

MEDIA COVERAGE OF FEMALE ATHLETES: UNDER REPRESENTATION AND INADEQUACY

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Abstract

It was found via a content study of Sports Illustrated covers that female athletes are underrepresented in print media. Female athletes also experience poor portrayal due to the sexualized way in which they are depicted. Women in sports have inadequate media coverage, which includes stereotyped portrayals in print journalism as well as their absence from prominent sports journals.

Introduction

The beliefs of their audiences may be shaped by media professionals. Journalists influence how their audience thinks by deciding how viewers see certain topics, events, and notable people. Professionals may manipulate ideas via framing such that the general public perceives one topic as being more significant or acceptable than another (Palmeri 2001).

Print media is one area of journalism where media framing is a significant activity. Female athletes are not adequately portrayed in print media. In addition, women are often shown in sports publications in inactive or socially acceptable roles (Knight &Giuliano2001).

Despite the opportunity and visibility of female athletes being on the rise in today's Mass media has not yet kept up with changes in society. There has been a 30-year trend toward young women and girls are playing sports at an increasing rate. This is not the case. journalistically accurate representation due to the emergence of women in mainstream sports One would anticipate that because they have been making headlines in the media more often over the last ten years, they would. Women suffer from being compelled into socially accepted customs since the media chooses to portray female athletes differently than their male counterparts.

Theories

Media Framing - The idea of media framing illustrates a reporter's and editor's decision as to which elements of a news item are stressed the most and which personal traits are highlighted. It shouldn't be viewed as a way for journalists and editors to be arbitrary in their rather of disseminating news, they use it to highlight some details over others that they believe are important. you either think are more significant to the target audience or more attractive (Palmeri 2001).

A journalist who frames a topic or person does so by casting that topic or person in a certain light and structuring the presentation so the reader understands it as the practitioner intends. Some believe that the results of framing amount to journalists distorting listeners' perceptions. Framing produces a doctored image of a problem, but journalists are educated to develop ideas in a way that would hopefully have a good impact. Although this is not always the case, media professionals strive to achieve it (Palmeri 2001). Framing is used to explain

why there are so few images of women in the media since journalists often focus on masculinity rather than femininity while covering sports.

Critical Studies - Another relevant theory for the topic at hand is critical studies.

Critical theories focused on communication are interested in how media and messaging relate to societal power structures. Examining the concept of male hegemony, or the process by which men dominate society, is important in relation to how women are portrayed in the media. The dominance of men in the realm of sport is one example of how prevailing ideas are often reflected in the media. Other concepts are only taken into account in that context, which marginalises them. These concepts are a manifestation of the critical theory's feminine studies subfield, which holds that societal structure reflects male hegemonic attitudes (Littlejohn 1999).

Literature Review

Opinions are readily influenced since the media is the public's main source of news.

Therefore, society's perception of female athletes is reflected in how the media depicts them. According to the findings of one research, print sports journalism has been reluctant to adapt to societal changes (Salwen & Wood 1994). Women's sports have become more popular and are being played, among other societal developments.

Much has changed in the realm of female sports since the passage of Title IX in 1972, which "requires all federally financed programmes, including athletics, to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for participation for men and women" (Knight & Giuliano 2001). One would anticipate that increasing engagement would result in more media coverage, yet women are not nearly as equitably represented in the media as their male counterparts. Despite historically high levels of female involvement in professional, Olympic, college, and high school sports, female athletes are still underrepresented in the media (Knight & Giuliano 2001). Female athletic events and female athletes are glaringly underreported and thus underrepresented across all mainstream media, according to Mary Jo Kane's essay "The Post Title IX Female Athlete in the Media: Things Are Changing, But How Much?" (Kane 1989). This conveys the misleading notion that women are disproportionately missing from the athletic scene (Kane 1989).

Female athletes are portrayed in a very different way than male athletes in terms of quality.

The article by Kane quotes Dorothy Harris, a sports researcher, as saying that "today's lady athlete has become so popular, she has suddenly become seductive."

This idea of the female athlete helps to "solid up and reassure" media professionals and the general public that female sports has shed the negative stereotypes of the past (Kane 1989). However, the concept of a "sexy" female athlete is formed since it is more common to see a female athlete in a sexualized stance on the cover of a sports magazine than in actual competition. Traditional stereotyped ideas of women emphasise femininity above strength and athleticism. According to Kane, stereotypical presentation eventually works to minimise or diminish the gravity and significance of women's sports (1989). Female athletes are portrayed as being extremely feminine as opposed to being heroic or physically strong, which contrasts with how males are portrayed as being tough.

Many magazine editors would publish magazines with images of women participating in conventional non-contact sports like golf, tennis, and ice skating out of concern of portraying women in a macho manner (Salwen & Wood 1994). Similar to what Knight and Giuliano found in their study "Being an athlete fits with the stereotypical male role, hence males are often presented as athletes in the media. Being an athlete for women goes against the stereotype of what a woman should be, thus media attention is focused on other parts of their "femaleness." " (Knight & Giuliano 2001, 219). Western society's social structures are a reflection of the idea that a woman's physical attractiveness matters to male viewers. Men like to see a woman who is more femininely inclined, more attractive, and not presented as being in charge (Media Report to Women 2002). Since most sports periodicals cater to males, media professionals must provide what their readership wants.

This study incorporates feminist studies and other cultural studies concepts. This idea claims that male predominance is reflected in societal structure. When connected to the ideas mentioned, it is claimed that the media serves as a mirror of society's mostly masculine influence (Littlejohn 1999). Publications in the media reflect cultural values. Therefore the domination of males in sports is shown to the public via the media. Despite a rise in the number of female athletes, men still control the majority of sports.

Media professionals assert that they are merely giving the people what they want (Knight & Giuliano 2001). The media will present a female athlete who is less covered and poses like a model rather than a sports figure if men would want to see that. This gives the impression that women's sports are less significant than "genuine" men's sports. The Tennis and golf are safe, socially "accepted" activities, and the majority of sports fans who read sports periodicals do not have an issue with female players engaging in these games.

more likely to be reported and discussed in front of the mostly male audience (Kane 1989). Despite the intention of giving the audience what it wants, this "symbolic annihilation," as Knight and Giuliano call it, incorrectly suggests that women's sports are less important and deserving of attention than men's sports (2001). The public is persuaded to assume that women do not merit the same amount of publicity as their male counterparts because of the way media professionals construct the depiction of females.

In a sense, it's plausible that the media is unaware of the harm it does. Knight and Giovanni recommend "The impact of the media's trivialising and marginalising coverage must be considered by them. Hopefully, sport will be seen as a completely appropriate and advantageous pastime for women with the media's rigorous devotion " (2001). In contrast to the social advancement that female athletes have achieved over the last 30 years, if female athletes are still demoralised in the media, there will be a regression rather than an advancement. When female athletes are depicted in the media in a sexualized way rather than an athletic one, the increase in female involvement since the passage of Title DC is not appropriately represented.

This inaccurate image has an impact on society as a whole as well as the media. Long ago, Women who compete in sports have been looking for societal acceptability. Studies involving the coverage and portrayal of female athletes reveal that the media have not improved the image and accompanying public acceptability of female athletes, according to

an article included in the Media Report to Women (2002). There has been a stigma against women athletes ever since they started competing hundreds of years ago. The "image issue" refers to this stigma (Knight & Giuliano 2003).

According to this perception, all female athletes are lesbians. The outcome is "The sports media often uses a in which they heterosexualize female athletes in a feminine manner " (Knight & Giuliano2003). Because of this, feminine traits are exaggerated by editors and writers, which is evident in how women are depicted in sports magazines. In these magazines, women are shown as having emphasised physical beauty.

For instance, despite the fact that figure skater Katrina Witt, beach volleyball player Gabrielle Reese, and Jan Stephenson, a golfer despite the fact that they are very accomplished athletes, the media often focuses on their appearance. For male athletes, this issue is significantly less prevalent (Knight & Giuliano).2001). The media focuses mostly on appearance, but it also emphasises conventional gender norms. Because media specialists think consumers instinctively dread the thought of powerful, It is usual for heterosexual traits to be emphasised above athletic abilities among sporty women. For instance, a female athlete's marriage or other male connection is highlighted more than her achievements in sports (Kane 1989).

These theories have been supported by studies. One research shows how beautiful female athletes are portrayed in the media in Knight and Giuliano's essay, "He's a Laker; She's a Looker: The Consequences of Gender-Stereotypical Portrayals of Male and Female Athletes." Knight and Giuliano showed survey respondents a picture of a physically appealing female athlete along with a description of her achievements. They were also shown a second picture of a less beautiful but equally accomplished female athlete. The same two sorts of photos of male athletes were also shown to the pupils. Based on the athlete's appearance, they were asked to rate him or her on a variety of qualities (Knight & Giuliano 2001).

The findings agreed with the authors' theories. The female athlete who was portrayed in terms of both her athletic ability and her looks was seen to be more appealing than the other. The impression of attractiveness among the male athletes was unaltered. Additionally, players whose media attention was drawn to their appearance were seen as being less courageous, skilled, and aggressive (Knight & Giuliano 2001).

Not only are specific images made fun of, but also important sports publications.

Sports Illustrated has long been a leader in sports journalism, and its coverage of female athletes

is criticised (Salwen& Wood 1994).

More publicity has been given to female athletes, claims Janet S. Fink's essay "Female Athletes and the Media," provided to women in the post-Title IX period, however as was previously said, this coverage has only been in "sex acceptable" sports (1998). If a female athlete isn't shown playing tennis or golf, she's often shown in a sexualized stance or, more frequently, not at all on the cover of the magazine.

The idea that there is a serious problem with the underrepresentation of women on Sports Illustrated magazine covers has been supported by a number of studies. L.N. Reid and L.C.

Soley performed one of the earliest investigations mentioned in 1979. They looked at Sports Illustrated covers from 1956 to 1976. They discovered that just 3.2 percent to 6.8 percent of the covers featured women throughout this time (Reid & Soley 1979). After four years, M. A comparable poll was undertaken by Boutillier and L. SanGiovanni. Less than 5% of sports coverage from Sports Illustrated covers between 1954 and 1978 was devoted to women (Boutillier & SanGiovanni 1983).

Additionally in 1983, Boutillier and SanGiovanni reviewed the "Silver Anniversary Issue" of Sporting Illustrated from 1979, which included images documenting significant sports occurrences from the previous 25 years. In comparison to their male counterparts, female athletes were portrayed in passive or non-athletic stances 60% of the time, whereas this was only the case 44% of the time (Kane 1989). Women had inadequate coverage, both in terms of quantity and quality. Despite their achievements in athletics, women were still presented in a stereotyped way. More recently, a research conducted in 1994 by L.T. Ryan discovered that out of 52 concerns, Fewer than six had a woman on the cover (Fink 1998). After two years, this number dropped to The covers of 53 editions featured four ladies (Knight & Giuliano 2001).

Despite cultural improvements, including more chances and involvement for female athletes, there is still a shortage of both number and quality in coverage and representation. Since the pre-Title IX period, there has been a minor rise in the number of female athletes on Sports Illustrated covers. is still a serious problem.

Methodology

From January 2000 to November 2005, 281 issues of Sports Illustrated's covers were reviewed. Popular sports magazine Sports Illustrated is well-known for its stature and credibility. Over the course of the five years, there were 299 covers in all, but only 18 of them had sportsmen. Fans or creative photographs were featured on these covers. The sample consisted of every issue's cover that could be located on Sports Illustrated Online.

Despite the fact that a similar research has been conducted in the past, none quite like this one.

finished during the last 10 years. One would anticipate that women would get more media attention given how rapidly they have entered the mainstream sports scene during the last ten years. This assumption was not supported by the study's findings.

Several different frameworks were used to investigate these covers. The first was whether the person on the cover was an athlete or not. The photograph was not a part of the sample if it wasn't of an athlete. The next step was to assign a gender to each picture. Moreover, these pictures

were categorised into three groups based on their analysis: action (A), posture (P), or model (M). Should the athlete was shown in a picture as active and was given the term action. Posing was defined as athletes posing while wearing their uniforms or any other sporting attire. Last but not least, if the athlete was modelling, it indicated that they were made to seem physically appealing by wearing anything other than a uniform.

Each issue featuring a female cover was especially mentioned since it was less typical to have a woman on the cover. This indicates that the athlete's identity, sport, and precise appearance

were tracked. Jennie Finch, a softball player, served as the cover model for the journal from July 11, 2005, for instance. Her hair was down and looked to be blowing in the breeze; she was wearing a miniskirt and a tank top. These details were written down because they show how media professionals frame female athletes to make them seem a particular way.

Findings

According to the data, male athletes were featured on the covers of 266 of the 281 issues. The remaining 15 had female actors. From January 2000 to November 2005, a guy was seen on the cover of Sports Illustrated 95 percent of the time. Seventy percent of the men portrayed on the covers were seen engaged in their particular sports. Only 40% of the women were seen in activity. Two of the ladies seen in the action scenes were engaged in socially acceptable sports. The edition from March 4, 2002 has a photograph of Sarah Hughes ice skating. On the cover of the May 26, 2003 edition, Serena Williams is seen playing tennis. A male and female duo well-known for deep-sea diving were photographed for the June 16, 2003, edition.

It is possible to exhibit heterosexuality by having a male companion. Additionally, it was discovered that female athletes were appearing in uniform on a number of covers. The August 30, 2004 issue's cover features the USA softball team, the gold medalists in 2004. The first DallasCowboy cheerleaders from the 1972 season are featured on the Sports Illustrated cover dated July 2, 2001. depicted in their current form. They get their makeup done, and their pom-poms are lifted as they are dressed in cheering costumes.

The October 7, 2002 issue's cover features women from Texas and Stanford University. Male athletes from their schools are there with them. They might be seen challenging the other school while wearing their uniforms. The edition from November 24, 2004 also has a section on collegiate sports. Division I basketball previews for men's and women's teams are the cover story for this edition. The female star player at the University of Connecticut is shown with the male star player. They both have a basketball in their hands while wearing their respective outfits.

Only six of the 15 editions that featured female athletes had these ladies really competing. Megan Quann, a female swimmer who competed in the Sydney Summer Olympics in 2000, and track and field star Marion Jones were featured on Sports Illustrated's back-to-back covers. The ladies were engaged in their various sports on each cover. On the cover of the September 22, 2003 edition featured Mia Hamm, one of the most well-known female athletes in the world. She was seen exercising while wearing her team USA outfit. The remaining highlighted ladies who aren't seen in an active setting are the last group. The cover of the edition from June 5, 2000 features Anna Kournikova. She is a well-known model who is not among the top players in the world of professional tennis.

She is seen embracing a cushion while sporting an off-the-shoulder shirt and flowing blonde hair. She is enticing the reader with her gaze. A second "tennis beauty," Maria Sharпова, is shown on the cover of the July 12, 2004, edition of Sports Illustrated. She was shot while wearing her uniform, but because of her strong grin and the tennis ball in her hands, her skirt was forced to rise up high on her upper thigh. Danica Patrick is featured on the cover of the issue from June 6, 2005. She is a champion NASCAR driver and currently the most well-

known female competitor in her sport. She is seen wearing her driving outfit, but her hair is loose and she is holding her helmet by her side. She has clearly been prepared for the photo. Jennie Finch, a softball star, is featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated for July 11, 2005. She is seen deliberately tugging down her denim miniskirt belt loop with her thumb to reveal her waist underneath a red tank top. Her hair hangs down, creating the appearance that it is being blown in the wind, and she leans forward so that the outline of her body is obvious.

Discussion

The content analysis's findings corroborate the idea that female athletes are underrepresented in print media and that, when they are, they are more often portrayed in passive or socially acceptable contexts. Only 5% of Sports Illustrated covers since 2000 have had a woman. Only 40% of the highlighted ladies were seen in activity.

The findings of this research support the media framing hypothesis. It has been shown that publications featuring male cover models rather than female ones are more attractive to the media's target audience. Media professionals opt to highlight the significance of men's sports over those of women's by producing publications with far more male than female faces on the covers, which matches the framing notion. The public receives a distorted perspective of the world of athletics via journalists and editors. They give the viewer the impression that more people are interested in learning about male sports than female sports. Readers are led to assume that fewer women participate in sports since 95 percent of the publications under study feature a male athlete on the cover. This is in opposition to the fact that more young girls and women are participating in sports.

There is a slight constraint to this study since there was only one sports newspaper examined. But since Sports Illustrated is the most well-known sports publication on the market, it is a good example of how the media presents ideas to the general audience.

Conclusion

Despite significant cultural changes, including the passage of Title IX which resulted in a rise in the number of women's sport options and participation nationally, female athletes have consistently gotten less coverage than male athletes. Print journalism has lagged in both the amount and quality of female representation in the media and has been sluggish to adjust to the increasing number of female athletes.

As a result of media framing, journalists now choose what the general public may learn from certain media channels. Reporters and editors substantially influence readers' opinions since they decide what and how athletes are portrayed on magazine covers. For women's sports to go further, a closer examination of the inaccurate representation of female athletes on magazine covers is required.

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