

Media Microaggressions against Female Olympic Athletes Up 40 percent

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Female athletes long have experienced microaggressions from the media and the public, such as racism, sexism, the belittling of athletic accomplishments and being the brunt of sexual jokes. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri School of Journalism have found that microaggressions against female athletes in the media increased by nearly 40 percent from the 2012 Summer Olympic Games to the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Cynthia Frisby, an associate professor of strategic communication at Mizzou, also found evidence of increased microaggressions against female athletes of color compared to white athletes.

Frisby and lead author Kara Allen, an undergraduate student at Mizzou, analyzed 723 newspaper and magazine articles covering the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. In the coverage of the 2012 Olympics, the researchers identified 69 microaggressions against female athletes. In the 2016 Olympic coverage, the researchers found 96 instances of microaggressions against female athletes. These microaggressions included four instances of sexual objectification, 26 instances of treating females as second-class citizens, 44 instances of racist or sexist language or jokes, 61 instances of restrictive gender roles, and 30 instances of focusing on the athletes' physical body types and shapes. The researchers also found increased microaggressions against female athletes who play more "masculine" sports such as basketball, powerlifting and wrestling.

In a separate study, Frisby examined 643 [news stories](#) about elite tennis players Serena Williams and Angelique Kerber to determine if athletes

of color receive different amounts of microaggressions from the media compared to [white athletes](#) who experience similar amounts of athletic success. Frisby found 758 instances of microaggressions against Serena Williams, a black woman, while she only found 18 microaggressions against Kerber, a white woman.

"We hope that we are making progress as a society toward inclusivity and acceptance; however, when examining the data for how the media cover sporting events related to female athletics, it is evident that we have a long way to go," Frisby said. "We've known for a long time that [female athletes](#) often experience discrimination and other microaggressions, but now that we have statistical data illustrating this issue, we want to use it to educate [media](#) and members of the public on how to avoid some of these problematic pitfalls."

The study "A Content Analysis of Microaggressions in News Stories about Female Athletes Participating in the 2012 and 2016 Summer Olympics," was published in the *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*. The study "A Content Analysis of Serena Williams and Angelique Kerber's Racial and Sexist Microaggressions," was published in the *Open Journal of Social Sciences*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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