

What Do You Stand For?

Jenna Tanner, 2020 BFA Senior Thesis

Introduction:

Women have been fighting for their rights within our society for decades. Strong, vocal, and determined women have helped pave the way for a more equal society. Though times have drastically changed, there are still many areas that fall short. Over the past few years, I have begun taking notice of the inequalities that female athletes face in the sport industry. Women's National Basketball, or WNBA, athletes often find jobs during their off-season to make a living. The United States Women's National Team, or USWNT, filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer claiming a pay gap between the men's and women's team. Female athlete's reactions are often negatively publicized for showing 'excessive amounts of emotion.' Female athletes have had their professional brand contracts terminated due to the absence of a clause pertaining to paid maternity leave. As someone who avidly engages in sports and sport content, I felt that it was important to turn my attention to this topic for my senior thesis, by creating a brand campaign addressing these issues. The intention of the project is to both bring awareness to the gender inequality and discrimination that women face in the sport industry, as well as represent a completely original brand through graphic design and marketing collateral. As someone who grew up playing sports, I noticed disconnections between the type of sport equipment available. When I would go into the store or shop online for soccer cleats, there would be far fewer women's options in comparison to men's. There were also far fewer women's sport teams in which to participate. I didn't think much of it, and I by no means have dealt with these topics to the severity that professional athletes have faced, but it made me wonder why any of this was

the norm. I wanted to make a statement with this project, and emphasize why this topic matters and should be talked about.

I began the project by developing the brand personality, collecting images of athletes who have had a powerful voice in the space, and thinking through what deliverables I wanted to showcase at the end of this year-long project. Through this brand campaign, I am aiming to bring together two things that I love to do, sports and design, with an emphasis acknowledging the inequality that females face within the sports environment. So, over the course of this senior year, I have been working to create a brand campaign highlighting issues of women inequality within sports. Through this project I hope to focus on two target audiences: 1) viewers avidly engaging with sports who don't understand the importance of female equality, and 2) young, female athletes.

Contextual Discussion:

The decisions I made during the creation of this project were based around facts found in countless articles and research. I looked into the history of sports, the psychology of work environments, and prominent issues that women face, amongst other topics pertaining specifically to design styles.

A. Scholarly Research

A topic that has gathered a lot of traction over the years is the Title IX ruling. As a brief summary, it was a law enacted to create equal opportunity and benefits for female athletes, particularly in the NCAA, in comparison to their male counterparts. A section in a larger handbook, titled, "*Gender and Women's Leadership: A Reference Handbook: Women's Leadership in the Enactment and Enforcement of Title IX,*" explains the ins and outs of the law.

The Title IX law states that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” As a female athlete and a sports fan, this law has created room for positive changes, and I am excited to see how it amplifies the space for female athletics in the coming years. Positive changes like this are things that I have used to fuel my brand campaign. Though the campaign primarily highlights the injustices that are being faced, the foundation is built on the notion that these ideas matter and need to be discussed.

A foundational article that I found helpful to include is titled, “*Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers’ sexism.*” Institutional discrimination through Human Resource policies have shaped our work environments. The article provides examples and analyzes the effects of this discrimination, and it helped me begin to understand how to best tackle the problem. It provided me with a baseline for understanding problems that women face in professional work environments, and how it has created structural imbalances. Even though this article referred to a much larger audience than I tackled with my project, it can still be applied directly to sports-related issues.

An article titled, “*Women Play Sport, But Not on TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media,*” written by Cheryl Cooky, Michael A. Messner, and Robin H. Hextrum provided insight to a study bringing light to the disconnect between the amount of sport played by athletes and the media coverage based on their gender. For example, men’s basketball received 76% media coverage during the 2008 NCAA men’s and women’s basketball tournament, compared to the 23% the women’s basketball received. Even in offseasons, men’s sports were covered by the media, while media coverage for women’s sports barely scraped the surface. Within professional media jobs, men represent, “94% of sports editors, 89% of assistant

sports editors, 88% of columnists, 87% of sports reporters, and 89% of copy editors/designers in the United States.” The article affirmed the fact that men’s sport coverage was far greater than women’s. After proving their hypothesis that this was occurring in the media, they asked the question, why? One of the biggest takeaways from the article that addressed that answer stated, “Moreover, the overall lack of coverage of women’s sport, despite the tremendous increased participation of girls and women in sport at the high school, collegiate, and professional levels, conveys the message to audiences that sport continues to be by, for, and about men.” Based on this article, I created a survey around this idea of media coverage to understand how people engage with sports content, specifically surrounding gender. I began wondering what better way to counter a lack of coverage, than by providing a brand platform meant to bring awareness and coverage of the topic? This article provided me with hard statistics that guided my project, and inspired some final designs.

B. Creative Research

I looked at examples of campaigns as a reference and inspiration. Nike created a brand campaign, called *Dream Crazier*, emphasizing the idea of women in sport, and the negative connotation that is sometimes received when they do things such as show emotion. *Dream Crazier*, highlights athletes (shown in Figure A below) like Megan Rapinoe and Serena Williams, who have had strong voices in this realm. The purpose of this campaign is to highlight how crucial it is for women’s voices to be heard. Women are often critiqued on a higher level than some of their male counterparts. The article also shows young girls, who represent the next generation of female athletes; that they have a voice. This helped aid in the decision to make young female athletes a target in my campaign. As a whole, I have used Dream Crazier as

inspiration in how to showcase explicit emotion and power through a brand campaign. It's images were captivating and conceptually moving; I wanted to evoke this feeling in my work.



Figure A. This is a photo is one example from the Dream Crazy Campaign. It shows the USWNT in a huddle. I drew inspiration from this image because of its ability to give enough context for the viewer to understand, but also emphasize messaging.

Tony Huynh, a digital content designer for the Orlando Magic, has been an inspiration of mine for a long time, and this project was no different. He is able to create engaging sport content which highlights athletes in multiple contexts and themes. I looked to his work as examples, Figures B, C, and D, for graphic design technique and inspiration. He is highly skilled in Photoshop and I took his technique into heavy consideration as I developed my prototypes.



Figures B, C, and D. These are examples of his creative work. Even with limited initial images to work from, he is able to create versatile, dynamic graphics. These attributes played vital roles when I was formulating the look of my photo poster series.

Peter Greenwood, a graphic designer from London, creates both detailed and minimalistic illustrated artwork. I first noticed his work Ping Pong, Figure E, because it had gone viral on design websites as I was in the initial research phase. I knew that I wanted to create an aspect within the project that did not point to the normal sports design look and feel, and his work gave me this inspiration. He also creates commercial work which has helped expand my idea of real-life ways this style could be applied to marketing or promotional collateral. I took particular interest in his minimalistic style, and ended up morphing it with my style to create some of my brand collateral. His work has an almost photographic feel to it, particularly with its use of leading lines and point of view. This was a technique that I incorporated into my own work.



Figures E and F. Ping Pong (pictured right) and Tune Out (pictured left) are examples of Greenwood's creative work. These served as great reference points as I created my illustrated poster series.

C. Primary Research

As I took all of this research into account, I formulated questions which pertained directly to the topic. During the studio time, I spent a lot of time engaged in tasks such as looking at graphic design inspiration, iterating exhibition ideas and spaces, and creating brand collateral. As I mentioned before, developing and asking questions of myself and the project have proved to be very important to keep progressing. I interviewed people within sports and entertainment to get a better understanding on how they face these issues. The purpose of those interviews was to get their take on the issue, perspective on the brand campaign, and advice to expand on the concept. Those interviews, in addition to surveys I have conducted, have helped influence the brand campaign and design. I also relied on technical feedback from my design mentors on how to best frame this collection of work to best emphasize its message and voice.

Methodology:

The majority of my methodology phase was spread equally amongst three areas: feedback from peers and mentors, research and brainstorm sessions, and iteration and revision.

A. Feedback

As I worked through the logistics of what this brand campaign could be, I relied heavily on peer feedback and critiques. I shared the ideas which I was starting to formulate in order to get a feel for how realistic they were. Opening my project up to a variety of people was helpful as I fleshed out my end goal, formulated my overall plan, and thought about project logistics. In class, I met with my professors and TA, while I was able to meet with professional designers, mentors, and sport administration outside of class. I was able to talk with Franc Nunoo-Quarcoo, a Stamps professor, many times over this year for design recommendations. My mentor, Mark Majewski, has been a great help with this project. His main focus is on digital content creation and marketing in the sport industry. Currently, he is working with the Boston Bruins as their Creative Director. Prior to that, he was the Creative Director at Clemson University Athletics, so he has had ample experience in the sports design arena. He has been a great resource in which to confide, in regards to the technical creation of graphic content. With his experience, he has designed a multitude of sports content, for a wide variety of audiences. These interactions helped provide the project become more structured.

B. Research and Brainstorming

While I gathered perspective from other's opinions, I was simultaneously researching and brainstorming to propel the project forward. I not only pulled information from scholarly articles, I also looked at design documentary series, campaign design, examples of marketing

graphics, survey results, and successful ad campaigns. This process helped to provide me with inspiration and creative ideas which would end up influencing my project. My brainstorming took simultaneous paths: one, the project logistics and planning, and two, the creative experimentation. To plan the project logistics, I took into account the class timeline and the volume of work I anticipated on completing. Writing blog posts each week during the fall semester helped me think through the project structure. The creative experimentation primarily surrounded formulating questions to give the project focus and creating sketches on paper. How could female inequalities be brought to attention through graphic design? What messages will resonate with a viewer about the topic? How can I frame the content in a context that is relatable and relevant? Who is my target audience? I find it useful to draw out ideas and concepts, specifically from the questions I formulated, before implementing them into the digital environment. Both Figure G and H, below, are examples of this process.

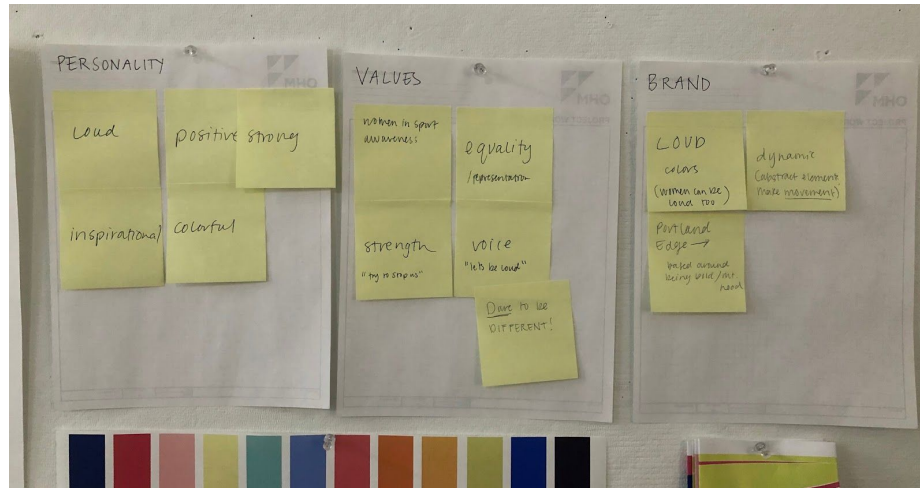


Figure G. This was a brainstorm of what words I wanted my campaign to represent through personality, value, and brand.

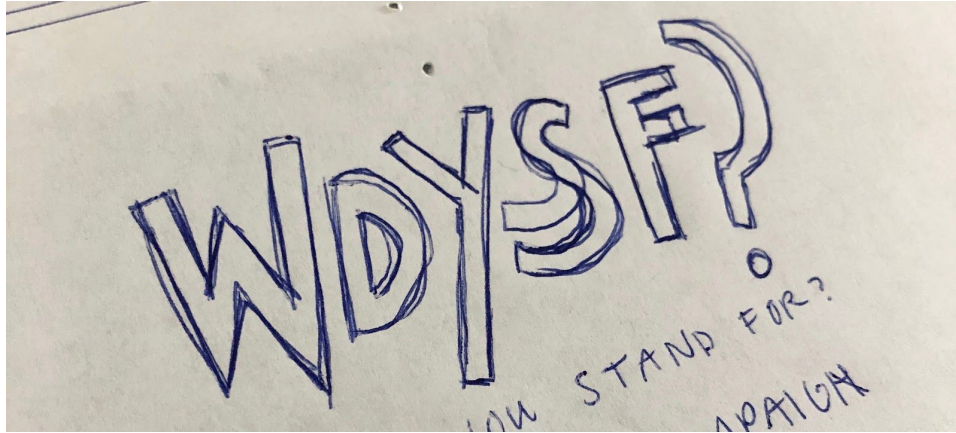


Figure H. This is a photo of an initial logo sketch. I like to brainstorm design concepts on paper before moving to digital.

C. Iteration and Revising

My initial sketches and brainstorming sessions led to another major part of my methodology process, iteration and revising. Much of the semester was spent taking research and creative concepts and iterating off of them. These developments were crucial as I began to flesh out and finalize the concepts that would become my brand campaign collateral. I was able to take insights from articles, professors, and peers to guide my reasoning, which helped me iterate and revise this project. The first few months of second semester were all about digital iterations.

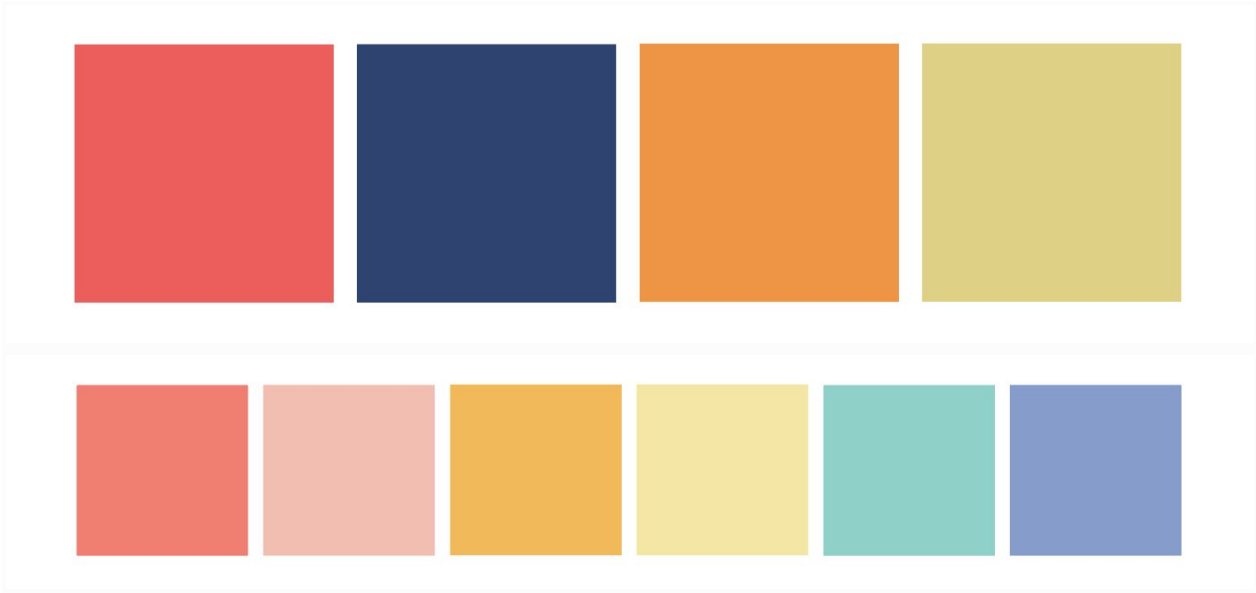
Creative Work:

The various designs in the brand campaign prove to the viewer that the issues addressed serve useful to the overall theme. Originally, I had planned to give the viewer a captivating space to walk into, allowing them to experience the brand and its collateral, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic I was not able to do so. With the institution of online classes, I moved my efforts to cultivating an online environment to house the project's work. My final work includes process work, a custom logo and brand, two poster series, social media marketing,

brand merchandise, and a style guide. These serve as visuals to convey the campaign's theme, and show the process that went into the creation of the designs.

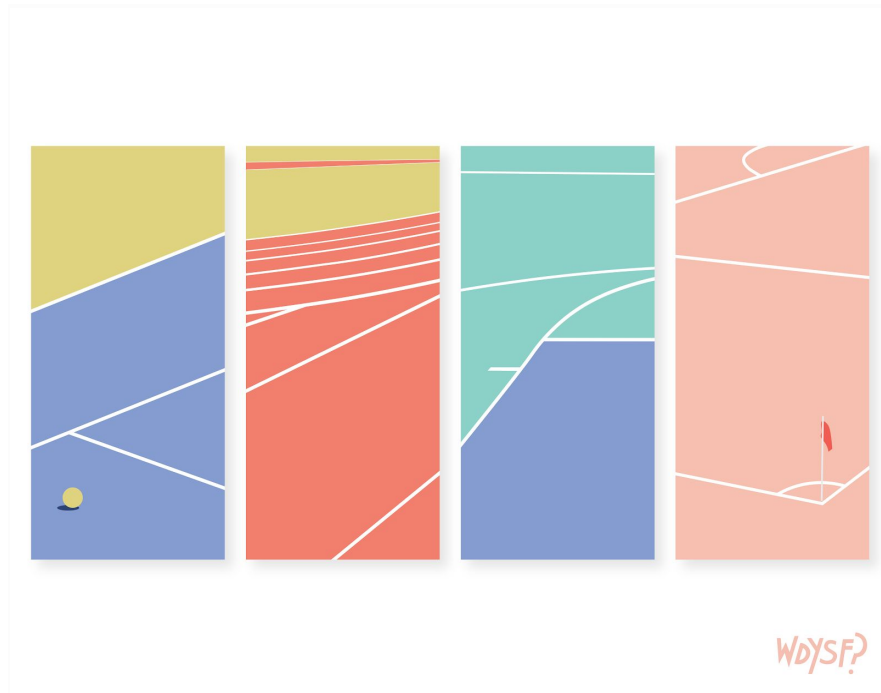
Process Photos:

A. **Brand Colors and Logo:** I wanted this brand to showcase its powerful voice through color. Gender shouldn't be defined by specific colors, so this palette encompasses what the mission of this brand is, which is gender inclusivity.



B. **Illustrated Poster:** This first poster series is based on a minimalistic illustration style.

Each sport represented coincides with sports that the brand's athlete photo poster series showcases. Its style can be seen within various aspects of the brand.



C. **Athlete Photo Posters:** This second poster series features female athletes in the sport industry, and a portrayal of what they stand for within this hypothetical brand campaign, as hypothetical brand ambassadors. Each poster highlights real issues athletes have faced.



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D. **Brand Merchandise:** These are physical pieces of the brand that its audience is able to interact with, physically. This will be a way for the brand to come to life and let viewers of the brand feel a part of, as they wear or show off its voice.



WDYSF?

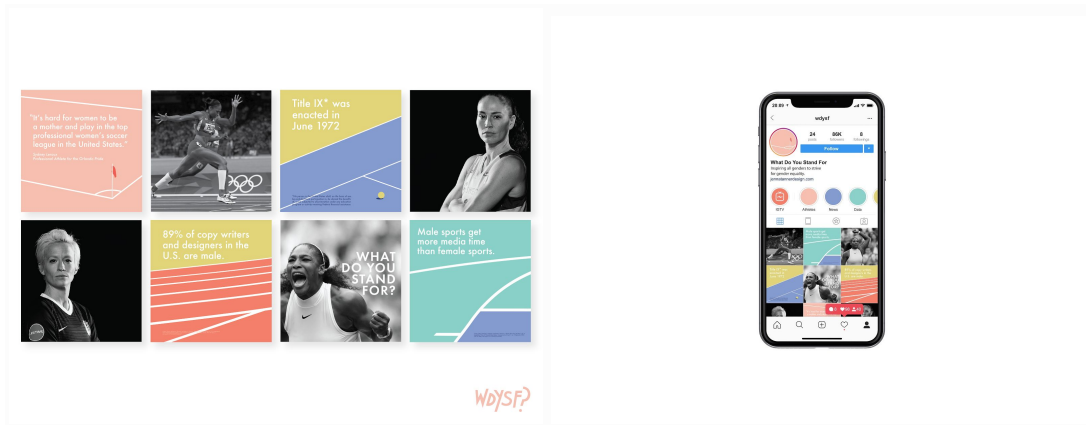


WDYSF?



WDYSF?

E. **Social Media Content:** Since this brand campaign is not just physical, and much of its target audience would be on social media, Instagram would be a great way to engage with viewers. This is an example of what this social media could look like.



Conclusion:

Over the course of this year, I have not only learned more about design, but I have also gained a deeper understanding about the role women play within sports. Working through deliberate research and brand development phases gave me a greater appreciation for the process. With this deeper dive, I spent more time defining my brand and understanding its target audience; I plan to take this process with me in future design projects. I have never had this long of a timespan dedicated to a project, and I appreciated the expanded opportunity to create. In the future, if I were able to, I would like to expand on this project and its theme. I do not anticipate my senior thesis alone coming close to solving the large issue of women's equality in sport. Though it has been a part of our society for many, many years, I hope that through projects and campaigns such as this, that eventually both genders will experience equality on all fronts. In the recent years, more and more athletes have become advocates for the cause, and I plan to keep designing with this theme in mind. Ideally, I would be able to

continue with this specific brand campaign, but I will do what I can with the resources available. Overall, this year has strengthened my knowledge of design, marketing, brand development, time management, and critical thinking. Though it may be over, I won't stop designing, and I most definitely will not stop advocating for gender equality, especially in sports.

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