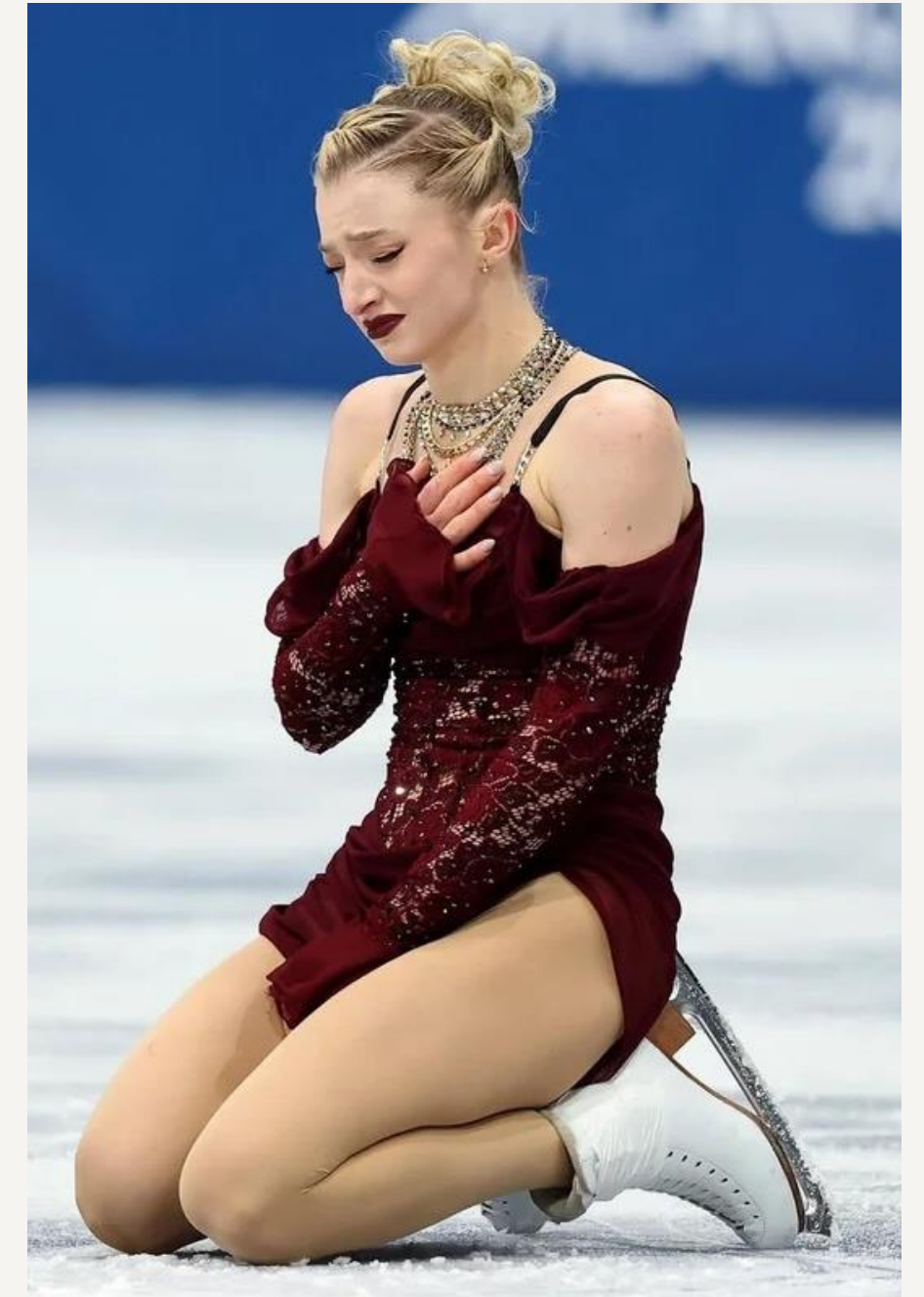

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UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN STATES

Current Event Analysis

*Presentation by
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The Incident: Amber Glenn, 2026 Olympics

Amber Glenn is an openly queer female figure skater, representing the United States in the 2026 Olympic Games. When asked about Trump's treatment of the LGBTQ+ community during a February 4th press conference, she replied that it had been a “hard time.” She subsequently subjected to online hate and death threats, resulting in her taking a break from social media. After finishing a disappointing 13th place at the Olympics, there was a significant amount of Making America Great Again (MAGA) commentary on how she deserved the placement, calling her criticism of Trump unpatriotic.

Media and Sports: A *Double-Edged Sword*

Mainstream media controls the narrative of sport and the athlete, and media depends on profit. Thus, media creates storylines to entice viewership within its respective audiences.

Athletes have become much more visible in the modern era of digital and social media. Both their behavior within the sport context and in their personal lives has become available for the general public to consume and scrutinize. It has also amplified voices in marginalized communities that were previously left out of public commentary.

01 *Amber Glenn as the Trailblazer*

The media storylines during the Olympic Games typically center on the “extraordinary.” Because Olympians by nature are all extraordinary, the media searches for other features to set athletes apart to create a storyline. Amber Glenn being a queer athlete who is a vocal LGBTQ+ advocate gave her the label as a “trailblazer” in a typically tight-lipped sport.

02 *Amber Glenn as the Villain*

In the current social and political climate, news media has become more openly biased to entice and ever-divided audience, feeding off hot-button issues such the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Amber Glenn’s story as an outspoken queer athlete was an opportunity to criticize athletes for not “sticking to the field” as justified by the consequences of her disappointing performance.

Age: The Maturation of Figure Skating

With the age of eligibility in the Senior ranks increasing to 17 years old in the 2024-2025 season, figure skating is becoming a more “adult” sport. And, adults have opinions. The fans have had to adjust from expecting the compliance of minors to outspoken adults.

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01 2022 Olympics Incident

During the 2022 Olympics, 15 year old Kamila Valieva received a positive doping test result from an earlier test. This created a conversation about whether a 15 year old could be held responsible for their training environment.

02 History

Figure skating has historically been a “young” sport due to the wear and tear on the body causing retirement when skaters reach their early 20s. A prevailing myth was that the body need to be small and lean to accomplish triple and quadruple jumps.

03 Current State

The increase in Senior age eligibility, progress in sport science, and better access to mental health services have contributed to more figure skating having a longer careers.

04 The Consequences

When a majority of the top figure skaters were under the age of 20, the expectation was that they would not be asked about controversial topics. Now, with more skaters in their mid-20s, the media is more free to provoke sensational answers.

Race: A History of Exclusion



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History

Minority groups such as Blacks, Jews and many others were historically excluded from the earliest ice skating clubs on the East Coast in the 1800s. The last time a Black skater qualified for the U.S. Olympic figure skating team was 2006.

Current State: Tokenizing Diversity

While figure skating has become more diverse in the last 200 years, it is still an overwhelmingly White sport. Diverse skaters who make it to the top tiers of the sport in U.S. are spotlighted to with both the positive intention of visibility but also as a tool to rehabilitate its exclusionary history.

As a skater with a diversity characteristic (queerness) Amber Glenn has been showcased in media campaigns. However, as a White woman, her voice is still privileged in both the skating and public contexts.

Gender & Sexuality

Figure skating is a highly gendered sport.

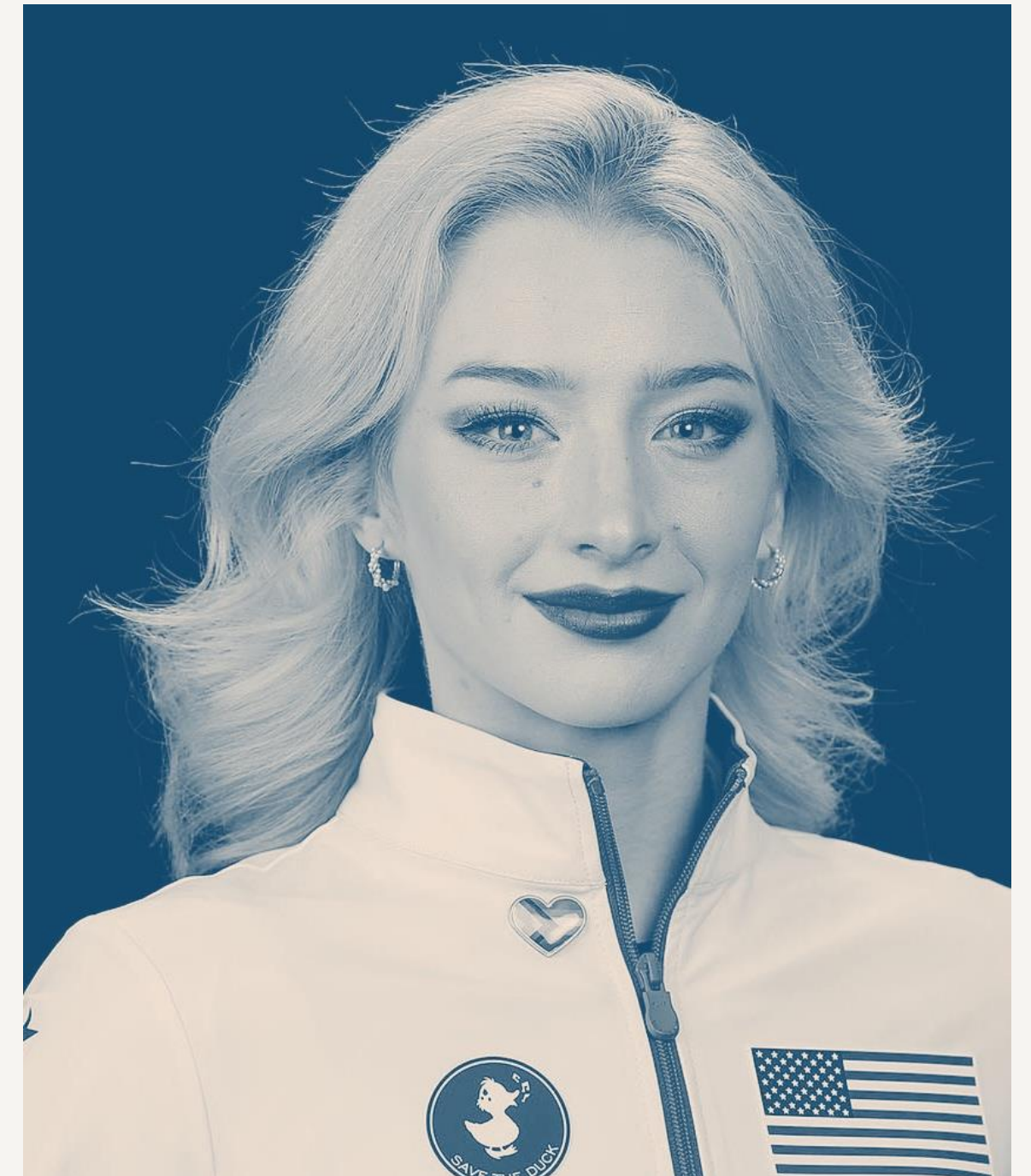
- Pair and Dance partnerships have specified “Man” and “Woman” roles within the rules.
- Women were not officially allowed to wear pants in competition until 2004.

Figure skating demonstrates the heterosexual ideal.

- Partnerships are required to be male/female and frequently demonstrate heteronormative tropes.
- The ideal female figure skater demonstrates her strength only quietly, with emphasis on beauty and grace.

Amber Glenn being a bisexual and pansexual woman threatens the traditional heterosexual, gendered ideal. While many fans have been supportive of her coming out. There have been some to question her character as a result of her sexuality. Glenn's existence questions the validity of gender and sexual norms within the sport.

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Politics and Sport

When asked about receiving pushback from speaking on political issues, Glenn responded that politics affects everyone. Her public political statements reject the notion that athletes should be a-political in their public persona. This also conflicts with the notion that athletes are the physical representations of their country. They are expected to be the embodiment of a nation.

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01 *“Stick to sports”*

Athletes in the modern era are highly visible public figures. Many believe that they should not comment on political or social issues because their “job” is to do excel in their sport. Because athletes are models of human excellence, speaking publicly on controversial issues can threaten the monolithic identity as “athlete.”

02 *International Olympic Committee Rule 50*

Rule 50 states that athletes are not permitted to demonstrate or wear any kind of political religious or racial propaganda on the fields of play, during ceremonies, or in the Olympic village or venues. The intent is to preserve Olympic political “neutrality.” This has led to questions about who’s values are being protected by the so-called neutrality.

03 *Ethical Conundrum*

Athletes are often put on pedestals as role models and can have a great influence on pop culture and young athletes who idolize them. Therefore, they have often been held to higher moral standards than the average person. However, athletes are also humans who have opinions and make mistakes. Like Amber Glenn, many of them use their notoriety to highlight issues that are important to them.

Social Media & Violence



The rise of social media has given athletes a platform for visibility and personal expression. Athletes use their social media to share their personal lives, achievements, and share information, resources, or opinions on issues important to them. This has become known as personal “branding.”

The downside is that social media creates both a digital and physical wall between perpetrators of verbal violence and threats of physical violence. Without the threat of physical retaliation (or many times, any consequences at all) people have become emboldened to harass athletes via their social media profiles.

Conclusion



Increasing media coverage of “diverse” athletes has both increased their visibility but also opened them up to criticism. As a queer, adult female figure skater, Amber Glenn’s presence creates tension in the immature, heteronormative ideal of figure skating’s past.

Her political comments and subsequent disappointing performance created an opportunity for critics and fans to comment on the place of athletes within the political sphere and the consequences of breaking from the “field of play.”

While cyberbullying has been a topic of conversation with the rise of social media, athletes with a large following who break the athletic stereotype are especially vulnerable to online aggression.

Questions



Do athletes have the right to use their public platform to speak on social issues? Does their public platform include their social media?

Does the media have a responsibility to protect out-spoken athletes?

Does Olympic neutrality protect the athlete or the political misdeeds of the countries in power?

Does having public notoriety mean athletes should get held to a higher ethical and moral standard?

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