

Media's portrayal of men and women in sports essay sample



Gender stereotyping has been considered as one of the long-standing social issues which until now remain as a great concern among some sectors in the society, especially from the gender-sensitivity advocate groups. It has been an issue raised since time immemorial that women is an inferior gender against the male gender in terms of treatment in the society and how they are being portrayed out in the open. It cannot even be denied that some conflicts in the society, nowadays, took root on the issue of who is the stronger sex - whether female or male. Such profound thought came in the time when women started to have become empowered and more career-driven, making themselves great competitors of the male population.

One best area where women truly excelled is in the field of sports.

Nowadays, a lot of women gained worldwide achievements in sports that were used to be in-lined just for men such as basketball, golf, football, car racing, wakeboarding, etc. But it is in this field, however, that obvious typecasting of women as the weaker sex is being manifested well in media. Sports media coverage is deemed to be generally bias against the female gender in terms of how female athletes are being projected or portrayed in sports news and feature articles.

Media, notably, plays a great role in projecting male and female athletes out in the public's eyes. As mind-setters and influential part of the society, media, in a way, affects a lot on how people set their opinions and make judgments for any decision-making. Accordingly, how the public will perceive sport games and its players is a work of media's portrayal of sports news/coverage. Donna Lopiano even stated on the media's ability to mold an individual's perceptions on women athlete achievers and on how one sees

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women in general as strong and highly-competent individuals (Sports Management Resources). Lopiana also cited on television sports coverage as inconsistent and non-existent when covering women's sports.

Furthermore, she emphasized on the media's portrayal in giving focus on sports-related skills and the showing of sexuality among the athletes.

According to her, when it comes to male players, media's coverage generally focuses on their skills and performance during the game; however, when it comes to female athletes, their sexuality and physical appearance weighs more important than their skilled performance as portrayed by media.

It is in this idea that this researcher would like to dig deeper on this kind of media's portrayal among male and female sports players. This paper will develop through the basis or thesis that gender of the athletes play a significant role on how media cover sports events. Such thought was based on the concept that sports, wherein the players are women, receive few prominence in mainstream media coverage (Boyle, 2006). Accordingly, media, as also a form of business, sets their format in a way that is appealing to the public. It is being said that media's lack of coverage on women's sports is based on the knowledge that such news feature is less appealing to the public; thus, low turn-out of TV/radio viewers or readers.

To further achieve its aim of analyzing media's portrayal on sports events/news in terms of gender of its players/athletes, this researcher will use the content analysis research method. In this manner, it can be clearly seen such media's treatment on the news in terms of length of airtime, placement in the print in terms of page number as well as its placement on the page of a newspaper or magazine. Through this research paper, media
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will be made aware on the general observations of the populace in the way they treat female athletes in their news coverage as well as the recommendations/suggestions on how to avoid such since this is a great violation for the practice of objectivity among mass media practitioners.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research paper will benefit some of the important components in the society especially the media. Aside from the fact that this is a school requirement, this study also enables in providing the media results and recommendations that can help them in their media treatment on sports with respect to the issue of gender. The results of the study will give the media some ground of basis on how they will portray female athletes and male athletes. Furthermore, this will enable them to give a larger picture that in a society nowadays where people are already so conscious and sensitive on gender biases, portrayal of both male and female athletes should somewhat be equal.

Also, this study will play a significant role to female athletes in particular. Based on prior readings, they were portrayed differently than male athletes in terms of the length of exposure on their games and how they are presented in sports coverage. Through this study, media will be given the realization that female athletes should be portrayed relative to the sports they play and not on their attractiveness and sexuality. In effect, athletic skills of female athletes will be given focus, which can be of great help for their career developments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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The genders of players play a significant role in the media's treatment of sports news. According to a research article, *A Look at Women's Sports in Media Coverage*, the author Amanda Black averred that the media's way of covering of men and women's sports presents clearly that women are the weaker sex than men, and that women are better off in taking good care of domestic concerns as they are the mothers and the wives. This can be attributed on Black's observations that women are underrepresented and unappreciated in sports coverage, especially on soccer and basketball sports events.

Also, despite on how lady-like the sports can be, as long as it is being played by men, the latter still dominates the media mileage as the one who is well-skilled and competent. Accordingly, such is happening during women golf tournaments. In a survey conducted by Women Sports Foundation (2003), it was found out that the visibility of female sports is far lesser than the males as media coverage about women's sports is not being given too much attention. On another aspect, the low number of media coverage among women's sports can also be attributed on the under-representation of sportswomen in all forms of media as well as the less representation of women for the production of sports coverage events.

Statistics have also showed the bias news treatment of media against sports being played by women athletes. Accordingly in America, only nine percent airtime was given to women's sports while males' sports (male athletes) incurred eighty-eight percent of media coverage. In Canada, as well, it was found out that female athletes receive only a mere three percent of coverage among its major Canadian dailies (Media Awareness Network). <https://assignbuster.com/medias-portrayal-of-men-and-women-in-sports-essay-sample/>

Also, the *lingo* and the kind of photo shots can best construe how media treat women athletes. Accordingly, commentators (most of whom are males) use languages tailored-fit for the sports coverage when the players are males; but, when it comes to women athletes, the adjectives used are in such a way off-tangent from the main event of the sports – such words included vulnerable, weaker, frustrated, etc. Also, the way photos are being layout on the page and the way the photo shots were taken also speak on the wide difference on the media's coverage on male and female sports. Accordingly, media's photos of male athletes are usually those that were caught- in-the-act while playing; on the other hand, female athletes usually pose in the photos, showing more of their sex appeal than on the sports which they played.

Ariel Shaker (2002), also tackled on media's coverage on basketball games and the differences of its news treatment based on the gender of the players/athletes involved. According to him, it is now rare to find women basketball games being televised in a full-length basis. He added that during 2000-2001 college basketball season in San Francisco, only ninety-five women's games were televised while that of male basketball games had 407 telecasts. Also, in non-cable TV, there are more airings of male basketball games compared to that of the women; thus, affecting the exposure of these female basketball players for career move purposes. It should be taken into consideration that these women basketball players also aspire for a higher venue/ground where they can play basketball, but the lack of TV exposure among these girls makes them less famous, hampering bigger opportunities for the development of their careers as basketball players.

A certain study also reflected the lack representation for female athletes compared to male athletes in sports news coverage. The study showed that in NCAA News coverage of male and female collegiate athletes within the year range 1988-1991, 297 paragraphs in a 731-square inch space in the newspaper was utilized for news involving female athletes while 820 paragraphs in a 1, 788-square inch was devoted for male athletes. Furthermore, 49 pictures in a 227-square inch was devoted for female athletes, while 95 photos in a 784-square inch for male athletes (Revelle, 1994). On another study, it was emphasized that gender difference has something to do on how media conduct coverage on sports events. The study of Nathalie Koivula (1999) entitled *Gender Stereotyping in Televised Media Sports Coverage* cited that televised sports in Sweden during within the year of 1995-1996 and in 1998, less than ten percent of the sampled sports news time covered female athletes and less than two percent of the said time was allocated to cover women athletes whose sports are generally perceived as for masculine games only.

The abovementioned examples of studies on media treatment on sports clearly showed the vast difference of how media nowadays portray female and male athletes in their news. Furthermore, these studies did not only delimit on the athletes but on the kind of sports as well as the gender of the coaches, which also gained same results - women coaches and women athletes playing sports perceived for males only were predominantly portrayed less differently than male athletes and male coaches. Said results implied that media sports coverage have certain

divisions when it comes to gender and the kind of media portrayal they will use on such.

Another issue raised is on how women athletes are being portrayed in media. Jennifer L. Knight (2001) in her article *He's a Laker; She's a "Looker": The Consequences of Gender-Stereotyping Portrayals of Male and Female Athletes by the Print Media*, she said that there are quite a number of articles and studies that show female athlete's attractiveness being given more importance among media sports coverage. Furthermore, the athletic capability and skills of the women athlete just become secondary gist. This said claim can be well reflected on media's portrayal of famous tennis player Anna Kournikova wherein photo shots of her and news coverage primarily focuses on her attractiveness, and not specifically on her ability to play tennis. According to Knight, this kind of media treatment on women athletes has a great affect on people's perceptions on athletes, and in women athletes in particular. It seems that male athletes can really be directly associated on the sports they play, while women athletes are more portrayed in their attractiveness and sexuality while playing their games.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Theory

This research study will be guided on the media and communication theory of Gatekeeping. Gatekeeping Theory is wherein mass media has to filter first the news and feature stories at their end before releasing it for public consumption. This theory also involves on how such "filtering" will be done, reflecting the kind of portrayal method the media has on particular

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issues/news. Gatekeeping will also try to identify the factors involved for the kind of gatekeeping the media are basing on. In this particular case, it is the factor of gender among athletes.

Research Instrument

Most of the abovementioned related literature are studies that investigated media's treatment on sports coverage relative to the gender of the athletes. It analyzed based in on the gender of the players involved in terms of: (1) length of airtime both in TV and radio, (2) number of times the player was made seen in the screen, (3) languages used by sports commentators in describing the player, (4) the size area occupied by the news item or feature story in a page of the newspaper, (5) the number of times the name of the athlete was mentioned, (6) the placement of the news story in the newspaper - whether front page, second page, or last page, (7) the tone of the print article in terms of communicating to the reader, (8) size of photos of the players, (9) number of stories that had accompanied photos, and (10) the placement of the news story on the page - whether banner story, upper fold, or lower fold.

If further developed, this research study will focus primarily on the sports basketball and golf as these are few of the many sports wherein both women and men excelled. Aside from the sampled references, this research study will also try to endeavor in interviewing credible mass media practitioners especially directors, producers, and newspaper editors. In this effect, their parameters will be known on how they will treat sports coverage relative to the gender of the athletes. Through these interviews, it will be known how

these media practitioners conducts gatekeeping in their sports news/feature stories, and what likely will influence them in treating the news as something special. Results of the interview will also serve as support to whatever results obtained from the content analysis of the sampled sports coverage in terms of the gender angle of the players involved.

CONCLUSION

Media plays an important role in the society as it gives aide to people in making decisions and lawmakers in setting policies. The power of media is boundless as reflected nowadays in the way they treat news and conduct coverage on the different aspects or issues that surround the world today. This research paper was enable to unearth another profound greatness of media in terms of how they can maneuver and treat their stories so as to set the minds of their consumers through their products.

This research paper came into conclusion that gender, indeed, plays a significant role in how they conduct sports coverage. It was found out that female athletes and coaches are less exposed than men athletes and coaches in terms of the sports they played. Accordingly, women are being portrayed more in their physical appearance and sexuality than on their skills and capabilities to the sports they chose. Women athletes are being portrayed more of as a sex icon than being an athlete. This can be construed on the number of studies that showed how photos of women athletes are taken while playing their sports, and how such photos try to exude the sexuality aspect of the woman. Meanwhile, male athletes and coaches are portrayed by media as those that are really the players on the

game. Unlike on the portrayal of women athletes by media, male athletes are presented through their skills and capabilities in the game they played.

Such realization will lead to the fact that gender stereotyping has been the main issues of the society ever since before. Sports coverage on male athletes are being conducted in that way because, as expected, males are associated in masculinity - and that sports is generally a masculine world. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be more of feminine and less active in sports (especially on extreme sports) compared to men. This kind of perception, however, is not already applicable in this modern context wherein women empowerment is already widely observed and practiced. Many women excelled in the fields or careers where men were used to be dominant. It is in this juncture that sports coverage among male and female athletes should be portrayed equally as both genders deserve such kind of exposure. In hindsight, such exposure will make them more famous; thus, a good thing for their respective career moves.

Meanwhile, it can also be understood that most media outlets practiced this kind of news treatment among in their sports coverage basically to sell. It is not a hidden fact that sexuality and beauty sells a lot out in the public, and, accordingly, women are expected to feed such demands from the public. And a good venue for such is in a sports event especially wherein one can see well-built women athletes in their sexy attires.

To sum it all, media has been biased against women athletes than men athletes in terms of their portrayal of sports coverage. In this sense, media lost its objectivity over the need to sell more.

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