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ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

“It’s Not in Sport Media’s Interest to Challenge the Norms That It Benefits From”: Gendered Organizational Logics and Their Impact on Women in Sport Media

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ABSTRACT

Sport is a gendered environment that legitimizes and celebrates the prioritization of men. Sport media mirrors these inequities, evident through the sustained underrepresentation of women in this space. We sought to identify the gendered organizational logics of sport media organizations and their resulting impact on women’s experiences. We also aimed to understand the role of intersectional factors (i.e., age, race/ethnicity, family status, and socioeconomic status) on women’s experiences. Through semi-structured interviews with 23 women working in sport media in the United Kingdom and United States of America, we found that gendered organizational logics include demanding work schedules and content production expectations, assumptions about the inferiority of women, and fiscal responsibility justifications. Additionally, findings reveal that women’s work experiences are also impacted by the organizational logics of sport organizations, including gatekeeping access and workspace design and working conditions. The logics of sport media and sport organizations intersect and result in women navigating a gendered workspace through managing their appearance, grappling with lack of work–life balance, the need for privilege for career sustainability, questioning their belonging, and working through imposter syndrome. Sociodemographic factors provide insights to the racialized and classed experiences of women working in sport media. Study findings have implications for sport media and other types of organizations, including the impact of nonemploying organizations’ practices on workplace gender inequity.

1 | Introduction

Gender inequity in organizations results from processes and practices that serve to reinforce socially constructed differences between women and men (Acker 1990, 2006). Such differences are particularly stark in sport, which reflects wider patterns of gender inequality and exclusion through a focus on the gender binary and through the promotion and celebration of men (Bryan et al. 2021; Pape 2020). The sport industry not only normalizes but also reinforces and legitimizes this binary, which undervalues and minoritizes women, LGBTQ+, and gender nonconforming individuals (Kane 1995; Travers 2008). Sport is

often classed as an entertaining medium, thereby isolating it from critique, further perpetuating the social and economic marginalization of women and other minoritized groups (Travers 2008). Sport media plays a critical role in this minoritization by mirroring on-field inequities onto sport organizations through practices and policies that prioritize men.

Sport is produced for men by men (Bruce 2013; Chambers et al. 2004), including the media through which many fans consume sport (e.g., sport broadcasts, news coverage, and commentary). Sport is considered a “male preserve” (i.e., a domain where men resist to offset their potential loss of power;

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Davis 1997; Theberge 1985) and sport media plays a central role in creating and maintaining the masculinity of the field (Messner 2002). Women working in sport media are constantly scrutinized and “qualitatively and quantitatively” minoritized by the structures and processes in sport media organizations (Harrison 2018, 952). This is evident through the sustained underrepresentation of women in sport media. For example, women hold less than 10% of roles in sport media organizations in the two nations that were the focus of this study: the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA; TIDES 2021; Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation, n.d.). Further, women of color often experience extra hostility including racism and sexism in sport media (Harrison 2018), necessitating an exploration of intersectional factors that impact women’s experiences. Scholars have noted that a liberal feminist approach of providing opportunities to more women and ethnic minorities will not achieve change unless organizational processes and practices related to the conceptualization of gender and ethnicity are understood and addressed (Claringbould et al. 2004).

Research into women’s experiences in sport media has identified challenges women face in this environment including harassment, lack of work–life balance, adopting “masculine” working styles, and undertaking more precarious positions (i.e., freelancing; see Harrison 2024). These challenges result from the gendered nature of sport media organizations, and specifically, their processes and practices that have become normalized and legitimized over time (Claringbould et al. 2004). As such, there is a need for a dedicated approach to identify and explore the gendered organizational logics of sport media organizations and their resulting impact on women’s experiences in this field. We address this gap and add to the conversation on gendered practices in sport media by exploring women’s experiences in this space. Specifically, we consider the following research questions:

1. What gendered organizational logics impact the work experiences of women in sport media?
2. How do intersectional factors such as ethnicity, age, family status, and socioeconomic status impact women’s experiences in sport media?

This manuscript continues with an overview of literature of women in sport media. Next, we introduce gendered organization theory (Acker 1990) and gendered organizational logics (Sargent et al. 2021) that frame our work and provide a foundation for our methods, analysis, and discussion sections. This is followed by our methodology, where we explain the recruitment and interview process with 23 women currently working in sport media, which formed a basis for reflection and analysis. We conclude with a discussion of key themes and observations on gendered organizational logics that influence women’s experiences in sport media.

2 | Women and Sport Media: An Overview of Literature

As mentioned, women continue to be underrepresented in sport media. For instance, Franks and O’Neill’s (2016) inquiry into

women’s visibility before and after the London 2012 Olympic Games found that women averaged a mere 2.3% of bylines in the national UK press. Contributing to this underrepresentation, women working in sport media encounter a web of gendered expectations and experiences, including systemic discrimination, abuse, gendered workspaces, and organizational practices related to advancement (Hardin and Shain 2005). Caring responsibilities borne by women, exclusion from professional networks, and inflexible work schedules can contribute to fewer women of color and women working in sport media overall (Claringbould et al. 2004). Their gender, imposter syndrome, and work–life balance also play a role in women media members’ career-related decisions (Hardin and Whiteside 2009).

A commonly reported challenge is the expectation for women to balance familial and work obligations (Claringbould et al. 2004; Clark-Saboda and Lemke 2023; Hardin and Shain 2005; Hardin and Whiteside 2009; Hardin et al. 2008; Organista and Mazur 2020). Women in sport media recognize their access to work or career longevity may be impacted by their choice to have children (Hardin et al. 2008; Organista and Mazur 2020) or other caring responsibilities (Claringbould et al. 2004). To have more flexibility and control over their work, women may turn to freelance work, which can lead to women being minoritized into lower-level roles (Pajnik and Hrženjak 2022).

Additionally, constant scrutiny of women’s appearances and presentation styles is normalized in sport media (Harrison 2019; McClearen 2018). As such, sport media defines an “ideal female sportscaster,” whose attributes include being white, heterosexual, conventionally attractive, and entrepreneurial (Harrison 2021). For women of color, their gender and race intersect in the way the work they produce is perceived and discussed in the sport environment (Harrison et al. 2020). Women who do not “fit the mold” encounter various challenges.

Women are expected to perform extra labor to continue working in sport media: they must manage emotions, grapple with harassment, and navigate gendered workspaces (Harrison 2018); they must conform to more masculine norms such as working long hours (Hardin and Shain 2006; Organista and Mazur 2020; Topić and Bruegmann 2021) or adapting writing styles to be more masculine (Schoch and Ohl 2011). Women may also be expected to move to different roles or different organizations to pursue new opportunities or advancement (Smucker et al. 2003). Women are often pushed into niche reporting on “softer” topics or on lower-tier sports that get less visibility (i.e., women’s sport), thereby limiting access to reporting on more serious topics, impacting job satisfaction and career progression (Hardin and Shain 2006; Kian and Hardin 2009; Miloch et al. 2005; North 2016; Schoch 2013, 2022; Topić and Bruegmann 2021). Such factors can limit their ability to pursue or fully commit to a career in this space.

A liberal feminist approach focused on increasing the number of women in various roles to help women find a sense of belonging and progress and build long careers in sport media is not sufficient to achieve change. Such an approach delimits our understanding of institutional practices within sport organizations,

which are often assumed to be gender neutral (Claringbould and Knoppers 2012), and their impact on women's experiences and ability to thrive in gendered workspaces such as sport media. To fill this gap, we took a concentrated approach to identify the gendered logics of sport media organizations and their impact on women's experiences in sport media.

3 | Gendered Organization Theory

We frame our research in gendered organization theory and gendered organizational logics. According to gendered organization theory, gender is embedded into the structure, practices, and policies of work organizations through several interacting processes (Acker 1990, 1992). Though the organization of work has shifted in the decades since the introduction of the theory, research demonstrates ways in which modern organizations are built on organizational logics that produce or sustain gender inequality (Mickey 2019, 2022; Williams et al. 2012). Organizational logics refer to “the practices (customs or routine way of doing things in an organization) and policies (written rules or guidelines that structure organizational interactions and operations) that make up an organization” (Sargent et al. 2021, 6). Examples of organizational logics that privilege men and masculinities in modern organizations include expectations to work long hours, networking, teamwork, and supervisor discretion over career progression (Brumley 2014; Mickey 2022; Williams et al. 2012). Such logics demonstrate how, even as the numbers of women in organizations grow, the policies and practices that contribute to gender equity may not change (Berrey 2014; Brush 2003; Pape 2020). Further, given that organizations are also racialized and classed, as well as built on ideas of heterosexuality, women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face further barriers to equality at work (Acker 2006; Alfrey and Twine 2017; Ray 2019).

These gendered practices and policies have particularly dire impacts on women working in male-dominated, masculinized fields, some of which, such as the military, firefighting, and sport, have been classified as “extremely gendered” (Bryan et al. 2021; Sasson-Levy 2011; Tyler et al. 2019). Characteristics of “extremely gendered” organizations include high levels of gender segregation and hierarchical control, formal policies excluding women, and strong cultural legitimacy for gender inequality (Sasson-Levy 2011). Numerous studies support sport organizations—and the management and leadership of sport organizations, specifically—in this classification (e.g., Bryan et al. 2021; Hindman and Paulsen 2024; Hindman and Walker 2024; Pape 2020). Sport media, a subsector of the sport industry (Agha and Dixon 2021), has also been found to operate on organizational logics that disadvantage women, including presumptions that organizational practices are gender neutral, that the presence of gender inequality is normal, and a passivity toward efforts to improve gender equality (Claringbould and Knoppers 2012). Taken in tandem with the literature on women in sport media reviewed in the previous section, sport media organizations can therefore be understood as gendered. Using this frame, we aim to understand how women working in sport

media navigate and respond to gendered organizational logics in their organizations.

4 | Methodology

This qualitative study was guided by a constructivist paradigm (Finlay and Ballinger 2006) to identify the gendered organizational logics of sport media organizations and their impact on women's work experiences. This approach acknowledges that individuals create understanding through their personal experiences and that understanding combined with an exchange of ideas and constant reflection by the participants and researcher (s) results in the co-creation of knowledge. Following a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022; Braun et al. 2023), we analyzed data from 23 semi-structured interviews with women working in sport media.

4.1 | Participant Recruitment and Profile

Purposeful and snowball sampling (Patton 2014) were used to identify women working in sport media in the United States of America and United Kingdom, who were over the age of 18 and able to communicate in English. Women were identified on official websites of sport media organizations as well as on social media websites (i.e., LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter)). Data collection commenced following institutional review board (IRB) approval from the authors' universities. Interviews were conducted on institutional-approved platforms (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Zoom) to encourage participation and eliminate geographical barriers. We interviewed 23 women currently working in sport media as reporters, writers, podcasters, editors, journalists, photographers, broadcasters, commentators, producers, and analysts between June and September 2024. Participants worked at a range of media organizations. While some participants held permanent and tenured positions at major media conglomerates, others were employed in smaller, more local sport media organizations or were freelancers. Most participants covered multiple sports.

4.2 | Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a conversational approach, asking questions related to the aims of the study, while providing flexibility to delve deeper into topics that warranted additional inquiry (Patton 2014). Framed by gendered organization theory (Acker 1990), the interview guide was designed to explore the gendered nature of women's experiences in sport media. Prior to the interview, participants submitted sociodemographic information on a secure online form. This included information on their age, income, highest level of education, marital status, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, and caring responsibilities. Participants provided this information in their own words, including self-describing their ethnicities in words most comfortable and relevant to them. Nine participants indicated a race or ethnicity other than White, but we use a generic term (i.e., women of color) in this

TABLE 1 | Sociodemographic characteristics of 23 study participants.

Demographic factor	Number
Country of work	
United States of America	12
United Kingdom	11
Role	
Tenured	11
Freelance/Contractual	12
Race/Ethnicity ^a	
White or White British	14
Mixed race	2
Women of color of Hispanic, Asian, or African Descent	7
Age range	
22–54 years	
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual	18
Bisexual or Bicurious	2
Gay or Queer	3
Education	
Bachelor's degree	15
Master's or Doctorate	8
Income range	
US \$2500 to US \$200,000	
Marital status	
Married or in a relationship	8
Single	10
No answer	5
Caring responsibilities	
Of children and/or parents	5
No caring responsibilities indicated	18

^aExact ethnicities of the nine participants of color are not included to protect their identities.

manuscript to protect their identities, prevent discovery, and thus, maintain ethical standards of research reporting. The participant profile is summarized in Table 1.

The interview began with background information on participants' role in sport media and how they obtained their current position, with a discussion on a typical workday and how their workspaces were organized at events and/or within their organizations. We asked them to describe what they enjoyed about their work, the challenges they navigated, and factors that have contributed to or restrained their success. Further, we asked participants to reflect and elaborate on relationships with their superiors and peers and their perceptions of how their experiences differed from men colleagues. Transcript checking was utilized, allowing participants to review their answers and make any amendments they deemed necessary.

4.3 | Data Analysis

We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022; Braun et al. 2023) to analyze data and answer our research questions. The first two authors independently coded the data and discussed relevant themes and subthemes before coming to a consensus. We first engaged in inductive coding, assigning code labels to snippets of data through a close reading of the transcripts. We then grouped codes into a list of initial themes. For example, we grouped codes of “culture of not taking a break,” “working long hours,” and “demand for constant content” into a theme initially labeled “expectations to always be working.” We continued to engage in theme development, moving back and forth between themes, codes, and data, until we had a refined list of themes and subthemes that answered our research questions. Lastly, we considered relationships between our themes through a process of conceptual mapping (Braun and Clarke 2022). We sought to achieve trustworthiness of our findings through the rigor of our analysis, as well as our engagement with both our positionality and reflexivity (Delia et al. 2024). Throughout data collection and analysis, we wrote reflexive memos capturing our initial hunches and making connections between data, themes, and theory (Braun and Clarke 2022; Charmaz 2015).

4.4 | Researcher Positionality

The authors of this study were outsiders to the context in which this study was being conducted. The primary and third authors are women of color and the second author is a white woman. All are academics, currently engaged in teaching and researching sport, with a focus on women and gender equity-related work. As such, we acknowledge that our interests and assumptions are based on our prior experiences of studying and researching gender equity in sport. As women, we were able to share experiences, develop a rapport with study participants, and delve into challenging areas with sensitivity and care. It also allowed us to build brief but meaningful relationships with participants through shared reflection, leading to co-creation of relevant and meaningful knowledge.

5 | Findings

Findings demonstrate how the gendered organizational logics of both sport media organizations and sport organizations produce and sustain gender inequity for women working in sport media, leading women to navigate their gendered workplaces. The findings are summarized in Table 2 and presented below.

5.1 | Gendered Organizational Logics of Sport Media Organizations

As described by participants, sport media organizations are built on gendered organizational logics that contribute not only to the underrepresentation of women, but the segregation of women to lower-status roles. Such logics include demanding work schedules and content production expectations, assumptions about

TABLE 2 | Gendered organizational logics of sports and sports media organizations and their impact on women's experiences.

Theme	Subthemes
Gendered organizational logics of sport media organizations	• Demanding work schedules and content production expectations • Assumptions about the inferiority about women in sport • Fiscal responsibility justifications
Gendered organizational logics of sport organizations	• Gatekeeping media access • Workspace design/Working conditions
Resulting impact on women's experiences in sport media	• Managing appearances • Lack of work–life balance • Need for privilege • Questioning belonging • Imposter syndrome • Racialized experiences

the inferiority of women in sport, and fiscal responsibility justifications, which disadvantage women in various ways.

Despite any gains in gender equality over the past decades, women report being in the minority and frequently are still the “only woman in the room.” Some participants noted this trend held true even when covering women’s sport, such as this participant who worked in women’s golf: “I find it really odd how there’s just basically a lot of men with no previous experience in women’s sport other than the event we currently work on and they don’t understand the nuances of like being a woman in sport.” Women of color reported often being the only, or one of few, racial minorities in their departments. One participant said, “He [her boss] said, ‘you know, you’re the first woman on this...like you’re the first woman being a front page editor.’ And then I was like, oh my God, he said I’m the first woman on the job, but I’m probably the first Black on the job, too...And then I realized... I haven’t seen another Black person or Asian ...”

Beyond being the minority, participants described that women and individuals from other minority groups are often segregated into lower-status roles in sport media. White men tend to fill roles with higher prestige outlets, as well as leadership roles. Women are less likely to be seen in leadership positions and some participants point to seeing more women in freelancing roles on which media companies increasingly rely but which come with less power and job stability. As one participant related, “Yeah, the men tend to have the seniority. And the men tend to have more full-time positions as opposed to freelance. And the women tend to be younger, less senior, and working for either what I’ll call new media: so, a podcast, a blog, something like that, or be an in-house writer [working directly for the sport organization].” Another participant shared she was planning to resign from her position in part “because of the lack of senior women in the team who make decisions.” She drew a connection between the lack of women in leadership and her lack of promotion in the organization, reporting that she felt a woman might have more respect for her contributions.

While women remain underrepresented, some participants reported their belief that their gender led to their job opportunities, because sport media organizations are looking to add diversity to their teams. As one interviewee said, “I know I’ve been definitely given opportunities because I’m a woman of color and that obviously is tokenism, and I know that for sure because it’s just so obvious because I’m the only person of color. And obviously I’ve ticked a box and at that point you’re kind of torn between your own values and being like this is a great opportunity.” Another participant felt that she benefited from her gender, as it allows her to “fly under the radar” and not be seen as a threat by her male colleagues because of their gendered assumptions about her abilities.

Women are expected to work long hours and always “be on,” which impacts their access and opportunities if they have or plan to have caring responsibilities. As one participant said, “It is draining and it is kind of like you always have to be working because it feels like everyone else is working all the time.” She described a situation in which she was pressured into working long hours despite her attempts to resist: “I’d worked an 18-h day the day before, got up. And then they said, can you just do this quick Boris Johnson thing before you get the train? And I said no. And then the editor rang me up and was like, ‘this never happens, you need to do this.’ So, then I had to do it.” Another participant pointed to working long hours—and trying to outwork other reporters—as a strategy for success in the field: “I’ve interviewed Andy Murray once at like 3:30 in the morning. So, not everybody stays. Yeah, so do I need to? Technically, no, but in that case it’s like I know that a bunch of people will have gone home and I know that there’s only going to be three people. So if I’m one of them, I get to ask a question.”

Though this demanding work schedule applies to everyone and might be perceived as gender-neutral, gendered societal expectations related to caregiving contribute to women and men experiencing sport media work in different ways. As one participant, who was reflecting on how her personal life might be different if she had not prioritized work as much when she

was younger, stated, “I guess for a man it’s different.” Another participant shared that while such gender roles may be “old-fashioned,” she noticed that “A lot of people at work have kids, but it’s mostly men who have kids and their kids are a bit older as well. I think it is very stereotypical, but I think it’s a little bit easier for the dads to be able to go [travel to cover sporting events].”

Organizational decision-making around story coverage and assignments also have gendered implications in sport media organizations. For instance, sport media organizations prioritize coverage of men’s sport, disadvantaging women who entered the field to cover women’s sport. Participants reported how their supervisors and others in their organization would denigrate women’s sport. As one participant said, “[P]eople have said to me like there’s no future in women’s sport, or like people said to me ‘commercially women’s sport is not viable.’” Such organizational discourse around the inferiority of women’s sport served to reproduce sport (and by association, sport media) as the domain of men, resulting in an environment where women employees were questioned on their knowledge and made to feel like they did not belong. Despite working in sport media, participants were still challenged on their knowledge about sport, as colleagues quizzed them on even the most basic information. One participant shared how a colleague asked if she knew about a famous athlete: “But he explained to me who Muhammad Ali was. I was like, ‘I’m a sport journalist, I know who Muhammad Ali is.’ Like, I’m not an idiot.”

Several participants described their sport media organizations as having a “boys’ culture.” One participant described it as a “very kind of loud, quite aggressive environment,” noting that if you cannot assimilate to the culture as a woman, “you can get the sidelines very quickly or only given very specific work.” Indeed, participants were often asked to report on or edit stories related to what are perceived as “women’s issues,” such as interpersonal violence (IPV) or maternity leave. One participant said she is often asked, “Can you read this? Because I feel like I need your eye on it as a woman.”

Although women across our sample reported a lack of belonging, the intersection of age, race, ethnicity, and nationality exacerbated such feelings. Age was a particularly salient intersectional factor for many participants, who felt that younger women are taken less seriously, with the older white men in sport media thinking of them like daughters. One participant, who noted she felt she was now taken seriously after reaching her mid-30s, said, “So I’m seeing them [younger women] having to work really, really hard to be listened to and taken seriously...I find it kind of interesting that even the younger men are doing it. It’s not something that stopped with the older guys.” Another participant noted how her age, combined with her gender, led to her belonging being questioned: “So often I feel like they must be thinking how on Earth is a girl that’s younger than us, managed to just work for this incredible broadcaster ... It’s almost. It’s like, oh, we’ve seen her once. Let’s see if she lasts.”

Some participants described additional discrimination based on nationality, another example of intersectional experiences for certain women in the field. For example, one woman described

noticing the difference between English and French sport media: “And I will say I think it’s easier in the English-speaking environment than the French speaking... The UK are better at having more female journalists, for example, or female analysts in the sport area, than in France...speaking with some of the journalists and I could tell that... you’ve got more of a camaraderie and you know togetherness and things like that.” Similarly, another participant noticed the difference between Western countries and [an Eastern European nation]: “You can notice some different cultural differences in terms of how women are treated, so I mean definitely things are worse in [the Eastern European nation] than they are in the West.”

Another organizational logic in sport media organizations revolved around fiscal responsibility. Frequently, editors and producers would use budgeting to justify the lack of women’s sport coverage. One participant described wanting to cover “diverse” stories that challenge the “white cis male perspective” in sport media: “But then when you try to cover it, people say no or they don’t have enough budget and it’s exhausting. I feel like that is a burden that minority people bear more...And this is having editors say no to your ideas because of budget or because they distribute clicks and like money. And named much more than the interest, the stories that really challenge the status quo...So like it’s not in sport media’s interest to challenge the norms that it benefits from.”

Budgeting not only impacts whether women’s sport gets covered but also the resources dedicated to them when they do. As one participant shared, “I did the [Women’s] EURO final and it was just me and we had a meeting about it, but no one checked my script, no one was there with me. I was doing everything on my own. And I was really inexperienced. And then they said at the end that they weren’t happy with the product. And I’m like, well, if you’re not happy with the product, put in the resources, like, if you’re doing this for the men, you’d probably have a team of like, five producers doing it.” In this way, the lack of dedicated resources toward a high-profile women’s sporting event resulted in not only an inferior product but potentially impacted the evaluation of the participant’s job performance because she was not given the support to do a better job.

Participants also reported gendered restrictions on travel being attributed to budgeting logic. One participant shared why she was not being sent to cover an annual media day event: “I’m not going because it’s more expensive to send a female who would have to have her own hotel than sending two guys that can share. So, for budget purposes, I’m staying behind.” Participants also experienced a lack of dedicated resources such as budgets for wardrobe or on-site meals. One participant said this led to her and other staff having to “buy our own stuff to wear [and organize] catering.”

5.2 | Gendered Organizational Logics of Sport Organizations

Beyond the organizational logics of sport media organizations, participants shared how other sport organizations contributed to their gendered work experiences. The logics of such

organizations impacted women in sport media because their jobs involve coverage of sport (e.g., events, leagues, teams, and athletes) and often involve physically working in spaces controlled by sport organizations (e.g., stadiums and arenas). Specifically, we identified two gendered organizational logics shared by participants: gatekeeping media access and workspace design/working conditions.

Women's access to cover sporting events and personnel such as coaches and athletes is limited not only by their supervisors at their sport media organization but also by those connected to sport organizations. Thus, "gatekeeping" practices by public relations officials, managers, agents, and sometimes coaches and athletes themselves determine who receives media credentials, gets interview access, and asks questions during press conferences. As participants shared, such practices seem to benefit men. One participant commented on the lack of women reporters in press rooms and said, "Men almost always open the press conference. The first question almost always goes to a male journalist." Even when women are given the same media credentials as men, they can be questioned and limited from accessing areas of sport venues. A participant described how she and other women colleagues would be stopped by event security even when trying to access spaces at the same time as men: "... all of us had the same type of access and you weren't supposed to get in certain places, but they let everyone else through and then they stopped me. Like literally, my boss walked by, the same credential I had, they let him go and they stopped me."

Participants expressed that men had an easier time connecting with and speaking to coaches and athletes in the field. One participant noted, "The biggest difference is how [male] coaches talk to [men]. They can throw it back with them and they feel more comfortable giving more." Another participant echoed this and added, "Men can be more buddy-buddy with coaches and athletes.... [They can] sling arms around athletes... walk around like buddies... party with them." In comparison, women felt pressure to be professional, prepared, and buttoned up because as one participant explained, "people don't take jokes very well coming from women."

Another participant described how men working in sport media gained access to athletes in men's sport by building relationships that would not be permitted for a woman: "Sometimes I feel like with male sport, I'm not as able to get as close with the players as the male reporters are, so a lot of the male reporters are chatting away with them. Some even had their personal numbers, things like that. I mean, I don't think that would ever fly with me." This participant perceived that getting "close" to players would be considered inappropriate because of heterosexual assumptions about relationships between men athletes and women journalists. Not only do women face gatekeeping barriers to avoid the perception of sexual relationships, they also encounter gatekeepers who sexually harass them and withhold access if women resist their advances. One participant shared a similar experience with a male agent whose behavior she described as "really gross" and "really inappropriate." When the participant refused to engage, "He really gave me the cold shoulder for the rest of the trip and limited the access and that was awful." Participants added that they felt the pressure to stay at events despite harassment because their job necessitated

them to navigate access issues themselves and continue to work and report.

Participants also experienced challenges in writing and reporting on issues they cared about, such as race, social justice, and mental health, due to sport organization gatekeepers, who restricted access to athletes or coaches for valuable perspectives on critical topics. One participant explained this was augmented by the lack of structural resources such as "[sport] clubs not necessarily having safe spaces [for athletes] to have these conversations before they go to a journalist" and the story ultimately being derailed because "the editors [say] no." Meanwhile, another participant described how her job required her to ignore problematic off-field issues when covering athletes. She shared that her toughest days are when she is asked to cover a team who has "signed somebody that has a domestic abuse charge or a sexual assault charge and you kind of just have to swallow that.... When you just sort of have to be very much thrown into situations that you really, really disagree with."

Additionally, women described how the workspace design and working conditions established by sport organizations for media members reproduced gender inequality. For example, one participant called the "media scrum," where a large group of reporters stand in a semicircle around an athlete or coach, a "nightmare" due to her short stature: "There's nothing worse than being in a pool of 300 people where there's like no opportunity to get questions in [and] everyone is taller than me." Meanwhile, multiple participants pointed to sport organizations' (in particular men's sport organizations') practice of holding interviews in locker rooms as gendered. Though courts in the United States determined nearly 50 years ago that barring women reporters from locker rooms constituted sex discrimination, one participant related that in practice, this still happens, saying, "The first assignment I ever had was a college football game and I wasn't even allowed in the locker room." Another participant shared how working as a media member in men's locker rooms impacted her job performance: "It's really uncomfortable...when you don't feel comfortable, it's hard to let go and do your job because you're thinking about other things."

Several participants noted that sport organizations should end locker room interviews entirely. One said, "Look, I think locker rooms should be shut in general. I think we should be able to talk to athletes right when they come off the field. The locker room's their private area or give it a 10-min cooling down period. And then [have] the press conference." Another participant described how locker room practices vary by sport, with many women's sports not allowing media in the rooms, or if they do allow media, athletes remain dressed for their interviews: "Interviews with people in a locker room where they're naked is just like a weird concept. Because women don't do that. It's just the men." Even in men's sport, she noted differences between locker room practices, with basketball players being more modest and "not in all these crazy states of undress" while in football, "everyone's like getting in and out of the shower" and "doing their interviews in their boxers."

Notably, women's needs were often overlooked when working on site, leading to distress and lack of satisfaction with the work

environment. A participant shared an example of working “Nine hours without a toilet break [because the event organizer was not] thinking about who he had on this team,” and this made her feel like she is “not being valued” in the workplace.

5.3 | Resulting Experiences for Women in Sport Media

Our findings indicate that the gendered nature of sport media organizations and sport organizations intersect and have a profound impact on women's experiences in their work environment. Study participants shared that this intersection meant they had to learn to navigate two very gendered spaces and adjust various aspects of their personal and professional lives to continue working in this environment. Participants had to manage the way they presented themselves, delay milestones in their personal lives, and manage feelings of imposter syndrome to combat the lack of belonging they experienced in their work environment.

Participants discussed unease with the attention paid to their choice of dress, hair, and makeup and their heightened awareness of how they presented themselves because that impacted how their peers perceived them. One participant explained that she had to “think very hard about my outfit [because] you have to look a certain way to be seen seriously.” These challenges were applicable for all women but especially for participants in their twenties or those who appeared younger than their ages because their work environment is consistently dominated by middle-aged white men. However, careful considerations on their hair and dress did not yield peace of mind for study participants because women's appearance is routinely analyzed and commented on social media, which one participant felt “would never happen if it was a man reporting. It's that you're what you wear. As a woman, you have to think about ... Yeah, male colleagues probably don't need to.” Another participant shared that such fan behavior on social media has “taken a tremendous toll on my mental health.”

Women discussed the undue attention they fielded from male colleagues, and the intersectionality of their two workspaces meant this impacted their access and ability to do their work. Participants felt distressed due to the uncomfortable experiences with male colleagues and sport organization gatekeepers, which led to self-restriction on access to events. One participant shared that she feels uncomfortable in her work environment at times, “because no matter what I do or say, it just becomes, by virtue of being in a bar or another situation, I fear, ‘How could this be interpreted?’ And I'd rather just remove myself fully from the situation.” Choosing not to attend industry events means participants are unable to network and make connections or write impactful stories on major happenings in sport.

Participants of color layered the racialized nature of their experiences to these findings and discussed the lack of resources, which impacted their experiences. Women of color routinely manage their own dress, hair, and makeup at events because sport organizations do not provide the necessary resources for them. One participant shared that lack of budgets meant,

“[Sport media organizations] don't really cater for people of color. Or again, makeup-wise skin tones, that needs to be a broader offering. So, yeah, you do it yourself.” Another participant shared that she is, “Very aware of the fact that no one else will know how to manage my hair apart from me unless you happen to be Black. So, when I have had makeup done, I've been very polite to the makeup artist as I'm polite to everybody and say, ‘look, sorry about my hair. I'll sort it out myself.’” Participants of color termed these experiences as “very isolating.”

Participants shared that they delayed personal milestones such as marriages or having children and regularly sacrificed family time because of the intersection of their two work environments. Participants explained that there is a demand for constant content because of the nature of the sport industry and their sport media organizations expect them to deliver. This means, as one participant explained, that “It's really hard to have work-life balance if you're going to go all in on this career.” Another participant shared that it was harder for her to go back to work after having a child because “I can't be as flexible as I used to be... I can't go at the drop of a hat to a shoot somewhere else because I may be not feeling well enough or I have to be here for an appointment or whatever.” A participant discussed her age and her lack of a committed relationship and children at this stage in her life and explained, “Your literal clock is guided by this career where you always have to be in the know; you have to be on top of things. You always have to have your phone by you... That's kind of hard to like, build relationships around.” One participant delayed her wedding because of the busy sport schedule but had what she termed “the luxury” to work in sport because she and her partner “don't have children... And so these are decisions that we have the ability to make.”

Along these lines, participants expressed that their ability to continue working in sport media was an inherent privilege: they had supportive parents or partners whom they could rely on for financial, emotional, and other forms of support; they had access to education and internships and networks, which allowed them to access opportunities in sport media. A participant shared that she felt very “lucky that my parents live in [major UK city],” which allowed her to “cover things and that is a huge privilege.” Another participant discussed her “privileged position” and attributed that to “going to a well-off [university] and I got that from coming from very upper middle-class parents who gave me so many intangible privileges.” One participant acknowledged her privilege in her supporting partner who also worked in the sport media space, allowing them to “figure out a better balance in our lives.”

Though participants experienced joy from working in sport media, they often questioned their value and their belonging in their roles. They felt the need to over-prepare for work should they be questioned by colleagues on matches or events. One participant explained the pressure she experienced and “working twice as hard [because she felt] I have to prove myself a lot... constantly in a way that it's sort of inexplicable to all of the men that I work with.” Participants felt they had to hold all the information about an event to ensure their belonging in the space. A participant shared that she was always “worried that you don't know enough and then not doing things because of that.”

Another participant, a woman of color, delved deeper and discussed the challenges of “battling not just only with yourself in terms of trying to manage your doubts about why am I not working? Why am I not getting the work and things like that? You’re also having to battle with others in the same space because the jobs are so few and far between.” Another woman of color expressed her uncertainty and lack of confidence when she secured jobs: “Am I ticking a box? Is it because at the end of the year you need to say how many shows women presented? At times there I was like, why me more than another person? That was not a good feeling and that’s probably why I lost a lot of confidence.”

Lack of confidence and experiencing imposter syndrome meant women perceived a sense of isolation in their work environment. They were often the only or one of a handful women in their workspace. A participant shared that among colleagues in her organization, “none of them were women and that really kind of started to feel a little isolating.” Another participant termed it “exclusionary” and that she “still [does not] feel like I’m part of the crew with that, possibly because I don’t cover men’s [sport] like 100% of my time and I might if I did.” One participant added that to “get into this group [of men] quicker, [she had to] very quickly brush up on all the news of [a football team] at the moment. Just so you can be part of that conversation.” This meant they could not share their experiences with other women and often felt lonely and bereft in their workspace.

Participants of color felt especially isolated due to the lack of diversity in organizations overall. One participant shared, “There’s hardly any color in the press rooms. There’s probably a handful of us. And I would also say that’s the same for on-screen talent as well.” Another participant discussed her discomfort of working in a press room dominated by white men. She shared an example of working a football game for a major broadcaster and entering “the press room and it was all just men. I felt so stirred up. I think they thought I’d got the wrong room. I decided not to sit there. It was freezing outside. I just wanted somewhere to sit because I was really cold. But I was like, I would rather go outside [because] the atmosphere here is very cold. I literally sat in the stands and just prepped my notes.”

One participant who is interested in sharing critical stories on sport and stakeholders in this space expressed acceptance at the lack of belonging she felt in the sport media space. She shared, “The system is set up to not value those things. I’m very aware that I put myself in this position. That’s what I’m trying to say in that I’m putting myself in a position where you might not necessarily get that feeling of happiness.”

6 | Discussion

Through interviews with 23 women working in sport media in a range of roles, we aimed to identify the gendered organizational logics of sport organizations and the resulting impact on the work experiences of women in this space. Study results indicate that women encounter gendered organizational logics in two spaces: within their sport media organizations and in the sport organizations that they interact with through their jobs.

Notably, findings provide insights to the resulting impact on women’s experiences whose work is centered at the intersection of two spaces as illustrated in Figure 1 and discussed below.

Working in sport media segregates women into lower-status roles, whether it be with lower-status organizations (e.g., local vs. national), positions (e.g., reporter vs. commentator), or employment relationship (e.g., freelance vs. tenured). Women are expected to dedicate long hours (Hardin and Shain 2006; Organista and Mazur 2020; Topić and Bruegmann 2021), face abuse and/or harassment (Hardin and Shain 2005; Harrison 2018), be pigeonholed to softer or less commercialized storytelling (Hardin and Shain 2006; Kian and Hardin 2009; Miloch et al. 2005; North 2016; Schoch 2013, 2022; Topić and Bruegmann 2021), face differential treatment and scrutiny, stereotypes, and prejudices about their abilities and their work, manage their appearance (Harrison 2019; McClearen 2018; Schultz and Sheffer 2007), grapple with imposter syndrome (Hardin and Whiteside 2009), balance their professional and personal lives (Claringbould et al. 2004; Clark-Saboda and Lemke 2023; Hardin and Shain 2005; Hardin and Whiteside 2009; Hardin et al. 2008; Organista and Mazur 2020), and cope with lack of belonging and a sense of isolation at work. These findings reinforce a culture of gender inequity that is normalized in sport overall, and they result from organizational logics that are assumed to be gender neutral.

Notably, study findings provide insights to organizational logics related to budgeting and the allocation of resources or lack thereof toward women working in sport media. The women in our study discussed their inability to cover women’s sport events when they wanted to (and being given fewer resources to do so when they did), travel to work events because their organizations refused to pay for individual hotel rooms, needing to buy their own meals and/or wardrobe, and even managing their



FIGURE 1 | Intersection of the gendered nature of sport and sport media organizations and their impact on women’s experiences.

own hair and makeup. Such restrictions are made logical by organizations' desire for fiscal responsibility but are far from gender neutral. Decisions about resources tied to women's sport coverage are based on gendered assumptions about the perceived lack of interest in such stories, thus reinforcing ideas that women are inferior to men in the field of sport, on the field and off. Endorsements of gender inequality amongst athletes creates organizational norms about men's and women's abilities that impact gender equality in professional roles as well (Anderson 2008; Claringbould and Knoppers 2012; Pape 2020). As Daum and Scherer (2018) found, sport media organizations' focus on catering to male sports fans to drive digital ad revenue has also contributed to a lack of coverage on women's sports. When sport media organizations decide not to cover women's sport (or dedicate fewer resources to do so, thus resulting in poorer quality coverage), they are limiting opportunities for women working in sport media, whether those women are pigeonholed into such assignments or are actively seeking out such work. The lack of financial resources to support women in their roles means women's access to events and coaches/athletes is restricted, thereby impacting their ability to fulfill their role.

Another consequence of this budgeting logic relates to the increased reliance of freelancers within sport media (Daum and Scherer 2018). As participants noted, women seemed over-represented in freelancing compared to tenured roles, and freelancers have lower status. Certainly, several of our participants worked on a freelance basis, and many described this as their choice, as it allowed them greater flexibility over their work schedule. However, that such a choice is made to achieve flexibility results from another organizational logic: that long hours and constant production are needed for success. This logic stems in part from the evolution of sport media to a 24/7 news cycle focused on driving clicks through quantity of stories to increase digital advertisement metrics, resulting in increased demands on journalists (Daum and Scherer 2018; McEnnis 2021). Women with caregiving responsibilities may "choose" freelancing because they have more control over their schedule, but it is the organizational logic that makes this choice necessary, forcing them to "opt out" of higher status, more secure jobs in favor of lower-status positions that offer improved work-life balance (Yavaş 2024). Combined with fiscal responsibility logic that reduces the number of tenured positions available, women are pushed into freelancing roles that may be more flexible but are also more precarious because they offer less job security and fewer benefits (Pajnik and Hrženjak 2022). Sport media's increased reliance on precarious positions mirrors trends across industries (e.g., Oddo et al. 2021; O'Keefe and Courtois 2019). Women and other minoritized individuals are more likely to be employed in precarious positions and such precarity leads to further discrimination at work (O'Keefe and Courtois 2019; Young 2010).

Our findings demonstrate how women were impacted not only by the organizational logics of sport media organizations but also by the logics of the sport organizations that they interacted with through their jobs. Prior research has considered how nonemployer workspaces consist of organizational logics that can either sustain or disrupt gendered, racialized, and classed inequality regimes. Specifically, Sargent et al.'s (2021) study of

the organizational logics of coworking spaces found that such spaces lacked the gendered and racialized occupational hierarchies of traditional work contexts, because those working in these shared spaces all worked for different organizations. However, in the sport media context, our participants noted the presence of cross-organizational hierarchies that emerged when working at sporting events: working for high-profile organizations and being a full-time tenured employee denote status and were frequently associated with white men; while lower-status roles included freelancers, new media, and in-house reporters, roles frequently occupied by women. Additionally, while Sargent et al. (2021, 26) found that the organizational logics of many coworking spaces "disrupted the reproduction of inequality regimes in organizations," the sporting spaces in which women in sport media work are controlled by sport organizations, which as prior research has shown, are themselves operating under gendered organizational structure and logics (Bryan et al. 2021; Hindman and Paulsen 2024; Hindman and Walker 2024; Pape 2020). This includes locker rooms, perceived as "exclusive male domains" (Guridy 2024, n.p.), where, as our findings indicate, women may still struggle to gain access or be forced to navigate personal discomfort to do their jobs. Thus, the practices of sport organizations, such as the design and structure of locker rooms, press conferences, and gatekeepers' control of access to events and athletes, have negative impacts on the women working for sport media organizations.

Our findings go beyond an examination of "white femininity" (McClearn 2018, 944) and provide insight to intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity, age, family status, socioeconomic status, and their impact on women's experiences in sport media. Nine participants in our study identified as multiracial or women of color and they discussed the racialized nature of their experiences, specifically in their access to job-related opportunities and resources available in their roles. Managing their own hair, makeup, and wardrobe contributed to a lack of belonging, experiences these participants perceived as unwelcoming. Participants who secured opportunities wondered if their successes were due to "tokenism," thus coping with imposter syndrome and questioning their value in the media space. Previous research indicates that marginalized individuals may internalize anti-affirmative action discourses, buying into the idea that such policies result in them receiving opportunities based on their surface level identities rather than their merit (e.g., Fleming and Girma 2021; Unzueta et al. 2010). Inequities within organizations arise from an uneven distribution of resources, insufficient access to opportunities for growth and advancement, and rewards and may be based on gender, social class, sexuality, and race (Acker 2006). As study findings illustrate, these inequities are hidden in everyday gendered processes and practices of sport organizations and result in producing a sense of powerlessness and isolation within individuals, which poses further challenges and barriers to minoritized women (Acker 2006; J. Amis et al. 2017).

To sustain a career in sport media, participants discussed the need for privilege. They reflected on their ability to work long and flexible hours, arrange childcare, learn a second or third language, feel financially secure through their parents or partners, gain an education, and access to a second, more stable

source of income, all of which allowed them to pursue their passion and continue working in sport media. Processes and practices related to hiring, structuring, role allocation, compensation, and advancement produce inequities within organizations (J. M. Amis et al. 2020). Everyday economic realities intersect with such organizational practices and serve to further exclude women and minoritized groups from seeking and building a career in heavily gendered environments like sport media. Finally, younger participants (i.e., women in their twenties) discussed the extra labor they performed to present themselves as suitable for the role in front of their (mostly) older and male colleagues. Previous research has found that although younger women navigate challenges in sport media, they experience high job satisfaction in their roles and opportunities for advancement (Hardin et al. 2008; Smucker et al. 2003). In contrast, our study findings indicate that younger women feel burdened with the additional labor they must undertake to fit into their work environment, prompting some to question their value, and even consider leaving their roles.

We acknowledge that our findings are limited to the context of the United States of America and United Kingdom. In addition, although our sample is diverse and includes women of color of varied ethnicities, other women with varying intersecting identities may have different work experiences in sport media. Future research can build on this work and consider those intersectionalities and their impact on women's access to and experiences in sport media across the globe.

7 | Conclusion

We identified multiple gendered organizational logics that produce and sustain gender inequity in sport media organizations. Although assumptions about the inferiority of women in sport may be specific to the sport context, other logics identified have the potential to be present in other types of organizations. Like Williams et al. (2012), we found that logic around long work hours disadvantaged women. We also found that a logic of fiscal responsibility was used to justify decisions that negatively impacted women. Such logic may be employed in other organizations to make decisions around distributing resources, layoffs, and restructuring in ways that reproduce gender inequity (Mickey 2019). Further, the organizational logics of sport organizations, including gatekeeping access to powerful individuals and workspace design/workplace conditions, might also operate in other settings.

While we sought to identify the gendered organizational logics of sport media organizations, participants made clear that the logics of other organizations, namely the sport organizations they cover, profoundly impact the gendered nature of sport media work. These findings underscore the need for gendered organization theory to extend beyond the walls of employers to encompass other types of organizations individuals interact with through their work. To eliminate gender inequity, it is not enough for organizations to tackle the gendered structures and practices within their organizations; these extra-organizational practices contribute to gender inequities as well.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared.

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