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Print media narratives of bullying and harassment at the Football Association: A case study of Eniola Aluko

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Abstract

In this article we draw on critical theory to discuss how power frames the ‘narratives’ of Eniola Aluko, a Black, female footballer who accused an established (White) football coach of bullying, harassment and racial comments. We discuss data analysed from 80 print media articles from three British newspapers (with circulation figures ranging from 1.4 million to 135,000 a day), from 6th August 2017 to 19th October 2017. In our findings we discuss the four dominant themes. Through our analysis we examine how race, gender and belonging frame Aluko in ways that seek to position her as an outsider and question her legitimacy in the white male space of football. We demonstrate that these frames are shaped by, as well as reinforce, existing power relations, and influence how bullying and racial harassment are represented in media accounts. We argue this type of analysis has implications for our understanding of how narratives bullying and harassment in sport can be re-framed along dominant power lines that question the legitimacy of athlete’s accounts and experiences.

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13 **Key words**

14 Media Representation, Gender, Bullying, Racism, Football

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25 On the 7th August 2017, various media outlets in the United Kingdom (UK) reported that Eniola

1 Aluko, an England female football player, had received an £80,000 settlement from the
2 Football Association. Allegedly the Football Association paid this settlement in response to a
3 2016 complaint Aluko made about bullying and racial comments against the then England
4 women's coach, Mark Sampson (Taylor, 2017). At the time Sampson became manager of
5 England Women in 2014 Aluko was already an established player with nearly 100 caps. It was
6 widely reported that in 2016 Aluko filed a complaint to the FA which detailed bullying and
7 examples of unfair treatments, as well as a broader culture of harassment and bullying in
8 Sampson's approach to coaching the England team. The complaint also included details about
9 a racially offensive comment that Sampson had made in 2014 to Aluko commenting that 'my
10 family should 'make sure they don't (come?) over with Ebola' before the England v Germany
11 Game (Aluko, 2017). The media broke this story a year after the Football Association had
12 cleared Sampson and his staff through an internal inquiry. In response to the media interest and
13 broader concerns about sport governance on the 11th September the chair of the parliamentary
14 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport select committee informed the Football Association they
15 would face a parliamentary inquiry to question their handling of Aluko's complaint. Shortly
16 after, on the 18th October 2017, a one-day parliamentary hearing took place to review the
17 evidence and to question the Football Association about their internal investigation processes.

18

19 The purpose of this article is to focus on print media representations of Aluko, and her
20 complaints about bullying, harassment and racially offensive comments from when the story
21 broke to the day after the inquiry. Aluko is a Black female footballer and in this article we
22 argue that intersecting power lines frame the way her story is told, to date little research has
23 explicitly focused on how complaints of harassment and bullying in sport are represented in
24 sports media. In the UK Racial Harassment is defined 'as acts designed to intimidate, humiliate,
25 ridicule or undermine the confidence of a person by reason of a person's race, colour, ethnic or

1 national origins, religion or belief' (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, 1999). The article
2 begins by providing a contextual overview of issues of race, gender and racism in sport and
3 football, before moving onto discuss the theoretical framework, methods and finally the results,
4 discussion and conclusion are presented.

5

6

Race, Gender and Racism in football

7 While race is often defined as biological, referring to skin colour, or other physical markers,
8 ethnicity explains cultural characteristics such as dress, norms and values (Farrington et al,
9 2012). Despite accepted definitional differences, van Sterkenburg et al, (2019) argues that
10 when people discuss race, a range of markers refer simultaneously to biology and cultural
11 difference, suggesting that both race and ethnicity should be considered social constructs (van
12 Sterkenburg et al, 2019). This is because traditional racisms may be circumvented through
13 drawing reference to nationhood or religion to mark the difference and highlight racial and
14 ethnic hierarchies (Morning, 2009).

15

16 Issues of race and racism in sport in sport are well documented (Cashmore, 2014, Carrington,
17 2001, Hylton, 2018) with research that has explored the multiple ways in which Whiteness and
18 White privilege work in sport (Long et al, 2015, Harrison, 2015, Hylton, 2009). To date, much
19 of this research has focused on men, which may be related to how 'Football' and 'England'
20 remain most closely associated with men and masculinity as representing the nation (Bowes,
21 2017). The long-standing identification of football as a male preserved has restricted girls and
22 women's opportunities to play football (Williams, 2007; Scraton et al., 1999). Despite women
23 playing football in England since the end of the 19th century (Petty and Pope, 2018), the
24 Football Association banned women from playing on Football Association affiliated clubs
25 grounds from 1921 until 1971. This was detrimental to the growth of women's football. In

1 organisational terms, The Football Association only took full responsibility for women's
2 football in 1993 (Dunn, 2016). This was in response to pressure from the international
3 governing body 'FIFA' who wanted a single organisation for the men's and the women's game
4 and the FA merged with the Women's Football Association (WFA) (Scraton *et al.*, 1999). Since
5 1998, the growth of women's football has remained slow, but post-2011 with the launch of the
6 semi-professional Football Association Women's Super League, the focus on women's success
7 at London 2012 and beyond, there has been a growing investment which has increased the
8 numbers of people watching the women's game, while the men's game has continued to
9 dominate as the primary sport.

10
11 Ratna's (2007, 2010, 2013) research, one of the few to highlight the intersections of *race and*
12 *gender* in football discusses how the experiences of British Female Asians are gendered and
13 racialised. She discusses the way British Asian females play up and play down particular
14 identities to negotiate their inclusion within football (Ratna, 2013). Some of the players deny
15 issues of race and racism in the game which could mean that examples of racism went
16 unchallenged. For those players more likely to question issues of race and racism they were
17 more likely to be positioned as outsiders in the game and less likely to progress in formal
18 structures. As Ratna (2013) demonstrates there is a need to capture the complex and nuanced
19 workings of discrimination in sport to explore how racism exists and how the experiences of
20 BME female footballers are affected by intersecting identities of race and gender in a primarily
21 white male sport. In this article we do this by exploring how these identities frame newspaper
22 stories and in the following section we discuss the theoretical framework adopted.

23
24 **Theoretical Framework: Critical theory and power lines in media representations**

1 In Birrell and McDonald's (2000) *Reading Sport*, they outline critical theory as a useful
2 framework for understanding how media reports of controversial incidents provide an analysis
3 of broader power relations in sport. In particular they outline how critical incidents and how
4 they are framed in the media can be informative in understanding power relations, as well as
5 how power influences the reporting of incidents. As discrimination exists beyond a single axis
6 of power, it is necessary to explore the multiplicity of social identification and how
7 discrimination may reflect inequalities of power. Framing is a way of explaining how a
8 controversial event is represented and it draws attention to how journalists organise and select
9 facts or narratives and then present a storyline (Kian and Hardin, 2009).

10
11 This perspective stresses the way media narratives may guide and limit public understanding
12 of events and personalities in sport. Rather than just providing neutral and factual accounts, the
13 way athletes are represented in the media carry significance (Birrell and McDonald, 2000).
14 When analysing print media representations, it is necessary to consider how power is framed
15 in media narratives, as well as illuminating who has power and who does not. In *Reading Sport*
16 (2000) power relations are conceptualised as multiple and existing on different axes. How
17 stories are framed in the media influences interpretations of race, gender and identity which in
18 turn provide people with discourses about race and ethnicity (van Skerkenburg, 2011).
19 Research on race and racism in print media have led some to suggest the (print) media are
20 institutionally racist and concerns about the lack of diversity in media workforces (Kilvington
21 and Price, 2017). Carrington, (2011) emphasises the role of media exploring how media can
22 confirm and challenge racial equality, particularly in an era of heavily mediated sport. Using
23 the term white sports/media complex emphasises how racialised relations of power are
24 connected to representational politics. Carrington (2011) emphasises the complexity in how
25 the media both deny racism while simultaneously representing racial difference which needs

1 careful analysis. In the following section research on gender, race and the nation that inform
2 our understanding of the role of media narratives and media representations are discussed.

4 **Gender, Race and the Nation in Print Media**

5 Feminist scholarship has continued to highlight how female athletes are trivialised, sexualised
6 and underrepresented in all forms of sports media (McClearn, 2018, Godoy-Pressland, 2014).

7 While research highlights changes to the amount of print media coverage, female athletes
8 remain underrepresented (Biscomb and Matheson, 2017). Petty and Pope's (2018) recent
9 analysis of the 2015 Women's World Cup draws on theoretical considerations of Connell and
10 power relations to argue that there has been more positive print media coverage during mega-
11 events, reflecting broader shifts in gender relations where women's sport is now more widely
12 respected (Petty and Pope, 2018). Who is represented in the sports media is connected to ideas
13 about national identity and representation. Bowes and Bairner (2016) demonstrate how media
14 representations of Britishness for female athletes are complex, contradictory and often differ
15 from male athletes representations. In this respect, who represents the nation in sport is about
16 power (Black, 2016). The images of successful female athletes which are most circulated by
17 the media emphasise homogenised white standards of 'beauty' (Gill, 2008), thus marginalising
18 or rendering some women invisible.

19
20 In other research outside of football discussing gender, race and the nation Zenquis and
21 Mwaniki (2019) critically discuss media representations of Nnemkadi and Chinenye
22 Ogwumike, professional second-generation Black African WNBA players. They demonstrate
23 how the intersection of race, gender and nationality in print media narratives emphasise
24 whiteness as the norm alongside stereotypes of Africa that influence the narratives of the
25 athletes. The authors adopt the term color-bland racism to explore the way media framing has

1 become more subtle in highlighting difference. This is so that the press can avoid being labelled
2 racist, while drawing on ethnicity as the marker of difference (Zenquis and Mwaniki, 2019).
3 Schultz (2005) draws on McDonald and Birrell's (1999) framework to outline how print media
4 representations polarise and privilege some identities over others in media representations of
5 Serena Williams. This includes a focus on her appearance and athleticism, which seek to re-
6 inscribe whiteness as the normative identity in women's tennis (Schultz, 2005). In other
7 research exploring intersections of power in media reports it was noted that women and ethnic
8 minority athletes are often absent (Deeb and Love, 2018) and when are discussed could be
9 framed as troublesome by the print media (Kilvington and Price, 2017). These observations
10 highlight how the whiteness of sport spaces continue to highlight the role of white privilege in
11 sports (Long and Hylton, 2002, Harrison, 2013). In the following section we outline the
12 methods adopted in this research.

13

14

Method

Design

16 Media research involves the 'systematic' study of media and involves typically one of the three
17 elements of the media; media production, representation or consumption. In this paper, we
18 focus on print media representation (Millington and Wilson, 2016). Media analysis is an
19 established method in the sociology of sport, and in this article, we adopt similar methods to
20 other studies on print media representation (Bowes and Kitching, 2019, Biscomb and Griggs,
21 2013, Deeb and Love, 2018) to provide an analysis of print media representations of Aluko,
22 Sampson and The Football Association around the time of the inquiry. Despite the growth of
23 online media and platforms, print media remains a salient source of news. Print media articles
24 were searched using the online 'UK Newspapers' directory. For a range of articles and
25 journalism styles, The Guardian, The Times and The Sun were selected. In the UK, The Sun is

1 a traditionally Eurosceptic, right-leaning tabloid with the largest circulation, 1.4 million. The
2 Times is a broadsheet newspaper, with circulation figures of 406,000. However, it is also
3 recognised as being a more right-wing, Conservative-supporting newspaper (Cushion et al.,
4 2018). The Guardian was chosen as a left-leaning, broadsheet newspaper, it has a smaller
5 circulation (Binderkrantz et al, 2016). We collected data from different newspapers to ensure
6 we explore the differences between papers in the media representation of female athletes
7 (Biscomb and Matheson, 2017).

8

9 *Data collection*

10 The timeframe for inclusion of media articles was the date the story first appeared in The Daily
11 Mail, which was the 6th August 2017 (Cunningham, 2017) to the day after the parliamentary
12 inquiry on the 18th October 2017 (6th August to 19th October). 80 newspaper articles were
13 identified during this period. The articles were found using the search terms, ‘Aluko’ ‘Eniola
14 Aluko’ ‘Eni’, and the articles were placed into three files, one for each newspaper, and entered
15 into NVivo, a tool used to organise, qualitative data. Our approach was informed by McDonald
16 and Birrell (1999) in accepting there is no one truth in the event or story, but to consider how
17 the story, is influenced by dominant power relations, both within and outside of sport. The
18 frames of the story have more considerable cultural significance, and make visible ongoing
19 social inequalities that counter the notion that sport is meritocratic and apolitical.

20

21 *Data Analysis*

22 Following a qualitative approach, deductive thematic analysis was used to understand the
23 framing of Eniola Aluko and Mark Sampson and the issue of racism in the Football
24 Association, focusing on how media narratives framed the incident, Aluko and Sampson
25 before, during and after the parliamentary inquiry. We adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six

1 phases of thematic analysis to explore patterns in the data. The first stage involved familiarity
 2 with the data; reading and reading the articles and that were groups by paper and date. Stage
 3 Two involved generating initial codes which were done by the second author. Both authors
 4 then searched for themes and discussed these; at this stage we identified frames and narratives
 5 aligned to power. Stage Three involved reviewing the themes and Stage Four involved refining
 6 these themes and discussing and cross-referencing themes, during this stage, we discussed how
 7 race, gender and national identity were influential in framing in media narratives. Stage Five
 8 involved defining the themes and a final agreement of themes. The themes that discussed in
 9 the results section of the article are, Aluko as ‘Other’, Is it Racism? Aluko as the Problem, and
 10 Sampson as the Victim and Questioning the Football Association? In the following section, we
 11 discuss the themes before providing a more substantive critical discussion of the data.

12

13

Results

Aluko as ‘other’

15 In this theme we discuss the process of ‘othering’ where in some media articles Aluko was
 16 emphasised as different to Sampson. This is noticeable in a few ways, but one is to emphasise
 17 Aluko’s place of birth thereby emphasising to the reader that she wasn’t born in England,
 18 examples include, ‘Aluko, who was born in the African country (The Sun, 22nd August 2017).
 19 ‘after telling Nigeria-born Aluko’ (The Sun, 19th October 2017). The emphasis of Aluko’s
 20 place of birth occurred most frequently before detailing the rest of the article,

21 To recap, Aluko - who is of Nigerian descent - accused the then-England women’s
 22 manager Sampson of making a racist comment about the possibility of her family
 23 carrying the Ebola virus’ (The Sun, 19th October 2017).

24 These examples are similar to previous research that has highlighted how media can reinforce
 25 the racialized identities of players by disassociation from their country (Law and Hylton, 2009),

1 through emphasising Aluko's place birth, this signals that she is was not born in England and
2 also emphasises she is not White.

3

4 Other examples include how Aluko's race is noted or emphasised in articles, for example, 'The
5 Chelsea player, who is mixed-race' (The Guardian, 7th August 2017). Reference to Aluko as
6 mixed-race emphasises she not White. In stressing Aluko is mixed-race or Nigerian, it seeks to
7 question her position and legitimacy to question the English (white) Football Association.
8 Another way this occurs is through comparison in media articles which while highlighting her
9 place of birth also compare her with her brother, who plays for Nigeria, 'despite her ties to
10 Nigeria (for whom her brother, the Fulham winger Sone Aluko, plays), she chose to progress
11 with England' (The Guardian, 17th August). The relevance of Aluko's brother is not clear, it
12 seeks to reinforce to the reader as a reminder that Aluko's birthplace and her family are not
13 from England. In doing so it positions Aluko as an outsider, questioning Aluko's Englishness
14 through her family affiliation. Through emphasising Aluko as born in Nigeria, and as mixed
15 race, these narratives frame Aluko as different from the white established FA and
16 predominantly white British born players and coaches. This othering often came before
17 discussing the complaint which then focused on the extent to which Aluko had or had not
18 experienced racism.

19

20 **Is it racism? Questioning Aluko's Narrative**

21 A consistent approach in media reporting was to repeat how the Football Association insisted
22 Mark Sampson has been cleared 'of allegations of bullying and discrimination' (The Times,
23 18th August 2017). The emphasis of clearing Sampson at an internal Football Association
24 investigation reminds the reader that Sampson was found not guilty (by the FA) of the
25 allegations. Despite the framing of the internal investigation as flawed some media reports

1 continued to deny or obscure this, for example, in *The Sun* (18th August 2017), ‘Sampson has
2 been cleared of making racial comments – but admits he must watch his words’. The denial of
3 racism, alongside the recognition that his language needs to change, reframes the issue to
4 question what is racism? In an article in *The Times* (20th August 2017) the severity of the claims
5 made by Aluko are further questioned,

6 so on the basis of what we have seen so far, this ‘scandal’ is based upon two comments,
7 one of which was judged not to have been made and the other which is rather innocuous.

8 These comments both question the validity of the complaint and suggest that even if the
9 comment was made, it was not as severe comments as ‘interpreted’ thus suggesting it might be
10 Aluko rather than the language that is the problem. In a later article, in *The Times* (30th August
11 2017) there is a more direct attack on Aluko, ‘to call this a ‘racism’ storm is to trivialise racism’.
12 This problematises what is and is not racism, it invites the reader to question whether Aluko is
13 too quick to identify her experience of Sampson's behaviour as racism. *The Times* (11th August)
14 noted, ‘Aluko should know the difference between bullying and high demands delivered,
15 occasionally, with coarse language’. The introduction of the interpretation of language as the
16 problem suggests it is the person’s interpretation that can be problematic. In later media reports,
17 there is an indication that there are lesser and more problematic forms of racism, as *The*
18 *Guardian* note (19th October, 2017) ‘Racism is a big word; not everything is racism. Sometimes
19 remarks that land badly is just unfortunate’. Such framing around what constitutes racism and
20 racist comments problematise the experiences of those who report racism as their
21 interpretations are discussed and questioned, shifting the focus from those using the language
22 to those receiving and start to reposition or question who is the victim is.

23
24 **Aluko as the problem, Sampson as the victim**

1 In a similar way to how racism is questioned there was a narrative in where media stories
2 framed Aluko as the problem while her manager, Mark Sampson, was framed as the victim.
3 This refers to a suggestion that through her complaint she had encouraged other people to turn
4 on Sampson and accuse him of bullying, ‘anyone with a grievance- and they are queuing up to
5 bash up- is coming forward with another damaging allegation’ (The Sun, 15th September 2017).
6 The use of the term ‘grievance’ and ‘damaging’ infers that Aluko has created and manipulated
7 a situation in which others are open to accuse Sampson. Aluko, and her actions become the
8 focus not the problematic behaviour or language used by Sampson.

9

10 Another example can be seen in The Times (22nd September) when the journalist quotes a
11 former England captain, ‘it does seem like a bit of a witch hunt’. In this frame the narrative of
12 racism and discrimination is obscured. The notion of poorly framed comments, as opposed to
13 racism, is noted in the following media report,

14 We should never confuse racism- the systematic discrimination against ethnic groups –
15 with a comment or two here and there made by decent people during a lifetime of good
16 work (The Times, 30th August 2017).

17 The term ‘decent’ people suggests that decent people are not racist, and people who make racist
18 comments are not racist. Instead, there is an inference that others can misinterpret comments;
19 this shift focuses on the person who deems the comment as racist, and they become identified
20 as the problem.

21

22 The Times, and The Sun, in different narratives, express concern with Sampson’s welfare as a
23 result of the accusations he faced, ‘The idea that any manager could work with a player who
24 accuses of racism is quite remarkable’ (The Sun). There seems to be little consideration given
25 the players and how they would continue to work with a manager/coach in a situation where

1 they have complained about bullying and harassment, perhaps part of a broader issue where
2 athletes are considered disposable and easily replaced. Sampson is frequently referred to in the
3 print media as the ‘most successful coach’. ‘Mark Sampson was the most successful England
4 women's coach on the pitch’ (The Sun, September 13th, 2017). The emphasis on Sampson’s
5 success, while also emphasising that he is the ‘women’ coach to signal the difference between
6 men and women’s game validates his success in coaching the women’s game. In direct contrast
7 is the minimal discussion of Aluko’s success as a player; for example, The Sun only made one
8 reference to her number of caps 102. In minimalising the sporting success of Aluko she is not
9 positioned as an essential player, so there may be a suggestion that Aluko may be jealous of
10 other players or enacting revenge against Sampson for not being selected.

11

12 In contrast in The Guardian and The Times, Aluko’s sporting achievements were described
13 more frequently as the ‘102 Cap International’. The Times was also more likely to make
14 references to Aluko as a qualified lawyer, recognising her non-sporting achievements alongside
15 her sporting success. By emphasising Sampson’s success, this also enables space for the reader
16 to doubt Aluko by the suggestion that she could be seeking revenge for not being picked. This
17 was discussed in The Times (8th August 2017) and The Guardian (17th August 2017) when they
18 refer to Aluko as accepting ‘hush money’. Both women were from a BME community, and
19 they are positioned as troublesome, as well as using discrimination laws to seek compensation.
20 These examples illustrate how women playing or working in the game have to deal with the
21 media scrutiny, on top of the harassment they have faced.

22

23 **Questioning the Football Association**

24 The day after the inquiry, media discussions continued, but there was a shift in focus to
25 questioning the poor internal processes at The Football Association, who apologised to Aluko.

1 The Guardian reflects on the case and discusses the perceived complexity of racism,
2 Trying to determine what prejudice looks like, and how prejudiced people behave, still
3 confounds us. Not all people who have problematic attitudes to race wear a white hood
4 and carry a burning torch. Not all sexists grope women. Some of these people would
5 describe themselves as nice. Some of them, in different situations, actually are nice.
6 Not everybody plays the part they are expected to play. (The Guardian, 19th October
7 2017).

8 In some media reports there was some criticism of the Football Association, and there was a
9 questioning of their poor handling of the incident. This was discussed in the media reports as
10 well as questioning the culture of the Football Association,

11 It was as if they had been shaken awake from a dream in which a little racist banter,
12 such as telling a player of Nigerian descent not to let her folk bring in Ebola when they
13 came to watch her play for England, was greeted with backslapping chortles. In their
14 world, only a very bad sport would not laugh along. Unluckily for the Football
15 Association, but happily for the wider game, Ms Aluko is not readily intimidated by
16 any anxiety about fitting into a racist culture. She is both courageous and well qualified,
17 and she has brought The Football Association to a humiliating account with a measured
18 determination that finally bore fruit in front of MPs on the digital, culture, media and
19 sport committee on Wednesday afternoon. (The Guardian, 19th October 2017).

20 In her written statement to Parliament, Aluko explains a legal letter sent to the FA via (?) about
21 her complaint was copied to the FA Chairman Greg Clarke, in response Clarke responded with
22 ‘I have no idea why you are sending me this, Perhaps you can enlighten me’ (Aluko, 2017).
23 The handling of the case did spark some discussions about the Football Association as
24 institutionally racist and some dialogue of the idea that the culture of sport should allow
25 problematic behaviours. Ultimately Aluko’s complaint was upheld, which emphasised how

1 her complaint should have been more seriously addressed by the Football Association who did
2 not handle the situation very well, The Times (19th October 2019),

3 has taken three investigations to prove that two incidents of abuse took place, and MPs
4 accused the Football Association 's leaders of a "shambolic" process. Clarke also had
5 to apologise to MPs for having described issues such as institutional racism as "fluff".

6 In these narratives the Football Association and culture of the Football Association are
7 identified as problematic, and it is highlighted how practices, may limit the culture whereby
8 complaints are made and addressed. There was however little discussion of the whiteness of
9 the FA or structural racism or the role of mediated discourses in framing race, and ethnicity or
10 harassments.

12 **Discussion**

13 In the framing of Aluko's story her experience of racial harassment and bullying was
14 questioned, denied, and sometimes reframed as her misunderstanding or misinterpreting the
15 comments made by Sampson. Aluko and the complaint about Sampson became a media-
16 mediated story which highlights the interconnecting power lines, race, gender and national
17 belonging (McDonald and Birrell, 2002). Sexism in football towards players, fans and referees
18 remain ongoing issues in how women's football is experienced at all levels of the game and
19 media representations (Dunn, 2014, Jones, 2008, Jones et al, 2013). Gender relations shape and
20 frame the way Aluko is represented in media articles. Thus, despite changes to media reporting
21 noted by Petty and Pope (2019), Bourne and Pitkin (2019) and Bowes and Kitchings (2019)
22 how women's sport is positioned as other, and therefore inferior to men's sport remains a
23 relevant area of analysis, even if the narrative has become less explicitly sexist (Cooky et al,
24 2015). How gender frames the story is through the presentation of Sampson, a White successful
25 male coach of the women's game. The media framing frequently emphasises his success as a

1 coach and his knowledge of the game to which female footballers have benefited. In contrast,
2 there was little emphasis on the number of caps and the footballing success of Aluko before
3 (and after) Sampson became England Women's Coach. The emphasis is frequently on
4 Sampson's success while simultaneously minimising Aluko's which positioned the women's
5 game as less valued than the men's. This aligns to broader research findings which highlight
6 the way sport continue to still position men's sport as more appealing than women's sport, and
7 men as more suitable for coaching positions (Adjepong, 2019).

8

9 The Football Association, is an established historic (male) governing body and although they
10 represent the men and women's game, while the governance of the FA remains male-
11 dominated. Those who criticise the FA are positioned in ways that seek to deny them and these
12 narratives are similar to other women experiences, for example Eva Carneiro, a female doctor
13 who was positioned as troublesome and a belief that she complained about sexism at Chelsea
14 for a settlement fee (Gibson, 2015). The FA is an established and powerful organisation who
15 have the power to try and influence the reporting of the story. This is indicated by Aluko in her
16 written statement to the inquiry where she suggests that during the initial media frenzy the
17 Football Association were providing one-sided information to journalists to try and influence
18 how the story was told (Aluko, 2017). The FA was influential in trying to control the media
19 narratives in their favour (Aluko, 2017), and this a reminder of how powerful institutions can
20 influence how less powerful people are perceived (van Skerkenburg, 2011)

21

22 Perceptions of belonging and who represents the nation and the relationship between this and
23 birthplace play a role in framing Aluko's story. The white sports/media complex used by
24 Carrington (2011) is relevant to consider the way racialised discourses are circulated through
25 mediatised critical events. Through the emphasis on Aluko's place of birth, the media narrative

1 seek to position Aluko as different, it frames her 'Britishness' as different to Sampson's and
2 other players. This remains significant because of how sport continues to be a space in which
3 notions of Britishness are constructed and contested (Fletcher and Lusted, 2017). This is at a
4 time when through the ongoing political context of Brexit, anxieties about Britishness and who
5 belongs in the UK and who does not are growing. Emphasising national identity, and place of
6 birth is a way of framing Aluko as different without drawing on or stressing biological
7 difference that may be more likely to be termed racism. Other analyses of print media have
8 found similar findings, Black's (2016) analysis of Mo Farah, a British Olympian from Somalia,
9 highlights how the print media frame the narrative of his success in a way that suggests he is
10 both included in and separated from British national identity. Being British and White are part
11 of dominant ideas about Britishness. Thus emphasising difference through the place of birth in
12 media stories is significant. Aluko's decision to play for England while her brother plays for
13 Nigeria questions this Britishness and their commitment to the nation. The way these stories
14 are represented are particularly significant at a time where belonging is increasingly
15 problematised in the UK post- Brexit. Who represents and who belongs in the 'nation', is
16 narrowing and there is growing hostility to 'others' (Gibbons and Malcolm, 2017).

17

18 The discussions about what is and what is not racism in media stories focus on the extent to
19 which Aluko misinterprets the series of events. This works in a way that the legitimacy of
20 Aluko's complaint is questioned. By questioning racism and the complaint made by Aluko;
21 this seeks to deny racism, or if it did occur, suggest that racism is a historical or individual
22 problem (Deeb and Love, 2018). Thus what constitutes racist comments and how we
23 understand racism and racist behaviours may mask white privilege and issues of power
24 (Carrington, 2011, King, 2007, Harrison, 2013). The focus on whether Sampson's comment
25 were racist, or misinterpreted, fails to account for broader structures of white sport and sporting

1 organisations culture and language. To suggest that in elite sport there are different standards
2 of acceptable language because of the high-pressure environment and the pursuit of elite
3 performance focuses on the individual, and their ability to withstand such comments. By
4 focusing on this, readers are invited to question the legitimacy of Aluko's account, questioning
5 her resilience for elite sport, while simultaneously hearing about Sampson's success as a coach.
6
7 There was space in media reports given to questioning Sampson's use of language, but this
8 sought to separate issues of poor language from racism and broader structures. The opportunity
9 to discuss issues of race, sport, harassment and bullying cultures in sport are not realised. There
10 is little discussion about other aspects of Aluko's complaint about the private spaces in which
11 racial comments are made by those working in the sport. Post-racial ideologies stress that there
12 was once racism, but now there is not. These ideas exist alongside as common-sense beliefs
13 that sport is meritocratic, anyone can be successful if they work hard enough, therefore race
14 and racism is denied (van Skerkenburg and Peeters, 2019).

15
16 There were minimal differences in reporting across the newspapers, highlighting as Biscomb
17 and Matheson (2017) suggest, that more research may need to explore the differences between
18 papers in the media representation of female athletes. In this research, *The Guardian*, a left-
19 wing broadsheet newspaper, was more articulate about Aluko's sporting achievements and
20 were more likely to use her 'voice' in their stories. By giving more space to Aluko to explain
21 her experiences and give her a voice to discuss her experiences of bullying and harassment.
22 Articles in *The Guardian* were also more likely to stress her position her as a positive role
23 model for young aspiring female footballers (and other sports as well). In contrast, the tabloid
24 newspaper, *The Sun* was generally more sympathetic to current management and governance
25 structures which arguably favour white, middle-class males who currently govern football in

1 England. Although they too found space, primarily post the inquiry to critique aspects of the
2 Football Association and the culture, none of the articles discussed issues of racial harassment
3 or bullying and few questioned the structures or structural inequalities in sport or the media
4 (King, 2007).

5

6

Conclusion

7 In this article, we provide an analysis of the print media during a specific critical event around
8 media reporting of bullying and harassment in sport. Research providing a critical analysis of
9 how narratives of discrimination and harassment in sport are significant because *sport* and *the*
10 *media* remain a mechanism for sustaining the ideology of (white) male superiority (Fink, 2008).
11 Aluko is a Black female player who questioned a White male coach and the establishment of
12 the Football Association. This ‘story’ is significant as women’s football does not receive as
13 much print media coverage as the men’s game, the story received coverage because of the
14 allegations of racism, the fact Aluko accused a White male coach and because of the cultural
15 interest in the Football Association.

16

17 As previous research has suggested media representations of female athletes are increasing
18 (Petty and Pope, 2019), and examples of blatant sexism are reducing, but others suggest a trend
19 around online social media abuse of athletes. We would suggest future research analyses should
20 extend to other forms of media to understand the range of views that exist concerning gender
21 and race relations, and how people reinforce and challenge via these platforms. In Aluko’s
22 written testimony to the inquiry she discusses how difficult she has found the press intrusion
23 and the different ways her story was framed and re-framed with a different focus (Aluko, 2017).
24 This highlights the significance of how the framing of athletes accounts of harassment and
25 bullying are therefore needed to consider the way media narratives are re-framed along

1 dominant and intersecting power lines that question the legitimacy of people's account of
2 discrimination and harassment.

3

4

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