


TELEVISION COVERAGE OF TRANSGENDER ATHLETES: THE CASE OF ESPORTE ESPETACULAR

A COBERTURA TELEVISIVA SOBRE ATLETAS TRANSGÊNERO: O CASO DO ESPORTE ESPETACULAR 

COBERTURA TELEVISIVA DE DEPORTISTAS TRANSGÊNERO: EL CASO DEL ESPORTE ESPETACULAR 

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Abstract: Nowadays, the sports scenario, particularly portrayed by the media, is presenting new perspectives regarding LGBTI+ athletic-sport practices. The objective of this research was to analyze television coverage of the participation of transgender athletes in sports, based on the program "Esporte Espetacular". Methodologically, the research is characterized as qualitative and exploratory, using screen ethnography as a data production tool. Four reports produced from 2017 to 2019 were analyzed, totaling approximately 35 minutes. The findings allow us to infer that all episodes' narratives present conceptual mistakes and an approach that tends towards sensationalism, focusing on a particular type of transgender identity, on the biomedical discourse of advantage and testosterone, as well as instances of denial, embarrassment, and non-recognition of the transgender body in sports.

Keywords: Sports. Video-Audio Media. Transgender Persons.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The transgender¹ population has historically fought for basic civil rights such as the right to their name, respect for their identity and social inclusion (SILVA, 2019). The struggle for their rights reveals that, every day, the exclusion of this group from Brazilian society intensifies, which shows high levels of violence directed towards the LGBTI+² community (BENEVIDES, 2022; GGB, 2023).

As a possibility for social inclusion, it should be emphasized that sports are understood as an important phenomenon that promotes inclusion, enhances physical, mental and social abilities, and fosters the development of skills for individuals and groups. Sports are considered a social manifestation of the population, spread across many social nuances throughout history (MELO; FORTES, 2010), and access to them is treated as a right for all Brazilian citizens, guaranteed by constitutional law, and with a prioritized status of human rights on the international stage (MACHADO; TURATTI JUNIOR, 2018).

In the meantime, the participation of transgender individuals as athletes in sports competitions holds symbolic importance in representing these individuals integrated into the social environment. These spaces can be seen as inclusive and potential for the process of socialization and visibility of this community, although this is not always fully realized (COELHO; MOURÃO, 2018; PEREIRA; GARCIA; PEDROSA, 2020).

However, there is an international trend on facing this issue, including from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which encourages the development of new policies for inclusion and the promotion of diversity in sports. Examples include the IOC's recommendations in 2015 and 2021 concerning hyperandrogenism, transgender issues, inclusion, and fairness in sports competitions endorsed by the committee.

In the media, this topic has been presented through events and occurrences that bring forth new perspectives regarding athletic and sports practices, such as the participation of Tiffany Abreu in the Brazilian Women's Volleyball Superleague and the first transgender participation in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics by New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard. Moreover, there's a noticeable increase in attention to transgender narratives compared to previous years, although some approaches are still inappropriate or conceptually inadequate (LOVE, 2019).

The media coverage of transgender athletes has been the subject of investigation by Grespan and Goellner (2014), Chaves (2019) and Love (2019), focusing on Fallon Fox, and by Garcia and Pereira (2020) and Nascimento (2020), centered around Tiffany Abreu. These studies, mainly conducted with a focus on online media, highlight the prevalence of language that emphasizes the primacy of

1 We will use both "transgender" and "trans" to signify an identity that disrupts cis-heteronormative gender norms, crossing and returning through borders, and expanding the numerous ways of understanding non-cis gender identities.

2 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and more. The acronym is proposed by the Aliança Nacional LGBTI+ to encompass all gender and sexual orientation identities that diverge from cis-heteronormativity.

gender as assigned at birth, perpetuating a narrative that portrays transgender identity as marginal and pathological. Additionally, comments made in news reports and by internet users often establish a comparison between before and after the transition that sometimes fails to accurately portray the effects of the cross-hormone process, further reinforcing gender binary perceptions.

However, despite being immersed in digital networks with a growing production of content and information through online media, a recent study released by *Kantar IBOPE Media*³ in 2022 reveals that television continues to have a larger audience reach in the Brazilian territory, reaching 93% of the population, and it remains a point of reference for viewers. Lolla, Martinelli and Pasquim (2010) provide a critical analysis of television, demonstrating that it generally plays a potentially influential role in the lives of viewers. Characters from various programs tend to influence viewers through a popular and easily accessible language. According to the authors, television is highly relevant as it can transmit information and shape individuals.

Regarding the media's treatment of LGBTI+ themes in general, there is an observed increase in the coverage of such topics in news reports. However, internal discussions about transgender issues still lag when compared to the identities of "lesbian" and "gay" (BILLARD, 2016). Considering this, the main objective of the present study was to analyze the television coverage of transgender athletes' participation in sports. To guide the research, the following question arises: how is the participation of transgender athletes treated in Brazilian sports television?

Our attention will be focused on the sports television program titled "*Esporte Espetacular*" (EE), known as a weekly informative show that contextualizes sports within society. It has been aired on Sunday mornings by *Rede Globo de Televisão* since 1973, with a goal of showcasing sports spectacles and promoting lesser-covered sports disciplines in the media. Additionally, the program aims to delve deeper into certain events in the realm of institutionalized physical practices that could influence the viewers (SOUZA, 2006).

2 METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as qualitative according to Minayo (2013) and exploratory following Gil's approach (2002), utilizing screen ethnography by Rial (1995) as a data production tool. The methodological approach is grounded in the perspective of screen ethnography, which, as defined by Balestrin (2013), involves experiencing moving images, such as those in cinema and television, as ethnographic screens, allowing, through a methodological approach, the articulation of gender and sexuality studies from a post-structuralist perspective.

The post-structuralist perspective is a theoretical approach that questions and critiques power structures, fixed notions of identity and knowledge. It emerges from

³ Latin American division of Kantar Media, a global leader in media intelligence and the largest advertising group worldwide. Its main expertise lies in measuring television viewership and conducting research on communication, media, and consumption. For more information, please refer to <https://kantariopemedia.com/brazil/>.

the influence of philosophers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, considering social structures and identities as constructed through relations of power and language. This perspective is important for challenging fixed notions of identity, questioning power structures, and encouraging reflection on how social categories and power relations influence our lives (WILLIAMS, 2012).

To generate our data, we undertook an ethnographic journey through the screen, investing significant time observing from various angles to perceive the adopted discourse strategy within the object and the possibility of presenting and constituting what is referred to as reality (BALESTRIN, 2013). We utilized the streaming platform *GloboPlay* due to its accessibility for viewing recorded news segments. In our search, we employed recorded segments aired from 2015 to 2021 addressing the theme “transgender and sports” as inclusion criterion. Exclusion criteria were related to video unavailability. Following filtering, four news segments were classified and analyzed.

For analysis, the following steps were taken: a) an extended period of screen engagement; b) systematic and varied observation (watching the program in different modes without interruption, pausing for note-taking and extras); c) field notebook recording (both the description of television scenes and questions that could be pertinent for subsequent analysis and discussion). Subsequently, passages deemed convenient that included production and presentation of content aired on an open channel for democratic viewer access were selected/transcribed.

Upon transcribing the news segments, we organized them by scenes. In addition to transcribing dialogue, we documented the iconic elements present in each scene in the field notebook, as well as all impressions resulting from this analysis - such as characters’ attire, behavior towards filming, the surrounding setting, and corresponding impressions. Table 1 (below) summarizes the process:

Table 1- Reports from *Esporte Espetacular* addressing “Transgender and Sports”

News segment and title	Date	Duration	Analysed scenes
EE1: Jogadoras de vôlei que nasceram homens superam preconceitos e se estabelecem (Volleyball players born male overcome prejudices and establish themselves) ⁴	09/04/2017	8 min 54 s	40
EE2: Polêmica – primeira atleta transgênero do torneio divide opiniões no esporte (Controversy – first transgender athlete of the tournament divides opinions in the sport) ⁵	14/01/2018	7 min 59 s	24
EE3: A atleta transexual Andraya Yearwood luta pelo direito de disputar provas de atletismo (Transexual athlete Andraya Yearwood fights for the right to compete in track and field) ⁶	27/10/2019	8 min 48 s	18
EE4: Homens trans competem em igualdade com outros homens (Trans men compete equally with other men) ⁷	03/11/2019	9 min 3 s	21

Fonte: The authors (2021)

4 Available at: <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/5788637/>. Accessed on: Aug. 28, 2023.

5 Available at: <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/6421019/>. Accessed on: Aug. 28, 2023.

6 Available at: <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/8038455/>. Accessed on: Aug. 28, 2023.

7 Available at: <https://globoplay.globo.com/v/8056909/>. Accessed on: Aug. 28, 2023.

The results and their corresponding discussions were interconnected in what we termed “points” or subsections, which highlighted specific commonalities found throughout the study. Four subsections (points) are presented, each containing scenes from the field notebook. While we analyzed a larger number of scenes, we filtered to include those that stood out the most, consequently presenting discussions about the theme that depict the scene.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially, we would like to reflect on the titles of the news segments, as they are part of the content by articulating it and guiding the audience towards a kind of understanding⁸. In “EE1: Jogadoras de vôlei que nasceram homens superam preconceitos e se estabelecem” (Volleyball players born men overcome prejudices and establish themselves), a production error is present in the comment that the athletes were born men when, in fact, the designation of an identity is socially and culturally attributed based on specific markers of a given group or society (WILLIAMS, 2012). This mistake represents a severe misrepresentation of the discussion at hand, as it reinforces biologizing discourses that can, to a greater extent, justify exclusions or prejudices.

In “EE2: Polêmica - primeira atleta transgênero do torneio divide opiniões no esporte” (Controversy - first transgender athlete in the tournament divides opinions in the sport), by using the term “controversy,” the reporters contribute and commit to surprise, along with drama, provocation, and human interest to attract large audiences (COELHO; SILVA, 2018), bordering on sensationalism.

In “EE3: A atleta transexual Andraya Yearwood luta pelo direito de disputar provas de atletismo” (Transgender athlete Andraya Yearwood fights for the right to compete in track and field events), we have the only statement that identifies an athlete, giving her prominence in the report’s title. However, as we will see, the transgender marker is used to categorize Andraya within the framework of the medical-legal system and thus inherently understanding her as a transgressor.

In “EE4: Homens trans competem em igualdade com outros homens” (Trans men compete equally with other men), the structure of the statement raises questions about the meaning of “other men.” Involuntarily, the title already marks “other” conditions that stimulate a sense of strangeness since “trans men” diverge from “other men,” and the ambiguous meaning translates into stigma for those who, just like in EE3, would be considered transgressors.

Given this, we can say that the titles present errors and reinforce conceptual confusions, strengthen stigmas, and contribute to initially creating a certain bias for the viewer. They also consolidate gender binarity and mark those who would be transgressors and, therefore, disruptors of what is understood as conventional sports.

⁸ It's important to note that there were no transgender journalists leading the reports; all were cisgender. While we identified positive aspects in the attempt to portray the narratives, such as giving prominence and voice to the transgender athletes presented, this work primarily focuses on the subtleties of the discourse and how these narratives were processed for presentation to the audience.

3.1 POINT 01 – REPRESENTATION/PASSABILITY

In this subsection, the capacity for passing and representation of transgender individuals within the social context, whether in sports or not, will be discussed. It is necessary to point out that, in terms of media representation, there already exists a traditionally prominent framing of transgender individuals involving pathologization, marginalization and disciplining of transgender identity in relation to gender non-conformity (LOVE, 2019). When discussing passing, we will emphasize gender performativity, a set of regulated and repeated acts that reaffirm a substantial gender image in the context of cisheteronormativity (PONTES; SILVA, 2018).

“At Isabelle’s request [trans woman athlete], we avoided showing old photos and videos” [Cisgender male reporter narrates footage with images of Isabelle].

Source: Field Notebook - EE1, scene 12 (Authors, 2021)

“Just like Isabelle, Tiffany also requested that we avoid using old photos and videos in the report” [Cisgender male reporter narrates footage with images of Tiffany].

Source: Field Notebook - EE1, scene 17 (Authors, 2021)

By showing Isabelle [trans athlete] on the court and Tiffany in a moment of beauty, applying makeup and seeing herself in the mirror, the reporter narrates that Tiffany, Isabelle’s inspiration, rises above suspicions and really likes what she sees in the mirror today.

Source: Field Notebook - EE1, scene 39 (Authors, 2021)

When addressing representation, Carvalho (2021) draws attention to the fact that it emerges as a manifestation that trans people can speak for themselves and they both are able to and should occupy spaces whose rights are guaranteed to them. This, in turn, paves the way for other transgender individuals to continue claiming their places of speech. Primarily, it involves reconstructing their stories by dismantling the subordination that has long been imposed upon them. When requests are made, as in EE1, scene 12 and EE1, scene 17, not to broadcast images that do not correspond to the athletes’ current bodies, it relates to the fact that, for trans women, the pursuit of a certain appearance is motivated by the desire to be socially accepted as women and/or recognized as such by their families. This motivates them to seek ways to embody femininity. This pursuit aims not only for the status of a trans woman but also to encompass as many characteristics as they consider feminine (SERRANO; CAMINHA; GOMES, 2019).

As highlighted in EE1, scene 39, what Tiffany sees in the mirror aligns with the understanding Barros, Lemos and Ambiel (2019) put forth regarding changes in body image as decisive for femininity and self-esteem, influencing quality of life, since aesthetic alterations can significantly contribute to the promotion of health and quality of life within this population segment.

According to Álvaro and Garrido (2007), the degree of a person’s sense of belonging to a particular group will influence their perception of self, of others and how their perceivable role in the observing society will be. This contributes to the sense of belonging to certain social groups. Social support, self-acceptance, and integration

of this population segment can help alleviate the psychiatric burdens experienced by marginalized groups. A peer community provides a social milieu where variant identity doesn't become stigmatized and self-evaluation often tends to occur in comparison with other peers rather than with members of the majority culture (BOCKTING *et al.*, 2013; MEYER, 2003).

3.2 POINT 02 – PERFORMANCE LINKED TO PARTICIPATION

In this subsection, relevant points regarding the performance and mode of participation of transgender individuals in sports will be presented. Additionally, the context of participants in the interviews from the reports will be explored, as they provide comments about this participation.

With Tiffany's appearance on the court, her victories are showcased along with a subsequent comparison to her main competitor, bringing to light her performance in comparison to other athletes. In the same scene, a question is raised, originating from social media, about potential advantages of the transgender player.

Source: Field Notebook - EE2, scene 2 (Authors, 2021)

The IOC's recommendation regarding the participation of transgender athletes in women's competitions is mentioned, along with commentary on possible discrepancies among different medical specialties on the topic. During the same scene, the effects brought about by hormone therapy are understood.

Source: Field Notebook - EE2, scene 8 (Authors, 2021)

The figure of a doctor [cisgender man] is presented, affirming the possibility of advantages due to a potential late process of submission to hormone therapy treatment as recommended by the IOC. This process is further labeled as a "legacy" of testosterone, serving as conclusive evidence for the acquisition of advantages.

Source: Field Notebook - EE2, scene 9 (Authors, 2021)

Player Aline [cisgender athlete] reflects on her perception of the physical strength displayed by the athlete Tiffany and one of her main adversaries. She also ponders that the number of points earned by the athlete is always proportional to the number of conditions and receptions she obtains during a competition.

Source: Field Notebook - EE2, scene 18 (Authors, 2021)

Damasceno (2018) reminds us that studies dealing with the physical performance of transgender athletes are inconclusive and still in their infancy. The field of Sports Medicine is far from reaching a verdict that can be delivered without acts of social injustice. Reeser (2005) adds that the frequency at which transgender athletes are expected to have a significant impact on a particular sport should be equally low. It is also possible to anticipate that genetic mutations that could spontaneously lead to advantages in athletic performance occur at very low frequency rates.

However, Vaz *et al.* (2020, p. 185) draw our attention to another aspect prior to the performance of transgender athletes: the concern should not be focused on validating participation based on presented metrics but rather on recognizing the presence of these bodies in the sports field.

It is only when a trans woman, member of a sports team or athlete of any individual modality, has her presence respected in sports practice (competitive or not) that her performance should be evaluated. Is it not so that we proceed to prospect sporting talents of cis persons? (our translation)⁹

This way of interpreting transgender bodies results in conscious and unconscious attempts to deny and exclude their participation as active individuals in society and culture. It seeks to link their existence to a subservient condition of their own identity through a device that does not recognize them as equals but rather as marginalized or even disruptive subjects (LUCAS; NEWHALL, 2019; CASTRO; GARCIA; PEREIRA, 2020). Nascimento (2020), after analyzing news articles about Tiffany's case, infers that numerous ways are employed to justify the exclusion of transgender athletes from cisgender athletes, based on conservative Christian and political discourses. These justifications range from portraying them as men dressed as women to attributing it to biological hormonal injustice, improper comparisons between cisgender men and women athletes, ignorance of the cross-sex hormone therapy process for transgender athletes and the dissemination of false information aimed at spreading confusion rather than clarification and information.

In EE2, scene 2, for instance, where Tiffany's victories were showcased along with a subsequent comparison to her main competitor, the player's performance is emphasized, with particular attention to the choice of words used during the report. Franciscato (2003) notes that media tends to elaborate in a way that highlights certain characteristics of an event as it sees it, guiding effects of meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal resources, sometimes even employing metaphorical language. This allows the viewer to perceive something from the empirical world mentioned in the discourse presented by the host and, consequently, construct directive arguments about a certain issue. As seen in EE2, scene 8, for example, discourses like the ones presented contribute to reinforcing feelings of estrangement towards specific social groups and can be both reinforced by and reinforce existing prejudices disseminated in society.

In EE2, scene 9, regarding factors related to cross-sex hormone therapy, Harper *et al.* (2021) point out the significant scientific controversy surrounding the decision of how and when to permit transgender women to compete in the female category. Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies have already identified that cross-sex hormone therapy in transgender women significantly reduces muscle cross-sectional area, lean body mass, strength, and hemoglobin levels. The duration of intervention is a factor that influences the magnitude of these changes (HARPER *et al.*, 2021).

Hemoglobin levels, for instance, decrease to those indicated in cisgender women after 4 months. While this change could impact athletic performance, it's observed that even with significant reductions in muscle cross-sectional area,

9 "Quando uma mulher trans, membro de uma equipe de esporte coletivo ou atleta em qualquer modalidade individual, tiver o respeito à sua presença em locais de prática esportiva (de competição ou não), daí sim partiríamos para avaliar seu desempenho. Não é dessa forma que procedemos na prospecção de talentos esportivos de pessoas cisgênero?"

lean body mass, and strength after 1 to 3 years of cross-sex hormone therapy, the values remain higher than those in cisgender women, suggesting the possibility that transgender women may retain certain bio-physiological characteristics even after 3 years of intervention – which could potentially confer an advantage (HARPER *et al.*, 2021). However, the authors emphasize that these findings do not exhaust the necessary research that needs to be conducted to better understand the impact of cross-sex hormone therapy, especially in the long term.

In EE2, scene 18, it is reported that the player Tiffany has a significant performance and scores due to her plays on the court. However, as presented in the study by Castro, Garcia and Pereira (2020), the technical superiority attributed to other players regarding Tiffany's performance is merely occasional, offering neither minimal nor extreme assurances that the player could maintain the same level of performance at all times. To provide a better context, Vaz *et al.* (2020, p. 169) signal that within the competition standard of the *Superliga*, the player Tiffany demonstrates a performance equivalent to other skilled athletes, “notwithstanding a supposed superiority in relation to a cisgender woman's performance” (our translation)..

When we seek a theoretical perspective on the representation promoted by television regarding the transgender audience, we can identify an issue with said representation and how the theme is addressed. Furthermore, there's a situation of silencing or estrangement, marked at times by neglecting to address the topic (NASCIMENTO, 2020).

Additionally, in line with Love (2019), there is a notable emphasis on the role of “science” and “testosterone” through the authoritative figure of the cisgender male doctor, reducing the narrative to an issue of legitimacy based on the discourse of advantage. As Love (2019, p. 218) points out, “[...] media coverage focused on concerns about “unfair advantage” tends to reinforce a binary understanding of sex that positions women as biologically destined for inferiority”, missing a powerful opportunity to investigate the complexity that surrounds the discussion of sex and gender in sports, as well as its binary, exclusionary and limiting division.

Finally, it is worth noting that the validity of the biological discourse is not denied, as it can be applicable to many cases involving the subject. However, this applicability cannot be solely confined to this, or even to supposed representatives from the field without proper expertise on the matter. As Chaves (2019, p. 139) points out, “[...] frequently people do not have a formed opinion on the matter or are uninformed, as one may perceive in some of the interviewed persons' discourses” (our translation). Here, we must inquire: does the interviewed doctor work with transgender individuals, has he studied hormone therapy for transgender people or has he engaged in providing care, observation and support for this community? If not, what becomes evident is yet another media representation that confirms – and spreads – the idea that “[...] sporting culture itself knows little about what it means to be transgender”. (CHAVES, 2019, p. 139, our translation).

3.3 POINT 03 – RESTRICTION AND EMBARRASSMENT

In this subsection, we will address the issues surrounding controversies about on-site participation of transgender athletes, based on perceptions of legislative cases, harassment, transphobia and other attempts to prevent the participation of such athletes in various competitions.

A controversial bill from the São Paulo Chamber of Deputies is portrayed, as it aimed to prohibit transgender athletes from participating in sports competitions in the state. At the time, one of the main affected athletes would have been the volleyball player Tiffany.

Source: Field Notebook - EE3, scene 1 (Authors, 2021).

The case of Andraya Yearwood is described, a black young transgender woman, 18 years old, who was considered a rising star in American athletics. However, she was seen as a threat to the sports participation of cisgender girls.

Source: Field Notebook - EE3, scene 3 (Authors, 2021).

Three teenagers who competed against Andraya in track races decided to publicly express their dissatisfaction with her presence in female competitions. These girls filed a lawsuit to try to change the competition rules in the state of Connecticut, which currently allows athletes to participate in events according to the gender they identify with. On this occasion, one of these girls even appeared on television programs to share her story of discontent.

Source: Field Notebook - EE3, scene 12 (Authors, 2021).

In EE, scene 1, a bill in São Paulo is portrayed that views transgender women as a threat to the female category (composed of cisgender women). This understanding of transgender embodiment as a “threat” or causing “dissatisfaction” is based on the medical-legal system, so that people are understood and categorized primarily through frameworks of social markers of difference, such as race, gender, social class, among others¹⁰. The transgender person can alter or reinforce these frameworks by making complex changes to their body, becoming a threat to the system. From there, the ways in which they are framed, understood and utilized are expressed not only by sports but also by the media (LUCAS; NEWHALL, 2019).

Harper (2015) highlights that transgender athletes face resistance due to a distorted line of reasoning that claims cisgender men have physical advantages due to their body type, and that transgender athletes would have advantages when competing within their gender identity. This is illustrated by the dissatisfaction of athletes when competing against transgender athletes, as mentioned in EE3, scene 12¹¹. Additionally, Silva (2019) highlights the controversies surrounding this topic, often stemming from the lack of academic literature and scientific research on this subject.

¹⁰ We recommend reading the work of Camargo (2020).

¹¹ In the continuation of the scene, Ana Paula Henkel, a former volleyball player who opposes the participation of transgender individuals, is given a voice. She claims unfairness in sports due to the inclusion of transgender athletes. However, she lacks expertise on the subject and promotes ideas that suggest potential sports cheating, as if the inclusion of transgender women in competitive sports were an immoral or unethical action aimed at achieving better performance in the field, as noted by Castro, Garcia and Pereira (2020). In summary, including her in the debate fosters confusion, spreads misinformation, and encourages sensationalism.

Harper (2015) and Silva and Carlos (2019) argue that the inclusion of transgender athletes in high-performance sports provides an opportunity for visibility for this population. However, due to deeply ingrained prejudice in various social layers, this does not necessarily lead to the recognition that these athletes deserve, often resulting in implications that underpin prejudiced discourses.

In EE3, scene 3, when considering the prejudice faced by athlete Andraya, the issue of harassment comes into play. Harassment can be understood as an intrusive action or behavior practiced by individuals who believe they have power over others they consider to be subordinate. This includes actions and comments that are insulting, intimidating, humiliating, malicious and/or offensive¹². When a person experiences harassment, it creates an uncomfortable environment for those who are targeted by this practice, often leading to self-exclusion. We agree with Lucas and Newhall (2019) when they point out that the absence of identity and subjectivity policies in the sports environment naturalizes sporting hegemonies, keeping trans athletes consistently underrepresented, underreported and silenced, to the point where, metaphorically, they do not exist.

Due to the support network within a sports organization, athletes can continue to participate in sports. If not for the athletes' ability to adapt and avoid interference in their lives resulting from constant derogatory comments, it would be difficult for them to compete in various sports, even if their environment doesn't exhibit many cases of discrimination (GARCIA; PEREIRA, 2020).

It is of utmost importance to ensure that transgender athletes feel safe and welcomed when participating in sports competitions according to their gender identity. Thus, it is imperative that international, national, or regional organizations adopt inclusive policies to ensure the participation of all athletes.

3.4 POINT 04 – AFFIRMATION AND (IN)VISIBILITY

In this subsection, we have the theme of the feeling of identity recognition combined with a sense of belonging. At this juncture, transgender individuals who were the sources of the reports carry with them a sense of self-fulfillment, which they are able to articulate in their words, enabling the elaboration of this topic. When discussing the sensation of gender recognition, a fundamental aspect pertains to how the individual perceives themselves.

Despite being about a transgender man, the report exemplifies the disrespect that is directed towards these bodies. Chris Mosier expresses his disappointment with the portrayal that, upon winning his first triathlon competition as a transgender man, he would be a “woman of steel.”

Source: Field Notebook - EE4, scene 4 (Authors, 2021)

The historical context of Pat Manuel is depicted, who recounts that during adolescence there wasn't much dialogue about transgender people, and he felt that something was wrong with his body.

¹² For more information, please refer to the article from the Office of the Comptroller General of the Federative Republic of Brazil. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/cgu/pt-br/centrais-de-conteudo/campanhas/integridade-publica/assedio-moral-e-sexual#:~:text=No%20site%20do%20Conselho%20Nacional,ou%20f%C3%ADsica%20de%20um%20trabalhador%E2%80%9D>. Accessed on: June 23, 2023.

Source: Field Notebook - EE4, scene 10 (Authors, 2021)

After having his participation in a duathlon competition approved, Chris Mosier recounts that his presence on the U.S. national team could initiate a national discussion about transgender people in sports.

Source: Field Notebook - EE4, scene 11 (Authors, 2021)

“It was an incredible accomplishment, not just for me, but I also thought about the impact it would have on the community because my presence on a U.S. team could initiate a national discussion about transgender people in sports.” [Chris Mosier, transgender man]

Source: Field Notebook - EE4, scene 14 (Authors, 2021)

When discussing the disappointment of not being recognized with the gender one identifies with, as reported in the excerpts above, it falls upon the process of invisibility¹³ which, for some, is assigned to bodies that transcend normativity. When it comes to the journey of transitioning to a transgender man, such a path is understood as a much less controversial step compared to transitioning to a transgender woman (CHAVES, 2019).

This understanding might stem from the belief that transgender men face fewer restrictions in participating in sports competitions, as it is still commonly believed that someone who was assigned female at birth wouldn't have the anatomical and physiological conditions to outperform someone who was assigned male at birth. Implicitly, this rests on the lingering biological notion that suggested any man could be inherently stronger than a woman, once “Mosier competes with other men and narrates that people did not believe that he could win, be competitive or equal ‘natural men’ in sports performance” (CHAVES, 2019, p. 137, our translation).

Prado (2021, p. 249) adds that the lack of focus on cases of transgender men establishes silence and omissions, culminating in the “idea of inexistence of those bodies in the high performance sports scene”. As a result, it reinforces the notion that masculinities would continue to be a privilege of cisgender men.

In the report where athlete Chris Mosier was portrayed as a woman, it is important to note that, in relation to transgender men, in order for them to gain respect and be seen on an equal level to cisgender men, they need to excel in various factors, not only at sports level but also in their social life (GIRARDI; EDRAL, 2018).

Besides physical strength, we may also include amidst these factors techniques, psychological characteristics, conditioning and other ones that form a complex mosaic. This allows, for instance, for Chris Mosier, as a trans male, to become as competitive an athlete as other so-called “natural” men (CHAVES, 2019, p. 137).

Inherent to this, we perceive that sports disciplines are characterized as yet another binary social instrument that is proliferated in collective social consciousness. They socially mark and reinforce gender divisions while simultaneously subverting and displacing them, recreating inequalities between representations of masculinities

13 The exercise of rendering the existence of transgender men invisible is prevalent in numerous social spaces. In sports media, there are few cases that adequately delve into portraying the issue. As documented by Prado (2021, p. 248, our translation), “in Brazilian sports media, when transsexuality gains visibility it is female participation that directs the debate”.

and femininities (GRESPLAN; GOELLNER, 2014; LOVE, 2019; LUCAS; NEWHALL, 2019).

4 CONSIDERATIONS

While considering the relationship between the development and production of this type of telejournalistic narrative content and its mass dissemination through the presentation of the topic “transgender and sports” to the television audience, we observe that the narratives still exhibit conceptual errors and an approach that leans towards sensationalism. They excessively focus on a particular type of transgender identity, on the biomedical discourse of advantage and testosterone and on episodes of denial, embarrassment, and non-recognition of the transgender body in sports.

In the light of Lucas and Newhall (2019), we understand that the media’s concern with determining whether an athlete is transgender or not speaks more to an exercise of categorization as a “threatening body,” aiming to judge if their participation is fair or cheating. The way discussions are framed in television media about a particular subject tends to stimulate critical thinking among those who listen and watch. Presentation techniques also significantly influence the behavior of the viewer, potentially becoming a future field for further discussions on relevant issues addressed in tele-sports media about the topic.

However, as pointed out by Lucas and Newhall (2019, p. 120), the televised discourse presented tends to lean more towards “[...] maintaining the sex/gender system than it is about providing access to sport and physical activity” for this public in an appropriate manner. Although it might convey the idea that this type of portrayal and narrative is favorable, as if seeking to affirm equal access, it often ends up reinforcing a certain visibility and definition of transgender that may not always be acceptable for the portrayed athlete or other transgender athletes.

This research, in line with other discussions in the field of physical education, does not exhaust the complexity of the situations discussed in this context, but contributes to the expansion of the debate and the presentation of new ways of discussion, which is essential for changing social paradigms.

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Resumo: Hoje em dia, o cenário esportivo, sobretudo retratado pelas mídias, vem apresentando novas perspectivas em relação às práticas atlético-esportivas LGBTI+. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi analisar a cobertura televisiva sobre a participação de atletas trans no esporte, com base no programa Esporte Espetacular. Metodologicamente, a pesquisa caracteriza-se como qualitativa e exploratória, utilizando a etnografia de tela como ferramenta de produção dos dados. Foram analisadas 4 reportagens produzidas de 2017 a 2019, totalizando aproximadamente 35 minutos. Os achados permitem inferir que todas as narrativas televisivas apresentam equívocos conceituais e uma abordagem que tende ao sensacionalismo, além de enfocarem um tipo específico de identidade transgênero, no discurso biomédico da vantagem e da testosterona e de episódios de negação, constrangimento e não-reconhecimento do corpo trans no Esporte.

Palavras-chave: Esportes. Mídia Audiovisual. Pessoas Transgênero.

Resumen: En la actualidad, el escenario deportivo, el escenario deportivo, tal como es retratado por los medios de comunicación, presenta nuevas perspectivas con respecto a las prácticas atlético-deportivas LGBTI+. El objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar la cobertura televisiva sobre la participación de atletas trans en el deporte, basándose en el programa "Esporte Espetacular". La metodología empleada en esta investigación se caracteriza como cualitativa y exploratoria, y utiliza la Etnografía de Pantalla como herramienta para la producción de datos.. Se analizaron 4 reportajes, producidos desde 2017 hasta 2019, con una duración total de aproximadamente 35 minutos. Los hallazgos sugieren que todas las narrativas televisivas analizadas presentan errores conceptuales y muestran un enfoque que tiende hacia el sensacionalismo, centrándose en un tipo particular de identidad transgénero, en el discurso biomédico de la ventaja y la testosterona, así como en episodios de negación, vergüenza y no reconocimiento del cuerpo trans en el deporte.

Palabras clave: Deportes. Medios Audiovisuales. Personas Transgénero.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Gabriel Frazão Silva Pedrosa: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Visualization, Writing (original draft).

Rafael Marques Garcia: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing (review and editing).

Erik Giuseppe Barbosa Pereira: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project management, Supervision.

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