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Content Analysis of *Sports Illustrated* Articles Depicting Women's and Men's College  
Basketball

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Art in Sociology

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by

Kalah Wilson

May 2012

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Dr. Martha Copp, chair

Dr. Leslie McCallister

Dr. Joseph Baker

Keywords: gender, hegemonic masculinity, sport, content analysis, inequalities

## ABSTRACT

Content Analysis of *Sports Illustrated* Articles Depicting Women's and Men's College

Basketball

by

Kalah Wilson

Despite an increase in women's participation in basketball, equal representation and portrayal of female athletes in comprehensive media coverage remains in question. This study examines the portrayal of femininity and masculinity in sports magazine articles and explores how they may reinforce hegemonic masculinity. A content analysis of *Sports Illustrated* articles for a full season was performed. Three themes support theories of hegemonic masculinity: comparison to male greats, mentioning male family members, and presence of default assumptions.

Additionally, two themes emerged involving the tendency for sports authors to depict athletes in accordance with gender inequality. Overall, the *Sports Illustrated* articles analyzed provide support for literature about bias in media depictions and representations of female athletes.

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I would like to thank every member of my committee for their dedication to editing my manuscript and passion for making me a better sociologist.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

More than a decade after the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act of 1994, the most recent piece of Title IX legislation, many opportunities for female athletes have emerged in American organized sports. These gains are evident in the sport of basketball. The recent sponsoring of women's leagues by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has provided unprecedented opportunities for female basketball players. From 2008-2009, NCAA basketball competition consisted of 1,054 women's teams and 1,030 men's teams involving 15,381 female athletes and 16,911 male athletes (U.S. Census Bureau 2011).<sup>1</sup> The progressively equal participation among male and female players in collegiate basketball is correlated with an increased participation in high school basketball. The Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) released an examination of NCAA data measuring change in athletic participation from 1991-92 to 2004-05 that suggests a 3.6 percent increase in men's college basketball participation and an 11.1 percent increase in women's college basketball participation. Similarly, the National Federation of State High School Associations reports a 5.8 percent increase in boys' high school basketball participation and a 17.7 percent increase in girls' high school basketball participation from 1991-92 to 2004-05 (Cheslock 2008).

Despite this increase in participation, the presence of equal representation and portrayal of female athletes in media coverage remain elusive. Eastman and Billings' (2000) study of sports reporting found varying degrees of gender bias favoring men's sports in both broadcasting and journalism. A similar pattern emerged in other studies of media outlets, suggesting that

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<sup>1</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011. "Participation in NCAA Sports by Sex: 2008-2009."

media coverage of female athletes is persistently unrepresentative (Hillard 1984; Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993; Billings, Halone, and Denham 2002; Adams and Tuggle 2004). In their analysis of broadcast commentary during the 2000 NCAA Final Four basketball games, Billings et al. (2002) found that male players were consistently described as more athletic while descriptors used for female players were unrelated to athletic performance. In fact, studies found that much of the broadcast commentary about female athletes focused on personality and appearance (Billings et al. 2002; Knight and Giuliano 2002; Adams and Tuggle 2004). These findings warrant the application of the concept of hegemonic masculinity to further examine bias in sports media.

This study examines underlying themes related to hegemonic masculinity and the portrayal of femininity and masculinity present in one of the most authoritative sports media outlets: *Sports Illustrated*. With a total of 3,193,688 paid and verified magazines in circulation, *Sports Illustrated* ranked 14<sup>th</sup> out of the top 100 magazines by the Audit Bureau Circulation<sup>2</sup> in 2010 (Link 2011). The distribution and reach of *Sports Illustrated* extends beyond print to its prominent media channel on television and its websites. *Sports Illustrated* is published by Time Warner, the largest media conglomerate in the world, with a revenue exceeding \$25 billion in 2009 (Free Press 2011). Revealing connections to massive media corporations highlights the concentrated authority over what media consumers hear, read, and watch. This corporate connection to Time Warner affords *Sports Illustrated* the distribution power to reach widespread audiences and contributes to bias in media framing. Research suggests the framework of media outlets has a direct effect on public perception (Entman 1993; Fink and Kensicki 2002). Textual media frames are generated from the presence or absence of specific topics and keywords that

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<sup>2</sup> The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) is an independent organization that provides audits of circulation, demographics, and readership information from the world's top sources in print media.

impact the audience's judgments and beliefs (Entman 1993). In male-centered media outlets these frames often reflect traditional notions of gender and establish male superiority. Thus, media frames can serve to grant dominance to men and help shape the audiences' view of women as subsidiary.

Additionally, media are framed in response to audience composition. According to demographic reports, *Sports Illustrated* readers are predominately male and middle-aged (Puffer 2011). Thus, much of the content is male-centered<sup>3</sup> and conforms to principles of hegemonic masculinity. The term hegemony was traditionally used in reference to social class and power struggles.<sup>4</sup> Although hegemony was not originally termed for gender studies, it applies to male-dominated social institutions such as sports and media (Kian, Vincent, and Mondello 2008).

The sociological concept of hegemonic masculinity originated in an effort to address universal claims about men as a group by elucidating multiple hierarchies in race, class, and gender. Connell (1995) theorizes that hegemonic masculinity, as a pattern of gender practices, confers dominance to men and furthers the subordination of women. Originally applied to research on patriarchal systems and labor politics, hegemonic masculinity has been used to study a range of applied fields in addition to masculinity studies (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Kian et al. (2008) apply hegemonic masculinity to their analysis of media coverage of the 2006 NCAA Division I Women's and Men's basketball tournaments. They found a variety of ways that media participants supported dominant notions of gender rankings. For instance, sports writers frequently mentioned men's teams and coaches even when their article's purpose was to cover women's tournaments. A similar male-centered theme occurred when writers repeatedly

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson (2004:168) explains when media are male-centered our attention is focused "primarily on men and what they do," which contributes to patriarchy.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony to describe the use of ideologies as consent for higher social classes to confer dominance to others (Bates 1975).

compared athletes to male sports icons rather than female sports icons. Kian et al. (2008) also found that parents, especially athletic fathers, were commonly mentioned in articles highlighting star players, as were reports of female players who perfected their skills by competing against male players. An additional hegemonic theme uncovered by their study was the overwhelming prevalence of male-only sports, such as football, even in articles covering basketball tournaments.

Various studies reveal the existence of male-centered sports media. Hillard (1984:251) performed an interpretive analysis of magazine articles about professional tennis players, revealing that both male and female tennis players were depicted in terms of a “debunking motif” that reveals gender segregated character flaws. In other words, athletic imperfections among female players were in line with stereotypical feminine gender roles, while the imperfections associated with male players were in line with stereotypical masculine gender roles. Hillard (1984) addresses the question of whether negative representations of female athletes are more prevalent than negative representations of male athletes. Among the magazines studied, male athletes were allowed more prominent coverage and female athletes were evaluated in terms of traditional standards of feminine beauty associated with a male-identified readership. Hillard’s (1984) findings also support male-centered and male-identified media constructions of reality. His analysis affirms the male-dominated journalism of sports media noting that all of the major championship articles were authored by men, 40 of the 42 editorial pieces on male athletes were authored by men, and over half of the articles on female athletes were written by men.

Word choices in sports media have the power to shape the mental imagery readers form. Hofstadter (2001) speaks to how making presumed generic references using male-identified

terminology or pronouns have negative consequences for how we perceive women's standings. Assigning men to the generic model creates a default assumption by subsequently marking women as an exception or non-standard. Sports casting is a predominately male profession resulting in male-identified commentary passing as standard sports rhetoric. Thus, assigning "male generics" to organized sports creates the default assumption that sports are inherently male.

Hofstadter (2001) explains that the characteristics of the default assumption will affect our perceptions of the subject regardless of the details included. For example, *college basketball* is considered generic terminology for a male-dominated sport while *women's college basketball* is perceived as the substandard. Consequently, writing with male generics reinforces men as the default by governing the foreground of our imagery and relegates women to be deviant exceptions.

Messner, Duncan, and Jensen's (1993) comparative analysis of verbal commentary coverage of the 1989 NCAA basketball tournaments and the 1989 U.S. Open tennis tournament also illuminates the construction of hegemonic hierarchies in sports media. Their findings suggest that television sports commentary infantilizes female athletes and athletes of color, ambivalently frames the athletic achievements of females, and marks female athletes as "other." The authors found that men's games were described as the universal standard, while women's games were constantly "marked" by differing tournament logos and verbal references to "women's" college basketball. In fact, Messner et al. (1993:125) claim that "over the course of the three women's games, there were 28 instances of graphic and 49 cases of verbal gender marking, for a total of 77 instances of gender marking. This meant that gender was being marked an average of 25.7 times per women's game." The authors conclude that often the language used

in sports media infantilize female athletes, downplay their athletic accomplishments, and label female athletes deviant.

Daddario and Wigley (2007) found that even when sports casting appears to present unbiased coverage it marks female athletes using gender stereotypes. In their qualitative analysis of the 2004 Summer Olympics, they reported that commentators focused on female athletes' assumed emotional states and referred to their family's influence and their own familial roles. Media portrayals based on gender stereotypes alter people's perception of an athlete's abilities and achievements. Knight and Giuliano (2002) argue that media outlets can actively shape public opinion of athletes by focusing on attractiveness over athleticism. While male athletes' abilities are also underestimated when attractiveness becomes the main focus, female athletes are portrayed more often as attractive and less often as athletic. Such trivializing media coverage mostly affects public perception of female athletes. This is especially damaging for female athletes because the general public has "weaker schemas" for an ideal female athlete than for an ideal male athlete due to less exposure via mainstream media outlets (Knight and Giuliano 2002:224).

Similarly, racially marked descriptors based on stereotypes appear in sports casting, serving to downplay the achievements of male and female athletes of color. Daddario and Wigley (2007) found that announcers and writers applied cultural stereotypes to Asian Olympic divers based on stature, self-discipline, and speed and referred to them as token representatives of their country. Billings and Eastman (2002) summarize common racial stereotypes used to develop hypotheses in their analysis of prime-time coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics. The authors found that racial descriptors were in line with stereotypes presuming that black athletes are naturally athletic while white athletes are intelligent and hard working. Additionally, white

athletes received 1200 more mentions than black athletes; this overrepresentation remained consistent within the NBC telecast.

Overall, sports media exhibit gender bias and favoritism toward white male athletes. Eastman and Billings's (2000:192) comparisons across media outlets "revealed the very high degree of embedded favoritism toward men's sports and men athletes, even at times when major women's sporting events were peaking in newsworthiness." The over representation of men's sports coverage confers dominant status to men and contributes to the devaluing of female athletes.

This raises the question: do social attitudes concerning female and male athletes shape media depictions or is bias a product of patriarchal media outlets? The patterns found in other research, such as a preponderance of attention to men's athletic participation even in stories about women athletes, suggest hegemonic masculinity is situated in sports media under the guise of maintaining consumer demand. Schrock and Schwalbe<sup>5</sup> (2009) suggest media outlets, specifically male centered magazines, include depictions of athleticism, violence, and aggression as a way to convey what it means to be a man. Thus, the masculine traits specific to hegemonic masculinity are included in sports rhetoric and used as bait for readership.

As readership increases in response to such rhetoric, authors and editors may deem the inclusion of male-identified language and situations necessary for profitability. A content analysis of *Sports Illustrated* articles depicting women's and men's collegiate basketball is fitting for further explanation of how often themes related to hegemonic masculinity occur in sports media. Additional discussion shows how the presence of hegemonic masculine discourse has

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<sup>5</sup> Schwalbe (2005) elaborates on the dramaturgical task of being a man by coining the concept "manhood acts" or the tasks individual males must do to be credited as a man.

implications for the creative process of sports reporting as well as the equal representation of female and male athletes.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS

The textual dataset consists of 92 articles on women's and men's college basketball players, teams, and coaches found by manually searching *Sports Illustrated* magazines published during the 2010-2011 NCAA basketball season. Specifically, 21 magazines dated from November 1, 2010 to April 11, 2011 were analyzed.

To ensure objectivity each article was coded for themes<sup>6</sup> related to previous literature on hegemonic masculinity and cultural constructions of gender but also assessed for emergent themes or patterns. Due to the difficulty of establishing a coding scheme for multiple articles written at different times by different authors, I reviewed each *Sports Illustrated* issue separately before selecting three themes identified in the literature on hegemonic masculinity and two emergent themes. The themes relating to hegemonic masculinity were identified as comparisons to male greats, the marking of women's teams and players as deviant, and the mentioning of players' parents or athletic male sibling(s). When a former or present professional male athlete was used as a reference point for the collegiate athlete's mannerisms and athletic ability, the comparisons to male great theme was applied. The use of "women's college basketball" as a title for articles referring to female players and coaches counted as the deviant contrast to "college basketball" as a title for articles referring to male players and coaches. Additionally, the presence of "lady" before the team name counts as a deviant category to the generic team name used to reference men's teams.

Themes from previous research on cultural constructions of gender were based on amount of full article pages and count of text highlighting women's or men's basketball, as well

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<sup>6</sup> To ensure inter-coder reliability Dr. Leslie McCallister examined a random sample of magazines and analyzed them using the same coding scheme.

as the use of language that infantilized or objectified female athletes. An assessment of article length was performed for the full article pages and count refers to the amount of text (in pages) highlighting women's or men's basketball. The use of "girl" or reference to the athlete by first name counted as an example of the infantilizing theme. I also made note of the number of articles authored by women or men. Additionally, the following themes emerged throughout the analysis: the mention of playing professionally or establishing a career postparticipation in collegiate sports and the presence of violent language in articles depicting game play.

## CHAPTER 3

### DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

#### Cultural Constructions of Gender

Overall, the *Sports Illustrated* articles analyzed provide support for literature about bias in media depictions and representations of female athletes. This is most obvious in the discrepancy of coverage in both count and frequency (Table 2). Of the 121.55 pages of text featuring collegiate basketball, more than 87 percent (n=106.7) highlighted male players, teams, and coaches. Over three-quarters (84% n= 166.7) of page space were devoted to college basketball focused on men's collegiate basketball, whereas 14 percent of page space (n= 28.5) were relevant to women's collegiate basketball.

Bias in frequency of text translates to inconsistent coverage during main season events. Of the 32 pages dedicated the NCAA tournament preview 27 pages featured men's basketball including two centerfold championship brackets discussing the league's top teams. Similarly, a preview issue of *Sports Illustrated* included 21 articles totaling 24 full pages of text to discuss 68 men's collegiate teams while allotting one article and one page of text to discuss 10 women's collegiate teams.

Greater evidence of *Sports Illustrated* being a male-dominated media outlet emerged when considering the authorship of articles. According to Table 1 only 11 out of 92 articles were written by women supporting the cultural constructions of women as deviants in the traditionally male-only institution of sports media. No evidence sustains the presence of infantilizing language as a cultural construction of gender, but a particular article discussing Baylor's point guard, Odyssey Sims, includes objectifying commentary: "Griner's running mate not only fits

into a sports car but plays like one-driving expertly, handling smoothly and betraying deceptive power.”

Table 1. Article Authorship

	Male	Female	Total
Author	Author	Author	
Amount	81 (88)	11 (12)	92

*Notes:* Numbers in parenthesis are percentages.

### Hegemonic Masculinity

I found three themes that support existing literature on hegemonic masculinity. First, the overwhelming mention of male greats in both women’s and men’s articles means that at least one famous man was either mentioned or made comparison to a total of 35 times (Table 2). An entire article in a December issue of *Sports Illustrated* compares University of Connecticut’s Maya Moore and the Huskies’ winning streak to UCLA’s Bill Walton and their streak in the 1970s. This article makes several male comparisons as well as a direct juxtaposition to an iconic men’s collegiate team. The article also includes the opinions of those in opposition of the comparison:

And if UConn indeed wins the record 89<sup>th</sup> [game] on Dec. 21 against Florida State, you will hear some serious braying. Women’s basketball is weak. UConn doesn’t play anybody. They have so much talent that they just roll over their opponents. Bryant Gumbel, the host of HBO’s *Real Sports*, has already brayed. Following Frank Deford’s recent segment on UConn coach Geno Auriemma, Gumble looked as if he had eaten a bucket of bad clams as he begged his viewers not to compare UConn’s accomplishments with UCLA’s.

In an article highlighting Xavier seniors Amber Harris and Ta’Shia Phillips, the sports reporter suggests “Phillips is an old-school, back-to-the-basket enforcer with a Kareem Abdul-

Jabbar skyhook and a nose for rebounds.” A paragraph later, he quotes Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer saying “She [Phillips] is the closest thing our game has to Kevin Durant.” Similarly, in a “March Madness” issue of *Sports Illustrated* a sports reporter compares Baylor’s Brittany Griner to a male icon outside the sport of basketball: “Griner is threatening to do for post play in women’s basketball what Dick Fosbury did for the high jump: simply pervert the art beyond recognition.” The inclusion of commentary like this assumes males, male athletes, and men’s teams are the standard for comparison, making females, female athletes, and women’s teams, the exception seeking recognition.

Parents and family members were mentioned in a way that reflects hegemonic masculinity. Fathers and male siblings were typically depicted as coaches and motivators; whereas mothers, when mentioned, were portrayed as emotional supporters. In fact, an article titled “Paternal Instinct” highlights male head coaches whose sons play collegiate basketball. The article specifically focuses on Creighton player Doug McDermott’s decision to play for head coach and father Greg McDermott. In a three page article highlighting Ohio State forward Jared Sullinger the author includes a quote from his mother referring to her by her first name while discussing the impact his father had on developing his skills. Describing Sullinger’s father as “a cement truck of a man who doesn’t speak as much as bellow” the article dedicates 0.5 pages of text to the role Sullinger’s father and brothers had in shaping him into the “best basketball player in the family.” A similar example of mothers’ taking a backseat occurs when both parents of San Diego sophomore Kawhi Leonard are credited with helping their son succeed, but the author makes it clear that his father “reinforced the idea that extra work was the key to improvement.” The author of a piece discussing the success of Brigham Young senior Jimmer Fredette spends one page of the 2.5 page article crediting his father and older brother with coaching him. This

article includes pictures of Fredette's father and older brother and describes them as coaches, mentors, and role models. Fredette's mother, on the other hand, is mentioned briefly as the one who gave him his nickname and allowed him to dribble the ball in the house. The paragraph discussing the athlete's mother ends with a nod to her brother's ability to introduce speed and agility drills to his nephew. In an article discussing eligibility issues, particular athletes' mothers are described as rooting on their son's teams and "praying that she'll get to watch her son soon."

Although some titles of articles distinguished between college basketball and *women's* college basketball, an analysis of default assumptions did not support the notion that women's basketball headlines were consistently deviant from men's basketball headlines. However, article text frequently described women's basketball players and coaches as deviants from men's basketball players and coaches. Inside the NCAA tournament preview, Ohio State senior David Lightly is described as the "best defender in college basketball" while later in the preview Stanford, UConn, and Baylor are described as having "ruled *women's* basketball this season." In fact, there is much evidence of male-centered sports reporting. A correspondent covering UConn women's winning streak claims "losing is something that happens to the Other Guys." Also, the second half of this article discusses head coach Geno Auriemma's admiration for John Wooden showing the presence of male centered media even in an article assumed to highlight female athletes.

I found several interesting examples of women's teams being referred to as "lady" when mentioned in men's articles. An article in a preview issue featuring the top 10 women's teams predicted to make it to the national championship includes a subtitle stating "Move over, Huskies." Initially this title assumes equality in team names and debunks the notion that women's teams are marked. However, later in the article Baylor's women's team is referred to as

the Lady Bears due to the mention of Baylor's men's team in the top pick. This not only supports the notion that women are only the deviant category in the presence of men but the use of "lady" also perpetuates conventional heterosexist assumptions concerning gender roles. For instance, a blurb refers to the athletes on UCLA's and Stanford's women's teams as "West Coast ladies" reinforcing femininity as the counter to a masculine ideal suggesting that women are fair and congenial partners for their "gentlemen."

#### Emergent Themes.

Two themes emerged from the content. First, I termed the mention of athletes' future or current postcollegiate sports career as "pro count." Men's articles mentioned playing professionally over 19 times more than women's articles (Table 2). In fact, a nine page spread in a March issue of *Sports Illustrated* discussed the success of Kentucky coach John Calipari and praised him as the coach who is known for getting college players to the NBA. An article in the NCAA tournament preview was dedicated to singling out five of the league's top male players and critiquing what aspects of their performance they would have to alter in order to "turn pro." Interviews with an NBA talent scout were featured in the article stating this about a San Diego State forward:

He does a lot of good things, but he has trouble scoring. Sometimes he can make plays for other guys, but there are a lot of tall wing players in the NBA who can do that but are better than him. Still, he has had a heck of a year. If he has a bad tournament, he could slip to the second round [of the professional draft], but if he kicks butt, he could be a lottery pick.

The greater prevalence of pro count in articles highlighting men's basketball reflects cultural stereotypes concerning male athletic prowess and disregard for intellectual growth in college. Aside from undermining academic achievements the expectation for men to move on to a more professional and profitable sports career supports the hegemonic ideal that men's success

is defined in terms of monetary gains. Compulsory professionalism, as an aspect of hegemonic masculinity, narrows the options for male athletes to achieve success outside of a short-lived and physically stressful career in sports. In fact, an excerpt in a preview article describes a player's interest in acting and volunteer work but ends with a quote that suggests other activities should take a backseat to basketball.

There will be more growth, more acting (he hopes), and other interesting pursuits, but for the next few months, he says with a chuckle, 'I've cleared my schedule. It's all about basketball.

I also found that articles discussing female players rarely mentioned postcollegiate sports careers but rather their futures in the job market or family ambitions. The same March issue that featured a scouting report for top male athletes referred to Stanford's player of the year candidate Nneka Ogwumike as "humble, selfless, motherly" and mentions her aspirations to become a dentist. An article intended to highlight the accomplishments of UConn's Maya Moore mentions the possibility of a pro career after discussing her "poise," her success in school, and interest in politics: "She gets an A in Handling the Press Diplomatically 101, further preparation for a political career."

Second, I found a prevalence of violent language and situations; most notably a difference in the amount of time violence occurred in women's and men's articles (Table 2). Traditional masculine ideals are often over represented in sports media, especially the value of toughness in sport and the relationship between sports and violence (Nixon 1997; Washington and Karen 2001). The type of violent language used to describe interactions between players and game play also differed in line with gender stereotypes. Violent descriptors used in women's articles were typically hysterical or random. For instance, "Cat Scratch" is the title for an article highlighting the competition between Xavier seniors Amber Harris and Ta'Shia Phillips. Their

violent interactions are described as yelling and arguing with a quote from Coach Kevin McGuff claiming they share “a love-love-love-love-love-hate relationship. They’re like sisters. Ta’Shia can get on Amber, but no one else can.” Additionally, women’s violent interactions are often dismissed as uncharacteristic or a loss of impulse control. A sports reporter discussing Brittany Griner’s encounter with Texas Tech player Jordan Barncastle claims:

Griner’s dunks during games and in the pregame layup line have, predictably, become popular online. She also generated her share of clicks last season when she slugged a Texas Tech player after jostling for position, breaking the opponent’s nose. After the punch Griner’s supporters were quick to note that it was wildly out of character. And this season Griner has precisely zero technical fouls, despite the inevitably physical double- and triple-team defenses she faces.

Conversely, violent language is often characteristic in articles about male athletes. Within the first page of an article highlighting BYU’s Jimmer Fredette the player is described as being a “gunslinger with a grudge” having a “dangerous weapon” (his swagger and confidence) and consistently “attacking” his “victims” (opponents). A Sweet 16 article titled “It’s Knockout Time” includes violent phrases like “crushing Purdue” and “ripped the Boilermakers.” An additional article describes players’ athletic abilities in violent terms:

The three [point shot] was also the primary weapon for Ohio State in its more expected advance to the Sweet 16. In a 98-66 demolition of George Mason, the Buckeyes hit 16 of 26 threes. Though the sniper in the game was senior David Lightly, who dropped 7 of 7 from downtown, the Buckeyes’ usual assassin is 6’6” senior Jon Diebler.

Rather than dismissed as out of character, as it is for women, men’s violence is normalized as part of well rounded game play. In fact, a caption for the photo of an elbowing and grimacing Derrick Williams, the focus of the accompanying article, implies that to be a better player the athlete must “get mean.” A preview article describes Michigan State’s top players as being competitive on and off the court, claiming their competition often results in “throwing

punches” that produce “an intense, unshakable bond.” Another article mentions how Kansas’s Tyshawn Taylor broke his thumb while “in a brawl.” The incident was characterized as his usual “antics” and chalked up to a lack of maturity. An article discussing Kansas State ends with the following interview with a player suggesting that violence is not only a normal part of game play but necessary for success.

Samuels says blood was shed during the practice after the Colorado loss, ‘it was so intense: elbowing, rug-burns, guys on the floor.’ Unmistakable signs of life.

Table 2. Existent and Emergent Themes

	Men’s	Women’s	Both	Total
Count	106.7 (87.75)	12.7 (10.44)	2.2 (1.81)	121.6
Full Article Pages	166.7 (84.11)	28.5 (14.38)	3 (1.51)	198.2
Male Great	26 (74.29)	9 (25.71)	0 (0)	35
Female Great	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0
Pro Count	77 (95.06)	4 (4.94)	0 (0)	81
No Pro Count	5 (55.56)	4 (44.44)	0 (0)	9
Violent Count	54 (91.53)	5 (8.47)	0 (0)	59

*Notes:* Numbers in parenthesis are percentages.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest a lack of gender parity in male-centered media and sports outlets. In fact, limited progress has been made in an attempt to overthrow the gender bias present in sports media. Despite a noted increase in female participation in basketball, men's basketball receives considerably more coverage than women's basketball. What latent reasons explain the lag between sports reporting and sports participation? The answer may lie in an analysis of the male-centered media in question. Limited research exists on the study of underlying benefits to men for perpetuating androcentric media reports. The evidence of masculinized media is apparent when considering a vast majority of articles highlighting female basketball players mentioned or made comparison to male icons. Yet no male athlete, or female athlete for that matter, was compared to a famous female.

Additionally, an analysis of *Sports Illustrated* as a social product may elucidate invisible privileges associated with producing male-dominated media sources. This study does not address in detail the exploitation of athletes of color nor the impact of advertising. Because *Sports Illustrated* is ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in combined circulation, the number of people that this magazine can reach makes it an attractive vessel for advertisers (Link 2011). Thus, an analysis of gendered marketing tactics and the impact of advertisements on the magazine's content would be relevant for future study.

It is not within the scope of this study to assess the social consequences of the divergence between the creative process for journalists and editors and the incorporation of advertising. Profitable publications intended for mass circulation require advertisements in order to maintain

low cost and product accessibility. Subsequently, those in charge of producing a piece for journalistic value are often forced to compromise their goals to satisfy their largest source of funding: advertising agencies. Editors may struggle to incorporate relevant articles into the limited space left over after the inclusion of the “complimentary copy” or articles mandated to support advertised products (Steinem 1990:185). In sports media the complementary copy fuels the exploitation of athletes by profiting from the fusion of the athlete and brand name or product.

Another possible limitation to this study is the moderately short sample of articles and magazine issues. Future research may examine hegemonic masculinity and the intersection of cultural constructions of gender in sports media over time by assessing a larger sample.

Expanding the media sample and content would allow for a more complete understanding of changes in representation of athletes and an analysis of consistently emerging themes.

Additionally, a cross comparison of *Sports Illustrated* with other leading sports magazines may aid in a more comprehensive understanding of male-dominated sports media.

The patterns and themes emergent from this research could be elaborated on via in-depth interviews or focus groups with sports media journalists. More qualitative measures could better explain the relation of hegemonic masculinity and the shaping of sports reporting. Also, interviews with athletes concerning their media depictions in comparison to their self-identity would help debunk stereotypes concerning gendered athleticism.

As a major contributor to the study of bias sports media this study provides a foundation for future study on emergent themes. The patterns found specifically address the question do social attitudes concerning female and male athletes shape media depictions or is bias a product of patriarchal media outlets? The inclusion of overtly violent language and situations in men’s articles suggest these hegemonic masculine traits are used to attract male readership. An increase

in male audience, and subsequent decrease in female audience, allows the creation of a social product geared toward men via the exclusion and devaluation of women.

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