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Amy Barber

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**Dominating Soccer on the Pitch - Transforming Culture off the Pitch: A Rhetorical  
Analysis of How Megan Rapinoe Is Leveling the Playing Field  
for Women's Anger**

by

Amy Barber

A Thesis

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Thesis Committee:

Catherin Fox, Chairperson

Jeff Bineham

Matt Barton

### **Abstract**

Angry women have been the catalyst for numerous social changes throughout American history. Many researchers argue that this progress is stifled, however, because women's anger is subject to social constructs that contain it. These social constructs reinforce dominant norms by conditioning how women express and reflect upon anger. Megan Rapinoe is a professional soccer player who advocates for social justice and simultaneously resists the social constructs of women's anger. A rhetorical analysis surrounding Rapinoe's anger unveils her as revolutionary in how she uses anger because she remains purposeful, exudes composure and conscientiousness, and creates credibility. Each of these rhetorical moves challenge the constructs that often lead to women's anger being portrayed in a negative light. The rhetoric surrounding the ways that women's anger is represented in the media work to either perpetuate these normative gender expectations or challenge them. Women, like Rapinoe, who challenge social norms have no agency in media representations. This is problematic because Rapinoe's consistency and style have the capacity to create change, but some of the manners of representation work to undercut her purpose. Although this problem exists, Rapinoe remains purposeful in her anger since that is what she has agency in. People who recognize or support the revolutionary ways that Rapinoe uses anger, can see the expanded possibilities for thinking about women's anger differently and possibly applying these moves to anger and other oppressing social constructs.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Social Conditioning of Women's Anger**

Angry women have been the catalyst behind many groundbreaking social changes throughout American history. Because of women who get angry, demand social revolution, and seek out allies, gender equality has shifted, societal constructs have been reimagined, and privilege has been illuminated. Women have participated in measures of resistance which led to societal transformation like anti-lynching campaigns, the call for equal voting rights, police brutality protests, and abortion rights crusades. These social justice movements showcase that many women are livid at violence, inequity, objectification, and oppression and their anger is opening doors for societal awareness and social transformation. A current example of women who are angry, who are challenging social injustice, and demanding equality is the United States Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT).

The USWNT has won four Olympic Gold Medals and four World Cup championships, making them the most successful and dominant team in women's soccer history; yet, they are subject to discrimination and gender pay inequality and they are furious about it. They are also furious about the discrimination and injustice that many marginalized groups face across the globe and they serve as public advocates for them. Just as the angry women who revolutionized social change before them, the USWNT believes in equal rights for all individuals; they visibly express support for disenfranchised groups whether they identify with the group or not. This team makes bold public statements about unfair treatment through television broadcasts, public speaking engagements and, perhaps most notably, through a lawsuit they filed against their

employer, the United States Soccer Federation, (USSF) citing gender discrimination (Morgan v. United States).

On International Women's Day, March 8, 2019, all 28 members of the current USWNT filed a class action lawsuit against the USSF for, "violations of the Equal Pay Act and...violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964" (Morgan v. United States 21). The 25-page complaint illuminates gender disparities in salaries, inequitable stadium conditions, and unbalanced methods of travel the USWNT receives when compared to the United States Men's National Soccer Team (USMNT). The lawsuit notes that the women's team has won more national titles, international championships, and Olympic gold medals than the men's team, and has garnered more television viewers and produced more revenue than the men's team. Despite this success, the USSF offers them less money in marketing and promotions and sets ticket prices low. The team is demanding equality in every aspect of their employment for every member of "the class" named in the lawsuit as well as "all current and/or former (US)WNT players who were members of the (US)WNT at any time from February 4, 2015 through the date of final judgment, or the date of the resolution of any appeals therefrom, whichever is later" (Morgan v. United States 17). The date the team filed the lawsuit and the language they use in it confirms their objective of demanding justice for their own interests and working as allies for all people in underserved communities.

There are four women from the team named as "class" representatives: Becky Sauerbrunn, Alex Morgan, Carli Lloyd, and Megan Rapinoe. As agents for the team, they agree to settle for nothing less than total equality by disputing the USSF's claim that "market realities are such that the women do not deserve to be paid equally to the men" (Morgan v. United States

1). The lawsuit is groundbreaking because the USWNT was four months from playing in the World Cup at the time of filing. Creating this potential controversy so close to the biggest tournament in soccer, could have had distracting outcomes and alienated fans, but the team persevered and won the World Cup in July of 2019. The lawsuit is also revolutionary because a California court granted it class action certification in November of 2019, indicating “an early procedural success” (Hays, par. 1). This lawsuit has potential social revolution and possible backlash and the team is prepared for both.

Megan Rapinoe, co-captain on the USWNT, is the most outspoken member. She is a thirty-four-year-old white woman who publicly resists racial discrimination, police brutality, homophobia, gender discrimination, and numerous other social injustices. Rapinoe began protesting racism and police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem at team soccer matches but has since been required by the soccer federation to stand. She continues a different form of protest, however, by not singing or placing her hand over her heart and has made the claim that she is unlikely ever to do so in the future (Weisholtz). She openly supports LGBTQ rights as an ambassador for a non-profit called Athlete Ally (“Pro Ambassador”) and she has publicly rejected a potential visit to the White House, citing President Donald Trump’s divisive ideology as the explanation for her decision (Schad). Rapinoe has positioned herself as a spokesperson and supporter for numerous disenfranchised groups through brazen acts of political resistance.

Although Rapinoe has embraced the role of advocate for marginalized groups, not everyone believes she is a champion. She is heavily criticized in various public arenas for her outspoken advocacy and physical acts of political resistance. Her critics do not share her

ideology and have expressed their disapproval through public opinion pieces, defacement of advertisements that feature her likeness, and negative comments on her activism. Most of Rapinoe's adversaries cite her progressive values or her position as an athlete rather than a politician as reasons they oppose her. Supporters of Rapinoe feel quite the opposite, they show up to victory parades, inundate her with awards and trophies, and attend her soccer camps. She is a controversial public figure: people either love or hate her.

Rapinoe is unique and worthy of investigation because she is breaking some of the societal conventions of women's anger. At times, the ways that she is reimagining the constructs of women's anger simultaneously creates social change for our anger and for other socialized gender norms. Rapinoe resists the current anger parameters of how women express and reflect on our anger because of *what* she is angry about, *how* she protests, and *who* she speaks to. The ways that Rapinoe uses anger is revolutionary because she advocates for marginalized groups that she is not a part of, and she is one of the first female athletes to physically protest in public while also verbally protesting in spaces typically reserved for expressing gratitude. She is bold in who she says perpetuates divisiveness and who needs to contribute to positive social change. Rapinoe's anger is being heard because she is breaking out of social barriers.

Rapinoe sees her activism and public platform as a personal privilege and repeatedly defends her stance on numerous types of social injustice. She explains her resistance to discriminatory policing by saying, "I haven't experienced over-policing, racial profiling, police brutality...But I cannot stand idly by while there are people in this country who have to deal with that kind of heartache" (Weisholtz, par. 6). She names homophobia as another injustice she advocates for by saying, "... people are still being beat up for being gay. Part of it is just about

talking about it all the time and starting to break down stereotypes” (Brookes, par. 33). Rapinoe is revolutionary because she displays resistance for groups she identifies with and groups she does not identify with. It is more common in contemporary society to protest as a member of a group, but very few people protest for injustice outside of their ingroups (Leonard et al. 101). Rapinoe is using her positions of privileges to resist normative expectations regarding the people for whom she advocates.

The ways that Rapinoe protests expand normative expectations because she combines physical and verbal protests and uses every opportunity to plead her case, even when behavioral standards tell her otherwise. She has received criticism for what she says and for the ways she physically resists. In response to this backlash, Rapinoe says, “There is no perfect way to protest...I feel in my heart it is right to continue to kneel during the national anthem, and I will do whatever I can to be part of the solution” (Weisholtz, par. 7). She recognizes that some people find kneeling during the national anthem disrespectful and calling out injustices during recognition speeches distasteful, but Rapinoe vows to persevere. Since Rapinoe made this statement, the federation has mandated that athletes stand during the anthem but she perseveres in doing whatever she can by now refusing to place her hand over her heart or sing. Rapinoe is one of the first white or female athletes to combine physical and verbal resistance and one of the first to reimagine the context of a recognition speech by expressing anger and gratitude simultaneously.

Rapinoe believes she has a responsibility to use her platform to raise awareness and carry out resistance, and she also believes that others should join her. She argues, “...if you are in a position of influence like I am, you can use your platform to elevate the millions of voices being

silenced, and support them... (Rapinoe, “Why I Am Kneeling”, par. 10). Rapinoe calls on anyone with privilege to use their platform to promote equality and social justice by giving a voice to those in marginalized groups without one. During her World Cup victory speech, she implores her audience:

This is my charge to everyone. We have to be better. We have to love more, hate less. We have to listen more and talk less. We’ve got to know that this is everybody’s responsibility, every single person here, every single person who is not here, every single person who doesn’t want to be here, every single person who agrees and doesn’t agree, it’s our responsibility to make this world a better place (Rapinoe, “US Women’s World Cup”, 04:28 - 04:54).

Just as Rapinoe urges people with privilege to take action, she also appeals to those not in the public eye. She believes that everybody has a responsibility to be an advocate and an ally for stopping the perpetuation of stereotypes and discrimination.

Rapinoe is as bold in who she calls on for allyship as she is in who she calls out for perpetuation of discriminatory norms. Citing the divisiveness of the administration, she declared a boycott of the White House in a video recorded prior to the World Cup and incited a public feud with Trump by stating, “I’m not going to the fucking White House” (Rapinoe qtd. in Brockes, par. 2). She also challenged USSF President Carlos Cordeiro during her USWNT victory parade speech by identifying assurances he made to the team and saying she looks forward “to holding those feet to the fire” (Rapinoe, “US Women’s World Cup”, 03:36 – 03:38). This behavior aggressively pushes gender norms for women because these men are in highly powerful positions and it is not normative conduct for women to question powerful men. Period.

Rapinoe is clear about what injustices she is fighting for, the ways she demonstrates her call for inclusivity and social justice, who she thinks should be fighting with her, and who she believes is stifling progress.

### **Athletes and Activists**

Rapinoe joins a host of sports figures throughout history who have also been angry and engaged in political resistance. She cites Colin Kaepernick's NFL kneeling protest against racism and police brutality as the motive for her own parallel protest ("Megan Rapinoe Defends"). At the 1968 Summer Olympics, African American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in a symbolic gesture of protest while on the Olympic podium in Mexico (Blakemore). When Muhammad Ali infamously protested the Vietnam War by refusing to be drafted, he cited his religious beliefs and the climate of racial conditions in America as his motivation. He said, "I don't have no personal quarrel with those Vietcongs. ...All I know is they are considered as Asiatic black people and I don't have no fight with black people." (qtd. in Oates, par. 2). Each of these athletes joined a social movement by publicly expressing their anger and frustration at mistreatment, inequality, and oppression, like what Rapinoe is doing. Also, like Rapinoe, they faced both positive and negative responses from the general public, fellow athletes, and politicians. The difference between these athletes and Rapinoe is that each of these athletes is a man.

Female athletes have made similar efforts in the crusade against injustice throughout American history. In 1973, tennis great Billie Jean King called for equality in the prize money that women received in tennis tournaments that featured men and women. That same year, she created the Women's Tennis Association (Mervosh and Caron). Thirty-four years later, after

pressure from tennis star Venus Williams, the Wimbledon tennis tournament agreed to pay women victors the same amount of prize money that men had been receiving (Mervosh and Caron). While each of these women spoke out against gender inequity, they did not display any physical signs of resistance or demand equality in areas other than economics as Rapinoe does. Still, without these trailblazing female athletes, Rapinoe would likely not be a trailblazer herself. King and Williams both articulated anger at the disparity of monetary awards for women in tennis and eventually helped create financial equity in tournament purses. These women paved the way for Rapinoe and her teammates to be currently engaged in a fight for gender equality for female soccer players and part of that equality includes monetary compensation.

Williams' sister, Serena, has also contributed to the fight for gender equality in sports. Her experiences have largely been about the double standards of exhibitions of rage in the game of tennis. Williams has been subject to public criticism for expressing anger and was handed the largest fine ever given by the US Open for raging at a line judge (Clarke). Another incident in 2018 left Williams with a \$17,000 fine after she expressed anger to a chair umpire who accused her of being coached. She called the umpire a "thief" for what she called "stealing a point" from her (Clarke). This incident is significant because male tennis players have infamously displayed angrier, more violent, and more aggressive behavior with few, if any, consequences. Williams acknowledges her adverse behavior, but also points out the multitude of double standards that take place in tennis by stating, "I've seen other men call other umpires several things. I'm here fighting for women's rights and for women's equality and for all kinds of stuff.... He has never taken a game from a man because they said 'thief.'" (qtd. in Clarke, par. 2). Williams is a significant figure in the call for gender equality and has made strides in working toward equality

among tennis players. Women from the WNBA, USA Hockey, and the World Surf League are among other groups of female athletes who have publicly condemned their respective sport for gender discrimination (Mervosh and Caron). Without these women coming before her, Rapinoe's resistance might not gain traction.

Rapinoe acknowledges the additional difficulties many of the progressive athletes and angry women who have resisted before her have faced. The male athletes who I have acknowledged may have the ingrained privilege of being a man, but each one is an African American man, so they do not have direct access to male privilege and they are subject to racism and stereotypes of the "dangerous black man." The female athletes also face hurdles of racism and sexism in how their anger is received and represented. Rebecca Traister recognizes how racism and sexism have a compounding effect. She says, "...more than simply a doubling of bias; for the racism faced by nonwhite women is amplified and altered by sexism, and the sexism they encounter is perverted and exacerbated by racial bias" (71). Similarly, Soraya Chemaly explains, "...anger in white men is often portrayed as justifiable and patriotic, but in black men, as criminality; and in black women, as threat" (xiv). Rapinoe pays attention to these tribulations before acknowledging her own privilege in her *Glamour* "Women of the Year" speech. She recognizes Kaepernick, African American victims of police brutality, and individuals who have been key in previous social movements before stating, "...I'm not gonna act like my whiteness has nothing to do with me standing before you now." (Rapinoe, "Megan Rapinoe's Acceptance", 04:01 – 04:03). She is aware that if it were not for those who came before her and her own white privilege, she would not be in the position to gain attention as she is now.

A rhetorical analysis of Rapinoe's anger is both timely and relevant. The current climate in America has shifted ever so slightly from women being second-class citizens regularly subjected to gendered abuses, to women gaining more equality and more protection from mistreatments. Women's anger is picking up momentum with movements like #metoo and the 2016 Women's March and this is encouraging because angry women are ultimately the catalyst for social revolution. Chemaly concurs, "The importance and visibility of women's collective anger can't be overstated" (216). She recognizes that to keep the momentum of these movements, women need to stay angry and Rapinoe may be just the role model that women need to keep the fires of social justice burning. An analysis of the rhetoric of Rapinoe's anger can give us insight into how she expresses and reflects on her anger and how it may be different from the current social norms. We can also understand the rhetoric surrounding how she is represented by the media and what this could mean for the expansion or perpetuation of the social constructs of women's anger and how this one construct may transcend other social constructs.

It is important to first understand the framework of a theory about women's anger so the social constructs can be defined and used in the analysis of the rhetoric of Rapinoe's anger. The remainder of this chapter will introduce this theory, the methodology I use, and the guiding research questions. The second chapter will offer an analysis of the rhetoric that Rapinoe has agency in by examining the artifacts of expressions and reflections. The final chapter will analyze the artifacts of representation, which Rapinoe has no agency in, and offer suggestions of potential implications surrounding the rhetoric of Rapinoe's anger.

## **A Theoretical Framework of Women's Anger Conditioning**

Women's anger has been studied through a variety of disciplinary lenses: Leonard et al. studied it through the lens of social psychology, Cox et al. through the lens of women's health, Orgad and Gill through feminist media studies, and journalists Chemaly and Traister studied it through popular journalism. Each study points out that anger is the primary catalyst for women who seek to create societal change while also pointing out a crucial paradox that women find ourselves in: Women's anger is contained within societal constructs that perpetuate oppression, which necessarily limits the amount of power we have to effect social change. Nonetheless, each study shows that angry women who push the boundaries of how our anger has been contained do contribute to the slow expansion of our power.

Traister concurs with the claim that women's anger is both socially conditioned and groundbreaking in her popular book, *Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger*. She asserts that women are subject to societal norms which place specific parameters on how women express anger as well as how we reflect upon and talk about our anger. Gendered norms also influence how women's anger is represented, particularly in popular media. Men's anger and women's anger are received very differently in American culture and this is a main argument that Traister makes. I have distilled her work and identified these three categories of women's anger: modes of expression, modes of reflection, and modes of representation. These categories are important because they will provide the framework for my analysis of Rapinoe's rhetoric. Ultimately, Traister argues that angry women are foundational in social justice movements, but to be effective we must challenge the parameters that have contained our anger.

### *Conditioned Expressions of Women's Anger*

Traister argues that social and hegemonic parameters allow female anger four conditioned expressions. She describes these as:

1. divine intervention
2. humor
3. vulgar language
4. ferocity

These primary exhibitions of anger are received by society through a social lens that tolerates women's anger while simultaneously delegitimizing it. What follows is a detailed description of each of the four conditioned expressions of women's anger that are pivotal in eventually answering my research questions.

Divine intervention is when women choose to take no responsibility for their expressions of anger, instead, claiming that a higher power is to blame. This can be further sub-categorized as methods of expression that women use "...to avoid direct expression..." of anger so that we are generally accepted in relationships and in society (Cox et al. 874). What this means is that when we use this conditioned expression, we do not actually articulate that we are angry on our own behalf, which may allow us to keep our relationships intact. Traister offers Carrie Nation as an example of divine intervention. Nation was an early voice in the American landscape for gender equality and fought for voting rights as well as the rights of women to be free from physical abuse in marriage. She threw rocks and hatchets at saloons to protest drunken husbands who physically abused their wives. She claimed God came to her in a vision and told her to carry out these actions in response to the marginalization and mistreatment of women (Traister 84).

Women, like Nation, have been trained to believe that anger is illegitimate, and in order to negotiate the conflict between having the emotion and expressing it, we must often use the indirect expression of divine intervention to remain within societal boundaries.

Using humor is another way that women can negotiate the conflict of feeling anger and feeling the need to remain within the constructs of anger expression. This happens when women laugh off unwanted harassing or offensive behavior or when we make jokes about unequal pay or workplace conditions. Humor can also be further sub-categorized as a method of expression that women use "...to avoid direct expression..." of anger so that we are generally accepted in relationships and in society (Cox et al. 874). We use this to name something we are angry about, but by not directly saying we are angry, we may not suffer the serious consequences that Chemaly describes of being perceived as "...hostile, irritable, less competent...unlikeable..." (xvii). Traister illustrates the concept of humor by citing Tina Fey's jokes about Harvey Weinstein long before his public demise. Fey was irate that Weinstein's sexual predation was well-known and tolerated in Hollywood (102). This an example of how women are conditioned to laugh off serious infractions because directly expressing anger is too risky to our relationships, careers, and place in society.

The third category Traister uses to describe conditioned expression of women's anger is profanity. Vulgar language fits into the sub-category of methods women use that Cox et al. label as "externalization" (888). Profanity has the appearance of a direct expression of anger, but this research shows that women are "bypassing a critical aspect of conscious anger experience and expression...failing to claim responsibility for her feelings and communicate them in an attempt to resolve the problem that triggered them" (Cox et al. 887). Expressing anger in this manner

does not allow for our anger to be productive. Productive anger expression aims to solve the problem that caused our anger and allows us to process the feeling of anger. Traister recalls an incident where Alicia Shepard was called 'dear' by the executive director of a trade group at a meeting she attended. Shepard responded with, "'Don't call me dear, fuckface'" (qtd. in Traister 108). Traister claims that Shepard later went on to explain that she may have used this language in response to years of being called inappropriately affectionate names by older white men who were strangers or virtual strangers to her (108). Women sometimes attempt to validate anger by using vulgar language but, as illustrated by the examples, our anger is rarely directed appropriately or used productively when we do this.

The final category Traister offers for conditioned anger expressions is ferocity. A small number of women explode with fury when expressing anger and this method is also "externalization" (Cox et al. 888). This research shows that a verbal or physical outburst may appear to be a direct expression of anger, but women are still missing critical components of productive expression because we do not recognize the origin of our anger nor do we often direct it appropriately (Cox et al. 887). Traister offers Maryland senator Barbara Mikulski who gave a fiery speech on the Senate floor following the defeat of the Paycheck Fairness Act in 2014. She expressed rage and unleashed furious anger at the outright gender inequality that Congress supported in the defeat of this bill and she gained attention for it (Traister 109). The attention Mikulski received was largely about her behavior and little attention was paid to why she was angry. Explosive fury is a conditioned expression that women often feel forced into because we do not have the option of expressing productive anger.

### *Conditioned Reflections on Women's Anger*

In addition to arguing that women's anger has been conditioned to be expressed in four basic forms, Traister also theorizes that women's anger is subject to specific conditioning in the ways we talk about or reflect upon anger in three main ways. She describes these as:

1. talking about anger in the past tense
2. engaging in self-blame
3. conflating anger with a "learning experience"

Traister's work provides an entry point for understanding how social norms condition how we reflect on our anger. Staying within these rigid parameters often forces us to make deliberate and unoriginal decisions about how to talk about anger.

The first category Traister offers for anger reflection is talking about it as something that happened in the past. Women are expected to suppress anger as it happens and once the feeling has diminished or disappeared, we reflect upon it using past tense verbiage. Traister uses an excerpt from Hillary Clinton's memoir about her 2016 loss in the Presidential election as an example of this. Clinton acknowledged feeling fury at the way Trump treated her during a debate in which he invaded her personal space and attempted to intimidate her. Traister writes:

Acknowledging how tight her grip on her microphone was during the debate, Clinton told me it was an extension of the internal control she was mustering. 'Think of all the times where you are either mentally or physically gripping yourself,' she said. '[Willing yourself] not to respond, not to lash out, not to display the anger that you feel, because you know it will redound to your detriment. So you swallow it'" (81).

Clinton's reflection of her anger illuminates how women are conditioned to repress anger in real time and only talk about the feeling after it has faded. When we can show that we are no longer angry, we are subject to fewer of the social repercussions of being perceived as "...hostile, irritable, less competent...unlikable..." (Chemaly xvii). The result of this type of conditioning is that our anger becomes less dangerous or intimidating and we can keep our social standing because we acknowledge that our anger has been reconciled.

Self-blame is the second category Traister offers for the conditioning of women's anger reflection and this happens most often in cases of sexual assault or harassment. For example, during the 2016 presidential race, an *Access Hollywood* tape revealed that Republican nominee Trump admitted to and boasted about committing sexual assault on multiple women (Traister 22). This prompted women across the country to share personal stories of assault and harassment, many of whom had a direct experience with Trump himself. A *People* magazine reporter, who had been in Trump's house for an interview, recalled that he led her to a private room and assaulted her. She reflected on the way she handled the situation by stating that once she returned to her hotel room, "shock began to wear off and was replaced by anger. I kept thinking, 'Why didn't I slug him? Why couldn't I say anything?'" (Traister 22). The reporter turned the blame on herself and reflected upon it as if she were the one who acted inappropriately. She did not place her anger where it originated, with Trump, because she is conditioned to understand that her anger is illegitimate so one way to talk about it is by conveying that she was in the wrong. When we do this our anger is once again less intimidating and less threatening which allows us to maintain our social status.

The final category Traister offers for how women are conditioned to reflect on anger is casting it as a learning experience. When we do this, we acknowledge that we stepped outside of anger constructs and will correct our behavior. Traister offers the example of Michelle Obama reflecting on her anger after being critiqued for a statement she made while her husband was a Democratic nominee in 2008 (Traister 68). Obama had expressed anger at the continued inequality in America and was reprimanded for it. She did not speak about it publicly until years later when she said, “‘I thought this was real, but it was a game too. And I wasn’t playing the game, I was just being passionate...So I had to learn how to deliver’ – and here, she pasted a big smile on her face, an offered a shake of her hair – ‘ a *message*’” (Traister 70). So that Obama could regain her position in society, she had to reflect on her anger with apology and by stating the lesson she learned.

### ***Conditioned Representations of Women’s Anger***

Even when women follow the parameters of anger expression and reflection, we are subject to these public re-presentations of our anger:

1. We will be told that we are nothing more than maternal beings.
2. We will be told that our angry tears are truly tears of another cause.
3. We will be accused of harming ourselves mentally or physically.
4. We will be subject to name calling and derogation.
5. Our anger will be simply erased.

These representations that work to reinforce constructed norms about our anger are entirely out of our control. Feminist media studies scholarship argues that experiencing these public representations of our anger confirms messages of “female self-beratement, low self-esteem and

discontent” (Orgad & Gill 597). When we experience messages of female anger that tell us these disparaging characteristics, we are more likely to adhere to the social parameters of anger expression and reflection to avoid as much backlash as possible. We *know* our anger is going to be re-presented in one manner or more, therefore, we feel conflict and strive to adhere to the norms.

The first category of representation from Traister’s research is that women are transformed into motherly or maternal figures to make our anger harmless or insignificant. Traister offers Susan B. Anthony as an example of an angry woman who was re-presented as a docile, nurturing, and maternal being (86). Anthony devoted much of her life to the fight against inequality and regularly displayed anger while doing so. A magazine article published just years before she died, began a series of re-presentations of Anthony as maternal by placing the focus on how she taught household skills to her nieces rather than the anger she displayed at injustice (Traister 86). The motive behind re-presented Anthony in this way is that motherly figures are not typically considered angry or harmful to society. Chemaly supports this concept, “Motherhood is central to our social perception of women...nurturing, forgiving, sacrificing – and is also central to how we think about women’s anger” (98). When women are represented in society through the lens of motherhood, we are reminded that mothers are selfless and harmless so that our anger becomes non-threatening, innocuous, and illegitimate.

Traister offers the second category of representations as “angry tears.” These representations inform us that women who may appear to be angry are not actually angry. They may say that we are frightened or sad or they may condemn or mock us for crying. Even though crying is a legitimate response to anger, it is framed as a weak reaction and representations can

use this as a move that will place the focus on our tears or our character rather than on what we are angry about. An example of a woman who was condemned and mocked for crying in response to anger is Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder (Traister 97). Schroeder once considered running for president. During the speech that she announced she would not, she cried and was publicly condemned for doing so. She was accused of setting women back one hundred years in terms of progressive gender equality and was subject to public mockery on the *Saturday Night Live* stage and other media platforms. Schroeder later recalled that the tears were a manifestation of a myriad of emotions with the primary one being anger (Traister 98). Women who cry in response to anger often get reframed as crying for some other reason or are ridiculed, as Schroeder was, and either of these representations make our anger secondary to our tears or our character.

The third category Traister defines in the representations of angry women is name calling and derogatory depictions. The public belittles women by depicting them as openmouthed and unattractive, with hands flailing in the air. Capturing images of women in an unflattering state perpetuates the notion that women who are angry are bitter, hostile, and unacceptable. In addition to unflattering images, the labels that describe angry women reinforce the notion that women's anger is illegitimate. Traister illustrates this concept with discussions of Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris. Warren was called "unhinged" by Mika Brzezinski of MSNBC and Harris was said to have "hysteria" by political advisor Jason Miller (Traister 54-55). The societal belief that women who express anger are in some way abnormal is emphasized when women's anger is represented in society through negative visual images and labeling.

The fourth category of representation that Traister describes is that women's anger is detrimental to our physical and mental health. Women who are angry are repeatedly told that it is bad for us to be angry; that it will ruin our teeth, hurt our digestive systems, and cause mental health issues. Traister argues that even her own dentist constructs anger as unhealthy for women. She describes how her dentist told her that women who were livid over Trump being elected president were putting their oral health in jeopardy (59). When our anger is represented as harmful, the perpetuation of women's anger as undesirable persists.

Finally, Traister describes erasure which happens when women's anger is ignored or erased from the narrative because we do not hold the power to tell the stories. Traister uses the "so-called Stonewall Riots" as an example (88). The events leading up to this movement of civil disobedience were the result of marginalized groups of LGBTQ people being angry with injustice. The Stonewall Inn was a popular gay bar in New York City during an especially unpopular time for gay, transgender, and lesbian people. In 1969, police conducted a raid on the bar as they had done dozens of times in the past, but this time the patrons engaged in acts of political resistance instead of cooperation. The story of the Stonewall Inn was retold in 2015 in a Hollywood movie titled, *Stonewall*. This movie portrayed the hero as a white cisgender man from the Midwest and completely eradicated the angry women who were realistically at the center of the revolt (Traister 89). Women's anger can be made invisible through nonexistent representation by those who have the power to chronicle the constructed norms. Our anger is ignored and the social construct of it being dismissible is then maintained.

While Traister's theory is not comprehensive, it offers insight into how the social management of women's anger happens and provides concrete categories for how our anger is

contained. Chemaly's research also offers a helpful understanding of how social power contributes to the conditioning of women's anger when she argues that "...power and privilege are the framers of our anger" (xiv). She asserts that we understand anger based on our position in society. We can see this in how women have lower social positions than men do, so our anger perception differs from men's perceptions. We can also see this in the previous description of how male African American athletes do not have full access to male privilege and how female African American athletes have double hurdles to face when accessing privilege. Anyone who does not have full access to privilege has socially constructed anger management parameters because of our positions along lines of race, gender, and class. Both Chemaly and Traister illustrate in their work how those without privilege learn to manage our anger in ways that mold to social expectations.

Women's anger has the potential to be a catalyst for social change because it is linked to power and privilege. Traister notes this in her research by outlining the pivotal role of women in the social movements that have changed the landscape of American society. She also acknowledges women's efforts in the current social movements of #metoo and the Women's March as having a potentially similar long-term impact as movements of the past. The problem is that because our anger is under the confines of the social constructs that are currently in place, the power of our anger is restricted. Many of those who are privileged with power are threatened with any possible shift in society and work to keep the structures that limit women's anger in place. Understanding the restrictive constructs of women's anger and how they lead to a suppressed potential in social justice, helps us to understand how the ways that Rapinoe does anger differently matters.

## Methodology

Rapinoe is a pioneer in what she is angry about, how she protests, who she calls on for assistance, and who she calls out as divisive. On September 4, 2016 when Rapinoe was the first white athlete to kneel during the national anthem, she was thrust into the public spotlight and has since been the subject of countless public broadcasts, articles, and awards. Analyzing the rhetorical discourse encompassing her anger uncovers how this rhetoric contributes to the transformation of social norms, particularly for marginalized groups. I have divided my artifacts for analysis into three general categories: those in which Rapinoe is expressing anger (expression), those in which she is reflecting on her anger (reflection), and those in which the media are representing Rapinoe's anger (representation). I have analyzed the artifacts in each category using the specific methods of anger conditioning as outlined in the theoretical framework section and the rhetorical moves that Rapinoe's uses.

The artifacts of expression I use are texts from the day of Rapinoe's first kneeling protest through her December 9, 2019 *Sports Illustrated* Sportsperson of the Year acceptance speech. These artifacts are samples of Rapinoe expressing anger in her own words in award speeches and in an open letter she authored for *The Player's Tribune*. The second set of artifacts are reflections and contain Rapinoe's own words as she discusses her anger in interviews for online or print publications and television broadcasts like *Sports Illustrated* and *CSN News*.

The final set of artifacts are the representations of Rapinoe's anger which center around her actions and/or words. These artifacts are put into two groups, one is labeled supportive and the other critical. It is necessary to identify each text as supportive or critical so that the representations of Rapinoe's anger can be categorically analyzed. Coupling the artifacts of

expression, reflection, and representation with scholarly and popular research allows themes to emerge that are present in sets of artifacts or in overall messages.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will aid in guiding this study:

1. What are the themes that arise from Rapinoe's expression of her anger?
2. What are the themes that arise from Rapinoe's self-reflection on her anger?
  - a. In what ways do these expressions align with or expand the research on women's anger and about how women's anger is conditioned by social norms?
3. How do representations of Rapinoe's anger by the media align with her own stated ethos and purpose? What does this tell us about how representations can both challenge and reinforce social conditioning of women's anger?

## Chapter 2: Artifact Analysis

### The Agency in Megan Rapinoe's Expressions and Reflections of Anger

As discussed in Chapter One, women are socially conditioned to manage our anger in the ways that we express it and how we talk about it. One reason why this is a problem is because we are given one set of parameters for our anger expression that is entirely different than the parameters that are set for our anger reflection. This creates a disconnect in what we are saying when we are angry and what we say when we talk about it after the fact. When this disconnect is present the stereotype of the inconsistent crazy woman is perpetuated (Chemaly xvii). The ways that Rapinoe uses anger does not perpetuate this stereotype because she does not adhere to the parameters society has set for her use of anger. The social conditioning of women's anger is also problematic because our anger has historically been a powerful tool for social change, but when it is contained through social constructs it leaves this tool less effective. I used the framework and categories provided by Traister and Chemaly to discover that Rapinoe resists these specific constructs. Understanding the current norms for women's anger assisted in discovering themes in Rapinoe's expressions and reflections of anger; they are clarity of purpose, composure and conscientiousness, and consistency. Rapinoe uses her anger as a catalyst for social change by breaking out of the containers that previous research identifies. The themes are present in each of the artifacts and helps us understand how Rapinoe resists the constructs of women's anger management. I have divided this chapter into three sections that align with each theme. Each section will illuminate the claims I make about Rapinoe's use of anger and identify at least one example of the theme in both her expressions and reflections.

## Clarity of Purpose

Cox et al. argues that the tactic of “anger diversion” directs our anger away from the issue that initially caused it (874). Tina Fey making jokes about Harvey Weinstein as a sexual predator long before he was formally accused and convicted is an example of humor being used as anger diversion (Traister 102). The problem with this is that she makes the joke and then moves on without directly expressing her anger about the crisis of sexual assault. Cox et al. argue that this tactic is unproductive because the cause of our anger is never directly addressed. Also problematic in anger diversion is the way women are rewarded for and expected to always “soften” our anger rather than being direct about it and staying on point when we are angry.

Rapinoe does not take part in anger diversion, instead she uses assertive expression, which is expressing anger conscientiously, often to others, without fury, and with a purpose (Cox et al. 874). What makes her use of anger unique is her refusal to contain or divert her anger and her ability to stay on point about what she is angry about and what she envisions as solutions. An example of her refusal to contain or divert her anger is a letter that she wrote to *theplayerstribune.com* after her first kneeling protest that gained her national attention. She writes:

...I will do whatever I can to be part of the solution...I believe it is my responsibility, just as it is yours, to ensure that freedom is afforded to *everyone* in this country...In the time it has taken me to write this article, many more Americans have been lost to senseless violence... I simply cannot stand for the kind of oppression this country is allowing against its own people... this is more than just raising awareness. I know that actions must be taken to help bring about real change...I am reaching out to community leaders,

corporate partners and leaders within the Black Lives Matters movement... (Rapinoe, “Why I Am Kneeling”, pars. 4-7)

She received a lot of backlash for her protest, and instead of backing down, she wrote this letter. The letter does not rein in her anger, instead it offers rationale for it and in doing so solidifies it. This is a repeated move for Rapinoe, refusing the conditioning that tells women to back down or backtrack or stop, instead she continues to express her anger unapologetically.

An example of her refusal to contain or divert her anger in artifacts of reflection occurs in an article for *The New York Times*. In this interview she is asked about the criticism and professional backlash she received from kneeling during the national anthem and how ethical it is to avoid conversations with people who disagree with her politics, like Trump. Rather than answer the questions in a way that diverts attention to her personal life or actions, she expresses the causes of her anger. She does not remain in the container of backtracking or denying her anger, nor does she allow the conversation to distract from her purpose by allowing it to be about her. She specifically names “police brutality”, “racial injustice”, a flawed “criminal justice system”, and “children locked up at the border” as the reasons for her anger and the foundational aspects of her protests (Marchese). In reverting to these specific issues, she demonstrates her refusal to be contained by social constructs that direct attention away from the issues and toward her behavior; she stays on point by reiterating what she is angry about and why.

An example of Rapinoe’s ability to stay on point about why she is angry and what she sees as solutions can be found in her *Glamour* “Women of the Year” speech. This magazine awards several inspirational women each year who are groundbreaking in a variety of fields. Rapinoe was among the women in 2019 who gave acceptance speeches after receiving this

honor. After she names racism, police brutality, and white supremacy as reasons she is angry, she says, "...I wanna re-imagine what it means to be successful, what it means to have influence, what it means to have power...for me personally to work relentlessly, to dismantle that system that benefits some over the detriment of others..." (Rapinoe, "Megan Rapinoe's Acceptance", 01:19 – 03:19). She is accepting this honor, but instead of saying "thank you very much for letting me live in your world," like women are expected to do, she uses this as an opportunity to express anger. Rather than engaging in anger diversion, which she would be doing if she merely said "thank you," she remains focused on naming the system of oppression as the root of her anger and takes personal responsibility for working toward breaking it down. In this same speech, she recognizes that most of the live audience are members of the media or sports figures who have public platforms. She includes the privileged audience members in her vision of social change by talking about reimagining success, influence, and power and says they should throw their ladders down to share their platform with the voiceless (Rapinoe, "Megan Rapinoe's Acceptance"). Rapinoe is in a situation where it would be socially acceptable to articulate only gratitude and divert from anger, but she rejects that construct to persist with her message.

Another example of Rapinoe remaining focused on her anger and on solutions is a television interview she gave within days of her initial kneeling protest where she was asked how social media have responded to her act of resistance. Rapinoe remains on point in both stating her anger and her fundamental goal of inciting change. She talks about hearing as many comments of inspiration as outrage, but says, "...it's been mostly positive and what I mean by positive is that we're talking about it and that's ultimately what I want..." ("Megan Rapinoe Defends", 01:06 – 01:11). She shows little concern about comments about her but displays

optimism at the conversations she initiated about the issues at the root of her anger because she sees discussions as a road to finding solutions. While the question aims to answer how her life has been affected by comments, she effectively streamlines the answer into serving her purpose of anger expression and solutions.

Rapinoe refuses to contain her anger or be diverted from her purpose in naming problems of injustice and offering solutions in the times she expresses her anger and when she reflects on her anger. She uses assertive expression in a manner that is unique for women in American society by remaining persistent in coming back to her cause no matter how many attempts are made to place the focus on her. She is also persistent in focusing on the importance of difficult conversations and in naming what steps must be taken and by who so that a shift in societal norms may be possible. One way that she is effective in gaining momentum from the community, is her ability to get them to take notice of her.

### **Composure and Conscientiousness**

To be rhetorically effective to an audience, we must connect with them. Women are expected to adhere to social constructs that make us contain or divert our anger and if we are bold and outspoken about it, there is a problem in connecting with an audience that expects us to operate within social norms. Often what happens to a bold, angry woman is that we get pigeonholed into a one-dimensional stereotype of the “angry bitch.” We can see this clearly in how Serena Williams’ anger has been received differently from male tennis stars like John McEnroe (Clarke). Being perceived as an angry woman creates obstacles in how we connect with our audiences and how trustworthy we are perceived to be.

Rapinoe is different because she is outspoken and bold, but rather than being pigeonholed as the “angry bitch” this boldness seems to work in her favor. Traister argues that societal representations of women who are bold often use visual images of them open-mouthed with hands flailing in the air in order to discredit them as “unhinged.” She also asserts that these women are subject to derogatory names, such as angry bitch, and generally dismissed (54). Oftentimes protestors are similarly represented as merely seeking attention, with nothing substantial to be angry about, and nothing substantial to offer the audience. Rapinoe’s use of anger is not necessarily subject to these stereotypes because it is coupled with two elements of style that make audiences pause and listen to her: composure and conscientiousness. By composure, I am referring to the way that Rapinoe remains poised and calm and by conscientiousness I am referring to the thoughtfulness and consideration she displays. Cox et al. argues that these are two elements present in assertive anger expression that can legitimize women’s anger (874). Women who express anger without being conscientious about it run the risk of being named a fraud. Not only is our anger dismissed, but we are delegitimized altogether for having nothing worthwhile to contribute. The problem with women not maintaining poise when expressing anger is that the focus is removed from what we are angry about and is reassigned to our unleashed fury. When this happens, the chance of our anger having a clear purpose or resolution disappears, as does the chance of connecting with our audience.

Rapinoe was presented with the 2019 “Sportsperson of the Year” award given by *Sports Illustrated* magazine. This award has rich history in its 66-year existence of honoring individual athletes or teams who demonstrate excellence in their sport. Rapinoe is only the fourth woman to

independently win this award in the history of the achievement. In her acceptance speech she says:

Is it true that I am the fourth woman deserving of this award? I don't think so. Is it true that so few writers of color deserve to be featured in this publication? No. Is it true that so few women's voices deserve to be heard and deserve to be read in this publication? I don't think so...not only do I believe that we can be better, I believe that we together, we just are better... Let's just be better. (Rapinoe, "2019 Sportsperson", 05:55 – 08:06)

As she calls out the magazine for perpetuating discrimination, she maintains composure, but does not back down on her message that she is angry that this magazine participates in sexism and racism and that she wants resolution to this problem. Even in this instance of receiving accolades for her achievements, she remains poised, angry, and focused on her purpose. She resists social norms that call for suppression of anger expression by refusing to only say "thank you," instead she uses assertive expression of anger while maintaining composure.

Rapinoe also exemplifies composure in how she talks about her anger in an interview with Anderson Cooper. After establishing Rapinoe's public conflict with Trump, his policies, and his messages, Cooper asks her what she would like to say to the president. She looks directly into the camera and calmly says:

...your message is excluding people. You're excluding me. You're excluding people that look like me. You're excluding people of color. You're excluding, you know, Americans that maybe support you. I think that we need to have a reckoning with the message that you have and what you're saying about make America great again...It might have been great for a few people and maybe American is great for a few people right now, but it's

not great for enough Americans in this world and I think that we have a responsibility, each and every one of us, you have an incredible responsibility...to take care of every single person and you need to do better for everyone. (Rapinoe, "Interview by Anderson Cooper", 02:42 – 03:29)

Trump has publicly criticized Rapinoe and maintains his general messages of divisiveness that she takes issue with. She maintains poise, repeats what she is angry about, and focuses on what she sees as steps to resolution, rather than backing down from a feud with potentially the most powerful man in the world. She has a bold and outspoken message of anger but conveys it without unleashing furious rage. Instead of saying things in a way that could allow her to be seen as the angry bitch, she uses a bold style that gets her noticed and keeps the content of her message consistent and substantial.

The second component in Rapinoe's style that drives people to pay attention to her is her ability to communicate anger while illustrating conscientiousness. For example, in her *Glamour* "Women of the Year" award speech she was cognizant that her live audience was comprised of athletes and members of the media who have power in wealth, voice, and position in society. She implores this audience to consider injustices that are happening outside of their own ingroup by stating:

I feel like if we really want to have meaningful change, what I think is most inspiring would be if everybody other than Raheem Sterling and [Kalidou] Koulibaly, if they were as outraged about racism as they were...If everybody was as outraged about homophobia as the LGBTQ players...if everybody was as outraged about equal pay or the lack thereof or the lack of investment in the women's game other than just women, that would be the

most inspiring thing to me...We have incredible platforms. I ask everyone here...lend your platform to other people. Lift other people up... (qtd. in Yang, par. 4).

Rapinoe displays her anger at these systems of oppression in a thoughtful manner by analyzing her audience. She knows that these are the people who can make a difference in community behavior, so she calls on them to be the change. This act of diligence makes Rapinoe stand out; it is a bold move for a woman to demand action from her audience rather than extend simple gratitude, especially when they potentially have more societal power than she has. When Rapinoe gets attention like this, what she is saying and the way she says it potentially creates a connection and credibility that is unique. Her conscientiousness enables many (but not all) to move beyond pigeonholing her in the angry bitch stereotype, and instead take note of her actual message about injustices and our collective responsibility to solve those injustices.

An example of Rapinoe displaying conscientiousness when reflecting on her anger is when she repeatedly says in a televised interview with Rachel Maddow that she stands by her message of anger and vigilance. Maddow comments on the effectiveness of how Rapinoe uses her platform to call for change and asks how deliberate she is in this process. Rapinoe responds:

I try to be as educated as I can...I'm quite off the cuff, but I'm also very thoughtful...and take a lot of pride and take very seriously the platform that we have and understanding...where my voice goes when I say things and trying to use those things for good and trying to challenge people and constantly...make people think...(Rapinoe, "Interview by Rachel Maddow", 07:30 – 08:11)

This response speaks to the nature of Rapinoe's repeated diligence in inciting social change.

Admitting that she works hard at educating herself about injustice and what her impact can be

illustrates the care she asserts in advocating for other people. Making a statement about how conscientious she is about understanding the world around her is an outspoken way to talk about herself. This is an unusual move for a woman, but the way that Rapinoe couples this with evidence potentially creates a level of trust with some members of her audience rather than the image of angry bitch.

Rapinoe takes opportunities that are typically reserved for expressions of gratitude, like public acceptance speeches, to express anger at social injustices. It is unusual for women to openly assert anger when normative gender expectations are that we should be eternally grateful, especially in a situation where we are being publicly acknowledged for excellence. Chemaly explains that when a woman expresses anger in "...institutional, political, and professional settings she automatically violates gender norms. She is met with aversion, perceived as more hostile, irritable, less competent, and unlikable – the kiss of death for a class of people expected to maintain social connections" (Chemaly xvii). Women usually think twice about expressing anger in public to avoid these social consequences that we have been conditioned to understand. Rapinoe sets herself apart from other female athletes and other angry women because she expresses and reflects thoughtful and realistic anger while maintaining composure and conscientiousness in public settings unique to female anger.

### **Consistency**

As discussed in Chapter One, Traister argues that women are conditioned to express our anger within a very different set of parameters from those that frame how we later reflect on it. In expression she finds that women use four distinct strategies: divine intervention, humor, vulgar language, and ferocity. Whereas in reflection, she finds three very different strategies:

talking about anger in the past tense, engaging in self-blame, and conflating anger with a “learning experience.” This kind of social conditioning is a no-win situation for women because it affects our credibility. For example, if we use humor to express anger (a method of anger diversion) people might not generally know we are angry. If we were to be asked about this joke later, we might say we were not joking and talk about our anger in the past tense. This creates an inconsistent message. Another scenario might be that we have a moment of angry expression, but when reflecting on it later, we might talk about it as a “learning experience.” Traister illustrates this concept by highlighting a time when Michelle Obama expressed anger in a speech but received so much backlash that she needed to apologize, name what she learned, and guarantee it would not happen again (68). My point in noting the different ways women are conditioned to express versus reflect on our anger is that it affects our credibility. Although there is nearly an unlimited number of methods of anger expression that can be coupled with methods of anger reflection to illuminate this concept, each one carries the same consequences – these constructs make women appear inconsistent, untrustworthy, and erratic. This affects future expressions of anger because it lays the foundation for the stereotype of the crazy angry woman who cannot be trusted.

We can see that Rapinoe is consistent between manners of expression and reflection in how she repeatedly presents herself as accountable, how she is dedicated to self-education by frequently offering examples of current events, and how she uses consistent language in her public addresses. Rapinoe’s use of consistency between the way she expresses anger and reflects on it is groundbreaking because she expands possibilities for women to resist being socially constructed as inconsistent, untrustworthy, and crazy.

### *Accountability*

An example of how Rapinoe demonstrates consistency in how she holds herself accountable to incite change in the world is how she uses her public platforms. In every artifact of expression, she says that she is angry, what she is angry about, and how she envisions change will happen. One example is the very thing that launched her into the spotlight – her 2016 kneeling protest. This act of resistance thrust her into the role of advocate for justice and equality, which was entirely what she intended. To show support for Colin Kaepernick, who kneeled during football games, Rapinoe kneeled during the “Star Spangled Banner” prior to a soccer match. She realized that people were watching and listening to her, but rather than just play soccer she viewed this as an opportunity that she felt compelled to take advantage of. She does this same thing when she is given a platform to speak to any number of people: she takes advantage of the opportunity. Rapinoe is consistent in using the public voice she has, even at times when it may seem socially inappropriate, which shows one of the ways she holds herself accountable for making change.

She remains consistent in her anger reflections by verbalizing her intention of keeping herself accountable and by using every opportunity to bring the conversation back to injustice. She says, “...I feel a responsibility to do this. I’m privileged to be a famous person and to be on this team and to be who I am, and if I just stay silent, it seems awfully selfish” (Rapinoe, “Interview by Rachel Maddow”, 08:24 – 08:35). Rapinoe repeatedly speaks to the personal responsibility she feels in having a voice that countless other people do not have. Maddow indicates throughout the interview that she is a fan of both Rapinoe’s soccer achievements and her social justice crusade, but Rapinoe remains steadfast in focusing on the issues. She ensures

that in all her public reflections she names her fight for justice and her personal responsibility in it. This move exudes consistency and makes her a potentially trustworthy and credible public ally.

### *Self-Education*

A second way that Rapinoe stays consistent with her anger is by displaying self-education, particularly in how she uses current concrete examples of people who are contributing to social change. In her FIFA “Best Female Player of the Year” speech she says:

...Raheem Sterling and [Kalidou] Koulibaly, they’re [sic] incredible performances on the field, but the way that they’ve taken on the disgusting racism that they have to face [not only] this year, but probably for their whole lives. The young Iranian woman who eventually set herself on fire because she wasn’t able to go to the game. The one out MLS player, Mr. [Colin] Martin... (qtd. in Yang, par. 5).

Showing that she is aware of the injustices and movements that happen in real time illustrate her dedication to learning about important issues. She has repeatedly stated that racism, sexism, and homophobia are among the discriminations she advocates against. By pointing out specific instances of current events that feature these injustices in this expression of anger, she provides evidence that backs up the reasons for her anger.

One way that Rapinoe shows she is consistently educating herself on the issues is an interview with CNBC. She is asked about why she thinks many male athletes are not public allies for social justice. As she talks about one of the most famous male soccer players in the world and how she wishes he would speak out about racism and sexism, she says, “If you’re a female athlete, you’re in the fight... Whereas male athletes have a completely different situation

and perspective...Cristiano [Ronaldo] does a lot of charity work, I'll absolutely give him that, but...one tweet, one show of support, can mean so much. It sets the tone for everybody else” (qtd. in Hess, pars. 8-9). Rapinoe places herself in the group of female athletes who fight because they are angry at gender discrimination and racism. She also illustrates knowledge about how change happens. She is aware that oppressed people are not the ones who can effectuate change but that people in positions of power, like Ronaldo, are the ones with voices that can potentially instigate social change. This statement is consistent with the example of expression because it highlights specific reasons that she is angry and a high level of knowledge about how movements of social justice occur.

### ***Language Consistency***

Finally, Rapinoe’s message can be easy to understand because she exudes consistency in the language she uses when speaking in public whether she is expressing or reflecting anger. An example of this is what she says in the victory speech she gave in New York City shortly after her team made history by winning the World Cup. Just as she does with every opportunity that she has, she talks about being angry, why she is angry, and how she envisions change happening, even when she is in the mist of celebrating soccer’s biggest victory. Rapinoe uses phrases like “We have to be better”, “We’ve got to know that this is everybody’s responsibility...”, “This is my charge to everybody...” (Rapinoe, “US Women’s World Cup”, 04:40 – 04:55). These are nearly the same phrases she uses in the *New York Times* interview when she reflects on her anger, “My big...’message’ right now...every person has a responsibility to be a participant in this society and make it a better place for everybody...” (Marchese, par. 3). Rapinoe uses nearly

the same words to convey almost every message which illustrates credibility and consistency without confusion.

Rapinoe represents different ways for women to experience our own anger aside from the constructed conditions we are subjected to. She shows us that we can use assertive expression of anger so that we can work toward a resolution to the issues that cause us to be angry. This differs vastly from the current conditions of anger diversion that render our anger illegitimate and unproductive. Rapinoe repeatedly states her purpose while staying on point no matter what the situation is or how someone tries to divert attention elsewhere. She has a bold style that uniquely couples composure and consistency which gets her noticed so that the substance of her messages can be illuminated in her expression of and reflections on anger. Her refusal to appear inconsistent by expressing anger one way and reflecting on it in another opens up possibilities for women to break down the stereotypical image that society places on us as crazy and not worthy of valuable contributions. Rapinoe also illustrates new ways for women to think about what connecting with other people can look like. In creating relationships, even with people she will never meet, she illustrates coalition building which helps us feel connected across movements for social change. Ultimately, society needs angry women because we are the catalyst for social revolution.

## **Chapter 3: Significant Findings**

### **How the Rhetoric of Representation Influences American Culture**

In Chapter One, I introduced the problem of women's anger being socially conditioned in ways that serve to contain or dismiss it. I outlined Traister's argument about how our anger is managed in how we express and reflect on it and how it is represented by the media. I linked Traister's work to the research done by Chemaly, Orgad and Gill, Leonard et al., and Cox et al. who also offer portals into the social conditioning of women's anger. Each of these researchers assist us in understanding that women are expected to participate in anger management through constructed parameters, but also that women's anger is a necessary component in creating social change. Additionally, I introduced the United States Women's National Soccer Team to show that Megan Rapinoe is a fierce social justice advocate who has a public platform because of her status as a world class soccer player and that she uses that platform as a vehicle to address social injustice. Most importantly, I pose the question: Does Megan Rapinoe's use of anger conform to or resist the normative expectations of how women are taught to express and reflect upon our anger?

In Chapter Two I analyze Rapinoe's expression of and reflection on her anger using the framework of Traister and Cox et al.'s research on women's anger. I make the claims that Rapinoe uses her anger differently because she focuses on her purpose, she remains composed and conscientious, and she creates a connection with her audience by proving herself credible. A main point I discovered in this analysis is that Rapinoe resists the parameters for women's anger that creates a disconnect between how we say we are angry and later talk about it. In Chapter Three, I will begin to explore the significance of my analysis by examining the ways in which

Rapinoe's anger has been represented differently by supportive versus critical media and, finally, I will offer some conclusions as to why Rapinoe's rhetorical use of anger matters to our larger American culture.

### **Artifacts of Representation**

As outlined in the previous chapters, the three components of the societal construction of women's anger are expressions, reflections, and representations. Representations are the ways that angry women are depicted in society; in the case of Rapinoe, these are articles written about her for websites or magazines. It is important to categorize and define the current constructs of representations so that the representations of Rapinoe's anger can be shown to either adhere to them or resist them. I have labeled the artifacts that resist current constructs as supportive and the ones that perpetuate current constructs as critical. As discussed in Chapter One, Traister suggests that representations of women's anger generally fall into five categories:

- maternal protectionism
- diversion (we are *really* angry about something else or not angry, but sad, afraid, etc.)
- personal danger (our anger is harmful to us)
- derogatory name calling
- simple erasure

These ways of representing women's anger serve to perpetuate normative gender expectations because they all work to contain it. As with all representations, we have no control over what is said about us, who experiences the representation, and how the audience acts based on the information they receive. In other words, in the arena of representations, Rapinoe does not have agency as she does in her expression and reflection on anger.

### ***Critical Representations***

The critical artifacts have themes that help us understand how these representations of angry women work. These representations generally dismantle Rapinoe's intended purpose, rhetorical style, and credibility through two main themes: ridicule of her sexuality and ridicule of her character. First, these two themes work as a barrier and detract the audience from her purpose and message, making it much harder for them to understand what she is angry about. Second, rather than seeing her style as making a connection with the audience and increasing her credibility, it becomes something that actually disconnects the audience from her through ridicule. One example of this comes from *townhall.com* author Chris Stigall who begins his article by claiming his dismissal of her is not because of her sexuality:

Let's just tackle the obvious thing off the top, lest the comments section below fill with charges of perceived homophobia. It's 2019, ok? Can we move past talking about gays as though we're discussing Rock Hudson in Hollywood's golden age? We aren't picking up gossip magazines because 'Megan's courting dames not fellas! Extra! Extra!' Sorry, we've moved into a new era of debating reparations for black Americans who are descendants of slaves and researching politicians who are descendants of slave holders which is a level of insanity for which is [sic] there is no gay equivalent. Not to mention no meaningful size of the American population wants to jail you or kill you or shame you for being gay (Stigall, par. 2).

Although Stigall asserts that Rapinoe's sexuality is not the reason he discards her, his mere mention of it has the opposite effect. No matter his intended purpose for bringing up her sexuality, by bringing it up he makes it about that. The focus on her sexuality is a micro-

aggression that is sarcastic and demeaning and not only belittles Rapinoe, but also Rock Hudson, gossip magazines, black Americans, and gays. From this example, we can also see how one negative stereotype feeds a chain of negative stereotypes, which again detracts from Rapinoe's message about social justice.

What happens when a representation takes on this demeaning tone and places the focus on Rapinoe's sexuality is that it perpetuates stereotypes about gay people. It invites the audience to form an image of an LGBTQ person in their mind and for some people this will be enough to disapprove of or to abnormalize the person and ignore the message. This tone gives the audience permission to think in this demeaning manner and to use it as they see fit. Placing the focus immediately on Rapinoe's sexuality diverts attention away from her message and feeds into existing stereotypes. Such diversion of the audience's attention is an effective way to ensure that Rapinoe's anger is not taken seriously nor are the injustices she is angry about. The novelty of Rapinoe's consistent message in both her expressions and reflections on anger as discussed in Chapter Two gets diminished.

The second broad theme in these artifacts is that each one engages in calling Rapinoe derogatory names and generally disrespecting her. An example of this comes from an article by Kyle Smith for *The New York Post* in which he describes Rapinoe as, "Arrogant, abrasive, sanctimonious, whiny, humorless, unpatriotic, self-important and immensely boring" while also disparaging her as "America's anti-sweetheart" (Smith, par. 1). By defining her in this manner, he eradicates her humanity by framing her as a second-class citizen who is undeserving of respect and maintains the stereotype of women as less-than. Representing Rapinoe in this way perpetuates the idea of women as nothing more than caricatures who are unworthy of certain

feelings and need to be managed. This dehumanizing treatment of women can lead to women being insecure, to devaluing our impact on society, and to the normalization of violence against us.

In discussing Rapinoe's kneeling protest, Smith asserts that it "...means nothing more than, 'I am an angry leftist in need of attention.'" When he brings up her equal pay fight, he asserts that female athletes and female sports are "minor league" that deserve less than men. He also calls her crazy by saying she is fighting for "imaginary pay disparities" and that "...her grievances are all in her head...She's a fake victim" (Smith, pars. 7-10). This representation is essentially depicting Rapinoe as crazy and in doing so perpetuates the stereotype of the crazy and inconsistent woman which works against the ways she uses anger to deconstruct these stereotypes.

The audience already has an image of Rapinoe, the lesbian, in their mind because of the first couple of paragraphs when they read about the stereotypical crazy woman that this representation depicts. By placing Rapinoe in yet another stereotypical box, other typecasts of women can materialize in the reader's mind and are easier to maintain. In addition to gender discrimination, the audience could assume the stance of homophobia, age discrimination, racism, or any other stereotype. The ripple effect of discrimination and marginalization happens when people *only* see others through the lens of the stereotype. The groups who are marginalized become the caricature who is less than human, and this often begins with just one stereotype being perpetuated, like the conditioning of women's anger.

The critical representations do several things: reinforce dominant norms, dehumanize women, and perpetuate stereotypes. I have shown how Rapinoe reimagines the parameters of the

social conditioning of women's anger by how she remains consistent in her expressions and reflections on anger, displays credibility through establishing a connection, and stays focused on her purpose. Each of the critical representations complicate these efforts because the ways Rapinoe is represented is entirely in the hands of the representations. Rapinoe can repeatedly talk about the same issues and present herself in the same manner, but she cannot control the representations of her words. This extends beyond just Rapinoe and anger; this often happens to women who attempt to expand boundaries of social conditioning. Even though we may have the intention of presenting ourselves as resisting norms, the ways that we are re-presented will sometimes still align within the power structure.

The second thing the critical representations do is dehumanize Rapinoe by discounting her anger. They shift the focus from her anger, her intention to remain on point, and her credibility and place it on her sexuality and on her as a person. Anger is a core human emotion and erasing it or containing it attempts to remove it from existence. In other words, when a representation removes our anger, it simultaneously dehumanizes us which diminishes our contributions to society, normalizes violence against us, and stifles our self-confidence. To contain or deny women our anger has dehumanizing effects.

Ultimately, when women's anger is contained in these inhumane manners, the constructs of racism, homophobia, sexism, and other stereotypes are all easier to maintain. Each of the critical artifacts exploit Rapinoe's use of anger and simultaneously creates a link for maintaining stereotypes of her as a female athlete, a lesbian, an advocate, and a white woman. Those who perpetuate social norms have power, so representing women who challenge the status quo in a

negative light can lead to the audience believing other things about these women without even thinking about it.

An audience for critical media is more often than not exposed to Rapinoe as the crazy woman, the angry bitch, or the ungrateful lesbian which allows for stereotypes and injustices to persist. But it is possible that an audience member catches a glimpse of a different representation of Rapinoe or overhears a conversation in which someone sees her differently and questions the critical representation. This could spark a chain of events that lead one person to think or act differently. The hope for change lies with the audience.

### ***Supportive Representations***

There are three themes that emerge that support Rapinoe's consistency, credibility, and focus. The supportive representations do this by portraying her as logical, inspirational, and revolutionary, thus challenging dominant norms and empowering women as agents of change. An example of Rapinoe being represented as logical comes in an article in *USA Today*. The article acknowledges Rapinoe's public dispute with Trump as well as her success in the world of soccer and her engagement in advocating for marginalized groups:

Rapinoe is smart, thoughtful and principled, and she made the decision to kneel for the anthem in support of Colin Kaepernick because she was bothered by the very real problem of biased policing that has cost the lives of far too many people of color. When U.S. Soccer changed its rules to require athletes to stand... Rapinoe said she would no longer sing or place her hand on her heart...Rapinoe is well aware her acts of protest can be a flashpoint, and she doesn't much care. That's the point (Armour, par. 13).

The language in this article represents Rapinoe as an angry, but well-informed and intentionally who logically understands the problems our society faces as well as what it will take to create change. The author acknowledges that Rapinoe understands the consequences she may personally face, but also that change is nearly impossible without someone experiencing consequences. This artifact also recognizes that Rapinoe faces barriers in her acts of resistance, such as the federation requiring her to stand during the anthem, but that she persists by finding another way to protest. The examples and tone of this article are supportive of Rapinoe's anger, her consistency, and her logical reasoning.

This representation contradicts the social norm of women's anger being exemplified as inconsistent and illogical. We can see from previous research on women's anger that it is typically represented in ways that work to contain it, which perpetuates the typified gender norms. However, by portraying Rapinoe's anger as an agent for change and positivity, this artifact invites people to think differently about women's anger and about us in general (we are humans who have something to offer society as change-agents). By representing women's anger as productive and logical, a door begins to open that allows the restricting stereotypes to be reimagined.

An example of Rapinoe being represented as inspirational comes from an article in the *LA Times* by Kevin Baxter. Baxter notes Rapinoe's advocacy in the areas of gay rights, equal pay, and female athlete equality. After setting the scene of the crowd chanting "equal pay" rather than "USA" after the USWNT won their second straight World Cup title, he says:

If Rapinoe didn't start the movement, she's certainly leading it. She was part of a federal lawsuit charging the U.S. Soccer Federation with gender-based discrimination. Not only

has the rest of the world been watching, but now it's participating...Rapinoe arguably has become the most impassioned and forceful advocate... (par. 6-12).

This representation of Rapinoe illustrates how she drives other people into action by pointing out how she inspired crowds of soccer fans to reimagine the legacy of the "USA chant." This is about more than the chant, however, this massive crowd boldly supporting equality, shows that progress *is* possible. This author is portraying Rapinoe as inspirational which is a departure from what is expected in a representation of a woman who displays anger. Inspiration in American culture typically does not come from women and certainly not from angry women. What this representation is doing by displaying Rapinoe as motivating is highlighting the possibility of the redistribution of power in American culture.

Power and privilege in society lies in societal constructs, who controls them, and who benefits from them. To be represented as inspirational is to have a degree of power in society. Furthermore, those who are inspirations become role models - one person shares it with another and another and so on. To represent Rapinoe's anger as inspirational (rather than "a problem") is a shift in power. When the power begins to shift, even ever so slightly, the entire structure can potentially be reimaged. It takes representations like this to start the chain of redefining who is inspirational and who holds power.

The final example of supportive representation portrays Rapinoe as revolutionary and is featured in an article in *The Guardian*. The article represents Rapinoe as a pioneer in the way she celebrates victory and the way she complicates social norms by saying:

She is unapologetically gay, unapologetically political, and above all, unapologetically proud of herself and her teammates. Her habit of celebrating a goal with her chest out,

arms thrown to the side to milk the crowd, is a standard piece of burlesque in men's football. When undertaken by Rapinoe, though, it made headlines. At last month's victory parade, she kissed the trophy and yelled: 'I deserve this!' and for a moment, conventions governing women's conduct in public seemed thrillingly, shockingly to change (Brockes, par. 3).

This author illustrates Rapinoe as a revolutionary force for potential change who is to be celebrated for her public display of self-confidence and self-worth. As Brockes notes, men have the freedom of demonstrating confidence, even when turned into cockiness, but women are expected to be demure and grateful. This artifact challenges the normative gender expectations that women behave modestly and instead celebrates her public display of confidence.

Social norms that tell us how to behave come from a multitude of places, but one of the primary sources and reinforcers of these norms is media. When the media represents someone in a way that differs from what the current societal constructs tells us about that person, the possibility of changes in social behavior occurs. Leonard et al. describe this phenomenon as "descriptive norms create injunctive norms" (108). This is a reversal of common thinking, instead of power working unidirectionally in the arena of normative expectations (social norms dictate behavior), Leonard et al., flip the script to argue that the challenge of normative expectations (injunctive norms) also has the power to influence and shape human behavior and create new norms. We can think about the social justice movements of women's suffrage, police brutality, anti-lynching, and abortion rights: somebody had to do something differently and get noticed for it for the re-creation of social norms to eventually occur. This phenomenon can be

applied to Rapinoe being represented as a “revolutionary” because she is behaving in ways that challenge the norms for women and anger, thus the normative boundaries can begin to expand.

Even though the inability to control representations of our anger remains, they still matter because they do something for social norms. Representations either help to perpetuate or reimagine norms and it is nearly impossible to gauge when either of these things might affect society. We can see how social norms might expand in how the supportive representations reimagine the portrayal of women and the how the critical ones perpetuate the current norms of portrayal. The supportive representations work to potentially redefine women as logical, inspirational, and revolutionary while the critical ones work to contain what women are currently meant to be.

### **Why Rapinoe, Representations, and Rhetoric Matter to American Culture**

This thesis confirms previous research about how the ways women’s expression and reflection on anger is represented by the media. The basic message: women’s anger is unacceptable. We learn how to act based on this message and when we see someone doing something different, we notice. I noticed Rapinoe, not because I am a sports fan or even necessarily an advocate for resistance, but because she is doing something different. She states her anger while remaining on point, she remains composed and conscientious, and she creates a connection through credibility. I had not heard a woman be so bold and outspoken, yet so enlightening and well-spoken. Once I noticed her, I noticed that she may be giving women a new way to think about the parameters of socially constructed anger. More importantly, once I completed this analysis, I discovered that because of what she is getting noticed for, the

possibilities for the deconstruction of other stereotypes exists, the redistribution of power exists, and the possibility of positive social change exists.

If Rapinoe can be a model for how to change the gendered norms about women and anger, it is possible that she is also setting the bar for how to break out of additional parameters. Women face many oppressive norms such as being held responsible for household tasks and child rearing, being limited in the jobs we hold, in being told what our surname should be in the event we marry, in being called othering terms like “you guys”, in how we are expected to dress, in that women’s sports are “minor league,” that we are less intelligent, competent, or hard-working than a man. To move toward equality, women can look to people like Rapinoe, who shows us how to do anger differently, and apply her moves to our anger or any of the other constructed norms. Women often unconsciously accept less-than treatment because of the norms we are subjected to in natural experiences like our anger, but being able to see that we have options in this one construct, can show us there are possibilities for ways to expand other social constructs too.

Societal power lies within the constructed norms and those who perpetuate them, but when we can see possibilities that expand the social constructs of anger – the power may begin to shift. Women can begin to see possibilities in having control over our own anger which moves toward regaining the power that the stereotype takes from us. It is possible that the deconstruction of this one construct can affect other stereotypical constructs. Women may begin to look at the roles we are conditioned into as caregivers or what careers we are steered into and dare to do something different. This could potentially reimagine power constructs which may lead to a more equal society. Women could have better access to wealth, education, politics, and

resources by resisting the power constructs that are currently in place. The power is in the construct and if we can take control of the construct, we can perhaps redistribute where the power lies.

Examining the social constructs and rhetoric surrounding women and anger matters: it matters because an analysis can illuminate the gender inequality of women's anger management and can give us agency in accepting or rejecting the messages this conditioning sends. It matters because when society frames women as inferior, we lose our humanity and the full potential of the impact we can have on our own lives and how we can impact society. It matters because having agency in the impact we individually have, moves us toward a redistribution of power that can lead to women having access to wealth, education, politics, and resources. It matters because angry women are the backbone of important social change; we are currently on the brink of another revolution, but because our anger is oppressed the process is stagnant or gradual.

Because of this analysis, my rhetorical awareness of these issues is enhanced, and I am able to pass along logical and well-rounded information to others. I can talk to colleagues and friends about Rapinoe, the work she is doing, and how it affects me. I can talk to my family members, who once told me Rapinoe is "obnoxious," about what I found in this research and potentially impact their ways of thinking about her and about women's anger. In doing any of these things, I may impact one person who also passes information on to someone else. Most importantly, I can teach my two young sons about the value of thinking critically. We can discuss being rhetorically aware of the representations they experience throughout their lives and how they impact thinking and behavior. I can model for them how to talk to others about our own values and beliefs with integrity and that when we experience something that is different,

maybe we can educate ourselves on what the difference is and why. Maybe we can look at people who are different from us and think about what their lived experience might be like. Maybe instead of noticing someone doing something different in passing, we can actively seek people out who are purposefully asking for change. Maybe the possibility of supporting people outside of our ingroup rather than degrading them or ignoring them can become reality. Rhetorical awareness is much larger than what it seems on the surface because it opens possibilities. It is not just about this particular topic (women's anger and the ways in which we are confined by gender norms), but it extends to how *all stereotypes* are perpetuated through language. With rhetorical awareness we can be much more conscious in how language is acting upon us and with this awareness we have choices both as listeners/readers and as speakers/writers in whether or not we want to perpetuate negative stereotypes. In other words, with rhetorical awareness we have a much greater agency in rhetorical situations.

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