

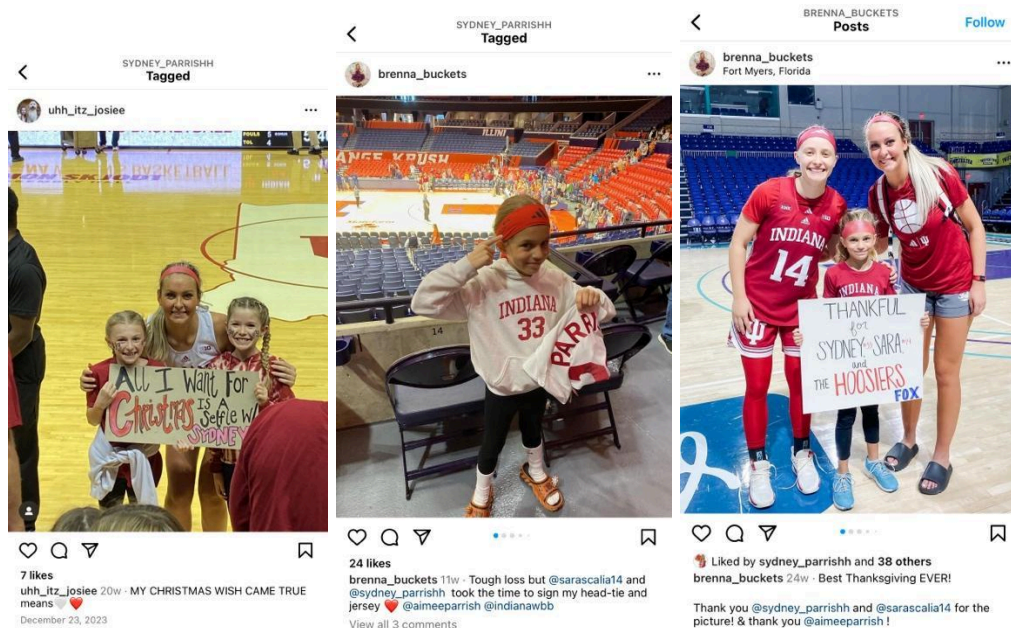
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Research Paper

Celebrity Power to Silence Gendertrolling

College senior Sydney Parrish plays basketball at Indiana University; due to her heavy social media following, Parrish has reached influencer status. Being a celebrity in today's culture does not always come with the expected glamour. Often, Parrish faces fan harassment and "gendertrolling," targeted abuse of women online from men. Currently, Parrish's approach to negative comments is ignoring and disassociation, choosing to only respond to positive feedback. Her lack of acknowledgment of male misogyny on social media is not assisting or hurting her—it is simply doing nothing. Abstaining from engaging with hateful comments from male fans is failing to stop the "gendertrolling" of women on social media. In this paper, I argue that celebrity athlete Sydney Parrish deals with "gendertrolling" in her Instagram comments by refraining from addressing misogynist comments, which does nothing to silence the harassment of women on social media by gendertrolls.

Parrish is a celebrity in today's terms, accomplished by fostering intimate fan interactions through reposting and commenting on fan-generated content. In addition to her impressive three-point shooting record, Parrish maintains a celebrity Instagram presence with 130K followers. The term "celebrity" encompasses many famous stars, including athletes (Grau, et al., 2007, p. 56). Although Parrish is not a typical celebrity, such as a singer or actor, she still falls into the famous category. In the past, celebrities were far removed from their fans, hiring a manager to deal with interactions (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 143). These managers acted as "intermediaries" between the luminary and everyday fans, and the manager ran "fan interfaces" to communicate with the celebrity's fanbase (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 143). With the

emergence of social media, such as Instagram, communication between fans and influencers, such as Parrish, has become more widespread (Samuel, 2019). Parrish manages her own Instagram account and interacts with followers by reposting and liking fan-created content, including photos of homemade signs and shirts. As a result, Instagram enables Parrish to communicate directly with her fanbase, forming strong bonds (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 139). Exercising celebrity status, Parrish nurtures intimate communication with followers by commenting on positive content created by fans.



Examples of Parrish engaging with fans on Instagram

Parrish's celebrity status flourishes by providing her fanbase with a taste of her daily life while simultaneously maintaining power gaps between herself and her followers. In the past, celebrities preferred to protect their private lives and only presented curated information to the public; now, social media encourages influencers to allow their followers a "backstage" glance into their daily lives (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 140) Being a celebrity involves sharing details about the famous person's life through a "public broadcast of daily life" (Samuel, 2019).

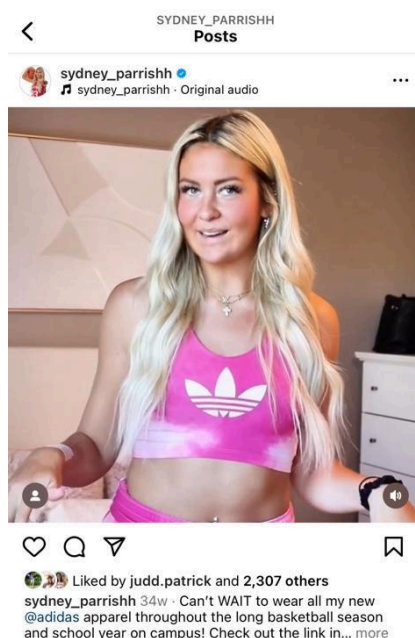
Following suit, Parrish uses her Instagram to post about everyday life events, such as spring break trips and graduation. While providing fans with a “backstage” glance, it is essential that celebrities showcase their authentic selves (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 149). Authenticity is key to building deep fan relationships (Rasmussen, 2018, p. 285). Parrish establishes her genuineness through fan interactions, posting personal content, and sharing pictures centered around basketball. Social media followers will quickly determine a fake influencer; therefore, to be successful, online celebrities must engage sincerely and honestly with their followers (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 149). Due to her genuine personality and original content, Parrish has established herself as a virtuous person, maintaining her celebrity status. In addition to connecting with supporters, celebrities must exhibit a distinct “power differential between fans and stars to maintain celebrity status” (Markwick & boyd, 2011, p. 155). When Parrish posts about her basketball achievements, she establishes a clear power separation between herself and her admirers. Therefore, athlete Parrish adheres to the influencer requirements of intimacy and power differentiation in her Instagram activity, making her a true social media celebrity according to today’s culture.

Female celebrities like Parrish face more challenges than male celebrities through interactions with the press and fans. Male stars caught in the act of a poor decision or scandal are treated with respect and seen as working towards redeeming the situation or recovery (Williams, 2008). Conversely, female stars are admonished and berated for placing themselves in unfavorable situations (Williams, 2008). When Parrish loses a game or commits an error on the basketball court, fans chastise and insult her via comments on her Instagram. When female celebrities face controversy, the world mocks them for not being more competent, while men are seen as the victims despite their misguided decisions (Williams, 2008). Throughout her

basketball career, Parrish is constantly judged by how she plays, what she wears, and what she eats on her Instagram. Landonryan comments on Parrish's basketball skills, remarking, "Damn if you would avg 30 pts a game ESPN be all over you." Similarly, healthieson96th comments on Parrish's pregame meal, stating, "Girl, you need some protein in them plates! Haha good luck though!" In addition, jmsellers88 comments on Parrish's new uniform, stating, "Those uniforms are ugly and should never be worn." No matter what she posts, Parrish faces distinct judgment because she is a female celebrity. Generally, "news media has a double standard" when it comes to viewing celebrities; female stars tend to make better stories due to their "emotional and open" qualities (Williams, 2008). While male celebrities can get away with being "bad boys," female stars are seen as "crazy and erratic" when they make decisions deemed poor (Williams, 2008). Due to her open femininity, Parrish endures harsh judgment from fans. As a result, Parrish tends to encounter more criticism from her Instagram followers than other male celebrities.

Because she is a woman, Parrish is presented very differently in social media advertisements and brand partnerships than male athletes; instead of being portrayed as a power icon for women and young girls, advertisers display Parrish as a sex symbol. Generally, in social media advertisements, male athletes significantly outnumber female athletes (Grau et al., 2007, p. 56). Additionally, companies typically tailor social media advertisements to showcase male athletes' physical abilities, while female athletes are displayed for their sex appeal (Grau et al., 2007, p. 63). Due to her naturally attractive features, Parrish is sexualized in many advertisements on Instagram. Parrish appeals to brands mainly due to her alluring features instead of her athletic abilities. In the United States, many women have explained that being a woman can impede their success in the world of business rather than help (Braga, 2023). Approximately 67% of women and 52% of men say that being a man is helpful in getting ahead

in the world (Braga, 2023). Because Parrish is a woman, she is disadvantaged in the advertising world of social media. Moreover, celebrity athletes on social media wield significant influence over their fans, often adolescents (Grau et al., 2007, p. 56). Therefore, the lack of women in social media advertisements sends a message to young girls that they are not as important as boys. Young girls are more likely to buy a celebrity-endorsed product than young boys, so the underrepresentation of women athletes compared to males hurts not only female athletes but also advertisers (Grau et al., 2007, p. 56). Because adolescent girls comprise a significant portion of Parrish's fanbase, advertisers are missing opportunities to connect with a significant market demographic. Overall, Parrish is displayed for her beauty instead of her athletic talents in advertisements on social media, which impacts how people view her as an athlete and individual.



Example of Parrish's Advertisements on Instagram

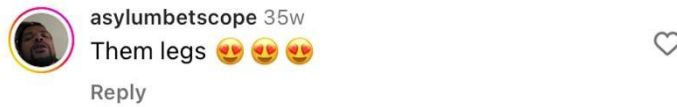
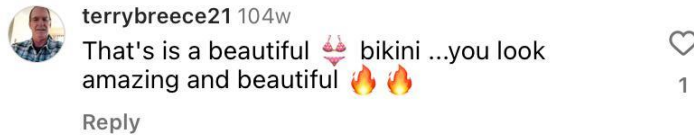
Throughout her social media presence, Parrish must deal with trolling and harassment in many of her posts. Typically, online trolls, also called "generic trolls," are male and aim to vex their victims through annoying, harmless harassment (Mantilla, 2015, p. 3). "Generic trolls"

strive to generate a reaction from their target, and while unpleasant for the person being trolled, it is not detrimental to the victim's life (Mantilla, 2015, p. 4). In her Instagram comments, Parrish comes across "generic trolling" from her fans, both male and female; most of Parrish's "generic trolling" involves agitating comments meant to waste her time. For example, Rddrg18 comments on Instagram, "Would you date a man shorter than you?" G00din comments on Parrish's Instagram, stating, "Wife." While neither one of these comments is necessarily malicious, they are superfluous and create noise on Parrish's feed. Similarly, harassment, specifically "networked harassment," causes social media users to berate others (Marwick, 2021, p. 1). "Networked harassment" involves a group of people banning together to bully one specific member of the social network who is challenging the community norms (Marwick, 2021, p. 1). Typically, the victims of harassment are women and minorities (Marwick, 2021, p. 3). Sadly, harassment usually results in the targeted group member "self-censoring," creating increased boundaries between groups and resulting in no change (Marwick, 2021, p. 3). When harassed about her athletic abilities, Parrish remains silent, believing it is better to ignore the comments and conform to the social norm. Sadly, Parrish must deal with the conflicts of "generic trolling" and harassment in her Instagram comments daily.



Example of "generic trolling" on Parrish's Instagram

In addition to “generic trolling” on social media, Parrish must also confront “gendertrolling” on her Instagram. Differing significantly from normal trolling, “Gendertrolling,” defined as the hatred of all women and their ideas, results in online abuse from men (Mantilla, 2015, pp. 10, 152). A gendertroll seeks out women purposefully, aiming to evoke discomfort and fear in their victims (Mantilla, 2015, p. 10). Another element of gendertrolling involves utilizing graphic images to insult women for simply being female (Mantilla, 2015, p. 12). A key characteristic of this kind of trolling is that it usually travels across multiple social media platforms and lasts for long periods—sometimes even years (Mantilla, 2015, p. 12). Most of the time, gendertrolling centers around women’s rights and can progress as extreme as threatening rape, death, and violence to the victim (Mantilla, 2015, p. 11). Fortunately for Parrish, the majority of her gendertrolls do not threaten death, but her tormentors strive to inflict discomfort through comments regarding Parrish’s physical appearance; cambria_615 comments, “Mud sharks love wearing fly-catching eyelashes. You probably have one of the worst bf’s out there. You are 🤢.” Additionally, the majority of Parrish’s gendertrolls are elderly men. Gendertrolls view tormenting their female victims as an opportunity for “online hate” (Meco, 2023). Gendertrolls are women-haters who strive to “drive women out of public life, putting democracy and human rights at risk” (Meco, 2023). One tactic gendertrolls employ is “gendered disinformation, which is strategically deployed to silence women in power” (Meco, 2023). The trolls’ thoughts aim to subdue women’s voices and “keep them in their place” (Meco, 2023). Young women across all social media are being “discouraged from speaking out online due to hate and misogyny” (Meco, 2023). Sadly, Parrish must deal with gendertrolls throughout her Instagram comments.



Examples of Gendertrolling on Parrish's Instagram

Because she is a celebrity, an athlete, and a woman with power and influence online, Parrish is often a victim of gendertrolls on Instagram. While women's basketball has recently garnered more attention due to emerging stars like Parrish, the increased fan interest also carries the negative aspects of publicity. In the past, basketball was mainly a male-dominated sport. Recently, the number of women's basketball fans has grown significantly, resulting in increased attention from the public and the gendertrolls. Basketball gendertrolls view the increased attendance and interest in women's basketball as a negative change because women are in power; consequently, they seek to halt the trend by inflicting harassment and embarrassment to evoke discomfort from their victims. Parrish frequently encounters these trolling interactions on her Instagram account. For example, denden72055 comments, "How's that tanning booth treating ya??" and "Shut up. Wear less makeup it looks bad on tv." In addition to these demoralizing comments, when Parrish posts pictures with her friends like an ordinary college-aged girl, old men proffer creepy comments such as, "This is why I watch the Lady Hoosiers," "Very beautiful," "Check DM," and "I have a dream..." Although these are not the most extreme types of gendertrolling, sexualizing Parrish comprises a form of embarrassment and can create discomfort. The gendertrolls hounding Parrish primarily focus on her appearance, specifically, her eyelash extensions, tan, and blonde hair. They aim to sexualize and demoralize her, hoping to

undermine her confidence regarding her athletic abilities. In contrast, this form of trolling is not a common experience for male athletes. Overall, Parrish experiences gendertrolling throughout her Instagram comments, usually regarding her appearance; although she should not have to face online hate comments, it is a reality she must address.

Given that gendertrolls target Parrish, how does she combat and respond to the antagonistic comments criticizing her appearance on her Instagram? The first step towards silencing gendertrolling is plainly addressing the offense (Mantilla, 2015, p. 154). Many forms of violence targeted at women on social media, including gendertrolling, have been “widespread but unseen,” meaning much harassment is happening, but the victims choose not to reveal their detrimental experiences to the public (Mantilla, 2015, p. 150). Currently, when faced with a negative comment about her appearance, Parrish ignores gendertrolling by refusing to engage with it entirely. She only responds to the positive comments left by friends and fans. In the past, women who shared their experiences regarding gendertrolling have been punished for creating the situation rather than the perpetrator punished for their actions (Mantilla, 2015, p. 150). Because of this fact, women celebrities such as Parrish have chosen to stay silent about their online abuse. As a result, if gendertrolling was being tracked, there would be so many occurrences that the data system would be overwhelmed. Therefore, the cure to gendertrolling comes with the “importance of naming,” meaning women who talk about their past experiences giving their situations a name will make them tangible and eventually have their voices heard (Mantilla, 2015, p. 154). Accurately naming specific forms of harassment, such as gendertrolling, is the first step towards overcoming online abuse, and it is essential to create awareness regarding the topic of gendertrolling so that other women online do not feel alone (Mantilla, 2015, p. 154). Therefore, Parrish needs to put the “power of naming” into practice by

engaging with her gendertrolls. Because she regularly deals with gendertrolling, Parrish has the opportunity to contribute to silencing the gendertrolls across social media.

Sadly, gendertrolling, an unfortunate reality, accompanies the privilege of influencing today's social media culture. Celebrity athlete Sydney Parrish faces harassment and gendertrolling regularly through the comments on her Instagram. Currently, she chooses to address the verbal abuse by disengaging and removing herself from the situation. Parrish needs to begin addressing and "naming" the targeted online negative words thrown at her as abuse. Taking the initiative to call out the gendertrolls will contribute to ending online hate directed at women. Female social media celebrities need to begin speaking up about their past experiences regarding online harassment and gendertrolling. Women on social media must band together and name their forms of abuse to call out the perpetrators and take the first step to eradicating online verbal abuse. Not only will this make social media a safer place for adult women, but it is essential to address the issue of gendertrolling to make social media a better environment for future young girls. Celebrities' actions regarding gendertrolling today will determine the social media environment for the young girls of tomorrow.

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