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Bridgewater “Comments” on 80 Years of Men’s and Women’s Sports

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This research is the result of the hard work and effort of 18 students in Dr. Maura Rosenthal’s first year seminar, Women in Sport Media. The work was also accepted for presentation at the 2008 Mid Year Symposium held on the BSC campus in December. The students would like to express the great pride they have knowing that as they complete their very first year at BSC, they have taken on the challenges that come with research and the risks that come with presenting and publishing it.

*S*ports media is important because it shapes the perceptions, aspirations and dreams of the viewers (Angelini, 2008). It shows the viewers the skill and athletic achievement of both male and female athletes. The media allows viewers to witness the athletic prowess of their favorite athletes on TV and in print. Within sports media, the viewers are able to learn about the many different sports that are offered around the world. The viewers are able to get a sense about who the athletes are, their talents, their sport and their achievement. It is apparent that sports media has a huge impact on the people around the world who watch games, buy magazines, and endorse their favorite team by collecting team and player memorabilia.

Women athletes have been greatly underrepresented in articles, magazines, pictures, and in film (Angelini, 2008; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). Women have always had to fight for the equality that Title IX promised them, and even today they are not at an equal level with men. Most of the pictures representing female athletes are more stereotypical than they are action shots, these pictures show women out of uniform and in sexy poses. In 1994, 275,305 athletes participated in NCAA sports and only 92,472 of them were women (33.6% women). The NCAA News gave women 34% of their coverage and that is not fair at all (Malec, 1994). Title IX promised female athletes the right to compete at an equal and fair level; unfortunately female athletes are still striving to compete at the same level as their male counterparts.

From the literature about women’s sports we can tell that the coverage about women is undisputedly a lot lower than the coverage of men. Those who began to analyze women’s sports realized the unfairness to women in media coverage. For example, the fact that figure skating is the most televised women’s sport mainly because it is not dominated by males. Other studies have shown that television announcer’s language clearly showed gender bias. For example, while covering basketball tournaments, researchers discovered that when female player’s outstanding shots were made announcers said it was not because of skill but because of luck. A different researcher established that female athletes were rarely viewed as adult competitors. Bonnie Blair, a medal winning Olympian, is known as “America’s little sister” instead of a

serious competitor. The result of all of these findings proved that female athletes were not taken nearly as seriously as male athletes (Bishop, 2008). This also shows how women are still at a disadvantage for equality, and that they are still not taken as seriously as the men.

Researchers have studied how college newspapers and television stations cover men's and women's sports on college campuses (Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). Their research focused on both printed media as well as a number of campus television broadcasts from a variety of universities. They found that in campus newspapers men were covered in 72.7% of the articles and 81.5% of the time in the campus's news broadcast, even though 41% of the college athletes were women. The main purpose of this study was to look at how Bridgewater State College's (BSC) student-run newspaper, *The Comment*, covered men's and women's sports since its inception in 1927.

Research Questions

1. What is the difference in the number, length, and description of male and female students in sports or recreation articles published in *The Comment* (the Bridgewater student newspaper) from 1928 - 2007?
2. In BSC's newspaper *The Comment*, what was the sex of the reporters and how did they portray the female athletes in their articles?
3. In *The Comment*, how many articles were written about women from 1928-1967 compared to 1968-2007?

Hypotheses

1. We expect to find that the men's sports or recreation teams will have better coverage in terms of number of articles and length of the articles as opposed to the women's sports from 1928 to 2007 in the Bridgewater State newspaper, *The Comment*.
2. We expect that the majority of the reports of BSC men's sports will have male reporters and that the BSC women's sports will have women reporters and that the females will in no light be portrayed as athletic as the men in any of the articles.
3. We expect that there will be fewer articles about women written in *The Comment* from 1928-1967 compared to those written from 1968-2007.

Methods

Bridgewater State College students based their research on the article "How Campus Media Cover Sports: The Gender-Equity Issue, One Generation Later" (Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). After brainstorming and compiling a lengthy list of possible research questions, the class examined the list. Based on the feasibility of answering the questions by searching through

old newspaper articles found in the Bridgewater State College Archives, the class narrowed down to the final three research questions. With the three final research questions in mind a small group of students went and briefly searched through the archives to see if concluding answers to the research questions was possible with the information that was found there.

After concluding it was possible to obtain answers, students researched articles online at Bridgewater's newspaper, *The Comment*. The website's back issues from 2003 until 2007 were available online to each student. The class was split up so that a few students were assigned to each of the years. Each student then individually researched the sports sections of issues from their assigned year. This research involved choosing three issues from the year; one issue from the fall season, a second issue from the spring season and a third issue from sometime in between those seasons. This was the same way that Huffman, Tuggle & Rosengard acquired their data. Of these three issues each of the articles from the sports sections (not including professional sports) were used as data to enter into a table produced by Dr. Maura Rosenthal in Microsoft Excel. The table consisted of the day, date, year, sport covered, story type, sex of athletes, sex of reporter, number of words and the headline of the article.

Then 18 undergraduate students in groups of one, two or three, entered the Bridgewater State College archives to attain additional data. With Mabel Bates' help (the archives director) each group was assigned to a box of collected Bridgewater State College newspapers, *The Comment*. Each box had folders organized by volume, issue number and year. For each issue the group was to read it and find all sport related (male and/or female) articles. The student groups then re-read each article and again noted the amount of words, date of article, its story-type, the sex of the author, the sex of the persons written about in the article along with a brief description of the article and its title. After the completion of the individual Excel spreadsheets, all the articles were compiled into one big and final spreadsheet

Articles About Men and Women 1928-2008

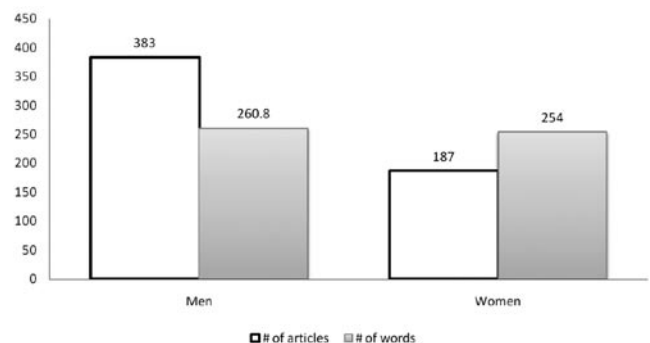


Figure 1

by Dr. Maura Rosenthal. The collective researching efforts resulted in 619 pieces of data to be further analyzed.

Results

Figure 1 shows 383 articles about men and 187 about women. The average word count for the articles about men was 260.8 and the average word count for the articles about women was 254. There were 38 articles about either both men and women or they could not be classified. Figure 2 summarizes the gender of the reporters who wrote the articles. Most of the articles did

and this could indicate that more and more women athletes started to participate in sports, or that they simply just got more coverage as the years went on.

Discussion

The results from the Bridgewater State College paper, *The Comment*, refer to how the reporters for the campus newspaper covered men’s and women’s sports differently. The results display the difference in articles about men and women, reporters by gender, and the difference in numbers of articles about women from two time periods. There were twice as many articles about men as there were about women which affirms hypothesis one, that men’s sports get more coverage. The results about the number of reporters based on gender prove hypothesis two to be true. The number of male reporters was about four times the number of women reporters but, there were more unknown authors than males. Lastly, in regards to women’s articles from two different time periods, there were more articles from the more recent time period which proves hypothesis three.

Title IX

Title IX has changed women’s sports in many different ways. Title IX states, “No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid” (Curtis & Grant, 2006). Simply put, the passing of the Title IX legislation gave women equal rights in any educational programs that men already had at schools that receive federal funds. A woman can no longer be denied participation in activities just because of the simple fact that she is a woman. Although it is not required that women participate in identical sports as their counterparts, schools are required to give women equal opportunities. Regarding female sports teams, girls are guaranteed things such as equal equipment and supplies, fair scheduling of games and practices, travel accommodations, opportunities to receive academic tutoring, exceptional locker rooms, practice, game, medical, housing, and dining facilities, publicity, support services, and recruitment opportunities of student-athletes (Curtis & Grant, 2006). Schools today are required to make sure they comply with these rules, and if it is found that a school has violated these guidelines, the institution could potentially lose all federal funds (Lopiano, 2005).

AIAW

The AIAW, also known as the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, existed before the NCAA took over control of college sports. The AIAW was established in 1971 to organize women’s college sport championships, and continued to oversee women’s college sports until 1982. The association had a television contract with NBC, but as soon as a profit was

Sex of Reporters

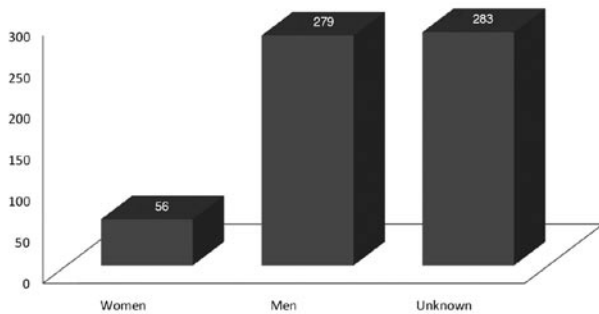


Figure 2

Articles About Women Between 1928-1967 and Between 1968-2007

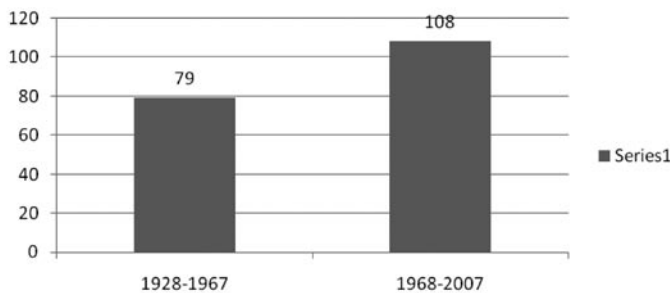


Figure 3

not have a specified author who wrote each article and there was a significantly larger number of male reporters than female reporters. There were 56 women sports reporters identified, 279 male reporters identified and 283 articles where the gender of the reporter could not be identified.

Figure 3 shows the difference in the number of articles about women athletes between the dates of 1928-1967 and 1968-2007. There were 79 articles about women from 1928-1967 and 108 articles about women from 1968-2007. This graph displays the increase of articles during the second time frame

being made off of the female sporting events, the NCAA stepped in and took over. The AIAW could not afford to compete with the NCAA, an organization that suddenly became interested in female sport and could pay for expenses such as transportation, something the AIAW simply could not manage to pay for. As Donna Lopiano implied, when the AIAW started to become too powerful, they were overtaken by an organization that had been firmly established for quite some time longer, since the early nineteen hundreds (Hawes, 1999). Today, the NCAA has firm control over both men's and women's sports at the college level, and the AIAW no longer exists.

Women's Sports at BSC 1920-1940

Women's sports at Bridgewater State College had slowly increased from the 1920s to the 1940s. At the beginning of the 1920's a women's recreation group called the W.A.A., also known as Women's Athletic Association, was put together and organized all women's recreational sports. There were no official women's sports that were recognized by the NCAA in the 1920s. Although coverage of women's sports was scarce in the earlier decades reporting had increased as the 1940s approached with more organized sports, and recreation occurring for women.

Women's Sports at BSC 1940-1960

With the data that was collected about women's recreation and sports from the time period of the 1940s to 1960s, it shows that the women at Bridgewater were very involved in sports but not involved in writing about sports for *The Comment*. Almost every reporter from this time was a male or unknown. However, women did have many sports they could participate in such as: tennis, softball, dance, hiking, archery, hockey, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, badminton, track, cheerleading and intramural games. Most of the data comes from the years of 1945, 47, 49 and a few from 1950. The majority of the articles are game recaps or news about the WAA. Although there is data, the men have the most articles.

Women's Sports at BSC 1960-1980

From 1963 through 1972, women still did not get the attention they deserved from the Bridgewater State College newspaper. Most of the articles still pertained to the male sports teams, and except for the occasional article about a female sports team, the articles were basically all written by male reporters. Still, some of the articles that were written about women were written by men. Out of all the articles that were written within this time, most of the ones that were about women were also about men at the same time. There were not many articles strictly dedicated to just females at the college. At one point of the research in

1964, there was one period where there were six articles in a row dedicated to women, but, then again, only two of them had over one hundred words. On the contrary, almost all of the articles dedicated entirely to men consisted of at least one hundred fifty words, with one article containing nine hundred seventy five words.

During this time, the reporters wrote about different types of sports. Sports such as bowling, roller skating, and badminton appeared in the newspaper in the early sixty's, but by the end of the seventy's, basketball had seemed to have taken over. This just shows how activities and interests can change so drastically in such a short period of time.

Conclusion and Limitations

As much as the class tried to make the research as accurate as possible there were limitations. The four main limitations in the project were the miscounting of each word in the articles, missing decades, missing issues in the early years, and in a majority of the articles the author was not stated. Another main limitation was that in the years 2003-2007 the research was extremely structured. Each researcher was given a specific year, then three issues were chosen; one from the fall, one from the spring, and one in the middle of the two seasons.

The research done in the archives however was not as structured causing the majority of the limitations. The researchers took boxes of issues from each decade, neglecting to follow the original format of choosing one issue from the fall, one from the spring, and one from the middle of the two. Even though there were not many limitations, the ones found could be quite destructive to the research. When it comes to the authors, the majority of the time men were the authors. From the 619 issues, 283 of the articles were written by unknown authors, where as men wrote 279 of the articles and women wrote only 56 of the articles. From 1928 to 1967 there were only 79 articles on women, but from 1968 to 2007 there were 108 articles. From 1928-2008 there was almost double the amount of articles written on men then there were on women. This basically sums up that men were covered more than women in this study. Based on the number of articles that women appear in compared to the number of articles involving men, the results shows the differences stated in the research questions. These differences showed that men were publicized more than women in the early years. However as time goes on women are gaining more popularity in the newspapers and other press.

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