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Nalan R. Ayvazoglu

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## **Gender Parity in Media Coverage of Athletes with Disabilities in Turkey**

By Nalan R Ayvazoglu<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This study examines the portrayal of female athletes with disabilities in a Turkish daily sports newspaper. A content analysis was conducted on 486 articles published in a popular sports newspaper between the years of 2007 and 2011. Female athletes with disabilities had less media coverage than male athletes with disabilities in Turkish sports media. While male athletes with disabilities were depicted more in team sports, female athletes were depicted mostly in individual sports. However, the individual sports female athletes participated in this study were sports that are considered 'masculine'. Female athletes with disabilities were depicted as passive in most of the articles published. Disability was visible and both male and female athletes were mostly depicted in wheelchairs which reinforced stereotypical perception of disability. Articles also focused on achievement of athletes with disabilities.

*Key Words:* Gender and disability, Sports Media, Content Analysis, Turkey

### **Introduction**

Media is a powerful tool that influences the beliefs, attitudes and values of society. The power of newspapers, one of the most prevalent media forms, in the formation of positive or negative perspectives about different cultures is inevitable. Media, including newspapers, can shape perception of the society about what constitutes appropriate, reasonable, and normal. Sport, as a social institution, is closely linked with the media (Chang & Crossman, 2009). Therefore, media representations of male and female athletes perpetuate gender stereotypes and impact the status of women in the society. Several studies emphasized the importance of media in creating and affecting the views of society about female athletes including those with disabilities (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Chang & Crossman, 2009; Fullerton, 2006; Hardin & Greer, 2009; Hardin & Hardin, 2005). These studies suggested that media reinforced unequal practice that advantages male athletes and promoted the idea that male athletes were valued more than female athletes (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Chang & Crossman, 2009).

Framing theory suggests that interpretation of an issue by audiences can be influenced by its presentation in the media (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). While media puts forth some of the characteristics, it can also hide some other characteristics particular to that issue (Entman, 1993). In this sense, one should not ignore the power of framing in media since it can alter the importance of any given issue. In DePauw (1997), physicality, masculinity and sexuality comprise the framework of sport, while "physicality represents able bodied physical ability,

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<sup>1</sup> Nalan R. Ayvazoglu has a Ph.D. in Adapted Physical Education from Indiana University, School of Public Health, Department of Kinesiology. Her research interests include female athletes with disabilities, physical activity of individuals with disabilities (specifically developmental disabilities) and their families. Currently she is working as Deputy Consulate Expert (Health Advisor) at Turkish Consulate General, 455 N. Cityfront Plaza Dr. Suite 29000, Chicago, IL 60611, USA. E-mail: nayvazoglu@gmail.com.

masculinity represents aggression, strength and courage and sexuality represents socially expected and accepted behavior” (p.421). According to Kane (1996) sport perpetuates beliefs about male superiority which was equated with social superiority. Female athletes on the contrary, are framed in stereotypical and traditional contexts where athletic ability is ignored (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Framing gender and disability in Turkish sports media therefore is important because content and images can be manipulated in the print media to appeal male dominant society by drawing the attention of the reader to certain characteristics of female athletes with disabilities such as their appearance or personal life. Simultaneously, media may also lead society to miss other important characteristics about female athletes with disabilities including their accomplishments. Considering the effect of media, one must not ignore its role in promotion and formation of opinions, ideas, and behavior and modification of social norms on specific issues such as female athletes with disabilities and gender stereotypes.

Hence, this study is important because it focuses on how gender, disability and sport intersect within the unique societal context of Turkish print media. In order to achieve this goal, one must first understand how Turkish media frames female athletes with disabilities and plays a critical role in shaping the perception about those athletes in Turkish society. Specifically, the aim of the current study is to investigate gender role portrayals of athletes with disabilities in Turkish news media by addressing the frequency of male and female athletes with disabilities as well as the ways in which they are portrayed.

### **Gender in Turkish Society**

After the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey became a secular country that embraces both Middle Eastern and Western values. Gender equality issues gained importance as a result of modernization process of Turkey. Within this process women were granted rights as their male counterparts for free education, to choose their spouses, and the right to vote. As a candidate country for European Union (EU) membership, Turkey tried to take measures to close the gap on women and gender equality issues. As a result success was achieved in gender policy changes. Especially, from the 1990 onward, gender equality issues became one of the visible focuses of governmental bodies. In 1993 Turkey signed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, 2012). Constitutional amendment since 2001, the adoption of new Civil Code (2001), the new Labor Law (2003) and the New Penal Code(2005) were legislative reforms in the area of Turkish equality reforms (Dedeoğlu, 2012). In March 2012, the law on ‘the Protection of Family and the Prevention of Violence against Women’ was adapted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Bozkurt, 2013). These efforts aimed to shift the position of women from being dependent citizens to more independent participants in a secular Muslim society by increasing their education level and taking part in work force, political and social areas (Dedeoğlu, 2012; Ersoy, 2009; Uray & Burnaz, 2003). There is no doubt that these legislative reforms made in the effort to gender equality strengthened the position of women in Turkish society. However, with all these legislative efforts, the average women in Turkish society does not yet fully profit from the legislative changes in daily life and the expectations that women be a wife and mother are still remaining (Dedeoğlu, 2012; Ersoy, 2009). Therefore, the main obstacle in front of gender equality is the patriarchal mentality of the society rather than the legislations (Bozkurt, 2013).

The patriarchal values and gender stereotypes place women at the bottom of the social hierarchy without providing them power (Alat, 2006). The perception of “the place of women is

her house” is still common in Turkish culture and women are framed as family, virtue or housewives whereas men are perceived to be more goal oriented and are allowed to be more independent since their role is outside of the house (Ersoy, 2009; Karataş & Gökçearslan-Çiftçi, 2010).

Hence, raising awareness to change this rooted patriarchal mentality in Turkish society is as important as changing laws. In this regard, media is a powerful tool in creating and broadcasting to raise the awareness within the society. Women including those with disabilities in Turkey have been trying to move from being dependent citizens to more independent participants in the society, in part, by participating in sports. Given the importance of male dominated culture of sports and socio-cultural context of Turkey, it is interesting to examine the extent to which media present female athletes with disabilities in Turkey, a place of cultural integration of East and West, through one of the most popular sports newspaper from framing theory perspective.

Along with legislative reforms to improve the status of women in Turkey, women also took active part in sports within modernization process. In 1926 women were seen in participating in track and field for the first time. In 1929, first tennis club was founded by a group of women in Ankara. Turkey participated to Berlin Olympics in 1936 with two women in fencing. First women gymnast Mübeccel Ergün opened a sports center in 1941 (Atalay, 2007). Since then, women were actively involved in many areas of sports in Turkey. In spite of the constraints to participate in sport and physical activity, including patriarchal mentality of Turkish society, today more and more women are actively participating in sports and fitness centers particularly in big cities. Currently, out of 2.538.483 licensed athletes, 736.276 are women (T.C. Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı, Spor Genel Müdürlüğü, 2013). In 2008, 3646 female athletes with disabilities were registered in sport clubs and federations (Çınarlı & Ersöz, 2010). While women participate mostly in gymnastics, ice skating, volleyball and dancing (Orta, 2012) considered “feminine sports”, they also participate in sports considered stereotypically masculine such as wrestling and weightlifting which have long been popular national sports in Turkey (Arslan & Koca, 2007). In addition, the number of female athletes participating in martial arts, such as karate, judo and taekwondo is also increasing (Aslan & Koca, 2007).

### **Disability in Turkish Society**

Individuals with disabilities consist 12.3% of the population in Turkey (Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 2002). According to the *Survey on Problems and Expectations of Disabled People 2010* by Turkish Statistical Institute (2010), 41.4% of individuals with disabilities are women. To fully integrate individuals with disabilities into society, revolutionary steps were taken between 2002 and 2013. The first Turkish Disability Law No: 5378 was enacted within this period (T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü, 2014). Specifically within this period, positive discrimination gained a constitutional basis for individuals with disabilities. In addition, today many non-governmental organizations advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. However, along with these efforts by government and non-governmental bodies, individuals with disabilities still experience difficulties in many areas from physical environment to legal rights, labor force to education in Turkey. Women with disabilities experience more difficulties than their male counterparts. More than 54.9% of women with disabilities are illiterate and only 44% of them are married (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2010). In addition to above mentioned challenges that individuals with disabilities experience in

Turkey, there is a social prejudice against that limits them participating in social life in Turkey (Tufan , 2008). Media's role in formation of this prejudice cannot be ignored. Specifically, Tufan (2008) mentions that media excludes individuals with disabilities by "sending a particular message: either be like us and take your place among us or stay where you are" (p. 68). This statement puts forth the importance of understanding the perspectives towards individuals with disabilities in Turkish society.

### **The Context of Gender in Sports Media**

In today's media, including print media, female athletes are frequently represented with their personal lives (Galily, Cohen & Levy, 2011) and appearance rather than their performances, skills and achievements (Sportsscotland, 2005). Moreover, sport is seen as belonging to white able-bodied man, and female athletes are seen as less important (Schell & Rodriguez, 2000). This is significant because by portraying sports as belonging to males and focusing on female athletes' personal lives or appearances, media undermines the status of women in sport and may cause society to treat women and men differently. Basically, how media frames female athletes, especially female athletes with disabilities, affects how they are perceived in society.

Existing research tends to focus on gender stereotypes of women both in print and visual media (e.g. Crossman, Vincent & Speed, 2007; Das, 2011; Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010; Knijnik& Souza, 2011; Luyt, 2011; Valls-Fernandez & Martinez-Vicente, 2007) including those in Turkish literature (e.g Arslan & Koca, 2007; Özsoy, 2010;Uğur-Tanrıöver, Vitrinel & Sözeri, 2009; Uray & Burnaz, 2003). Uğur-Tanrıöver et al. (2009), for example, gave important highlights about the current situation of gender issues in Turkish media. Although, selection criterion is not clearly defined, authors reported that women in Turkey are mostly represented either as a "sexual object" or as an "accessory" in most of the Turkish media (Uğur-Tanrıöver et al., 2009). Uçar-Ilbuğa and Sepetçi (2010) on the other hand, examined how foreign women are represented in Turkish media. The results of this study also confirmed similar findings with previous research done by Ersoy (2009) and Karataş & Gökçearsan-Çiftçi (2010) as well as Uğur-Tanrıöver et al. (2009), and revealed that foreign women shared same fate as their Turkish fellows; where they were framed as family, housewives or sexual objects (Uçar-Ilbuğa & Sepetçi, 2010).

Daniels (2012) studied the responses towards media images of performance athletes, sexualized athletes, and sexualized models. The results revealed that media coverage of female athletes shown performing a sport positively impacted the participants' views of those athletes. Images of sexualized athletes and sexualized models, however, lead to criticism of societal gender inequality (Daniels, 2012). In this regard, how female athletes are framed in media; whether with their athletic achievement or sexual appearance, is related to viewers' perception of female athletes.

Yaprak and Amman's (2009) reported that female athletes are portrayed either with their private life, failure in competitions, or as a sexual object in Turkish media. The authors also argued that the role of men and women in Turkish culture is also reflected in sports and as a result, the achievements of female athletes were less represented in sports media and if female athletes were represented, they were mostly represented as a "sexual object" (Yaprak & Amman, 2009). Similar inferences were reported in other studies. Arslan and Koca (2007) for example, reported that instead of athletic roles and performances, gender roles were dominant in both print and visual media regarding female athletes.

Another issue regarding the representation of female athletes is the inequality in the frequency of media coverage. In United States for example, 38% to 42 % of women participate in sports and physical activity, however, only 6-8 percent receives total sports coverage in media (Women and Sport Foundation, 2011). In a research, studying two newspapers from two different countries (USA and Spain), women-only articles were consisted 5.9 % of all articles with athletic content reviewed (Frideres, Palao, & Mottinger, 2008). Similar results were reported by Turkish scholars, Arslan and Koca (2007). The authors examined gender stereotypes in three different newspapers which represent different ideologies (two newspapers with secular point of view and one religious newspaper) in Turkish print media. Regardless of the ideology of the newspaper, out of 3638 sport related articles analyzed, only 220 of the articles had female athletes in their coverage and 37.3% of the articles concerning female athletes had gender stereotypes.

Özsoy (2010) analyzed photographs of Beijing 2008 Olympic Games in terms of gender discrimination, covered in five different Turkish newspapers, including one sports newspaper. Although half of the medals won by Turkish athletes in Beijing 2008 Olympic Games belonged to female athletes, the frequency of representation of those female athletes (37.8%) in Turkish media was less than the representation of male athletes (62.2%) consistent with Arslan and Koca's (2007) study.

Similar to their able bodied peers, female athletes with disabilities also face gender discrimination in media presentation. Schantz and Gilbert (2001) stated that "female athletes with a disability are exposed to a form of "threefold discrimination"; as in general they do not fit the social constructs of able-bodied athletes including those of masculinity and sexual attractiveness." (p. 71). Fullerton (2006) stated that athletes with disabilities were only represented in the newspaper when there was play in a "mainstream competition and they play in a unique way" (p. 7). In a recent study, Chang & Crossman (2009) reported that male athletes received more textual and photographic coverage than female athletes in both 2004 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in a largest circulated newspaper in Korea. A recent work of Buysse and Borchering (2010) also revealed gender and disability disparities in photographic coverage of athletes with disabilities. What makes this work more interesting is that the study analyzed photographic coverage of 2008 Paralympic Games from twelve newspapers in five countries (China, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa and United States) from different continents. Results revealed that female athletes with disabilities were covered less in the photographs in all newspapers analyzed, which suggest female athletes with disabilities share same fate regardless of the country they live in.

While gender inequality is well established in frequency of articles covering female athletes with disabilities, how those athletes are portrayed also need attention. Hardin and Hardin (2005), examined photographic images in 24 issues of Sports'n Spokes magazine in terms of disability, sport and gender and reported that women were often depicted as non-sporting and less competitive which was also supported in a study by Thomas and Smith, (2003). Further, female athletes with disabilities are less often depicted as involved in participating in team sports than their male counterparts (Hardin & Hardin, 2005). Research suggest that non-contact sports that emphasize beauty, grace and glamour of female body such as figure skating and gymnastics receive more favorable coverage than sports which is considered more masculine (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002). Sports that need stamina, aggressiveness, and devotion to a team are regarded as masculine and team sports are considered more masculine than individual sports (Hardin & Greer, 2009; Koivula, 2001). Giuggioli (2013) suggested that female athletes tend to

be portrayed in individual sports in Eastern countries (including Asia and Middle East) which do not challenge stereotypical gender roles, as they tend to be considered more feminine and gender appropriate.

Female athletes with disabilities are also represented as passive, with their failure, or with gender stereotypes (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Galily, et.al, 2011; Hardin & Hardin, 2005; Thomas & Smith, 2003). Presenting female athletes with disabilities in passive poses reinforce traditional perception of them as passive, weak and un-athletic (Thomas & Smith 2003). Depicting male athletes with disabilities in active poses on the other hand, suggests cultural perception of physicality, strength and masculinity in sporting body (DePauw, 1997; Thomas & Smith, 2003).

The visibility of disability in photographic images is also another issue that needs attention in the representation of athletes with disabilities. According to Thomas and Smith (2003) the invisibility of disability in photographic images suggest that media minimizes the visibility of an athlete's disability. The authors also argue that when athletes with disabilities are depicted in the media, they are often depicted in wheelchairs implying less disabling condition that is easier for the society to accept (Thomas & Smith 2003).

Studies specific to the coverage of female athletes with disabilities in Turkish media are almost nonexistent, however. According to one study on "The Representation of Individuals with disabilities in Print Media" by Republic of Prime Ministry Administration of Disabled People, among 18 subjects covered by media including individuals with disabilities, news on sports and individuals with disabilities were the third largest issue covered between the years of 2003- 2006 (T.C. Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar Bakanlığı, Özürlü ve Yaşlı Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2011). However, media representation of individuals with disabilities is still scarce when it comes to representation of female athletes with disabilities.

After careful consideration of literature on representation of female athletes with disabilities in print media, and because of limited number of studies on media coverage of female athletes with disabilities in Turkish media the following hypothesis guided this study:

H1- The frequency of coverage of male athletes with disabilities will be greater than that of female athletes with disabilities.

H2- Female athletes with disabilities will be shown in participating in individual sports more frequently than that of male athletes with disabilities.

H3- Female athletes with disabilities will be shown in passive poses more frequently than that of male athletes with disabilities.

H4- The disability will be represented more discernible in articles that represent male athletes with disabilities than that of female athletes with disabilities.

H5- Male athletes with disabilities will be represented by their athletic achievement while female athletes with disabilities will be represented through their personal stories.

## **Method**

### *The Newspaper*

The *Fanatik* is one of the most popular sports newspapers published daily in Turkey covering sports news and events, with a higher circulation (185.000- 200.000 sold per week). The newspaper is the first sports newspaper which began publication in 1995 and has a section

specific to disability sports where regional, national or international sport news about Turkish athletes with disabilities is reported. This newspaper was chosen because of its national prominence, circulation and having an extensive sports coverage on athletes with disabilities.

The *Fanatik* has an electronic archive of every newspaper published in text format on athletes with disabilities since January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001. However, online archive of articles published both in text and photograph format starts from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007. The newspaper selected was downloaded from its website (<http://www.fanatik.com.tr>). The articles and photos of athletes with disabilities were printed from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Since ‘disability’ is interchangeably referred with two different words in Turkish ‘*engelli* and *özürlü*’ both words were used in search engine. Keywords of *disability, handicapped, women with disabilities, men with disabilities, and disability and sport* were searched in the archives of the newspaper for each month of each year. Besides, “hurdle jumping” and “disability” is referred with the same word “*engelli*” in Turkish; thus, articles covering hurdle jumping of athletes without disabilities were excluded. The search included not just the “disability and sport” section of newspaper but whole archive of newspaper were also checked day by day in order to make sure no articles on athletes with disabilities were missed. A total of 572 articles were retrieved. Of those articles, articles that has logo of a sport federation as the photograph and with a focus on the sport rather than the athlete (e.g. having a basketball hoop as photograph and reporting news about disability basketball federation) as well as having cartoon or illustration about a disability sport were excluded from the analysis. Also excluded from the analysis were articles that reported news on charity events where celebrity posing with individuals with disabilities (with both male and female) with a focus on celebrity rather than the athlete or news on greeting the team in return of an international event by the government personnel or administration of specific sport federation where gender of athlete cannot be identified, and group photographs where the gender of people were not possible to identify. A total of 486 articles including both text and photograph consisted of the sample of the study.

### *Coding Procedure and Variables for Content Analysis*

#### *Coding Instrument*

A coding instrument guided by existing research that explored portrayal of males and females in media was developed to analyze the representation of female athletes with disabilities. The variables coded for each unit of analysis were gender (Taboas-Pais & Rey-Cao, 2012), type of sport (Hardin & Hardin, 2005), level of activity (Hardin & Hardin, 2005), presence of disability (Hardin & Hardin, 2005), and content of articles (Galily et al., 2011). Table 1 provides a complete description of each variable.

After identification of 486 articles on athletes with disabilities, gender was coded as (a) male only, (b) female only. For each article published, type of sport was coded as (a) team (e.g., wheelchair basketball, volleyball); (b) individual (e.g., archery, weight lifting, taekwondo, swimming); level of activity was coded as (a) active, (b) passive; presence of disability was coded as (a) discernible (b) non-discernible and content of the articles was coded as (a) athletic achievement (e.g., “she/he won us the game”); (b) athletic failure (e.g., “the water was too deep for her/him to win the race”), (c) personal story (e.g., “she had polio when she was little and struggled with the system”); and (d) story on the event (e.g., “He will compete in Zagreb”).



### Reliability

It is important to establish reliability in content analysis (Neuendorf, 2011). Inter-coder reliability is the extent where different coders reach same results among different characteristics of classification (Lombard, Synder-Duch & Bracen, 2002). Two coders (one male and one female) independently coded the articles selected both in pilot data and actual data. The author acted as the first coder. Both coders were trained to familiarize with coding system. A subsample of 20 articles (which were retrieved from another sport newspaper and were not part of the study) was coded for training purposes. The differences between the coders were resolved through discussion. For the purpose of this study, 70 more articles were coded (10-20% of full sample was suggested as a subset by Neuendorf, 2011) as reliability test to ensure that coding procedure is reliable, and data reflect consistency in the interpretation and application of coding systems. Using Cohen's Kappa (1960) formula, agreement between the coders was calculated. Inter-coder reliability for all variables in actual data were; (a) the gender of the athlete ( $\kappa = 1.00$ ), (b) type of sport ( $\kappa = .98$ ), (c) level of activity ( $\kappa = .97$ ), (d) disability ( $\kappa = .97$ ), (e) content of articles ( $\kappa = .97$ ), which was considered very high (Viera & Garrett, 2005). Chi-square statistical analysis was conducted to investigate whether variables varied by the gender represented in the articles. Effect sizes were reported as Cramer's V statistics.

**Table 1**  
*Coding Categories*

| Categories                  | Description  | Source                                      |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Gender (1.00 <sup>a</sup> ) |  | Adapted from: Taboas-Pais & Rey-Cao, (2012) |
| Male Athlete only           | The photograph and written text of the article is about male athlete (s) with disability.            |   |
| Female Athlete only         | The photograph and written text of the article is about female athlete (s) with disability.          |   |
| Type of Sport (.98)         |  | Hardin & Hardin, (2005)                     |
| Team                        | Sports played in teams, in collaboration/opposition.   |   |
| Individual                  | Sports where participation is individual without teammates, which can be played against an opponent. |   |
| Level of Activity (.97)     |  | Hardin & Hardin, (2005)                     |
| Active                      | Subject is clearly in motion or in posture that suggests he/she is about to take action.             |   |
| Passive                     | Subject appears obviously posed in the photo; motionless or appears only from neck above.            |   |
| Disability (.97)            |  | Hardin & Hardin, (2005)                     |
| Discernible                 | Subject has a visible physical disability (through visible cues such as wheelchair or crutches).     |   |
| Non-discernible             | Subject appears to be able-bodied.   |   |
| Content of Articles (.97)   |  | Galily et al., (2011)                       |
| Athletic Achievement        | The article covers the success stories of the athlete.   |   |
| Athletic Failure            | The article covers stories on failure of the athlete.  |   |
| Personal Story              | The focus is on personal aspects of the athlete.   |   |
| Story on the Event          | The focus is solely on the event rather than the athlete.  |   |

Note.<sup>a</sup> Indicates the inter coder reliability (Cohen's Kappa).

### Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that newspaper coverage of male athletes with disabilities will be greater than newspaper coverage of female athletes with disabilities. Results indicated that, of

the 486 articles coded, 454 (% 93.4) articles covered male athletes with disabilities and 32 (%6.6) articles covered female athletes with disabilities. Hypothesis 1 was therefore confirmed.

To test the hypothesis that female athletes with disabilities will be shown in participating in individual sports more than that of male athletes with disabilities a chi square test was conducted. The findings of the study supported the second hypothesis (Table 2). While articles focusing on male athletes with disabilities were depicted more in team sports (65%), female athletes were depicted more in individual sports (68.8%),  $\chi^2 (1, N=486) = 14.55$ ;  $p=.0001$ , Cramer's  $V = .17$ .

**Table 2**

*Frequencies and percentages of 'Types of Sport' in articles (n=486)*

| Variable      | Male Only N (%) |        | Female Only N (%) |        | Total N (%) |        |
|---------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Type of Sport |                 |        |                   |        |             |        |
| Individual    | 159             | (35.0) | 22                | (68.8) | 181         | (37.2) |
| Team          | 295             | (65.0) | 10                | (31.2) | 305         | (62.8) |
| Total         | 454             | (100)  | 32                | (100)  | 486         | (100)  |

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (1, N=486) = 14.55$ ,  $p = .0001$ , Cramer's  $V = .17$

Hypothesis 3 predicted that female athletes with disabilities will be shown in passive poses more frequently than that of male athletes with disabilities. Majority of the articles depicted male athletes with disabilities as active (64.1%), and female athletes with disabilities as passive (56.2%) which was as a result supported (Table 3),  $\chi^2 (2, N=486) = 5.29$ ;  $p=.02$ , Cramer's  $V=.10$ .

**Table 3**

*Frequencies and percentages of 'Level of Activity' in articles (n=486)*

| Variable          | Male Only N (%) |        | Female Only N (%) |        | Total N (%) |        |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Level of Activity |                 |        |                   |        |             |        |
| Passive           | 163             | (35.9) | 18                | (56.2) | 181         | (37.2) |
| Active            | 291             | (64.1) | 14                | (43.8) | 305         | (62.8) |
| Total             | 454             | (100)  | 32                | (100)  | 486         | (100)  |

*Note.*  $\chi^2 (1, N=486) = 5.29$ ,  $p = .02$ , Cramer's  $V = .10$

Hypothesis 4 predicted that disability will be more discernible in articles that include male athletes with disabilities than those with female athletes with disabilities in their content. Consistent with hypothesis 4 disability was more discernible in articles focusing on male athletes with disabilities (59.9%) than those articles focusing on female athletes with disabilities (53.1%). Discernible disability was mostly represented by wheelchair or clutches (n=229) in the articles analyzed (Table 4).  $\chi^2 (2, N=486) = 8.31$ ;  $p=.0003$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ .

**Table 4***Frequencies and percentages of 'Discernable Disability' in articles (n=486)*

| Variable        | Male Only N (%) |        | Female Only N (%) |        | Total N (%) |        |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Disability      |                 |        |                   |        |             |        |
| Discernible     | 272             | (59.9) | 17                | (53.1) | 289         | (59.5) |
| Non-discernible | 182             | (40.1) | 15                | (46.9) | 197         | (40.5) |
| Total           | 454             | (100)  | 32                | (100)  | 486         | (100)  |

Note.  $\chi^2$  (1, N=486) = 8.31, p= .0003, Cramer's V = .13

Finally, hypothesis 5 presupposed that male athletes with disabilities will be represented by their athletic achievements while female athletes with disabilities will be represented through personal stories. The majority of the articles covered stories on athletic achievement of athletes with disabilities in their content in both categories (50.2% and 56.3% respectively);  $\chi^2$  (3, N=486) = 17.10; p=.0006, Cramer's V=.19 (Table 5). Unexpectedly, most articles focusing on female athletes with disabilities reported athletic achievement in their content as opposed the personal story as hypothesized. While story on the event was the second most covered content on articles focusing on male athletes with disabilities (31.9%), personal story was mostly covered after athletic achievement in articles focusing on female athletes with disabilities (34.3%).

**Table 5***Frequencies and percentages of 'Content of Articles' (n=486)*

| Variable             | Male Only N (%) |        | Female Only N (%) |        | Total N (%) |        |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------|--------|
| Content of Articles  |                 |        |                   |        |             |        |
| Athletic Achievement | 228             | (50.2) | 18                | (56.3) | 246         | (50.6) |
| Athletic Failure     | 18              | (4.0)  | 2                 | (6.3)  | 20          | (4.1)  |
| Personal Story       | 63              | (13.9) | 11                | (34.3) | 74          | (15.2) |
| Story on the Event   | 145             | (31.9) | 1                 | (3.1)  | 146         | (30.1) |
| Total                | 454             | (100)  | 32                | (100)  | 486         | (100)  |

Note.  $\chi^2$  (3, N=486) = 17.10, p= .0006, Cramer's V = .19

## Discussion

This study explored the extent of coverage and forms of representation of male and female athletes with disabilities in one of the most popular Turkish sport newspaper "*Fanatik*" between 2007 and 2011. The findings revealed that female athletes with disabilities did not receive their rightful share of media representation in *Fanatik*. The hypotheses of this study were discussed under two sections; the frequency of coverage of male and female athletes with disabilities and the representation of those athletes from framing theory perspective.

### **The Frequency of Coverage of Female Athletes with Disabilities**

Consistent with previous research done in Western countries such as in US (e.g. Hardin & Hardin, 2005) or in Europe (e. g Shantz & Gilbert, 2001) as well as in Turkey (e.g. Arslan & Koca, 2007; Özsoy, 2010) findings revealed that, newspaper had more coverage on male athletes than that of female athletes with disabilities in five years, suggesting female athletes are still greatly ignored by the media despite the fact of an increasing number of successful female athletes participating in national and international competitions. Yaprak and Amman (2009) indicated that in some part of the society in Turkey, sport is still something that belongs to men and women do not have the same opportunities as men to participate in sports. Moreover, if participated, female athletes are not supported financially and socially in Turkish community as male athletes. This might be one reason why media focuses on stories about male athletes with disabilities more than the stories on female athletes with disabilities.

In spite of the challenges women are facing to participate in sports, Özsoy (2010) reported that, half of the medals won by Turkish athletes belonged to female athletes in Paralympic Games in Beijing, China, in 2008 (Özsoy, 2010). Besides Paralympics, Turkish female athletes with disabilities participated in different international competitions and events in Europe, United States, and Taiwan as well as other national competitions in Turkey during five years (2007-2011). Considering the presence of these international and national events, the lower number of coverage of female athletes with disabilities in a large circulated sport newspaper in Turkey is disappointing.

As mentioned earlier, due to gender roles in Turkish society, male hegemony in Turkish sports culture are dominant not only among “able-bodied” athletes but also in athletes with disabilities (Yaprak & Amman, 2009). These results confirm the findings that female athletes with disabilities are underrepresented in the media, especially in sports related print media consistent with previous studies (Arslan & Koca, 2007; Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Özsoy, 2010; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Thomas & Smith, 2003). As Entman (1993) argued, sports media in Turkey draws more attention to male athletes with disabilities by providing more coverage and directing attention away from events regarding female athletes with disabilities.

### **Type of Representation of Male and Female Athletes with Disabilities**

Although the quantity of media coverage continues to represent a concern, the quality of coverage is also very important to consider. Individuals with disabilities in general mostly participate in individual sports than team sports (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010). The results of current study indicated that female athletes with disabilities were mostly depicted in participating in individual sports consistent with previous studies (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Hardin & Hardin, 2005). However, there is a remarkable difference in individual sports that female athletes with disabilities participated in this study. Unlike in Western studies, Turkish female athletes with disabilities were not depicted as participating in individual sports mostly considered as feminine, that emphasize beauty and glamour of the female athlete as Hardin and Hardin (2005) discussed. Contrarily, in this study, female athletes with disabilities were depicted in participating in individual sports recognized as masculine, which involves, contact, and use of force or heavy objects (Koivula, 2001). In this study, most female athletes with disabilities covered in articles participated in archery, track and field, table tennis, weight lifting, arm wrestling, judo, Taekwondo and shooting. Gizem Girişmen, national archer, and Nazmiye

Muslu, national weightlifter, for example were two of the most featured athletes in the articles covering female athletes with disabilities. It is remarkable that female athletes with disabilities competing in “masculine” sports as weight lifting, taekwondo, judo or arm wrestling find their way into mainstream sport press in Turkey.

Consistent with the study by Buysse and Borcharding (2010), the newspaper ‘*Fanatik*’ presented female athletes with disabilities as posing, or the pictures were from neck above in most of the articles. Female athletes with disabilities were represented as passive (56.2 %) instead of actively participating in sports. Male athletes on the other hand, were portrayed more in action exposing their competence as athletes than female athletes (Buysse and Borcharding, 2010). This means that most of the articles published in *Fanatik* framed female athletes with disabilities in ways that did not highlight their athletic abilities or performances as athletes in their visual context. This type of portrayal brings forth the perception that female athletes with disabilities are not being treated as serious athletes as their male counterparts in Turkish society.

Contrary to the findings of Buysse and Borcharding (2010) and Thomas and Smith (2003), disability was visible in most of the articles reviewed in both male and female category. However, it is worth noting that while the percentages of male vs. female athletes with disabilities depicted with visible disabilities are somewhat close, the volume of images for male athletes with disabilities is larger. Further studies with more articles focusing on female athletes with disabilities are needed to better determine the visibility of disability in this category. Athletes in wheelchairs were featured most of the time as representing athletes with disabilities, which was also congruent with previous research findings (Buysse & Borcharding, 2010; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Thomas & Smith, 2003). Thomas and Smith (2003) argue that focusing on wheelchair athletes rather reinforces “stereotypical perceptions of disability” than the identity of the athlete as a “person” (p. 176).

Perhaps the most telling finding in this study is that, the articles in *Fanatik* mostly covered the achievement of both male and female athlete with disabilities during events in their story. The following statement is an example of athletic achievement of a female athlete with a disability; “After defeating her opponent from Finland in semifinals, our national archer Gizem Girişmen is finalist for World Archery Championship for Physical Disabilities..., August 22nd, 2009”. After athletic achievement, personal story was covered mostly in articles about female athletes with disabilities. An example statement to personal story is “After having polio as an infant, she has started arm wrestling at 39 years old..., August 26th, 2011”. What makes these results significant to Turkish society is that, the potential impact of embedded biases about gender and disability can be carried beyond sports. Utilizing appropriate behaviors, (as in this study, focusing on athletic achievement instead of athletic failure) on the other hand, can have meaningful impact on perceptions on the gender-disability relations in Turkish society. As Daniels, (2012) suggests, having images focusing on athletes’ performance can be useful to deploy positive messages about female athletes in this case about female athletes with disabilities in Turkish society.

The results of the current study seem to confirm the role that media preserves the differences between men and women in Turkish society as has been found in other studies (e.g. Galily et.al., 2011; Hardin & Hardin, 2005; Knijnik & Souza, 2011). The findings are in line with those from other nations such as USA, Brazil, Spain, France, Germany, India and Israel in many areas such as frequency of the coverage of female athletes with disabilities. However, there were two main points which were different from previous studies in other countries. First female athletes with disabilities in this study participated in individual sports that involve strength,

force, contact and use of heavy objects, which were considered masculine (Koivula, 2001). Second, instead of personal stories female athletes with disabilities were represented with their athletic achievements.

Media on its own may not change the “patriarchal mentality” in Turkey as Bozkurt (2013, p.35) puts it, but it can contribute to stimulating positive behaviors towards promoting sports for female athletes with disabilities by focusing on athleticism rather than other aspects as personal lives or sexual attractiveness of those athletes. Covering more athletic achievement in the news about female athletes with disabilities may increase the public understanding of the “achievement” of those athletes instead of “gender or disability stereotypes” and reinforce the positive perception of disability especially towards female athletes with disability in Turkish society. Thus, removal of stereotypical statements on gender and disability in coverage of sports about athletes with disabilities may have the potential to enable those athletes to envision and achieve equality within wider society. Given that as many as 185.000- 200.000 newspapers sold per week, and having a specific section dedicated to athletes with disabilities, it seems reasonable to suggest that the contribution of *Fanatik* to promote positive perception towards female athletes with disabilities in Turkish society is still scarce.

### **Limitations**

When interpreting data from current study however, one must keep in mind the limitations of having only analyzed a single newspaper. Other newspapers with different scopes including sports and ideologies as well as other forms of media such as television can give more of a complete picture on how female athletes with disabilities are portrayed by the media in Turkey and may allow us to draw stronger conclusions about the role of male hegemony in Turkish culture. Another area that needs further attention is the importance of the quality versus quantity of the news covered by sports media. It is important to have more news coverage in order to manifest the awareness regarding female athletes with disabilities and sport as well as to promote role models; however, it is more important to have less stereotypical and more positive content in the coverage.

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