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*USWNT and Twitter: Resistance and Activism in
the Equal Pay Campaign*

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Honor Scholar Program, Class of 2021

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Introduction

I. Background

On July 5, 2015, the United States Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT) beat Japan, 5-2, in the 2015 Women's World Cup (WWC) Championship game in Vancouver, Canada. The game, broadcasted by FOX, averaged 25.4 million viewers, making it the most-watched soccer game in U.S. history.¹ The win marked the first time that any Women's National Team won three WWC, and the first time that the U.S. team had done so since 1998.² Immediately after their success, the USWNT received a Ticker Tape Parade in New York City and had several media commitments. A little over a month later, on August 19, 2015, the USWNT players embarked on a series of six Victory Tour games across the nation. According to the USWNT's official website, the USWNT played their first Victory Tour game "in front of more than 40,000 fans at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh, setting a record not only for a soccer match in Pittsburgh, but also for the largest crowd ever for a stand-alone domestic friendly for the USWNT."³ The excitement that surrounded the team continued to develop after their major tournament win.

However, the excitement was short lived as the USWNT cancelled their Hawaiian game due to unplayable turf.⁴ According to the USWNT players, "The artificial turf was actually pulling up out of the ground, [...] This decision wasn't about 'turf v. grass.' This was about field conditions and player safety. [...] And nothing should ever be put in competition with our

¹ Richard Deitsch, "USA-Japan Women's World Cup final shatters American TV ratings record," on Sports Illustrated (SI) Online, July 6, 2015.

² Prior to 2015, the USWNT won the 1991 and 1998 WWCs.

³ U.S. Soccer, "World Champs Begin Victory Tour in Pittsburgh," August 14, 2015.

⁴ The game in Hawaii was supposed to take place on December 6, 2015, and the players had already flown to Hawaii ahead of the game.

protection and safety as players.”⁵ The statement indicated that the players were put in a situation where they either had to play the game and risk possible injuries, or they had to stand up for themselves and risk other consequences, such as fan backlash and issues with their employer, the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF). Furthermore, the statement designates a lack of oversight on the USSF’s part. Duly, the federation should have examined the pitch and determined whether it was a safe and playable surface, prior to naming it as a Victory Tour location. The cancellation of the Hawaiian game, in hindsight, was an indicator that tensions were building between the USWNT and the USSF.

Less than a year after their WWC win and a month after the end of the Victory Tour and its controversy, the USWNT submitted a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in January of 2016.⁶ The CBA was proposed, on behalf of the USWNT, by the U.S. Women’s National Team Players Association (USWNTPA), more commonly known as the players’ union. In a statement made by Kessler, the USWNT’s attorney, the new CBA “had equal pay for equal work as its guiding principle.”⁷ The players recognized the inequality that existed between themselves and the men’s team and actively worked for change by putting legal pressure on the USSF.

This newly proposed CBA was dismissed by the USSF because the contemporary CBA had not yet expired. The existing CBA was set to expire at the end of 2016 and the USSF was unwilling to negotiate a new contract prior to the 2016 Olympics in Rio, Brazil. Consequently, the USWNT players were disheartened by the USSF’s reluctance to compromise. Fearing that

⁵ ESPN and the Associated Press, “U.S. players say field ‘looked like it hadn’t been replaced in years,’” on ESPN.com, December 6, 2015.

⁶ The Victory Tour ended on December 16, 2015.

⁷ ESPN and the Associated Press, “U.S. women’s team files wage-discrimination action vs. U.S. Soccer,” on ESPN.com, March 31, 2016.

the team would strike just ahead of the Olympics, U.S. Soccer filed a lawsuit against its employees in order to “confirm the existence” of a standing CBA.⁸ Namely, the federation sought a judgement that absolved them of having to enter into negotiations over a new CBA prior to the Olympics. Similar to the cancellation of the Hawaiian Victory Tour game, the dispute over CBAs also revealed that the tensions between employee and employer had escalated.

On March 31, 2016, five prominent USWNT players—Becky Sauerbrunn, Alex Morgan, Hope Solo, Megan Rapinoe, and Carli Lloyd— filed a complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee (EEOC).⁹ The EEOC complaint was a response to the USSF’s lawsuit and an indicator of further escalation because of the type of legal action. In essence, the EEOC complaint required an extensive federal investigation to be conducted and it was the first time that the USWNT took serious legal action against their employer. While the filing, itself, was notable because of the USWNT’s challenge to their employers, the EEOC complaint focused on investigating wage discrimination and, secondly, on addressing work-related concerns.¹⁰

In order to promulgate their stance, members of the USWNT took to Twitter to address their legal activism in the physical world and continue it online. For example, Carli Lloyd tweeted, “Historic Moment. Proud of the strength of this team. #fighting #equalpayequalpay.”¹¹ Lloyd’s tweet emphasized how the women’s decision to file the complaint was ‘historic.’ With context, one understands the situation to be ‘historic’ because the event marks the first time the

⁸ ESPN and the Associated Press, “U.S. women’s team files wage-discrimination action vs. U.S. Soccer.”

⁹ These five players filed the EEOC complaint on behalf of the entire team which is clear from the team’s response on Twitter. For more, see Section 1 of Data and Discussion, entitled “March and April 2016”.

¹⁰ Work-related concerns refers to poor working conditions, including lesser quality facilities to train at and live in, low coach and staff salaries, and the lack of resources for working mothers, among others.

¹¹ Carli Lloyd (@CarliLloyd), “Historic moment. Proud of the strength of this team. #fighting #equalpayequalpay,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016.

USWNT took legal action against their employers. The rhetoric of ‘strength’ and ‘fighting,’ recalled images of resistance and rebellion. These women used their agency, provided by social media, to express their opinions on equal pay and to force the issue to be publicly confronted. The resistance language is repeated throughout their equal pay campaign, showing that is ongoing.

The significance of the EEOC filing cannot be understated as it demonstrated that the players patiently waited until they were World Champions and the best women’s team in the world to argue their position. The women proved to the USSF that they were capable of winning and showed their fans, new and old alike, that supporting them was fulfilling. In other words, the USWNT players strategically chose their filing date because it put the USSF in a difficult position to argue that the women worked less and were less successful than the men. Simultaneously, the women utilized their ever-expanding social media platforms to advocate for change in an abundance of arenas, including general women’s issues, workplace-related inequalities, mental and physical wellbeing awareness, and LGBTQIA+ issues. Depending on the player, these women spoke up about the aforementioned topics and used their platforms as a way to encourage change and foster communities and growth, meaning that they engaged in social activism. Although the USWNT women might have focused on bringing awareness to many different topics, they were and still are united on the issue of equal pay.

II. Research Questions and Thesis

Research for this study of the “equal pay campaign” centers around the following overarching question: how does the USWNT use Twitter as a performative mechanism for expressing and enhancing social activist causes? In particular, my research explores how members of the USWNT, both individually and collectively use social media in the pursuit of

gender equality and equal pay provisions. In what specific ways have the women engaged social media and why do they rely upon Twitter in particular? How does the rhetoric that the women use accentuate their motivations and advance their social activist cause? Is the women's use of Twitter effective in achieving the goals of their equal pay campaign? Which players use Twitter most prominently? Is this a matter of individual or coordinated expression? Why is this significant? Has the use of Twitter changed over the 4-years that I surveyed and, if so, in what ways?

Within the lengthy conflict between the USWNT and the USSF, this paper surveys the years 2016 to the present to explore how the use of media has changed over time. The chronology was chosen because it coincides with the USWNT's concentrated pursuit of the equal pay campaign. In sum, the paper focuses on how the 23 USWNT players, who featured in the 2019 Women's World Cup roster, used Twitter as a way to push back on the USSF and apply pressure on the federation in an attempt to fix the pay disparity.¹²

This paper argues that in the context of its disputes with the USSF over equality, the USWNT strategically utilizes Twitter because the social media platform facilitates a new and highly public form of resistance. Twitter functions as a vehicle of connection across boundaries, because it enables the USWNT or its individual members to outwardly stand in solidarity with other female athletes and women in general. The platform does this by providing them with an opportunity to share their relatively unfiltered and personal perspectives on the issue of equal pay, while simultaneously creating a space of social consciousness. Essentially, Twitter allows

¹² It should be noted that there are more than just 23 USWNT players who signed with, and get paid by, the USSF; although, because it is an active, very rotational roster, there is no set number of women's players who receive wages from the USSF. Thus, it is important to focus my research on the known USSF players, meaning the ones who played for the U.S. during the 2019 WWC in France.

the USWNT to “retweet” and interact with their fellow players, engage with sponsors actively supporting their campaign, other female athletes who are or have experienced discrimination, and females, more broadly, in an unimpeded manner. As a strategy for activism and protest, a connection across boundaries, and direct action against its employer, the USWNT’s reliance on Twitter represented a change in tactical methods from previous generations’ attempts to fight for equality.

III. Section Breakdown

The essay begins with a section containing the historical context of women’s soccer, providing extra attention to the USWNT. After the historical context section comes “Data and Discussion” which seeks to answer the proposed research questions by examining the players’ Twitters on significant dates in the equal pay campaign. The first subsection focuses on March and April 2016 because this was when the EEOC complaint was filed. The second subsection jumps a year forward, to when the USWNT tweeted in solidarity with the U.S. Women’s Hockey Team (USWNT hockey), who threatened to boycott the 2017 Women’s Ice Hockey World Championships due to breakdowns with their federation over a new CBA.¹³ Subsection III. (April 2017) is about the hopeful statements the USWNT made after signing their new CBA. Just as subsection II. highlights the USWNT’s solidarity with USWNT hockey, subsection IV. spotlights the USWNT’s support of the Danish Women’s National Soccer Team in their strike.¹⁴ In late 2018 (subsection V.), members of the USWNT used Twitter to address the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) players opting out of their CBA with the league.

¹³ This occurs in March 2017.

¹⁴ This takes place in September 2017.

In early March 2019, there is a slight, but very crucial, shift in the USWNT use of Twitter. Instead of tweeting about their withdrawal of the EEOC complaint and their subsequent lawsuit filing, the USWNT players remained silent on Twitter. This situation is investigated further in subsection VI.. In subsection VII. (late March-September 2019), the players reverted back to tweeting about their equal pay campaign. The Women’s World Cup took place during this time and many of the tweets from this subsection focus on wage gap bonuses and tournament sponsorships. The final two subsections focus on 2020, specifically March and May of that year, and how the USWNT responded to its lawsuit against the USSF and setbacks.¹⁵

Literature Review

Sports and activism have been linked for several decades as athletes have become celebrities and role models. These individuals are in a position to influence society and culture; thus, social media was strategically used. Although sports and activism have a longstanding relationship, the scholarship relating the two is much more recent. An early study, conducted by Kaufmann and Wolff in 2010, focused on why athletes participate in social and political activism. The two scholars synthesized their data into four conclusions—social consciousness, meritocracy, responsible citizenship, and interdependence.¹⁶ Kauffman and Wolff, then, define these terms and present case studies for each conclusion, prior to situating their scholarship within “liberation sociology.”¹⁷

¹⁵ It should be noted that the lawsuit is ongoing, meaning that these issues have yet to be resolved.

¹⁶ Peter Kaufman and Eli A. Wolff, “Playing and Protesting: Sport as a Vehicle for Social Change,” in *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 34, issue 2, (2010), 154-175.

¹⁷ It is important to note, the reports Kaufmann and Wolff explored are ones that they discovered by interviewing 21 athletes who were actively involved in a social or political cause. The athletes played a variety of sports and came from different backgrounds which allowed the researchers to analyze a wide-range of experiences and numerous social activist causes. Additionally, In the context of this essay, ‘liberation sociology,’ focuses on how athletes are able to ‘free’ themselves and gain independence within their athletic communities.

A few years after Kaufmann and Wolff carried out their study, there was a push for specification and increased scholarship into female athletes' activism. Susan Ware's 2013 study is just one example of such scholarship. She considered how Title IX expanded women's sports activism in the United States, and how this increase affected other nations' policies.¹⁸ Ware emphasized how women's sports were not seriously considered at an internationally political level until the 1990s when several women's sports, including soccer, were added to the Olympics. Simply put, there was "a disconnect between sport and organized feminism."¹⁹ The essay concludes on a more positive note, accentuating how, in our global and increasingly interconnected world, it is impossible to ignore women's sports and its progressive nature.

The shift towards women's sports and activism has, recently, become even more pronounced. In 2020, Cheryl Cooky and Dunja Antunovic published an article in *Communication & Sport* which works to "re-center the role of sportswomen," by attempting to reshape how the media portrays feminist athlete activism in their narratives.²⁰ These two scholars focused on articulating the WNBA's #BlackLivesMatter campaign and the USWNT's equal pay campaign in feminist scholarship. Cooky and Antunovic conclude that the female athletes used different types of feminism (intersectional and neoliberal) which apprise the players' solidarity and collective identity.²¹

During the past decade, the scholarship surrounding activism and sport, more saliently, the works on women's sport has expanded; nonetheless, there is room to further this field. While the

¹⁸ Susan Ware, "Title IX and the Global 1970s: Women's Activism in International Perspective," in *Social and Education History*, vol. 2, issue 2, (2013), 134-151.

¹⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁰ Cheryl Cooky and Dunja Antunovic, "'This Isn't Just About Us': Articulations of Feminism in Media Narratives of Athlete Activism," in *Communication & Sport*, vol. 8, issues 4-5, (2020), 692.

²¹ Ibid., 706-707.

previous works focused on situating athletes and, later female athletes, within the framework of activism, this paper seeks to further enlarge the scholarship through the lens of social media. The essay seeks to understand how the USWNT, specifically, use Twitter as a tool of communication and resistance, and in addressing how social media has shifted society's engagement with social change and activism.

Similar to the expansion of scholarship around the women's sport and activism, the field of study about social media has as well. While social media has only been around for the last 20 years or so, examples of its use as a tool of protest and resistance, are already abundant. From local to international communities, social media has changed how people have communicated and organized with one another. The few publications utilized case studies to examine how social movements utilize social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and others.

Bart Cammaerts's 2015 book, *Reclaiming the media: communication rights and democratic media roles*, examined large-scale social media and activism.²² Cammaerts roots his thesis in analyzing how social networks were scrutinized in regard to social movements. He concluded that media can be used as a tool for communication and organization but also as a method of resistance and establishing a position. Social media was more than just a space where information could be shared, but rather an active space where movements and organizations were formed and grew.

Dhiraj Murthy, like Cammaerts, also assessed how social media can be used to organize and shape a social movement. Murthy's study was a meta-analysis, meaning that he examined several studies governed by other scholars and categorized them by the benefits and drawbacks

²² Cammaerts, "Activism and media," 221.

social media provided a given social movement.²³ The benefits Murthy mentioned are reflective of Cammaerts', in that he posited that social media can be used as an organizing and uniting force. However, Murthy does call attention to a relatively serious flaw— social media permits individuals to have a presence and voice in the movement which has the potential to be misleading. The main issue, as Murthy mentions, is that “this could have consequences in terms of the clarity of a movement’s message.”²⁴ This highlights how a positive aspect of social media can also be a weakness if it is used excessively by a social movement. The examinations of social movements and activists’ use of social media provide a framework for understanding how and why nontraditional media is used. The examination of social media as more than just a tool of communication allows for arguments about its use as a tool of dissent, resistance, and protest.

Since Twitter was only launched in 2006, archival research using the social media platform is fairly new and continuing to develop. Most of the preliminary research focused on assessing the fan-athlete interaction. One such study surveyed 1,962 tweets by professional athletes in order to consider what the athletes tweeted.²⁵ The tweets were then categorized by the information they contained, such as interactivity and information sharing. This study was one of the first to detail how players used Twitter and showed that Twitter profiles can be used as primary source documents.

Another early study, collected tweets from the top five sportspersons who utilized Twitter over a one-week period in January of 2010.²⁶ Pegoraro, the researcher, wanted to examine who

²³ Dhiraj Murthy, “Introduction to Social Media, Activism, and Organizations,” in *Social Media + Society*, January-March 2018, 1-4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁵ Marion E. Hambrick, Jason M. Simmons, Greg P. Greenhalgh, and T. Christopher Greenwell, “Understanding Professional Athletes’ Use of Twitter: A Content Analysis of Athlete Tweets,” in *International Journal of Sport Communication*, vol. 3, (2010), 454-471.

²⁶ Ann Pegoraro, “Look Who’s Talking—Athletes on Twitter: A Case Study,” in *International Journal of Sport Communication*, vol. 3, no. 4, (2010), 501-514.

used Twitter the most and whether Twitter was used as a marketing tool or if it had another purpose. She concluded that the platform provided athletes with a way to communicate with their fans and to share information about their personal lives.

The field of Twitter research and sport was expanded in the mid-2010s by Roxane Coche, who explored how female athletes use the social media platform to position themselves within the discussion of gender and sport.²⁷ Both of Coche's studies analyzed female athletes' Twitter biographies and profile pictures, which authorizes a user to share information with their followers and the public. Coche's research expanded the field because her works focused on the athlete, herself, rather than on explicit communications female athletes and the general society.

While Coche reviewed the influence of traditional gender roles and values' effect on how female athletes framed themselves on Twitter, Gary Osmond focused on one particular athlete—Ian Roberts, an openly gay Australian rugby player. Osmond constructed his Twitter study around fan remembrances of the athlete. The main way that Roberts was remembered was through “social memory,” or an ongoing discussion of the man.²⁸ Osmond's work enlarged the field by signifying how Twitter can be used as an archive.

One of the most recent publications, involving Twitter and athletes, was in *Communication & Sport* in 2018. This study investigated how the USWNT players utilized Twitter in the 90-day period before, during, and after the 2015 Women's World Cup in Canada.²⁹

²⁷ Roxane Coche, “How Golfers and Tennis Players Frame Themselves: Content Analysis of Twitter Profile Pictures,” in *Journal of Sports Media*, vol. 9, no. 1, (2014), 449-471. Also, Roxane Coche, “How Athletes Frame Themselves on Social Media: An Analysis of Twitter Profiles,” in *Journal of Sports Media*, vol. 12, no. 1, (2014), 89-112.

²⁸ Gary Osmond, “Tweet Out?: Twitter, Archived Data, and the Social Memory of Out LGBT Athletes,” in *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 44, no. 2, (2017), 322-335.

²⁹ Molly Hayes Sauder and Matthew Blaszk, “23 Players, 23 Voices: An Examination of the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team on Twitter During the 2015 World Cup,” in *Communication & Sport*, vol. 6, no. 2, (2018), 175-202.

Sauder and Blaszkka placed the USWNT's tweets into two self-presentation categories: backstage and front stage.³⁰ By categorizing the players' tweets into these frames, the researchers were able to determine how the USWNT players utilized Twitter during the 2015 Women's World Cup. Unlike Coche and Osmond's studies, Sauder and Blaszkka focus their study on a selected period, entitling them to examine the event and how it affects the players' Twitter use.

Overall, the published research focused on an abundance of issues, including fan-athlete interaction, gender representation, and self-presentation. This paper examines Twitter as a mode of expression and action. Specifically, it discusses how the players used Twitter in their campaign for equal pay. Similar to Sauder and Blaszkka's study, this essay concentrates on a specific period (2016-2020), in order to offer a more in-depth analysis of the situation. Unlike Sauder and Blaszkka, this paper focuses on analyzing only a certain set of tweets that relate to my research question (i.e. the ones that mention "equality" or "equal pay"). In sum, the studies, including this one, just skim the surface on what Twitter can offer researchers and historians alike in relation to sport and sports history.

Methodology

Twitter is a social media platform which invites its millions of users to interact with one another by posting messages of 280 characters.³¹ As a social media platform, Twitter offers its users a variety of other ways to interact, besides posting messages, including liking, retweeting, and quote-tweeting others' posts. Many of these interactions are quick and respond to a person or an event happening in real time. Twitter is an evolving social media platform, spotlighting

³⁰ For more discussion, consult Sauder and Blaszkka, 2018.

³¹ It is important to note that from Twitter's founding up until 2017, tweets were limited to 140-characters, meaning that the earliest tweets examined are more likely to be shorter than the ones that come after Twitter's policy change.

movements or key events through the use of hashtags (#). Due to the large number of users, Twitter falls under the scholarly umbrella of ‘big data,’ meaning that collections of tweets are often large and unruly.³² At the same time, ‘big data’ grants scholars the opportunity to examine large-scale trends and patterns in the collection of social media posts. This paper seeks to narrow the amount of data by focusing specifically on the profiles of 23 USWNT players and zeroing in on key words, including ‘equality’ and ‘equal pay’.

Another principal aspect of Twitter is how it is utilized by its millions of users. Profiles are a representation of an individual and, as such, they contain information about a user such as a user’s name, location, age, pronouns, likes and dislikes, photographs, and other social media handles. The idea of representation extends to the USWNT players who emphasize and share their opinions on many topics including LGBTQIA+ rights, Black Lives Matter, and women’s equality, the focus of this paper. The main reason why this paper analyzes the USWNT players’ Twitters is because it is a microblogging site, enabling users to post their own opinions and engage with others’ opinions. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, Twitter puts rhetoric at the forefront, instead of photographs or other media.

Twitter is also a source for scholarly research. As Puschmann et al. mention,

Twitter’s embeddedness in everyday social and communicative interactions across so many nations of the developed world, and its role as a very public, global, real-time communications channel highlight the fact that it [...] provides a window on contemporary society as such, at national and global levels.³³

³² Cornelius Puschmann, Axel Bruns, Merja Mahrt, Katrin Weller, and Jean Burgess, “Epilogue: Why study Twitter?” in *Twitter and Society*, (USA: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 431.

³³ *Ibid.*, 426.

Meaning that Twitter permits scholars to analyze and relate how a subject or group of people understand the world. Twitter can be an advantageous tool for scholars to utilize in their research, especially of research that examines social media and its effect on a given topic.

One of the methods of analysis that scholars use to examine Twitter is discourse analysis. At its essence, discourse analysis seeks to make meaning out of linguistic statements.³⁴ Scholars, who use this method of analysis, work to understand why certain words are chosen, the possible double meanings of a statement, and the structure, or form, of a sentence. This is an important field of study because it provides for the interpretation of other's statements. Additionally, discourse analysis allows one to emphasize certain words or topical issues in order to articulate patterns of discussion.

While discourse analysis has been a method of scholarly study for multiple decades, using discourse analysis to examine social media is a newer approach. According to Gwen Bouvier, it is necessary for media scholars to keep the following question in mind during their explanations of social media data: "What is the relationship to what people do, say and show—the concepts, values and discourse—online to their offline lives, or even across social media platforms?"³⁵ Essentially, Bouvier urges scholars to question whether a participants' actions are consistent between their online and offline presence or whether there is an inconsistency in their performance and why that is the case. Overall, discourse analysis offers this paper an interesting insight into the linguistic quality of the USWNT tweets, while also allowing for an examination of the collection of tweets.

³⁴ Malcolm Coulthard, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, Second Edition, (NY: Routledge, 1985), 1.

³⁵ Gwen Bouvier, "What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields?" in *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2015), 155.

Historical Context

While the March 2016 EEOC filing and ensuing equal pay campaign were memorable, these situations were not the first occasions in which USWNT players challenged the USSF over unfair treatment, nor where female soccer players, in general, took a stand against large soccer institutions.³⁶ The first instances of organized women's football date back to the 1890s in the United Kingdom.³⁷ These games were an outcome of the larger feminist movement, where women argued for increased rights, such as the right to vote and to be recognized as having political agency. Playing sports was just one example of how women started to enter male-dominated spaces. These female athletes pushed back against the norms of their society, meaning that they were participating in an early form of feminist activism.

Around 1902, the Football Association of England (FA) decided that women and men were not permitted to play against one another. This ruling came as a result of women footballers being viewed as perverting the game because they were not following traditional gender norms. In other words, the female players were criticized for partaking in an activity that was thought to be masculine and, thus, that it was an abnormal pastime. Although women were not authorized to play against men's teams and they were not recognized as doing so, they still played football.

The popularity of women's football expanded throughout World War I because the men, who normally played football, were off fighting, causing the main source of sports entertainment to come from female footballers. According to Jean Williams, “[t]here were around 150

³⁶ “Large soccer institutions” refers to leagues (the FA and the National Women's Soccer League, or NWSL), federations (the USSF or the DBU, Danish Football Association), and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). These institutions are layered, meaning that some have a greater influence over soccer in general, while some are more regionally- or nationally-based.

³⁷ While ‘soccer’ and ‘football’ are interchangeable, when talking of England, I will be using the term football as it is the more commonly employed word to describe the game.

women's teams by 1921 playing regular, well-attended games, though without a league structure."³⁸ As Williams stressed women's football was thriving in England and the sport was popular enough that team owners could afford to start and continue supporting clubs.

In 1921, three years after the male footballers returned from the battlefields, the FA, made up of only male board members, decided to ban women from playing under its federation.³⁹ The ban lasted from 1921 until 1972 and was initially viewed as a relatively large shift backwards for women's footballers because they were no longer legitimized in the face of English football. Following the FA's ban, other federations such as the Deutscher Fussball-Bund (DFB) in Germany and the Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (KNVB) in the Netherlands issued their own bans on women's football.⁴⁰ However, these bans did not keep women from playing football, they kept women from doing so under a structured and bureaucratic institution. Women did not hide their sport, rather they 'publicized' themselves and actively resisted the conventions established by the FA. Even after the end of the bans in the 1970s, women's football was still subjugated and seen as lesser than men's football. The introduction of a Women's World Cup by FIFA in 1991 and the inclusion of women's soccer in the 1996 Summer Olympics aided the recognition of the women's game in many communities but issues of equality between the women's and men's European teams still existed.⁴¹

³⁸ Jean Williams, "The Fastest Growing Sport? Women's Football in England," in *Soccer & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2/3 (July 2003), 115.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁰ The DFB banned women's football from 1955-1970, while the KNVB banned women's football on-and-off between the years of 1924-1960.

⁴¹ It is important to note, the 1991 WWC took place 61 years after the first Men's World Cup; likewise, men's soccer has been included in every Summer Olympics, except 1896 and 1932, while women's soccer has only been played in seven Summer Olympics as of 2016.

While many European teams retain aspects of inequality today, there have been notable successes in a handful of countries including Denmark, England, and Norway.⁴² The Danish women's team went on strike in 2017, which ended with the team missing one of its World Cup qualifying games and, ultimately, missing out on the 2019 Women's World Cup. Their strike was a form of direct action, meaning that the women took a serious stance against their employers in the hopes of putting pressure on their federation to get better compensation. In the end, these women were approached by their federation in an effort to compromise leading to a new collective-bargaining agreement (CBA) that increased their pay by 60% and gave them an investment of another 2 million kroner, or \$320,000 USD.⁴³

Unlike the Danish women's team, who only received an increase of pay, the English and Norwegian women's teams obtained fully equal pay in salary. According to Louis Taylor, a reporter for *The Guardian*, the FA decided to pay their English men and women footballers the same bonuses and match fees other than those that are played for major tournaments.⁴⁴ This means that the men and women make the same money for playing friendlies. However, pay disparity still exists when it comes to tournaments such as World Cups and the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) European Championships. The reasoning behind this disparity is that FIFA doles out the prize money which skews towards the men and, thus, the women make less for their appearances.⁴⁵ Similar to England, Norway also offers the same amount of money

⁴² In Europe, the Dutch Women's National Team has also reached a better agreement with their Federation.

⁴³ "Danish federation resolves dispute with women's soccer team," *USA Today* (Virginia, USA), November 25, 2017.

⁴⁴ Louise Taylor, "England women's and men's teams receive same pay, FA reveals," *The Guardian* (England), September 3, 2020.

⁴⁵ For reference, the 2018 Men's WC had a total prize pool of \$400 million USD with \$38 million going to the championship team, while the 2019 WWC had a total prize pool of \$30 million USD with \$4 million going to the winning team.

to their men's and women's soccer teams.⁴⁶ Norway was the first nation to pay its men's and women's national teams equally.⁴⁷

Similar to the struggles of women's footballers in England, Continental Europe, and globally, women's soccer players in the United States also faced problems of legitimization and discriminatory practices. In 1972, The Department of Education passed Title IX, requiring that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."⁴⁸ Essentially, male and female athletes had to be provided with the same opportunities to play sports and receive the same quality facilities and treatment. This enabled more women to participate in athletics at the high school and collegiate levels in numerous sports, including soccer. Title IX opened the doorway for many female soccer players to compete and it was likely a factor in the USSF's decision to start a U.S. Women's National Soccer team.

The USWNT was started in mid-1985 after a few members of the U.S. Olympic Committee and the USSF came together and started advocating for women's soccer to be an Olympic sport. During their efforts, the USSF hired Mike Ryan as the USWNT head coach and had him fabricate his team by choosing 17 players from a "mini-Olympics for amateur athletes," known as the National Sports Festival.⁴⁹ Four days after the tournament ended, the 17 players and Mike Ryan jetted off to Italy to play the first USWNT games. This first team was

⁴⁶ For more information on Norway's agreement, see Samuel Lovett, "Norway's male and female footballers sign historic equal-pay agreement," *The Independent*, December 15, 2017.

⁴⁷ Other notable non-European teams that have signed equal pay agreements include Brazil, Australia, and Sierra Leone.

⁴⁸ "Title IX," U.S. Department of Education, (1972).

⁴⁹ Caitlin Murray, *The National Team: The Inside Story of Women Who Changed Soccer*, (New York, NY: Abrams Press, 2019), 10.

underfunded: their kits did not fit, nor were they even the U.S. colors— red, white, or blue. Michelle Akers, one of the early USWNT players, recalled, “I remember feeling like, *Well, I don’t know what this national team is anyway, but we’re not very USA-ish.*”⁵⁰ While this may not seem significant, as it was a last-minute endeavor, the issue is representative of what USWNT players continued to experience.

In 1991, FIFA held the first Women’s World Cup, called the “1st FIFA World Championship for Women’s Football for the M&Ms Cup.” FIFA had created this name because they were unsure of how successful the venture would be, and they did not want to tie it to the successful Men’s World Cup for fears of negatively impacting it. This tournament marked the first occasion where the USWNT had their own uniforms, meant for female athletes. The new female-inclusive uniforms seems to indicate that the USSF had started putting money into the USWNT. Although, according to Murray, the “small stipend [\$10 USD a day that the players received] didn’t change the fact of the matter: To compete in the tournament, players were spending money to be part of the team, not making it.”⁵¹ The women were playing soccer because they were passionate about the sport, not because they made money or gained fame from it. The USWNT won this first major tournament for women’s soccer; nonetheless, due to the lack of advertisement and media around the 1991 tournament, the team returned to little fanfare. FIFA did not even award the U.S. women with prize money as the women’s game was not financially lucrative enough. Instead, the USSF paid each player \$500 USD for their success— a massive accomplishment at the time.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹ Murray, *The National Team*, 24.

After a few decades and generations of players facing discrimination silently, or at least not openly, the USWNT took a ‘soft’ stance by sharing their experiences on social media platforms and, later, a harder stance by pursuing legal actions against the USSF.⁵² In 2015, the USWNT took to Twitter and online news outlets to express their frustrations over having to play on artificial turf during the 2015 Women’s World Cup in Canada. The six venues that were used for the tournament were all artificial turf, which while it provides the benefits of an even playing surface and provides for easier maintenance of pitches in the long run, there are drawbacks. One notable drawback is the large turf burns that many players sported throughout the tournament. Turf is also a much harder surface to run on than grass, meaning that players joints are impacted more.

In addition to the hard surface, it is especially dangerous to play on tur in the summer, as it is much hotter than grass and has been known to cause soccer cleats to melt or athletes to sustain low grade burns on the bottom of their feet. In response to FIFA’s decision to authorize Canada to host the 2015 WWC on turf, 81 players from 13 countries sued FIFA in an effort to force the organization to change the games to grass pitches.⁵³ Ultimately, the suit was ineffective and the female soccer players, who attended the World Cup, played on turf. This is just another example of the discrimination that female soccer players face because male players play solely on grass and there has been no occasion in which turf pitches were considered for hosting major men’s tournaments.

⁵² By ‘soft,’ I mean that the women did not strike or retire early to pressure the USSF, rather, the USWNT shared their positions through social and traditional media outlets before finally taking legal action.

⁵³ Laurent Dubois, “Artificial turf controversy a constant in backdrop of Women’s World Cup,” *Sports Illustrated*, June 23, 2015.

While it is unclear how much of an impact the WWC being played on turf had, if at all, on the USWNT signing an EEOC complaint against the USSF, it was one of a long line of inequalities that the USWNT had to overcome. On March 31, 2016, five of the USWNT players, most of whom held leadership roles on the team, filed an EEOC complaint against the USSF over unfair wages and treatment. The complaint was unfortunately unsuccessful and involved a lengthy affair in which the USSF refused to cooperate. A year after filing the EEOC complaint, the USWNT players withdrew it and opted to file a lawsuit against their employer, involving 28 federation players. This suit ongoing and, so far, seems like it has been unsuccessful in really pressuring the USSF to change their position. With the growth of the women's game, the USWNT fanbase is expanding, meaning that the recognition and support of the players is increasing as well. Likewise, the soccer community, itself, is experiencing change in how federations treat their players and address inequalities. This is reflective of the globalized society which is becoming more aware of gender inequality and is actively working to solve issues surrounding it.

Finally, it is imperative to cover context more specific to U.S. Soccer and the issue of pay disparity. The USSF attributes this disparity to the different pay models the USWNT and the USMNT use. The USWNT negotiated for a guaranteed salary, while the USMNT have a paid-by-appearance model. Put differently, the USWNT make money all-year-round while the men make money for each game they play. Guaranteed salaries offer more stability and security for players who do not receive it at a professional level, whereas paid-by-appearance salaries are more flexible. Due to the different pay models and to how FIFA allocates money, the USWNT receives less financial compensation than the USMNT.

One such example, that more clearly articulates this issue is wage bonuses. As Honey Campbell, a JD student at the University of San Francisco law, elucidates,

[...] the WNT players receive a bonus of \$1,350 for each Friendly won, but they do not receive additional compensation if they tie or lose the game. Therefore, if they lose all twenty games, then each player receives \$72,000 for the year, or only \$3,600 per game. However, if the women win all twenty games, then they receive \$99,000 for that year, or \$4,950 per game. The MNT is also required to play a minimum of twenty Friendlies per year, but regardless of the outcome, they receive a minimum of \$5,000 to play in each game.⁵⁴

This quote illustrates that, at the most basic levels, the pay structures, wages are unequal. The wage bonuses also indicate that there is a difference in expectations between the USWNT and the USMNT—the women are expected to win, while the men are rewarded for simply playing. While the issue of bonuses are only part of the equation, it helps one to understand the gravity of the pay structure situation. In other words, the wage bonuses are a microcosm of the entire affair, meaning that just as the bonuses are unequal, so too are the pay structures.⁵⁵ Overall, the USWNT, like its predecessors, had to (and continues to) find ways to demand action for equality.

Data and Discussion⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Honey Campbell, “Superior Play, Unequal Pay: U.S. Women’s Soccer and the Pursuit for Pay Equity,” in *University of San Francisco Law Review*, vol. 51, (San Francisco: University of San Francisco, 2017), 560.

⁵⁵ For more information, on the pay structures, see Data and Discussion Section, “IX. May 2020: A Lawsuit Disappointment.”

⁵⁶ It is important to note, this essay does not include every event or tweet that the USWNT players covered during this four-year period, rather, the paper focuses on examining the events that garnered the most media attention and were discussed the most by the USWNT players. Also worth noting is that not every player will be in each analytical section, nor will every player be represented in this essay—simply put, not every player engages in social media in the same way or offers their viewpoint on an issue.

I. March and April 2016: EEOC Complaint Filing⁵⁷

During the end of March 2016, specifically, March 31, the USWNT took to Twitter to announce that five of the team's players—Hope Solo, Becky Sauerbrunn, Alex Morgan, Carli Lloyd, and Megan Rapinoe—had filed an EEOC complaint against the USSF. While only five players signed the complaint, the rest of the team quickly took to Twitter to back up what their leaders initiated. The EEOC complaint is an example of legal action and should be recognized as an act of defiance or resistance by the USWNT players. This means that the players challenged how they were being treated, whether that be about unfair wages, issues around maternity, or problems with facilities, instead of maintaining the status quo. The women exposed the issue and took a unified stance, further solidifying the relevance of their offensive action against the USSF.

Additionally, the use of Twitter as a forum for expressing the USWNT's legal activism must be addressed because it differs from previous spaces that these women inhabited. Previously, USWNT players either silently pursued action against the USSF or they used traditional media outlets to express themselves. These women depended on third parties to advance their plights, limiting the players' personal, or individual, space to be defiant. Twitter, in this instance, was a mechanism for each of the players to take a stance individually, while also using similar rhetoric and hashtags as a display of unity and loyalty to the team's goal of achieving equal pay.

At 9:07 a.m., on March 31, 2016, Becky Sauerbrunn announced, via Twitter, that the five USWNT players had filed an EEOC complaint against the USSF (Figure 1). At the time, Sauerbrunn was one of two USWNT captains, and one of the five players who had signed the complaint. She was one of the leaders on the team and her authority gave her the opportunity to

⁵⁷ Tierna Davidson, one of the USWNT player on the 2019 WWC roster, was not on the team until 2018; thus, the USWNT's tweets cannot represent or include her opinion until then.

speak on behalf of all of her teammates in an official, public announcement.⁵⁸ The phrase “whole-heartedly supported by the entire team,” denoted that there was no hesitation by the team to challenge their employers. The phrase also emphasized that the team in its entirety felt compelled to address the USSF and its discrimination towards female soccer players.



Fig. 1 Becky Sauerbrunn’s tweet in reference to the EEOC complaint filing.⁵⁹

Moreover, the idea of solidarity amongst the players and their mutual feelings towards inequity lent itself to the establishment of a social consciousness. The players not only shared common identities of gender and profession but, also, they generated a collective one built on overcoming discrimination. This led them to take a more comfortable stance because they were not a bunch of individuals attempting to solve a problem, rather they were a group.

One instance of social consciousness was the tweets of several of the other USWNT players on March 31, 2016. Like Sauerbrunn’s tweet, some of the USWNT players utilized the hashtag, “#equalpayequalpay,” in their March 31 tweets.⁶⁰ Along with this hashtag, players posted the

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that only Carli Lloyd and Emily Sonnett directly interacted with Sauerbrunn’s statement— they both retweeted it.

⁵⁹ Becky Sauerbrunn (@beckysauerbrunn), “Five players signed the complaint, but the decision to file was whole-heartedly supported by the entire team. #equalpayequalpay #thegals,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016.

⁶⁰ The players who posted the same photograph of the team with the #equalpayequalpay were Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe, Ashlyn Harris, Ali Krieger, Kelley O’Hara, Emily Sonnett, Morgan Brian Gautrat, Lindsey Horan, Samantha Mewis, and Tobin Heath.

same photograph of the USWNT with the phrase “Equal Play. Equal Pay.” (Figure 2). The image, focused on the players’ huddle, was memorable because it was a physical representation of team unity. Forming a huddle is an action that teams perform right before a game begins or right after it ends; essentially, it is used to ground players and assisted them on the task at hand, whether that be preparing for a game or reflecting on it. The huddle is a space where teammates can encourage and support one another; most teams have a cheer or chant, a phrase used to communicate a common identity or goal, that ends a huddle. By the USWNT players choosing to present a photograph of themselves in a huddle with a shared phrase overhead, one can garner that the women wanted to emphasize that, as a team, they were committed to fighting for equality.



Kelley O'Hara ✓
@kelleymohara

It's pretty simple... [#equalpayequalpay](#)



9:24 AM · Mar 31, 2016 · Twitter for iPhone

1,760 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 4,296 Likes



Tobin Heath ✓
@TobinHeath

[#equalpayequalpay](#)



9:38 AM · Mar 31, 2016 · Twitter for iPhone

1,854 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 4,348 Likes



Fig. 2 A compilation of tweets from Kelley O’Hara, Tobin Heath, Morgan Brian Gautrat, and Megan Rapinoe, highlighting team unity after the EEOC filing.⁶¹

Similar to the significance of the image as a way to communicate team unity and social consciousness, the hashtag, “#equalplayequalpay,” was also a manifestation of unity. The intention of a hashtag, on social media, is to manufacture a space where posts discussing similar ideas or events can be found, meaning that it links posts. In linking posts, the hashtag creates a discourse space which admits any of its users to weigh in on an issue and respond to other users. Twitter, and other social media platforms, provide their users with the opportunity to open themselves up to new ideas or to share their viewpoints. Through hashtags, the platform can be a uniting force, meaning that it connects people and fosters commonalities between groups of people. In the case of the USWNT’s hashtag, the players were able to expand the conversation outside of just their team and make the event public, meaning that they were able to receive support from a larger group of people and were potentially able to put more pressure on the

⁶¹ Kelley O’Hara (@kelleymohara), “It’s pretty simple...#equalplayequalpay,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016; Tobin Heath (@TobinHeath), “#equalplayequalpay,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016; Morgan Brian Gautrat (@moeebrian), “Standing up for what is right.. #EqualPlayEqualPay,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016; Megan Rapinoe (@mPinoe), “Equal Play. Equal Pay. RESPECT,” *Twitter*, March 31, 2016.

federation. Hashtags continue to be linked to a post as long as the tweet is available, meaning that the discourse can continue long after the actual day that the hashtag was popular or trended.

From this event, one understands that social media is substantial to the USWNT's legal activism because it allowed the players as a collective and as individuals to share their viewpoints. Twitter provided the women with a space to exhibit their team unity, while permitting other women, whether they be athletes, fans, or the society in general, to take on their social consciousness and identity. This signaled the USWNT, while not explicitly stating it, understood that the issue of unequal wages went beyond just their current team.

II. March 2017: Supporting U.S. Women's Hockey

On March 15, 2017, the U.S. Women's Hockey team announced that they would boycott the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championship, the equivalent of the World Cup to soccer. These women went on strike in response to failed wage negotiations between themselves and USA Hockey, their employer. As the captain Meghan Duggan said,

We are asking for a living wage and for USA Hockey to fully support its programs for women and girls and stop treating us like an afterthought [...] We have represented our country with dignity and deserve to be treated with fairness and respect.⁶²

The USWNT hockey's argument was very similar to the USWNT soccer team's argument in their equal pay campaign. This indicated that the issue of pay disparity was not limited to just one team, nor were these incidences isolated.

⁶² SI Wire, "U.S. women's hockey boycotting world championship to protest unfair pay," on *Sports Illustrated Online (SI.com)*, March 15, 2017.

In response to the USWNT hockey's statement, many of the USWNT soccer players took to Twitter to offer their support. USWNT soccer's solidarity with their hockey counterparts indicated that the women understood the issue to be bigger than just their team and that if they did not act, then they were complicit, or passive bystanders. On March 15, 2017, Alex Morgan quote-tweeted, or retweeted with a reply, the statement that the U.S. Women's Hockey Team released through Hilary Knight, one of their captains (Figure 3). Morgan's use of a quote-tweet had a couple of designations: the emphasis was on Knight's tweet and Twitter users were able to see exactly what Morgan was responding to, and quote-tweeting, like hashtags, connected a discourse.



Alex Morgan ✓
@alexmorgan13

From one [#USWNT](#) to another, we are behind you. Everyone help our USA Womens Hockey team in fighting for what's right. [#BeBoldForChange](#)

Hilary Knight ✓ @HilaryKnight · Mar 15, 2017
US WNT will not play in 2017 World Championship due to stalled negotiations over fair wages and support from USA Hockey [#BeBoldForChange](#)

The members of the U.S. Women's National Hockey Team announce that we will not be playing in the 2017 IIHF Women's World Championship in Plymouth, Michigan unless significant progress has been made on the year-long negotiations with USA Hockey over fair wages and equitable support.

We have asked USA Hockey for equitable support as required by the Ted Stevens Amateur Sports Act. Specifically, we have asked for equitable support in the areas of financial compensation, youth team development, equipment, travel expenses, hotel accommodations, meals, staffing, transportation, marketing and publicity.

The goals of our requests are to achieve fair treatment from USA Hockey, to initiate the appropriate steps to correct the outlined issues, and to move forward with a shared goal of promoting and growing girls and women in our sport while representing the United States in future competitions, including the Women's World Championship.

Putting on the USA jersey represents the culmination of many years of hard work and sacrifice that reflect our love of both hockey and country. In making these requests, we are simply asking USA Hockey to comply with the law.

11:56 AM · Mar 15, 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1,663 Retweets 44 Quote Tweets 6,007 Likes

Fig. 3 Alex Morgan’s quote-tweet in response to Knight’s tweet about the USWNT hockey’s strike.⁶³

In terms of the first designation, Knight’s tweet was the focus of the discussion, meaning that Morgan did not attempt to speak over her fellow female athlete. The two female athletes might have had commonalities in their stories and experiences as female athletes, but their narratives were not completely the same. By Morgan quote-tweeting, she was standing with Knight while allowing the focus of the issue to remain on the USWNT hockey’s struggle with their federation.

Similar to the idea that Knight’s tweet was the focus, with Morgan being placed into a supportive role, Morgan further acted in this role by quote-tweeting and, more so, by including the hashtag, “#BeBoldForChange.”⁶⁴ The action of quote-tweeting, automatically connected Morgan’s response to Knight’s and enabled other users to easily move between the two athletes. By responding to Knight’s tweet, Morgan increased the visibility of the statement because people who followed her but not Knight had the opportunity to learn about what was happening between USWNT hockey and its federation. Morgan’s actions amplified Knight and her team’s position on their equal pay issue. Morgan’s own tweet utilized the hashtag, “#BeBoldForChange,” the official hashtag of the USWNT hockey’s movement. The utilization of the hashtag accomplished two goals: (1) it connected Morgan’s comments with the much larger discourse about the issue and (2) it was a display of solidarity, or an explicit way in which Morgan showed her support for USWNT hockey.⁶⁵

⁶³Alex Morgan (@alexmorgan13), “From one #USWNT to another, we are behind you. Everyone help our USA Womens Hockey team in fighting for what’s right. #BeBoldForChange,” *Twitter*, March 15, 2017.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ It is important to note, Alex Morgan was not the only player who stood in solidarity with the USWNT hockey on Twitter. The other players who did so were Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Ashlyn Harris, Crystal

Besides offering their support to the USWNT hockey, the USWNT soccer players also reintroduced their own ongoing legal negotiations with their federation. On the one-year anniversary of the USWNT's EEOC filing and just half a month after the USWNT hockey team went on strike, the collective of USWNT players tweeted out their support of USWNT hockey.⁶⁶ Between the tweets acknowledging USWNT hockey's strike and the tweets about USWNT hockey ending their strike which allowed them to compete in the IIHF World Championship, the hockey players negotiated with their federation and signed a new CBA.⁶⁷ Thus, the USWNT's tweets wished the female hockey players good luck at the IIHF World Championship.

In addition to the message wishing the USWNT hockey team success in the tournament, the USWNT also used this time to advocate for themselves and their campaign. Specifically, USWNT players tweeted: "On 1 yr anniversary of EEOC filing, sending best wishes to #USWNT hockey in their #2017WWC as we all seek to #changethegame #beboldforchange".⁶⁸ These tweets were significant for several reasons: (1) the messages revealed the team's unity, (2) the women placed their own identities and campaign in line with USWNT hockey's agenda, and (3) the soccer players addressed the USWNT hockey's achievement.

The March 31, 2017 tweet was an example of team unity. In other words, the USWNT players tweeted from their own accounts; however, all of the participants released the *same exact* tweet. This action demonstrated that the tweet was carefully thought out and the players understood that they had a platform which permitted them to call out certain subjects, such as

Dunn, Ali Krieger, Kelly O'Hara, Emily Sonnett, Lindsey Horan, Samantha Mewis, Tobin Heath, Jessica McDonald, and Christen Press.

⁶⁶ This event took place on March 31, 2017.

⁶⁷ Seth Berkman, "U.S. Women's Team Strikes a Deal With U.S.A. Hockey," in *New York Times*, March 28, 2017.

⁶⁸ Emily Sonnett (@emilysonnett), "On 1 yr anniversary of EEOC filing, sending best wishes to #USWNT hockey in their #2017WWC as we all seek to #changethegame #beboldforchange," *Twitter*, March 31, 2017.

USWNT hockey's procurement of better treatment and wage pay. All of the players tweeting out the same message demonstrated that the team was unified on the issue of equal pay.

The USWNT's tweets also addressed the success of the U.S. Women's Hockey team's negotiations; in the process, they aligned their own equal pay campaign and identity with the USWNT hockey's agenda. By highlighting the favorable outcome of the USWNT hockey's equal pay battle, the USWNT used it to accentuate their own campaign but also as a case study for how federations should interact with their athletes. This pursuit placed pressure on the USWNT's federation to respond to their requests. The date of USWNT soccer's tweet called attention to how their situation had not been promptly handled. In turn, the female soccer players could compare their own circumstance to the quickly resolved USWNT hockey's situation.

III. April 2017: The New CBA

Less than a month after the USWNT players put out a collective statement recognizing the anniversary of their EEOC filing, the women finally reached an agreement with U.S. Soccer about a new CBA. The new CBA granted the USWNT members much of what they sought including a base pay increase, the USWNTPA's control over marketing rights, and U.S. Soccer's commitment to the continued improvement of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), or the professional women's soccer league in the United States.⁶⁹ This deal was a historic one which bettered not just the best U.S. Women's Soccer players' lives, but all professional women's footballers that came to the United States to play.

⁶⁹ Kim McCauley, "USNWT CBA a victory for all American women's soccer players, not just the best ones," *SBNATION*, April 5, 2017.

Reacting to the new CBA, many members of the USWNT shared their opinions on Twitter.⁷⁰ These reactions were filled with hope and encouragement for a better present and future for the women’s game. For example, Alex Morgan, wrote a thread of two tweets,

Having made significant strides in our new USWNT contract, these changes will not only have an immediate positive impact on our team, but... / ... will also greatly help the future of this team. I’m so proud of our team and the unity we showed during this process. #ChangeTheGame⁷¹

There were a couple words and phrases in Morgan’s tweet that should be emphasized—“immediate positive impact” and “future.”⁷² The phrase, “immediate positive impact,” should be broken down into its components, which have favorable connotations. Additionally, the phrase also conveyed that the new CBA promptly affected these women and that the change was a much welcome one. While the first phrase focused on the present, the noun, “future,” referred to the succession of the team. By Morgan recognizing that the CBA did not just affect the current team, one garners that the USWNT, as a whole, understood that their position was temporary, but their legacy long-lasting. This realization was further evident in the hashtag, “#ChangeTheGame,” which can be interpreted as the USWNT permanently altering the expectations for women’s soccer. Although Morgan’s tweet was not the most detailed, it still articulated that the USWNT had success when negotiating with the USSF and would continue to fight for equality.

⁷⁰ The players who participated in this event were Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Ashlyn Harris, Morgan Brian Gautrat, Tobin Heath, and Alex Morgan.

⁷¹ Alex Morgan (@alexmorgan13), “Having made significant strides in our new USWNT contract, these changes will not only have an immediate positive impact on our team, but... / ... will also greatly help the future of this team. I’m so proud of our team and the unity we showed during this process. #ChangeTheGame,” *Twitter*, April 5, 2017.

⁷² *Ibid.*



Fig. 4 Megan Rapinoe’s tweet of an iPhone note, detailing her hope for the future after the signing of a new CBA.⁷³

Concurrent with Alex Morgan’s Twitter statement, Megan Rapinoe’s focused on emphasizing the current success while not settling for future betterment (Figure 4). Rapinoe repeated the word, “commitment,” multiple times which has many definitions including dedication and obligation or duty.⁷⁴ Using the word, “commitment,” underscored the lengthiness of the USWNT’s equal pay campaign and the willingness of the players to continue working towards a better future. This means that the team was not settled or fully satisfied with this new

⁷³ Megan Rapinoe (@mPinoe), “Picture of iPhone Note: ‘I have been so proud of this team throughout this entire process. Our commitment to one another, our efforts in growing Women’s Soccer domestically and across the world, and our continued fight for equality as female athletes in this country has been tremendous. I believe this deal is a crucial step forward in the future of the WNT. As a PA we feel proud that we are better today than we were yesterday and will be better tomorrow than we are today. Our commitment remains resolute to continue to push towards equality for all women,’” *Twitter*, April 5, 2017.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

CBA but, rather, the CBA was a stepping-stone towards equality. Rapinoe's use of the phrase "crucial step forward," literally showed that the team was not ending their fight with the federation while emphasizing the necessity of celebrating the small victories along the way.⁷⁵

Potentially more significant than Rapinoe's pride and excitement about the new CBA, was the end statement which turned outwards to women more generally. The final sentence acknowledged that women, as a gender, remained in a position of inferiority and oppression. By closing her statement in this way, Rapinoe addressed that the USWNT's situation was only one example of women being held in such a position. In addition, her statement allowed for other women to relate to her team, attempting to encourage the women to sympathize and support the USWNT in the future. The statement was also one of encouragement as the USWNT was able to accomplish much of what it wanted, so why would other women not be able to as well? Finally, Rapinoe, and the USWNT, stood in solidarity with female Twitter users who came across her tweet. Without Twitter, Rapinoe's reach would be limited and, thus, the continued fan support that was necessary for the USWNT to put pressure on their federation, would not have been as intense.

Unlike Morgan and Rapinoe, who tweeted out their own statements, Carli Lloyd quote-tweeted, Sunil Gulati, the contemporary President of U.S. Soccer's official announcement about the CBA (Figure 5). Gulati's statement focused on the all-around nature of the CBA, meaning how it would affect the senior USWNT, the NWSL, and the developmental programs for young female soccer players. This comprehensive statement was then retweeted by Lloyd, who seemed enthusiastic about the conclusion of the CBA. Unlike Morgan and Rapinoe who centered their

⁷⁵ Ibid.

statements around the long-lasting nature of the negotiations and the future of the National Team, Lloyd accentuated the connection between the USWNT players and the USSF. The tweet demonstrates the successful, compromising venture of the two organizations and the hope for the continued establishment of open lines of communication between the two. By quote-tweeting Gulati, Lloyd showed her followers that the organizations had put humanity and activism at the top of their priority lists.



Fig. 5 Carli Lloyd’s quote-tweet of Sunil Gulati’s statement about the new CBA and the relationship between the USWNT and the USSF.⁷⁶

IV. September 2017: Solidarity with the Danish Women’s National Soccer Team

⁷⁶ Carli Lloyd (@CarliLloyd), “Happy an agreement has been reached,” *Twitter*, April 5, 2017.

In September 2017, the Danish Women’s National Team (DENWNT) released a statement, saying that the team was going on strike. The decision to strike was made after the Danish FA, their employer, changed how it would operate soccer, resulting in “the women’s national team no longer classed as their employees.”⁷⁷ While this particular event was not focused on the problem of equal pay, it was significant because of the relation to it. In other words, the issue that the DENWNT were confronted with was losing recognition with their federation, a situation that would affect pay structures and overall treatment.⁷⁸

After the DENWNT announced their strike to the soccer world, many USWNT players were quick to offer their support.⁷⁹ Several USWNT players tweeted similar messages, personalizing the tweets when applicable. Allie Long’s tweet was an example of this method as she blanketed her statement with “we,” while tagging Nadia Nadim, a member of the DENWNT (Figure 7). The “we” in the statement provided an opportunity for Long to place her statement into her team’s larger message, meaning that she was a representative, or extension of the team. The use of “we,” contributed to the emphasis of the idea of social consciousness, or everyone on the team being united behind one concept or ideology.

On the other hand, Long separated herself from her teammates by tagging Nadia Nadim, one of her contemporary professional club teammates at the Portland Thorns. Even if someone did not know that Long and Nadim were teammates, there was a visual cue in the tweet depicting this—the rose emoji. The rose was (and remains) a symbol of the Portland Thorns; thus, by

⁷⁷ Duncan Wright, “Denmark women’s team refusing to play Sweden in key World Cup qualifier over payment row,” *The Sun*, October 18, 2017.

⁷⁸ Ultimately, the DENWNT did not participate in their October 20th World Cup Qualifying game against Sweden. This situation led to the DENWNT not qualifying for the 2019 WWC.

⁷⁹ The players who stood behind the DENWNT, in addition to Allie Long, were Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Samantha Mewis, and Alex Morgan.

utilizing this emoji, Long revealed the connection between her and Nadim and further upped the stakes by connecting herself to the DENWNT's fight. The significance of Long's tweet was that she positions herself beside the DENWNT and extended the USWNT's umbrella of their equal pay campaign, not only within their sport and gender but, also, outside of the United States of America. Long used this tweet to bring her and Nadim's users into one community focused on tackling inequality.



Fig. 6 Allie Long's tweet in response to the DENWNT's announcement of their strike.⁸⁰

V. *Late 2018: Standing with the WNBA Players Association*

On November 1, 2018, the WNBA Players Association (WNBAPA) announced that it was opting out of their current CBA, signed in 2014 and valid through 2021.⁸¹ The women desired to start growing and developing their league sooner, hoping to inspire future generations of women to play basketball. Their efforts were also fueled with the desire that they, the current generation, could live more comfortably.

⁸⁰ Allie Long (@ALLIE_LONG), "We stand w the #denwnt in their fight to #changethegame &urge the DBU to bridge the gap so WCQ play can resume! @nadia_nadim," *Twitter*, September 17, 2017.

⁸¹ Mechelle Voepel, "WNBA players opt out of CBA, can start negotiating sooner," *ESPNW*, November 1, 2018.

Similar to how the USWNT players offered statements of unity and encouragement to the DENWNT, several players tweeted in support of the WNBA players' decision to opt out of their CBA.⁸² Once again, the USWNT players expanded the equal pay and fair treatment discourse outside of their own team, forming a cross-sport relationship committed to positively impacting women's sports and their future development. This illustrated that the USWNT recognized that they were not the only female athletes experiencing inequality. Also, the players understood their influential positions and abilities to address these 'foreign' issues.

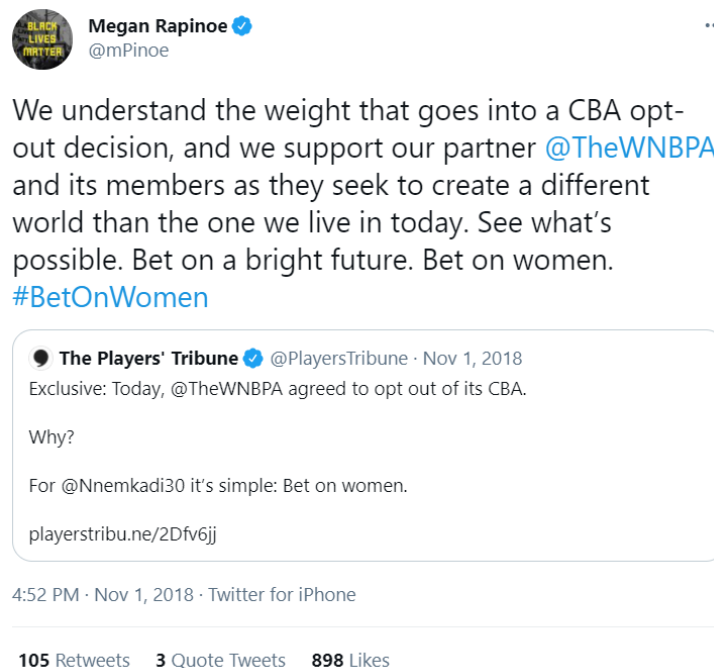


Figure 7 Megan Rapinoe's quote-tweet of *The Players' Tribune's* article about the WNBAPA opting out of their CBA.⁸³

One example of the USWNT's response to the WNBAPA's action was Megan Rapinoe's quote-tweet of a *The Players' Tribune* article (Figure 8). Rapinoe's keyword, "partner," was used

⁸² The participating players were Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Samantha Mewis, and Alex Morgan.

⁸³ Megan Rapinoe (@mPinoe), "We understand the weight that goes into a CBA opt-out decision, and we support our partner @TheWNBAPA and its members as they seek to create a different world than the one we live in today. See what's possible. Bet on a bright future. Bet on women. #BetOnWomen," *Twitter*, November 1, 2018.

to describe the USWNT's relationship with the WNBA women.⁸⁴ The women, who played soccer and basketball, were close-knit because they fought together, with the understanding that they were facing similar issues.

Another important part of Rapinoe's quote-tweet was that her message responded to an article by *The Players' Tribune*. *The Players' Tribune* is "a new media company that provides athletes with a platform to connect directly with their fans, in their own words. Founded by Derek Jeter, *The Players' Tribune* publishes first-person stories from athletes, providing unique insight into the daily sports conversation."⁸⁵ Alternatively stated, the news media company was founded by athletes in order to create a platform where athletes could share their true, authentic stories, especially about everyday inequalities they faced. Rapinoe's quote-tweet of this alternative media source furthered the discourse that comes directly from WNBAPA members, not ones from traditional (or "unbiased") news media. Rapinoe made space for the female basketball players' experiences to dominate the discussion while offering her and the USWNT's continued solidarity.

VI. *March 2019: Lawsuit Filing and Social Media Absence*

From late 2018 to March 2019, there was a temporary shift among the USWNT players' use of Twitter as a forum for constructing a community and initiating social activism to the USWNT remaining silent on the equal pay front. At the beginning of March 2019, the five USWNT players who had filed the EEOC complaint withdrew it; in the wake of the withdrawal, on March 8, 2019, 28 of the USWNT federation players filed a class-action lawsuit against the USSF.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Minute Media, "About," *The Players' Tribune*, 2021.

⁸⁶ It is worth noting, March 8th is International Women's Day. Thus, the USWNT players strategically filed their lawsuit on a day that was devoted to recognizing and supporting women.

The decision to file a lawsuit and withdraw the EEOC complaint was significant because the entirety of the USWNT committed to the legal action and to increasing the pressure they put on their employer.

At the same time, the women involved in the lawsuit did not use Twitter to disclose their positions and fight for equal pay, rather, the main source of knowledge came from traditional media outlets. For example, Christen Press told *The Associated Press*, “We believe it is our duty to be the role models that we've set out to be and fight to what we know we legally deserve, and hopefully in that way it inspires women everywhere.”⁸⁷ Here, Press articulated that the decision to file a lawsuit was about their “duty” as “role models” and the wish to “[sic. inspire] women everywhere.”⁸⁸ These words discerned the USWNT desired outcome of the lawsuit—their actions would set a precedent that women, regardless of occupation, could follow.

Due to their goal being one that was universal to women, it is interesting that the players did not tweet about their resolution. There was no given reason as to why the players did not act; thus, scholars can only theorize about it. One reason the players did not tweet could have been for legal purposes, meaning that tweets could have been brought up in the lawsuit and could negatively impact it. Another reason could have been that they did not want their social media usage to distract from their argument or their focus on winning the 2019 Women’s World Cup in France. At the end of the day, the significance of their inaction was that they did not utilize social media as a way to organize or rally their supporters for a continued dispute with the federation.

VII. *March-September 2019: Sponsorships and a New Partnership*

⁸⁷ Shanna McCarriston, “USWNT equal pay lawsuit: Everything you need to know about the Women’s World Cup champions’ legal fight,” *CBS*, July 11, 2019.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Although the USWNT did not tweet about the equal pay lawsuit filing, the players did take to Twitter to talk about issues of equal pay prior to, during, and shortly after the 2019 WWC. From March through September, the USWNT players tweeted about the ways in which organizations, other than the USSF, were stepping up and trying to positively impact the gendered pay gap. Here, there was a division in the types of corporations that spoke out in support of the women, which can be broken up into two sections: sponsors and a partnership.

In terms of sponsors, there were a number of profitable sports organizations that used social media campaigns as a way to express their supportive stances (Figure 9). While all of these companies stood in solidarity with the USWNT and women's soccer players more generally, one must consider the different levels of commitment and active support that the sponsors offered. One of the first sponsors to speak out against the inequality, FIFA fashioned in their bonus pay gap, was Adidas. Prior to the WWC, Eric Liedtke, an Adidas Executive Board Member and Head of Global Brands, released a Twitter statement which included, "all adidas athletes on the winning 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup team will receive the same performance bonus payout as their male peers."⁸⁹ While this deal was not specifically for the USWNT, it obviously affected the women as they were the winners and, as such, were the recipients of Adidas' bid. It is worth noting that Liedtke's statement was directed only towards Adidas athletes, meaning that women that are Nike, Under Armour, or another sports company's athlete did not receive this bonus. In the tweet, Adidas provided a general framework for other sponsors to manipulate.

Just as Liedtke's statement was compelling, so too was Megan Rapinoe's quote-tweet, where she recognized Adidas' efforts and challenged other sponsors to emulate it.⁹⁰ Her dialogue was

⁸⁹ Adidas (@adidas), "Equal pay for equal play. #WWC #WorldCup with Eric Liedtke's official note attached," *Twitter*, March 9, 2019.

⁹⁰ Along with Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn and Lindsey Horan also responded to Adidas' announcement.

notable because Rapinoe did not settle for one company's support, rather she worked towards getting more support for women's soccer. This discourse was one of activism as it was a call to action and an encouragement for other companies to get involved in fixing women's equality issues.

Following Adidas' statement of support and prior to the start of the WWC, LUNABar told the USWNT players that it would contribute to closing the roster bonus gap and pay the players. This news was recorded and subsequently released by several of the USWNT players on their Twitters along with identical statements (see Abby Dahlkemper's tweet in Figure 9).⁹¹ The takeaway from this identical message was the idea that the present was when women should be recognized and treated as equal to men, not a future date. This placed the emphasis of the situation on the women's success, and it put pressure on the USSF to raise its standards. All of the participating players attached LUNABar's video and utilized the same message, showing their organization and commitment to the cause of equal pay.

About 2 months after LUNABar's announcement, Secret Deodorant, one of the USWNT's sponsors came out with their own ancillary action. Secret Deodorant agreed to pay each USWNT player playing in the WWC \$23,000.⁹² The amount of money was not chosen at random as 23 was the number of players that a National Team could register for the WWC. Like the sponsors who announced their commitment to the USWNT, Secret Deodorant highlighted the idea of equality in their statement; specifically, this idea was present in the discourse through a series of

⁹¹ The players who tweeted a recognition of LUNABar's support were Megan Rapinoe, Abby Dahlkemper, Tierna Davidson, Kelley O'Hara, Allie Long, Samantha Mewis, Jessica McDonald, Christen Press, and Alex Morgan.

⁹² Secret Deodorant (@SecretDeodorant), "We're taking action to help close the @USWNT gender pay gap by giving \$529k (\$23k x 23 players) to the @USWNTPlayers #WeSeeEqual #EqualPay #PayThem #USWNT #USWNTPA #DontSweatFairPlay #ASNS," *Twitter*, July 14, 2019.

hashtags, “#WeSeeEqual #EqualPay #PayThem.”⁹³ The words that made up these hashtags focused on the concepts of payment and equality, the focus of the USWNT’s equal pay campaign. Jessica McDonald quote-tweeted Secret Deodorant’s statement to simply thank the company for its willingness to financially support the USWNT and, in return, for the implicit support of women’s financial equality.⁹⁴ While McDonald’s reply seems underwhelming, it publicized that these female players were grateful for the support, considering that they did not receive it from their federation, rather the situation was addressed by outside companies.⁹⁵

Overall, the introduction of sponsorship support, and the USWNT responses, were notable when discussing the USWNT’s equal pay campaign because of the implications that come with the endorsement. First, sponsors stepping in to support the team exhibited that the sponsors viewed the women as role models and brand influencers, meaning that they wanted the women to continue representing their companies. Secondly, paired with the first implication, there was the benefit of financial stability for the players because of the additional money, funds that they would not have received had their sponsors stayed passive. Third, the sponsorship attention on this issue was significant to the revenue disputes, meaning that, in their lawsuit, the players could argue that their representation increased the monetary intake of these outside corporations. Logically, this would indicate to the USSF that its revenue would increase with the continued success of the USWNT. Finally, sponsorship interest designated that there was interest in women’s soccer and with sustained funds and development, that the USWNT could become more profitable and a more desirable asset.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jessica McDonald (J_MAC1422), “Thank you @SecretDeodorant,” *Twitter*, July 14, 2019.

⁹⁵ The other USWNT players who tweeted about Secret Deodorant’s act were Carli Lloyd, Morgan Brian Gautrat, Allie Long, Samantha Mewis, Christen Press, and Alex Morgan.

Megan Rapinoe @mPinoe

Oh this is fun game! Who else would like to play??
 Bravo Adidas, this is what's up! Your athletes deserve it!
 #checkoverstripes 🙌🏻👏🏻

adidas @adidas · Mar 8, 2019
 Equal pay for equal play.
 #WWC #WorldCup

We believe in inspiring and enabling the next generation of female athletes, creators and leaders through breaking barriers.

Today we are announcing that all adidas athletes on the winning 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup team will receive the same performance bonus payout as their male peers.

Eric Liedtke
 adidas Executive Board Member and Head of Global Brands



8:02 PM · Mar 9, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Abby Dahlkemper @AbbyDahlkemper

Someday, a woman's goal will be worth as much as a man's. Someday is now. Thank you @lunabar for closing the roster bonus gap and standing alongside us in our fight for equal pay. #somedayisnow



3:12 PM · Apr 2, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Jessica McDonald @J_Mac1422

Thank you @SecretDeodorant 🙌🏻🙌🏻🙌🏻

Secret Deodorant @SecretDeodorant · Jul 14, 2019
 We're taking action to help close the @USWNT gender pay gap by giving \$529K (\$23k x 23 players) to the @USWNTPlayers. #WeSeeEqual #EqualPay #PayThem #USWNT #USWNTPA #DontSweatFairPay #ASNS



12:09 PM · Jul 14, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Fig. 8 A compilation of tweets from Megan Rapinoe, Abby Dahlkemper, and Jessica McDonald, referring to the support of various sponsors.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Megan Rapinoe (@mPinoe), “Oh this is fun game! Who else would like to play?? Bravo Adidas, this is what's up! Your athletes deserve it! #checkoverstripes,” *Twitter*, March 9, 2019; Abby Dahlkemper (@AbbyDahlkemper),

Similar to the development of open, sponsorship support during this time, the USWNT also established a partnership with TIME'S UP Now. TIME'S UP Now is a women's activist organization with 3 goals— safety, equity, and power. These goals are accomplished through social, legislative, and business means.⁹⁷ Essentially, TIME'S UP Now works towards changing the society in order to improve the lives of the general population. The USWNT partnering up with this organization, leads one to deduce that the team expanded their priorities even more, from just focusing on the rights of their team to female athletes, to the larger women's population more generally. This showed that the players understood that they have a larger impact on the world due to their status as celebrity athletes and role models.⁹⁸

One tweet, posted by Ali Krieger, stressed the value of the relationship between this organization and the USWNT (Figure 10). In her tweet, Krieger used the phrase “systemic problem,” when talking about the equal pay issue.⁹⁹ As “systemic” highlighted, the issue could not be fixed with a simple law or regulation, to solve the inequity, the society would need to restructure itself and consider productive methods to stop the current situation. By labelling the problem as a systemic one, Krieger's discourse expanded itself to include all women, meaning that her focus was not solely on the USWNT. The significance of the expanded discourse was that it created a gendered social consciousness. Krieger's rhetoric encouraged women to band

“Someday, a woman's goal will be worth as much as a man's. Someday is now. Thank you @lunabar for closing the roster bonus gap and standing alongside us in our fight for equal pay. #somedayisnow,” *Twitter*, April 2, 2019; Jessica McDonald (J_MAC1422), “Thank you @SecretDeodorant,” *Twitter*, July 14, 2019.

⁹⁷ TIME'S UP Now, “Our Work,” *TIME'S UP*, 2021.

⁹⁸ The players, who tweeted about the new partnership with TIME'S UP Now, were Becky Sauerbrunn, Ashlyn Harris, Abby Dahlkemper, Ali Krieger, Lindsey Horan, Samantha Mewis, Jessica McDonald, and Christen Press.

⁹⁹ Ali Krieger (@aliekrieger), “Equal pay isn't just a soccer problem. It's a systemic problem. Our culture + companies + laws need to change if we're going to end the pay gap for good. Join the fight by giving to @TIMESUPNow today,” *Twitter*, August 2, 2019.

together to cause change while ridding the discourse of other dividing factors such as race and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, Krieger included the link to the TIME’S UP Now website; specifically, to the donation center where women could give money to the organization to assist their ongoing campaigns.

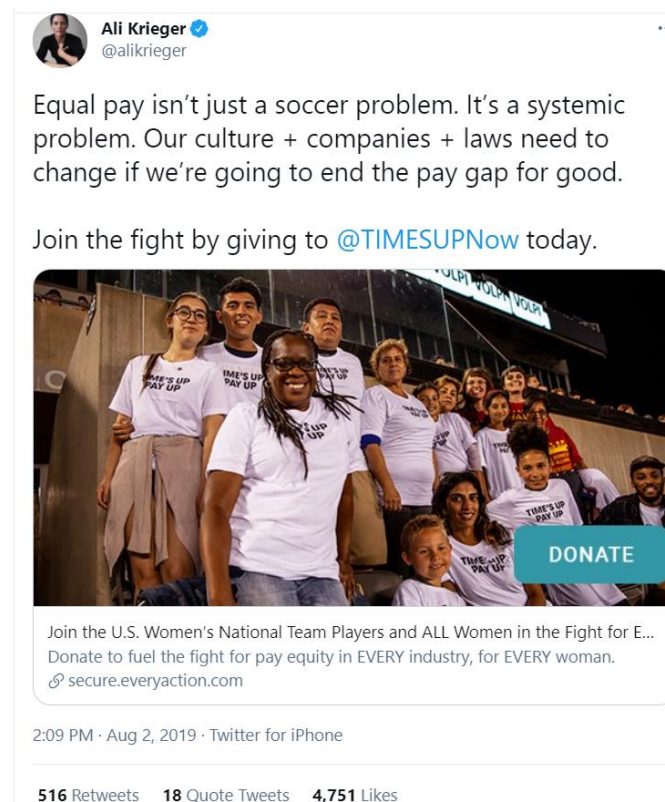


Fig. 9 Ali Krieger’s tweet about the USWNT partnering with TIMES UP Now.¹⁰⁰

Similar to Krieger’s representation of TIME’S UP Now, Samantha Mewis also tweeted about the USWNT’s partnership with the female-led organization. Mewis tweeted, “We’re teaming up with @TIMESUPNow because pay equity is about so much more than a paycheck: it’s about respect and dignity at work—whether that’s on a soccer field or anywhere else.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Samantha Mewis (@sammymewy), “We’re teaming up with @TIMESUPNow because pay equity is about so much more than a paycheck: it’s about respect and dignity at work –whether that’s on a soccer field or anywhere else,” *Twitter*, August 2, 2019.

Like Krieger's tweet, the end of Mewis' tweet focused on how women were generally treated, not just about how the inequalities the USWNT have faced. Mewis also included the words—"respect" and "dignity."¹⁰² These words both revolve around the word, "regard," meaning that they are about how other people perceive and treat one another. Mewis associated equal pay with these concepts because she intended the two to go together.

Later that same day, Mewis posted a thread of tweets that further explored how USWNT fans could be involved in the team's efforts. According to Mewis, there were:

[...] Three ways you can support our fight for #equalpay: / 1. Watch our games, on tv or in person (link to CBS local channel) / 2. Buy our jerseys and show your support of the @uswntplayers. (link to fanatics to buy jerseys) / 3. Give today to @TIMESUPNow, because this has never just been about soccer. It's about all of us. (link to TIME'S UP Now's website)¹⁰³

The first two ways of support focused on revenue streams, meaning that Mewis pointed out areas in which the USWNT got paid when people supported them. The more people who watch the USWNT, the more accessible the games could be (i.e. primetime TV) and the more money the USWNT could potentially make from a game. Similarly, the more people who buy a USWNT jersey, the more royalties that player, who's jersey was bought, receives. These were ways that the USWNT could be paid without their federation intervening. Unlike the previous two ways, the third way was meant to encourage people to get involved with and donate to TIME'S UP Now. In the third way, Mewis attempted to initiate a connection between one of her partnerships

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Samantha Mewis (@sammymewy), "THREAD: Three ways you can support our fight for #equalpay: / 1. Watch our games, on tv or in person (link to CBS local channel) / 2. Buy our Jerseys and show your support of the @uswntplayers. (link to fanatics to buy jerseys) / 3. Give today to @TIMESUPNow, because this has never just been about soccer. It's about all of us. (link to TIME'S UP Now's website)," *Twitter*, August 2, 2019.

and the general public, meaning that she related the issue to the society in order to encourage empathy and cause a resolve or identity among them.

Overall, from March to September 2019, the USWNT worked to establish deeper and more meaningful connections with their sponsors and partners. In turn, the team expanded their equal pay issue further than just women's sports, instead focusing on the bigger picture—how equal pay was an issue for all women. The USWNT used social media to encourage more sponsors to launch campaigns around issues of equality and to continue supporting women. While sponsors created campaigns, the USWNT also partnered with the women-led organization, TIMES UP Now, which was set on changing legislative policy and societal expectations on issues related to women. By thanking these organizations, the USWNT put pressure on the USSF for its passivity and lack of action when it came to matters of equality.

VIII. March 11-13, 2020: The Jersey Protest

During warmups ahead of their SheBelieves Cup game against Japan, on March 11, 2020, the USWNT players took the field, wearing their jerseys inside out, so that the four stars, marking the team's WWC wins were visible, but the U.S. Soccer crest was not. This action was a form of silent protest, meaning that the women did not make statements to the press or on social media prior to doing so. The protest came following the release of new information from the lawsuit, in which the USSF argued that the USWNT and USMNT did not perform equal work as the men's game required players to be stronger and faster than the women's game did.¹⁰⁴ Instead of responding right away, the women participated in the jersey protest and played the game against Japan, winning 3-1 and remaining unbeaten in their tournament win.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Nick Selbe, "USWNT Objects to U.S. Soccer With Jersey Protest," *SI*, March 11, 2020, updated March 12, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Soccer, "USA Wins 2020 SheBelieves Cup With 3-1 Victory Vs. Japan," March 11, 2020.



Fig. 10 A photograph taken of the USWNT's jersey protest.¹⁰⁶

The next day, March 12, the USWNT players took to Twitter to respond to the USSF's statements.¹⁰⁷ Many of the players posted a whole team photograph, taken before the game that showcased the lack of the U.S. Soccer crest (Figure 11). Along with this photograph, some USWNT players chose to write individual and personalized statements about the situation. For example, Julie Ertz concisely wrote, "TOGETHER."¹⁰⁸ The succinct statement was quite powerful considering that it recalled the idea of social consciousness and unity. In other words, Ertz and her teammates resisted together, in an act that was defiant but not violent. The use of only one-word allowed for the viewers' attention to be focused on the photograph, meaning that Ertz highlighted the silent act of resistance and felt like it offered enough of an explanation as to her feelings on the situation.

¹⁰⁶ Julie Ertz (@julieertz), "TOGETHER," *Twitter*, March 12, 2020.

¹⁰⁷ The participating players were Carli Lloyd, Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Ashlyn Harris, Crystal Dunn, Ali Krieger, Morgan Brian Gautrat, Julie Ertz, Lindsey Horan, Allie Long, Samantha Mewis, Jessica McDonald, Christen Press, and Alex Morgan.

¹⁰⁸ Ertz, "TOGETHER."

Unlike Ertz's one-word tweet, her teammate, Christen Press, presented an expanded statement. Press wrote, "It is the great honor of my life to play this sport and represent this country. Every woman deserves equal pay and every institution anywhere that doesn't value women as much as men must change now."¹⁰⁹ Here, Press affirmed how much of an honor it was to play under the American crest and to be recognized as an American professional athlete; at the same time, she condemned the "institution," or the USSF which did not appropriately and equally value their senior teams.¹¹⁰ The situation that Press described was one of an impasse, meaning that there needed to be reconciliation between the two organizations over the American ideals, such as liberty and justice. Like her teammates', Press's argument extended beyond the team to include other groups of women.

Similar to Press's statement, Jessica McDonald offered her own, focusing on the misogyny of sport and country. Specifically, McDonald posted, "We wanted to stand together as a team and make a statement on behalf of all women and girls that the federations comment are unacceptable. We love this sport and this country, and we cannot stand for this misogynistic treatment. #Equality."¹¹¹ McDonald's statement used more direct language than her other teammates did because she called out her employer and labelled it "misogynistic."¹¹² In her statement, McDonald held the federation accountable for its rhetoric and demanded that attention be paid to the rhetoric and actions that it employed during the lawsuit. By posting this to social

¹⁰⁹ Christen Press (@ChristenPress), "It is the great honor of my life to play this sport and represent this country. Every woman deserves equal pay and every institution anywhere that doesn't value women as much as men must change now," *Twitter*, March 12, 2020.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Jessica McDonald (@J_MAC1422), "We wanted to stand together as a team and make a statement on behalf of all women and girls that the federations comment are unacceptable. We love this sport and this country, and we cannot stand for this misogynistic treatment. #Equality," *Twitter*, March 12, 2020.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

media, McDonald made her opinions recognized and offered her viewpoint up for discussion among the fans, many of whom took her side and used similar rhetoric when attacking the USSF.

Overall, the events leading up to March 11 and shortly after were filled with incendiary statements made by the USSF which led to a silent but incredibly moving and meaningful protest on game day and, later, several direct and unified messages made by the USWNT. Without Twitter, the USWNT could not have made such personalized and directed statements while reflecting on their motivations—the love of the game and the desire to change it for the better.

IX. May 2020: A Lawsuit Disappointment

On May 1, 2020, Judge R. Gary Klausner, a U.S. District Judge for the Central District of California, rejected the USWNT's claim that they made less money than the men's team and, thus, should be duly compensated for it. The women argued that they played more games and, had the USWNT and USMNT been under the same pay structure, then they would have made more money than they ended up making. Judge Klausner countered this argument, in his judgement, writing,

This approach – merely comparing what each team would have made under the other team's CBA – is untenable in this case because it ignores the reality that the MNT and WNT bargained for different agreements which reflect different preferences, and that the WNT explicitly rejected the terms they now seek to retroactively impose on themselves.¹¹³

In essence, Klausner's judgement argued that the difference in pay structure was the reason for the inequality. Furthering his discussion, Klausner employed the USSF's assertion that the

¹¹³ Jill Martin, "US women's national soccer team players ask for appeal and trial delay after judge dismisses equal pay claims," *CNN*, May 9, 2020.

USWNT were offered and refused the same pay structure as the USMNT. Using this line of reasoning, Klausner threw out the USWNT's equal pay claim, declaring that there was insufficient evidence indicating that the women were not paid the same.¹¹⁴

In response to Klausner's decision, the USWNT acted quickly, making statements both to traditional media outlets and on Twitter. For example, Megan Rapinoe, during a "Good Morning America" segment, replied to the statement that the USWNT was offered the same contract as the USMNT, saying, "The men's contract was never offered to us and certainly not the same amount of money, so to say that we negotiated for our contract and that's what we agreed to, I think so many women can understand what this feeling is of going into a negotiation knowing equal pay is not on the table."¹¹⁵ In short, Rapinoe stated that the USSF did not even consider extending the same pay and benefits to the women as the men were offered, meaning the piece of Klausner's decision which claimed this, was flawed.

As well as using traditional media outlets, the USWNT also utilized Twitter. Molly Levinson, the USWNT spokesperson, released a Twitter statement about Klausner's ruling and where the team stood, which was quote-tweeted by several of the players (Figure 12).¹¹⁶ The rhetoric that was displayed by both Becky Sauerbrunn and Kelley O'Hara, in Figure 12, was one of resilience and perseverance. The two players, and their teammates, focused on continuing to "fight" and "push" for equality.¹¹⁷ This language was one of resistance as well because the USWNT did not accept Klausner's ruling and simply move on; instead, the women continued to

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The players who made a statement about Klausner's ruling include Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, Tierna Davidson, Ali Krieger, Kelley O'Hara, Morgan Brian Gautrat, Lindsey Horan, Allie Long, Tobin Heath, Christen Press, and Alex Morgan.

¹¹⁷ Becky Sauerbrunn (@beckysauerbrunn), "If you know this team at all you know we have a lot of fight left in us. We knew this wasn't going to be easy, change never is," *Twitter*, May 1, 2020; Kelley O'Hara (@kelleykohara), "We won't stop pushing for what we know is right #USWNT," *Twitter*, May 2, 2020.

resist the USSF and publicly address equality issues. Here, Twitter offered a space for reorganization and reflection on the social activism that the USWNT had been involved with up until that point. Additionally, it offered them the ability to freely protest and dissent from the narrative that the USSF and Judge Klausner initiated.

Immediately after Klausner’s decision, the USWNT’s legal team filed an appeal, meaning that the equal pay claims remain open-ended. While the judgement was a huge setback, Klausner’s ruling permitted the women to continue their trial on unfair working conditions, including flight and hotel accommodations and medical support.¹¹⁸ This means that even if the women are not able to argue for equal pay and backpay, they still have the ability to better their current positions.



Fig. 11 Becky Sauerbrunn and Kelly O’Hara’s quote-tweets of Molly Levinson’s statement about Judge Klausner’s ruling.¹¹⁹

X. *Deductions*

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

The USWNT used Twitter as a performative mechanism in order to state their opinions, pressure the USSF, and encourage other athletes and the larger female population to become involved in the equal pay campaign. It is evident that the USWNT's use of Twitter changed over the 4 years examined. At the start of their campaign, the USWNT focused solely on their own struggles to achieve equal pay. This focus was expanded throughout the 4 years to include other female soccer players, female sports, and women living in the U.S. more generally. The expanded focus indicated that even though the USWNT might not have been successful, yet, in their pursuit for equal pay, this did not de-motivate them from exercising their influence for the greater good of women.

Furthermore, there seems to be an impetus on players like Megan Rapinoe and Alex Morgan, who combined have a Twitter following of over 4 million users, to speak out on issues of equal pay. During the four-year period, the study is focused on, Rapinoe tweeted about equal pay 88 times (about 1.20% of her total tweets), while Morgan tweeted about this issue, 75 times (about 1.3% of her total tweets).¹²⁰ Alternatively stated, Rapinoe and Morgan did tweet about equal pay quite a bit. However, there was another player who devoted her time to this issue as thoroughly as Rapinoe and Morgan, the figureheads of the USWNT. In terms of the player who tweeted about equal pay the most, Crystal Dunn had the highest percentage of tweets (about 1.56% of her tweets are about equal pay). This number may seem insignificant, but it is important to note, Dunn used her Twitter to address issues of equal pay, as well as to spotlight racial inequality and other political problems. Taking these three players as exemplars of the USWNT, one can

¹²⁰ It should be noted that "total tweets" refers to how many tweets players have posted since joining Twitter. In other words, these percentages would be higher if I had the opportunity to go back and solely count the number of tweets the players posted during the period between 2016-2020.

determine that the players did tweet about equal pay, but they also tweeted about other social problems as well, meaning that they did not devote their time solely to this issue.

Returning to previous scholarship, this paper agrees with Kaufmann and Wolff's analysis on Twitter as a mechanism for creating social consciousness. Through coordinated tweets, the USWNT was able to further develop their social consciousness, by engaging in equal pay discourse with one another. In addition to the players using the online forum to discuss or boost one of their teammates' points, the USWNT also entered into discussion with other female athletes and other women. This was significant because women, in general, shared a space where they could discuss, organize, and carry out activist actions while encouraging one another in individual pursuits. The threads of Kaufmann and Wolff's analysis that can be found in this paper are also engaged in Cooky and Antunovic's study. Cooky and Antunovic's work, like mine, examined the USWNT's equal pay campaign. However, the study utilized the twitter campaign to articulate their argument about its neoliberal feminist qualities. This is a topic that I do not discuss in great detail which is potentially a limitation of this paper.

The final takeaway is that the USWNT's social media use about equal pay seems to be clustered around key events that take place over the 4 years, rather than a continuous stream of tweets. One can only theorize as to why this is; however, these players perform their activism just as much offline and on the field, as they do online, meaning that they use Twitter to spur their movement on and to confront the USSF as issues come up, rather than as a continuous effort. Overall, the USWNT did and (at the end of this paper's writing process) continue to use Twitter in their ongoing fight for equality. More specifically, the players used the social media platform to create discussions around the importance of women receiving equal pay and being treated well in their places of employment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper argues that the USWNT used Twitter as a performative mechanism, more specifically, as a method of resistance, over the four-year period, 2016-2020.¹²¹ This means that the USWNT utilized Twitter to form a social consciousness, establish themselves and their positions on- and offline, and bring women and organizations into discussion with one another. At the same time, the women engaged Twitter as a space for their collective and personal statements of dissent, meaning that the players tweeted statements which employed rhetoric of resistance, fighting, and perseverance. These statements called out their employer, other institutions which stood in opposition to female athletes, and the larger society for the systemic issue of gender inequality and the wage pay gap. The paper accomplishes this by breaking the equal pay campaign into its components, or the key events that happened throughout it. Examples of key events include, the EEOC complaint filing, the WNBA opting out of its CBA, sponsorships supporting the USWNT ahead of the 2019 WWC, and Klausner's ruling which eliminated the USWNT's equal pay claims from the lawsuit, among others. Overall, the paper attempts to add to the scholarship about women's sports and activism by examining this topic.

Due to the open-endedness of the equal pay campaign, it is hard to determine how successful the women were in it. However, one can theorize about the success of the campaign and its forward progress. At this point in time, it would be easy to argue that the USWNT's campaign was not successful because it did not accomplish its goal of full equal pay. This argument is too simplistic; while the women have yet to gain equality, they have pushed the boundaries closer and closer to equal pay. In other words, the women have had small concessions during the four-

¹²¹ It is worth noting that this equal pay campaign is still happening in the current moment, meaning that it could end with the women receiving full equality. However, this project was conducted between Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021, so the paper could only focus on events that have already transpired.

year period which indicate that equal pay and, later, full equality will be obtained—it is more of a question of when, than if. The current moment is an important one because the women's success and global fanbase, whether that be because of social media or another reason, has put the USWNT players at the forefront of gender equality.

It is also important to examine the usefulness of Twitter to the women's efforts. Twitter provided the women with the space to actively pushback against their employers and the general systemic institutions which kept them from a position of equality. Additionally, Twitter allowed the women to participate in their own movement as well as other women's movements, meaning that the USWNT players were not passive participants. The social media platform also allowed the USWNT to absorb information about other women's issues which they were able to boost and enlarge through their own social media engagement. Without Twitter, the USWNT would be limited in their ability to connect across professions, socioeconomic statuses, geographical location, and other confining factors. In its entirety, Twitter was a necessary mechanism for the USWNT to employ in their equal pay campaign because it provided the team with the faculty to establish connections across boundaries.

As I alluded to throughout this paper, the USWNT did not just tweet about their equal pay campaign, they also tweeted about racial inequality, gun control, and other politically potent topics. Though it falls outside of the range of the paper, these topics would be interesting to explore further. For example, how do the USWNT's tactics and rhetoric change from being active participants to being allies? How long have the women actively addressed these topics? Which player is at the forefront of these discussions and team movements? Like the equal pay campaign, are there events that these sorts of tweets are clustered around? Do the players tweet more consistently or more sporadically about these issues?

Other questions, that are outside of the scope of this paper, but could be further examined include: over the history of the USWNT, how has the rhetoric and discourse around equality changed and how has it stayed the same? Have all generations fought for equality? If so, why? If not, then was there another issue that players were focused on? As mentioned above, the current USWNT discusses other politically charged topics, has the USWNT always been involved in such issues, or is the current generation different in some way? How and why? How has social media, specifically Twitter, impacted these changes or enhanced the ways in which the USWNT are able to engage in these discourses?

As a relatively comprehensive movement, the USWNT's equal pay campaign (and its use of Twitter) is a necessary contribution to society as the women are actively trying to better not only their own lives but the lives of women everywhere. Currently, the USWNT's lawsuit is in a state of limbo, the women have appealed Klausner's ruling and are waiting to hear the results of that, as the rest of the lawsuit also lingers undecided.¹²² While this situation is not the outcome that the women had expected, nor wanted, it has opened the doors for the USWNT players to reflect on their efforts thus far and continue to speak on equality. One such opportunity, to discuss the issue of women's equality and sports, was granted to Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce, who spoke before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform on Equal Pay Day (March 24, 2021).¹²³ This occasion permitted the two to openly engage with lawmakers and, as such, it was significant. To end, on the words of Purce, who perfectly summarized the USWNT's equal pay campaign, "My response is always this: You would never expect a flower to bloom without

¹²² Without examining it too deeply, the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19) which became a global issue starting in March, has affected the speed at which the USWNT's lawsuit has moved. This is probably one of the main reasons why the lawsuit has not ended.

¹²³ Both Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce are current members of the USWNT. Rapinoe has been one of the more outspoken members of the USWNT, while Purce sits on Harvard's Board of Overseers and is the Executive Director of the Black Women's Player Collective.

water, but women in sport who have been denied water, sunlight, and soil are somehow expected to blossom. Invest in women, then let's talk again when you see the return.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Katie Campione, “USWNT Stars Megan Rapinoe and Margaret Purce Visit White House for Equal Pay Day: ‘Invest in Women’,” *People*, March 24, 2021.

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