanding sporting cultures. Indeed, it had become obvious, troubling some sports studies scholars, that mediated sport and its narrative tendencies were increasingly shaping social understandings of sport

and physical activity at less-elite everyday levels. To my mind, these realities made a case for putting the study of media and sport front and center in both media and sport studies.

Yet, in the mid-1980s, as I experienced it, it was the sociology of sport community, as evidenced by welcoming in scholarly societies such as the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, that saw merit in media and sport inquiry. Indeed, apart from the early 1990s formation of a media and sport section in the International Association for Media and Communication Research, resistance was the norm in communication and media studies (c.f., Wenner, 2015b). It took well into the new millennium for other major scholarly societies in communication and media studies to see their way to formalize a place at the table for media and sport research.

Encountering this state of affairs in the mid-1980s, my journey to advance the study of media, sports, and society was fueled by twin concerns. First, there was need to change the reality that there was little "there there" for sport in media and communication studies. Second, there was need to improve upon sociology of sport's often tenuous understandings of communication processes and media systems.

Over the last 30 to 40 years, much obviously has changed and the community of scholars has grown, and to some extent, merged. The necessity of interdisciplinarity throughout the social sciences and humanities, particularly germane to the synergistic relationship between media and sport and understanding its articulations in socio-cultural contexts, made it unavoidable that the area of inquiry would become a "blurred genre" (Geertz, 1973) requiring understandings of merged ecosystems. My coining of the neologism "mediasport" (Wenner, 1998b) symbolized how their inexorably fused political, economic, and cultural dynamics had yielded powers greater than the sum of their parts. This is not so surprising when considering that the mediasport amalgam is comparatively unique by virtue of its merger of two of Althusser's (2001) ideological state apparatuses. A further concern of this merger that came to motivate my inquiry, although it took me some time to realize it, was that its ideological force was effectively masked in and by the twin pleasures of sport and media consumption, both of which seemed, on the face of it, benign and fun.

On Theories, Methods, and Findings Near and Dear

Understanding those "pleasures" drove much of my early inquiry into seeking to understand how sport fandom was experienced through mediated channels. Although of a quite different flavor, the focus on sporting "pleasures" is also featured in my more recent work. Here, my aim has been to interrogate how media narrativization strategically characterizes and naturalizes "imagined" fandom and pleasures of sport as tools in support of advancing commodity culture. Below, the two seemingly oppositional ways I've considered mediated fandom earlier and later in my career are interwoven amidst the theoretical and methodological influences—the mashup of dirt theory, reader-oriented criticism, and narrative ethics that evolved into the mediasport interpellation—that characterize my approach to media, sports and society.

Mediasport Fan Experiences

My early work to understand how fans experienced mediated sport was anchored in explorative survey research by Gantz (1981), drawing on uses and gratification theory to examine motives for and behaviors associated with television sports viewing, and a line of experimental inquiry by the Bryant-Zillmann research group (c.f., Raney, 2006) using disposition theory to explore how team identification, contest outcome, eustress (including that from violence) and other matters triggered enjoyment of televised sports. Having more affinity with the sociological bent of the active audience/uses and gratifications tradition, I teamed up with Gantz in the 1980s and 90s for a line of studies (summarized in Wenner & Gantz, 1998) that served as a baseline for understanding audience engagement with television sport.

That our work was seated in larger survey samples than typical, reached beyond media studies to scholars in the sociology of sport, and debunked some culturally entrenched received wisdom about sports viewing contributed to its impact. In hindsight, our exploration of foundational dynamics set some baseline understandings. A core contribution of our work was in identifying a stable set of dimensions (fanship, learning, release, companionship, time filler) that guided motives for watching television sports

and linking these to the affective feelings and behaviors prior to, during, and after viewing. Particularly interested in gendered differences in sports viewing and how those interacted with fanship levels, we documented both the predictable ways men more systematically prepared for and were affected more long term by viewing sports but found that avid women fans, while less common, experienced televised sport in much the same way as their male counterparts. Our work put to rest the entrenched myth of the football widow with our findings showing that, in marriage and long-standing relationships, television sports viewing was positively seen as a shared activity, that relational conflicts over the amount of viewing were rare, with anger and resentment virtually absent as offsets in interest in sports were easily accommodated in relationships.

Although our line of inquiry was well-received, I had become uneasy with the increasing challenges (beginning with ubiquitous answering machines) of doing telephone surveys, the inherent unreliability of self-reflexive audience reports, and more importantly the limitations on critical conjecture about findings that were imposed by the conventions (and editors) of empirical social science. And while Gantz continued, fruitfully to this day, using surveys and experiments to hone understandings and contextualize mediated sport fanship, my "critical turn," begun in the mid-1980s, was functionally complete a decade later.

Dirt Theory, Commodification, and Mega-Events

My first critical foray meshed my early work on political communication with sketchy foundations in rhetorical theory to pose a *de facto* prequel to Real's (1975) seminal cultural critique of the Super Bowl as mythic spectacle. Here (Wenner, 1989b), fantasy theme analysis illustrated how idealized pregame show narratives, immersed in invocations of the American Dream and nationalism, were used to fashion naturalized "superhype" to frame the cultural meanings and importance of the Super Bowl championship game. That my first critical work on mediated sport focused on mega-events and their promotion through strategic communication reliant on making idealized connections between sport and other spheres of life was prescient.

I came to be concerned about how narrative "dirtiness" inherent in "media logics" (Altheide & Snow, 1979) conceptualized and shaped "media events" (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Further, such dynamics seemed particularly apropos to the application of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) as a lens to view to sport (Crawford, 2004) and its increasingly ubiquitous commodification (Horne, 2006), something most vividly on display in mediating sporting mega-events (c.f., Gruneau & Horne, 2016; Wenner & Billings, 2017) reliant on the production of spectacle (Debord, 1967/2004). While it took some time to mesh these pieces into a coherent theoretical and methodological approach, articulated as a dirt theory of narrative ethics attuned to the uniquely powerful cultural logics stemming from sport (c.f., Wenner, 2007, 2009b), understanding the communicative powers of dirt and how to command it in critical analysis was central.

Dirt theory, anchored in Douglas' seminal notion of dirt as "matter out of place" (1966, p. 35), focused on how "sport logics" often functioned as contagion to wield influence in other spheres of culture. A robust communicative concept, "dirt" is implicit in Hall's (1980) processes of "articulation," McCracken's (1990) postulations about "meaning transfer" and "displacement," and Baudrillard's (1993) conception of how original referents may disappear in "hyperreality." Beyond finding and characterizing "sports dirt" in commodity narratives, dirt theory applied the basic tenets of reader-oriented criticism to assess its negotiation in reading processes. By considering both what texts implied about characterized readers and the active ways readers negotiate, interpret, and resist sport-infused media texts, the approach transcended a received view that "preferred meanings" were all powerful (c.f., Iser, 1978; Machor & Goldstein, 2001). As a final step, dirt theory called upon the tactics of ethical criticism to assess the probity of the interactions between sports dirt, its reading, and characterization of readers (c.f., Gregory, 1998; Wenner, 2017). In applying this last lens, a critical assessment of the "dirtiness" of sport-infused commodity narratives could be made.

All of this line of inquiry was seated in a host of theorizing about consumer culture. My venture into sport's dirty environs was most influenced by the seminal work of Bauman (2007), who posed the

inescapability of a "market-mediated mode of life" dominated by an obligatory "consumer sociality," and Debord's (1967/2004) conclusion that commodity logics anchor today's lived experience. Using dirt theory, while anchored in consumer culture theory's disposition to read commodified popular culture texts as "lifestyle and identity instructions that convey unadulterated marketplace ideologies" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868), my work explored sport contagion processes inherent in beer commercials, idealized castings of interpretive communities in World Series reportage, the tendencies for sport star infused commercials to strategize received nationalism during Olympics coverage, how "postmodern" sports bars relied not only on televised sports but on mediated sports history for ambience and "authenticity," how Janet Jackson's notorious breast-bearing at a Super Bowl halftime show was linked to a television network's deep promotional strategies, and how heroic white quarterbacks were exclusively employed in commercial narratives to naturalize the advertising-to-event connection in Super Bowl broadcasts (Wenner, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1998a, 2004, 2008b, 2014a, 2020).

As these dirt theory studies illustrated the need and ways to interrogate how commodified media narratives activate "sports dirt" to drive meaning and wield power over diverse cultural understandings (about far more than sport), it seemed obvious that it worked as well to shape idealized understandings about the sports fan and fanship. Thus, my work shifted to examining commodity narratives of the media-made fan.

Mediasport Fan Narratives

Here a half-dozen studies using dirt theory to interrogate television advertising's invocation of sport revealed that consistent characterizations of sport's core "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) were bounded by narrative drawings of gender, fan, and consumer identities. The studies deconstructed not only the narrative embeddedness of how the broad contours of commodified fanship were drawn, but how more particularized imaginings painting male versus female commodified fanship distinctively hail and contain readers to service the sell of advertisers through sport.

At the meta-level, commodified fanship has been drawn in advertising narratives on the shoulders of received drawings of gender and gender relations. "Playing Dirty" (Wenner, 2008a) considers the terms of addressing fans in five sport-centered product categories (embracing reflecting, accessing, wearing, drinking, and paying relative to sport). Here the "hailed" (Althusser, 2001) consumer is the presumptively "ex-nominated" (Barthes, 1973) archetypal male fan in a sports fan-centered consumptive world where women are "symbolically annihilated" (Sabo & Jansen, 1992) through conspicuous absence. In "Gendered Sports Dirt" (Wenner, 2010), how men and women are "imagined" to relate can be seen in the narrative ethics of sport-infused beer commercials. Hailing of both sexes remains reliant on the "myth of difference" where "women are not seen as the fellows of men" (Pronger, 1990, p. 178), naturalizing "what men want" and "how women are" as oppositional, with the latter cast as problematic.

When one looks at the particularized drawings of commodified male fanship invoking sport logics to "seal the sell" in advertising narratives, the result is both flattering and not. In "Brewing Consumption" (Wenner, 2009a), desirable male bonding and camaraderie is featured across sundry sport-infused beer commercials in valorized settings free from the "civilizing" constraints of women. Dirty logics nostalgically hail "real men" men as imagined in sports fanship, a state where male bonding through sport is seen as special, where "vestigial hypermasculinity" (Wenner, 1998a) can be celebrated, and "boys can be boys." Still, such bonding is revealed as thin. Bonding amidst sports dirt features inherent distrust with competition, disingenuousness, and moral disengagement pervading mens' relationships (including those with the women they distrust), and routine mocking of homosexuality reveals underlying insecurities about being "real men." In "Mocking the Fan" (Wenner, 2011), activations of sports dirt across advertising for diverse products reveals cracks in "vestigial hypermasculinity" by showcasing an emergent "crisis of masculinity" with misandrist (Nathanson & Young, 2001) castings of the male sport fan as bumbler, slacker, and "himbo' (Patterson, 1996). Here, humorous "with a bite" archetypal constructions of the commodified male sports fan as nut case, loser, juvenile, relationally deficient, and emasculated reveal perceived marketing wisdom in employing an oxymoronic tactic to mock those being sold to.

In companion to these dynamics painting the male sports fan in advertising, the infrequently told "imagined" story of commodified female fanship is commensurately dirty. In "Reading the Commodified Female Fan" (Wenner, 2012b), television commercial narratives rely on masculine reading positions and the male gaze. The female fan (always for men's not women's sports) is cast as a stranger in a strange land where sport offers little refuge or safe bonding. Hailing the male reader, women are drawn as "babes," problematic in romance, unappreciative of men, and unhinged. Token castings of female fanship undermine its authenticity, with sports-sphere shopping characterized as primary motivators, and even authentic knowledgeable female fans castigated for inadequate knowledge. "From Football Widow to Fan" (Wenner, 2012a) looks beyond corporate storytelling inherent in television commercials to user-generated videos for signs of more egalitarian portraits of female sports fans. Yet, here too the masculine reading position is inescapable. Dominant are narrative castings of the female nonfan, "wronged women" who hate sports or "wise football widows" who move beyond victimhood to spite their sport-addicted male partners. Sparser narratives cast inchoate female fans as unknowledgeable accessories, tagging along with men, or apprentices, novitiates with much to learn. The few portraits that frame invested female fans as authentic, "walking the talk" of the male standard, frequently advance innuendoes casting this as deviant, with recurrent insinuation that female obsessions with sport are anchored in sexualized fantasies about male athletes.

The Mediasport Interpellation

Reflection on the dynamic contours of how promotional media narratives consistently invoke our "imagined" relationship to sport through strategic drawings of our gender, fan, and consumer identities coalesced in the development of my dirt theory of narrative ethics into the more meta-level theoretical postulation of the mediasport interpellation (c.f., Wenner, 2013b). Study after study confirms that, in the commodified space of contemporary media, "sports dirt," that is culturally embedded articulations and activations of the significance of sport and the meanings associated with engagement, had come to be stably defined and contained by a dominant and interlocked "holy trinity" of gender, fan, and consumer identities. Their narrative painting undergirds the ideological work of mediasport and is foundational to its power.

Mediasport's ideology, following Althusser (2001, pp. 109, 115), "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" and "hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects." For Althusser, the consent in our response to the terms and conditions how hailing addresses us is always ideological, having much in common with Lacan's (1977) notion of the "mirror stage" and Gramsci's (1971) explication of how hegemonic dynamics influence understandings of one's own identity. In mediasport's case, the interweaving of foundational hailed identities produces power greater than the sum of their parts.

That gender remains the great divide of sport is both obvious and given less credence than deserved. Its "sexual geography" enforces segregation with men and women infrequently on the same team or competing against each other (matters accommodatable in intersectional dynamics of race and ethnicity). Address in mediasport's narrative spaces routinely "others" women in relation to sport, with much evidence of symbolic annihilation, trivialization, infantilization, and ambivalence as norms. Even as elasticity in new media has enabled sporting women "rooms of their own," much takes place on media side stages. Main stage narrative castings continue to commonly draw women as bitches putting men in their place or disrupting "boys being boys" with civilizing or relational demands that reduce sporting enjoyment.

That men largely continue to "own" sport is evident as well in address revealing the core of fanship identities. Here, imagined fans are most often rabid, obsessive, and animated, never tepid. In self-serving mediasport hailing, sport always matters, important and to be celebrated. As well, idealized fans are anchored in flattering portraits about the benefits of male fanship, and even women fans are encouraged to embrace male fanship norms. Further in narrative space, fan identities are anchored in practicing appreciation of male sport and attendant assumptions of it setting a superior standard. With

occasional exceptions, such as "gender appropriate" Olympic events, few big media-big sport pairings hail to imagined fanship of female sport.

In the always there and always on mediasport marketplace, the merged hailing of our gender and fan identities has necessarily aligned in servicing important contours of our consumer identities. The hypercommodification that has infused our relations with both sport and media is now foundational. Horne's (2006) evidence about how much the consumerization of sport fanship has been driven by naturalization of media logics of advertising and sponsorship underlie Crawford's (2004, p. 4) conclusion that so much relates "directly or indirectly" to acts of consumption that "being a fan is primarily a consumer act and hence fans can be seen first and foremost as consumers." Moreover, sport fans, contained by ready drawing of gender, have both been idealized as consumers and become commodities themselves. In both "lived experience" and idealized narrative imaginings, sport fans have increasingly had their agency defined and confined by the commodity context, while erstwhile recognizing their own commodity value (c.f., Bauman, 2007; Wenner, 2007). The character of this constant hailing has served to establish sport-related consumption as pleasure. Returning to the focus on pleasure that began this discussion, it is this acculturative subjectification that enables the dirty entailments of mediasport to resonate with consumers and mobilize lasting ideological powers.

On the Larger State of Play

It is in some sense unavoidable that key spheres in the study of media, sports and society mirror the components of a basic sender-message-receiver communication process model. Senders imply individuals, institutions, production and encoding. Messages may be thought of as content or texts and sites of representation and signification. Receivers imply audience, fandom, consumption, and decoding. While theorists, such as Hall (1973), advocate for processual communicative study, much mediasport research focuses on readily accessible content assessments, with more difficult audience study evident but less common, and institutional (or source) studies infrequent as access issues challenge scholars.

A large community of scholars has shared in development of media, sport, and society inquiry through discernable stages (Wenner, 2015b). While evident are intersections with my preoccupations with sports dirt and identities undergirding the mediasport interpellation, diverse concerns over key social issues and some shifting sands may be seen. As the field has developed and garnered increased attention, growing pains have revealed some key controversies and challenges from emergent dispositions. In what follows, brief consideration of the stages and evolving concerns is followed by characterization of tensions and opportunities (c.f., Wenner, 2015a).

Stages and Concerns

Limited discrete studies, rather than coherence, were hallmarks of the "childhood" stage of inquiry in Mediasport 1.0 (1975-1989). Here key scholars and foundational works signaled interests and established ongoing themes. The aforementioned empirical social science strains most evident in that period, both survey inquiry into motivations for television sports viewing (c.f., Wenner & Gantz, 1998) and the Bryant/Zillmann group's experimental manipulations targeted at understanding dispositions for its enjoyment (c.f., Raney, 2006), were sandwiched by early critical work by key scholars. Notable early semiological analysis of televisual logics in commodified football spectacle (Buscombe, 1975; Real, 1975) signaled overarching concerns with political economy and nationalism. Cogently contextualized in Whannel's (1983) Marxist critique of the institutional arrangements and cultural politics of sport, key work anchored by Rowe focused concern over commodification and globalization amidst struggles over gender, race, ethnicity, class, and national identities (Lawrence & Rowe, 1986, McKay & Rowe, 1987). A first systematic attempt (Wenner, 1989a) to bring coherence to the area closed Mediasport 1.0.

Research agendas matured as the study of media, sports, and society experienced "adolescence" during Mediasport 2.0 (1990-1998). Impactful emergent scholars (e.g., Andrews, Bruce, Jackson, Boyle, Haynes) joined foundational scholars (e.g., Whannel, Rowe, Real, Duncan, Kane, Gantz, Wenner) in advancing research trajectories. Although organizations and research journals in the sociology of sport led the way in legitimizing media-centric inquiry, an early 1990's IAMCR working group startup signaled

sport's emergent relevance within media studies. Important book-length works by Barnett (1990) and Whannel (1992) presented cultural critiques of the central evolutionary relationship between sport and television. Notably, the latter work, in blending a critical cultural studies approach to questions of ideology and power, illustrated how production, content, and reception processes could be studied as a cohesive whole. Concerns over hypercommodification and globalization, showing how "circuits of promotion" (Wernick, 1991) were being used by sport and media organizations to build mutual benefice to grow markets and profits, drove increased focus on institutions and production. Research on professional practice, embedded in Ellul's (1964) concerns over "la technique," focused on the work cultures, norms, and routines that characterized sports journalism not only as a "toy department" but "boy department." Revealed were sport media's conservative tendencies, normatively stressing competitive success, naturalizing capitalism, and reinforcing stereotyped framings of masculinity, femininity, and race. In particular, daunting evidence mounted about how media coverage helps sustain gender as sport's great divide. Research on mediasport's gender climate documented absence, trivialization, ambivalence, and stereotyping as key features in coverage of women's athletics, while received hegemonic masculinity endemic in celebrative constructions of violence and naturalized narratives embracing heternormativity and homophobia were well-documented (c.f., Cooky et al, 2015; Creedon, 1994; Daddario, 1998; Duncan, 2006, Trujillo, 1994). Nascent by comparison, Mediasport 2.0 inquiry on race and ethnicity found reliance on stereotype and the tendency for media narratives to essentialize and naturalize difference with "black" and "white" athletes drawn as distinct categories, the former associated with athleticism and "natural ability," and the latter anchored in leadership and a strong work ethos (Davis & Harris, 1998). Complementing the still-developing empirical lines of audience inquiry begun in Mediasport 1.0, critical reception research focused on pleasure-power dynamic inherent in consuming mediated sport. Seated in cultural studies and influenced by post-structuralists such as Foucault and Lacan, audience ethnographies and reader-oriented discourse analyses explored audience position as subjects and tactics for spectator empowerment and resistance (Whannel, 1992). A second *de facto* handbook (Wenner 1998b), fusing scholars, interests and approaches from both sport and media studies, marked the close of Mediasport 2.0.

With research agendas maturing alongside the rise of diverse theoretical lenses and methodological approaches, the move to the "early adulthood" of Mediasport 3.0 (1999-2006) featured wide-spread engagement with critical cultural theories and tactics, the publication of noteworthy book-length treatments, much interrogation of how the institutional dynamics of commodification and corporate influence were increasingly driving the production and content of mediated sport, and finally, signs that the mainstreaming of mediasport research had penetrated US media and communication studies. Anchored in understandings about the conservative, even retrograde, socio-cultural dispositions driving the big sport-big media fusion, synthesis of the area's core agendas on "money and power" and "framing and identities" was seen in noteworthy authored books (Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Brookes, 2002; Rowe, 1999). Set amidst the area's central tendencies to focus on texts and content, benchmark edited collections (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Bernstein & Blain, 2003; Brown & O'Rourke, 2003; Roche, 1998; Rowe, 2004) showcased increased diversity in critical tactics to interrogate discourse and rhetoric, the necessity of engaging intersectional analyses to broaden gender-focused critiques, and the ways mega-event sporting narratives mesh commodification with nationalism. Not surprisingly, the character of sport's engagement with media-fueled commodification, resplendent in an era of "liquid modernity" where Bauman (2007) sees "consumer sociality" as pervasive, garnered increased attention. Here, key works (Andrews, 2006; Crawford, 2004; Horne, 2006; Jackson & Andrews, 2005; Miller, Lawrence, McKay & Rowe, 2001; Silk, Andrews, & Cole, 2005) interrogated sports' interface with commodity logics, the meshing of fan and consumer identities, the political economy of sporting globalization, and the naturalization of corporate nationalisms. Centrally related, focus was given to the manufacture and cultural significance of the sporting celebrity, most particularly at the intersections of masculinity and race (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Miller, 2001; Whannel, 2002). Intertwined with these collective tendencies emboldened by marketization and globalization, both the changing presses on sport journalists (Boyle, 2006; Lowes, 1999) and the entrenched "normalization" of gender, racial, and national bias in reporting garnered attention (Billings, 2004; Bruce, 2001, Hardin, 2005). The latter stages of Mediasport

3.0, facilitated by a series of Summits on Communication and Sport, a seminal statement (Kassing et al., 2004) about extending the contours of studying communication and sport beyond media, and the heft and range of the first true "handbook" (Raney & Bryant, 2006) on sports media signaled a maturing field.

This, and the launching of two scholarly journals, the *Journal of Sports Media* and the *International Journal of Sport Communication*, ushered in "middle age" during Mediasport 4.0 (2007-2014). Serving as tipping points, organizational resistance to the legitimacy of studying the nexus of sport in communication and media studies incrementally gave way across all major scholarly societies. Further signaling the field's maturation, coherent textbooks from emergent scholars (c.f., Billings et al., 2012; Kennedy & Hills, 2009) joined new twist stocktakings by foundational scholars (Rowe, 2011; Whannel, 2008) featuring attention to how processes of globalization, mediatization, and sportification were being changed in the digital age. Still, there was rising evidence that "the more things change, the more they stay the same." This was striking in the contrast between important studies showing how mediated fandom was being altered by digital and social media (Earnheardt et al., 2012; Hugenberg et al., 2008) and studies showing that female sport fandom continued to be "othered" and anchored in perceptions of male sport as "authentic" (Toffoletti & Mewett, 2012). Even as studies of mega-event production, such as for Olympics broadcasts, showed new sensitivities to interfacing with social media, the manufacture of engagement and celebrity value continued to be anchored in familiar drawings of nation, race and gender (Billings, 2008; Bruce et al., 2010, Markula, 2009). Few of the rising studies on the significance of sporting celebrity focused on female athletes (Sandvoss, Real, & Bernstein, 2012; Wenner, 2013a). Amidst this "something old, something new," the close of Mediasport 4.0 further signed the area's maturity and robustness with the launch of a third scholarly journal, *Communication and Sport,* and two substantial handbooks (Pedersen, 2013; Billings & Hardin, 2014) that gave particular attention to new media in the old mediasport mix.

Tensions and Opportunities

Good news and bad news characterized where media, sports, and society inquiry sat at the start of Mediasport 5.0 (2015 to present). There was good news that the disciplinary area had become vibrant in both sport and media studies, and the interface and understandings across scholarly communities had markedly improved. Yet bad news could be seen in emergent "mid-life crises" facing the area. To some extent these crises were fueled by success. While, as it developed, scholarship anchored in a Media, Sports, and Society disposition faced challenges of cohesion with too little integration from its interested but often discrete academic communities in sport and media studies, as well as tensions in contrasting approaches to knowledge production between empirical and critical researchers, overriding socio-cultural concerns, about fairness, inequities, effects and abuses of power, colored inquiry. Yet, in tandem with recognition of sport communication's growing societal importance and academic legitimacy, the emergence of two alternative dispositions, a complementary one looking to broaden communicative focus beyond media, and one with discernable focus on market effectiveness and away from socio-cultural concerns, points to opportunities and some decided tensions (Wenner, 2015a, 2021).

As the study of media communication is in many disciplinary drawings a subset of the broader field of communication studies which considers interpersonal, group, organizational, family and other communicative settings including mediated ones, it shouldn't be surprising that a Communication Studies and Sport disposition bloomed. Here, focus on "non-mediated" dynamics in particular brings important opportunities to study intra-team, family, leadership, coaching and management communicative processes in varied sport settings in ways that advance such stable concerns as they have been situated in the sociology and psychology of sports. Further, the disposition's genealogical anchoring in the study of rhetoric, already integral to studying mediated sport, offers new ways to focus on the use of language and symbols in communication *in* and *about* sport (Kassing et al., 2004).

In contrast, an emergent Sport Communication as Profession disposition brings administrative, managerial, and professional effectiveness lenses to inquiries about sport communication and its practice in service to sport and media organizations in ways counterdistinctive to the socio-cultural focus of foundational media, sports, and society inquiry. Most vibrant in strategic sport communication programs

set in sport management, but growing as well in journalism, broadcasting, public relations, and advertising education as housed in communication and media studies programs, the disposition takes sport in a received view and shifts focus to the pragmatics of practice, strategies, and effectiveness in the sport communication marketplace. To state the obvious, there is little place in the day-to-day practice of sport management or communication to question the logic, appeal, and importance of sport. As a consequence, much in the research agenda, most particularly from scholars seated in sport management, has overtly and covertly been driven by an administrative and effectiveness focus with an eye on how to advance marketplace appeal (Wenner, 2015a, 2021).

Given its focus on advancing the sport marketplace, it is not surprising that problematic tendencies in studying new, digital, and social media in sporting contexts have been most evident in scholarship seated in a sport management approach to strategic communication. Much research here has approached social media in sport as a "shiny new penny" and "game changer" in advancing the appeal to and monetization from fans. Here, there has been a tendency to overestimate both the breadth of new media use and its impacts. Too often, researchers have seemingly been blinded by an "infatuitis" of the "techno-smitten" and underestimated that "new" in media is a relative term and that "remediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), where legacy media adapt to new circumstances, is the norm. Compounded by the appeal of "quick and dirty" sweeps through digital postings and errors in projecting normal distribution assumptions on unrepresentative samples, such as active Twitter users, the tactics for studying the new media environment in sport communication remain under considerable debate (Wenner, 2014b, 2014c).

Coda: On Outcomes and Impact

This chapter has considered my personal journey and research priorities concerning the socio-cultural study of media and sport as well as the evolutionary development of stages of inquiry and current debates in the larger scholarly field of play. In striking ways, the outcomes and impact of my efforts, alongside those of an ever-growing interdisciplinary community, to advance the importance legitimacy of studying the mediasport nexus in communication and media studies and to facilitate the interface of scholars in the sociology of sport with those in communication and media, have been fruitful. While it has taken a long time to come a "long way baby," media, sports, and society inquiry holds deserved prominence in the sociology of sport as well as communication and media studies.

Much evidence has accumulated about the abundant pleasures that sport fuels through media and their narrative predilections. While it has been shown that mediasport consumers hold resourceful capacities to reappropriate meaning, and even resist dominant institutional narratives, it is clear that much that has driven the mediasport research agenda has been anchored in concerns over the tenor of agency amidst the pleasures and powers of the mediasport cultural complex. There is, as I have long argued, an essential dirtiness to sport as it is dispersed through media channels. The pathways through a "holy trinity" of hailed gender, fan, and consumer identities are well worn and powerful and continue to resonate in the increasingly commodified echo chambers of digital and social media.

For many, the cumulative weight of findings in social-cultural research about media, sports, and society illumine what is wrong about sport today. The rise of sport's globalization, corporatization, and commodification, its reliance on spectacle, mega-events, and celebrity, its powers to naturalize dominant ideologies and to essentialize difference through characterizations of nation, race, gender, and other identities would not have been possible without media and their framings. All in all, following Bauman (2007), the collective evidence about mediasport points to much "collateral damage." The plentiful pleasures that mediasport brings in engagement serve to mask that much that is offered in fun is a powerful, influential, and conservative cultural force. While meaningful change to this set of relations in today's corporatized and hypercommodified environment will be challenging, we have no choice, as Bauman notes, but to try by reaching out in public efforts towards containing the naturalized consumerist logics that media has helped advance. This is the project of scholarship on media, sports, and society and our ability to communicate the urgency of this is the challenge before us.

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