

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Gender Differences in Amount and Type of Coverage on Collegiate Athletic
Websites

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine if female and male collegiate athletes are depicted equally on their university's athletic websites. Nine University athletic websites were analyzed, comparing the amount and type of articles and pictures between male and female athletes. The results suggest that male and female athletes are represented equally on collegiate athletic websites, with females tending to be overrepresented.

Running head: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC WEBSITES

Gender Differences in Amount and Type of Coverage on Collegiate Athletic Websites

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Gender Differences in Amount and Type of Coverage on Collegiate Athletic Websites

Researchers try to differentiate between genders constantly; it is not uncommon to see headlines or articles discussing how males and females are different.. It seems that people are constantly focusing on how the genders are unlike when the question should be how are the genders alike?

It is a fact that there are dissimilarities in the biological makeup of males and females, but when it comes to an area such as sport, does that mean that one gender is better than the other since sport relies so much on the body? Throughout time, sport has been considered a predominantly masculine domain since more males play it and males watch it than females. Messner et al (2000) explained that there are certain themes expressed through the media to keep sport a male-dominated area. One of these themes is that women are used solely as props or prizes for a man during televised sporting events. In their study, Messner et al (2000) realized that males are being exposed to these themes at a young age, possibly staying in their mind forever and giving them a view that sport is a man's world and women can only be involved in it if they are benefiting the male athlete.

Many individuals assume women are not competent enough to be involved in sport, yet there are those out there that recognize that sport is a place for females to excel and participate. Yet, there is a lack of media coverage for women and if women are shown in the media, they are oftentimes stereotyped in a certain way. A study by Jones et al (1999) examined just that issue regarding female Olympic gold medal winners. Females that performed in gender-stereotypic events, such as gymnastics, received gender-stereotypic comments in print media articles. These comments included

statements about the athletes' beauty, grace, etc. For females that succeeded in male-appropriate sports, such as basketball or hockey, the reporters wrote about task irrelevant behaviors to de-emphasize the fact the women can actually succeed at a man's sport. When it came to coverage of female athletes on television shows, Messner et al (2003) found that when women were discussed, it was often in a sexualized, humorous manner. However, there was such little time dedicated to discussing female athletics at all, it was hard to compare against men's coverage.

While women are often portrayed in a non-serious, hyper-feminized role in the media, it is also important to look at how often women are portrayed that way. That is, how much coverage do female athletes get in the media overall? Bishop (2003) did a study on women's sports coverage in the popular sports magazine *Sports Illustrated*. He found that although women's sports are becoming more popular than ever, *Sports Illustrated* does not show it, with the lack of articles and photographs of women's sports in its pages.

Television and major magazines are large media markets that many people read and these markets often only report sports that compete at a professional level. Pedersen (2002) was interested to see if the gender inequality of newspaper coverage still existed at the high school athletics level. He found that females had fewer stories, that their stories were shorter in length, and that male stories were better placed than female stories. At the collegiate level, Huffman et al (2004) analyzed coverage of women's athletics in campus newspapers and on campus television news shows. While their findings suggested that women receive the same quality of coverage as men do, they still had less print space and air time. In a study by Wann et al (1998), inequitable newspaper

coverage was also observed at the collegiate level, but this time it was differentiated by the size of the university. Larger universities had the greatest coverage inequalities, although males received more coverage at all universities.

Newspapers, television, and magazines are media sources that inform the general public, but how do the media get their information? Broadcasts and articles are often filled with statistics and facts about certain athletes and people often wonder how this information is retrieved. Media guides of each sport at a college or university are available for anyone to buy and are oftentimes how journalists and reporters attain their information about a collegiate athletic team. Kane and Buysee (2005) analyzed collegiate sport media guides to determine if there were any gender differences. Sixty-eight universities provided media guides for twelve sports offered to both males and females. Kane and Buysee only analyzed the photographs on the media guide covers to determine if female athletes were presented in a serious manner. Their findings show that women are portrayed as serious athletes, actually resembling male athletes.

The purpose of this study is to expand previous research. Many media sources have been investigated in terms of women's sports coverage as compared to men's sports coverage. With the internet growing, web sites are now a main source of information. Thus, will there be gender inequalities when looking at collegiate athletic websites? Are there differences in specific collegiate sport homepages for males and females? Based on the work by Kane and Buysee (2005), it is hypothesized that females will be shown as serious athletes from the photographs on the websites. Also, females will have an equal amount of articles relevant to their sport, in contrast to articles irrelevant to their sport. Relevant articles refer to articles that discuss the female in the athletic setting; personal

athletic accomplishments for the athlete, or outcomes of the competition. Irrelevant articles would consist of articles focusing on life outside of the athletic setting for a female athlete; ones that ignore the fact that she is a female athlete, but instead zeroes in on her femininity.

Method

Materials

A total of nine collegiate universities were selected to be analyzed for the present study. These schools were broken down into size of university: large, medium, and small. The following is a table of the schools used, their total number of undergraduate male students, undergraduate female students, total number and male athletes, and total number of female athletes (31 March 2006).

| University | Location | Division | Conference | Total Enrollment | Male Enrollment | Female Enrollment | Male Athletes | Female Athletes |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Duke University | Durham, NC | I-A | Atlantic Coast Conference | 6,092 | 3,157 (51.7%) | 2,941 (48.3%) | 374 (58%) | 271 (42%) |
| University of Southern California | Los Angeles, CA | I-A | Pacific 10 Conference | 15,776 | 7,738 (49%) | 8,038 (51%) | 289 (46.3%) | 335 (53.7%) |
| University of Texas | Austin, TX | I-A | Big XII Conference | 33,518 | 16,014 (47.8%) | 17,504 (52.2%) | 325 (52.1%) | 299 (47.9%) |
| Bucknell University | Lewisburg, PA | I-AA | Patriot League | 3,414 | 1,711 | 1,703 | 405 | 410 |

| | | | | 50.1% | 49.9% | 49.7% | 50.3% | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------|---|--------|-------|--------|-------|-----|
| Northern Illinois University | DeKalb, IL | I-A | Mid-Atlantic Conference | 16,609 | 7,950 | 8,659 | 253 | 181 |
| University Of North Carolina | Greensboro, NC | I-AAA | Southern Conference | 9,738 | 3,083 | 6,655 | 146 | 111 |
| Barry University | Miami Shores, FL | II | Sunshine State Conference | 4,470 | 1,375 | 3,095 | 98 | 127 |
| San Francisco State University | San Francisco, CA | II | CA Collegiate Athletic Association | 17,157 | 6,866 | 10,291 | 93 | 172 |
| University Of Wisconsin | Whitewater, WI | III | WI Intercollegiate Athletic Association | 8,633 | 4,092 | 4,541 | 338 | 262 |

Procedure

When analyzing the aforementioned nine websites, two main areas of concern were addressed. The first were the stories featured on the websites. The stories were categorized as being an outcome story (recapping a recent game or match), an accomplishment story (individual or team and also athletic or academic), a preview story (previewing an upcoming game or looking at new recruits), a personal interest story, or

an announcement. . . Therefore, stories were placed in one or more of nine story categories. From there, the stories were then classified in terms of size; bigger than the computer screen (having to scroll down to read the entire story), or smaller than the computer screen. The monitor of the computer used was a fifteen inch monitor. . . If box scores were at the end of the article, this was not included in the length classification; the main body of the article was the primary focus.

The second area of concern was the photographs featured on the websites. These pictures were analyzed in the same fashion as Kane and Buysee's (2005) media guide study. First, it was determined if the athlete was in an active or passive role then if the athlete was in or out of uniform and finally if the athlete was on or off the field/court. . . A special note was made if the coach was pictured or if a miscellaneous picture was featured, such as the school's logo.

The main athletic page for each university was first analyzed. Each sport that was featured on this page, as well as the coding categories were noted for stories and pictures. From there, specific sports' homepages at each school were analyzed. There were a total of fifteen men's sports pages (football, baseball, basketball, golf, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, cross country [one school had track and field and cross country on the same page], fencing, lacrosse, soccer, wrestling, volleyball, and water polo). For women's sports, there were a total of sixteen (basketball, golf, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, cross country [once school included cross country and track and field on the same page], volleyball, fencing, field hockey, lacrosse, water polo, gymnastics, and bowling). Track and field and cross country were not assigned to men's sport or women's sport at four schools.

All analyses were done between March 13,2006 and March 17,2006. However, certain websites were analyzed prior to these dates only to determine coding categories; yet they were all re-analyzed once the categories were established. It is important to note that only the main pictures and stories on the webpages were reviewed; there were no archived stories that were evaluated. Advertisements and links were also not considered.

Results

From a total of nine collegiate athletic websites, there were three hundred seventy articles analyzed. The majority of the stories were less than the screen (266, 72%). The main type of story was an outcome story (166, 45%). The second most common story was personal athletic accomplishments (85, 23%). The least common story was team academic accomplishments (4, 1%).

Table 1
Total Number of Stories Broken Down by Gender and Type of Story

| | Male | | Female | |
|----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Greater than Screen | 46 | 26.7% | 57 | 29.4% |
| Less than Screen | 126 | 73.3% | 137 | 70.6% |
| Outcome | 75 | 43.6% | 89 | 45.9% |
| Announcement | 8 | 4.7% | 3 | 1.6% |
| Accomplishment | 37 | 21.5% | 43 | 22.2% |
| Personal Athletic Accomplishment | 5 | 3% | 7 | 3.6% |
| Personal Academic Accomplishment | 8 | 4.7% | 8 | 4.1% |
| Team Athletic Accomplishment | 1 | .6% | 3 | 1.6% |
| Team Academic Accomplishment | 4 | 2.2% | 4 | 2.1% |
| Personal Interest | 21 | 12.2% | 17 | 8.8% |
| Preview Game | 16 | 9.3% | 18 | 9.3% |
| Preview Players | 6 | 3.5% | 7 | 3.6% |

One hundred seventy two stories were dedicated to male sports, which came to 46.5%. Seventy three point three percent (126) of these stories were less than the screen. Keeping with the trend, the most common stories were the outcome stories (75, 43.6%). Female sports had a total of one hundred ninety four stories, or 52.4% of the total stories. Seventy point six percent of their stories were less than a screen (137) and they also had outcome stories as the most common (89, 45.9%). Refer again to Table 1 for a complete breakdown. When comparing males and females, it seems that there is no difference in number of types of stories and length of stories, which supports the hypothesis.

There were a total of three hundred eighty pictures on all websites. The majority of the pictures were active (238, 62.6%); the athletes were on the field or court (277, 72.9%); and the athletes were in uniform (300, 79%). Eleven pictures (3%) ended up being classified as miscellaneous, which, for all of these pictures, were the school's logo.

Table 2

Total Number of Pictures Broken Down by Gender and Type

| | Male | | Female | |
|-----------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Active | 105 | 63.3% | 131 | 65.8% |
| Passive | 61 | 36.8% | 68 | 34.2% |
| In Uniform | 137 | 82.5% | 161 | 80.9% |
| Out Uniform | 29 | 17.5% | 39 | 19.6% |
| On Field/Court | 130 | 78.3% | 145 | 72.9% |
| Off Field/Court | 36 | 21.7% | 53 | 26.6% |

One hundred sixty six pictures were of males, or 43.7%. Also following the trend, the majority of the pictures were active (105, 63.3%); the athletes on the field or court (130, 78.3%); and the athletes in uniform (137, 82.5%). Females occupied one hundred ninety nine pictures (52.4%). Most of the pictures were active (131, 65.8%); the

athletes on the field or court (145, 72.9%); and the athletes in uniform (161,80.9%).

Refer again to Table 2 for a complete breakdown. Again, there was not much difference between male and female athletes and how they are presented, which supports the hypothesis.

When considering the main athletic page, nineteen of the sports features were male and sixteen were female. Thirty two stories were featured, most of them (75%) occupying less than the screen. The two most popular types of stories were outcome (59.4%) and preview of an upcoming game or match (15.6%). As far as pictures, there were a total of thirty seven. About half of them were passive (51.4%) and half active (48.6%). However, the majority of the pictures were featured on the field or court (67.6%) and in uniform (73%).

Table 3

Main Athletic Website Broken Down by Number of Stories and Number of Pictures

| Stories | Number | Percent |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Greater than Screen | 8 | 25% |
| Less than Screen | 24 | 75% |
| Outcome | 19 | 59.4% |
| Announcement | 3 | 9.4% |
| Accomplishment | 3 | 9.4% |
| Personal Athletic Accomplishment | 0 | 0% |
| Personal Academic Accomplishment | 2 | 6.3% |
| Team Athletic Accomplishment | 0 | 0% |
| Team Academic Personal Interest | 2 | 6.3% |
| Preview Game | 5 | 15.6% |
| Preview Players | 0 | 0% |
| Pictures | | |
| Active | 18 | 48.6% |

| | | |
|-----------------|----|-------|
| Passive | 19 | 51.4% |
| In Uniform | 27 | 73% |
| Out Uniform | 10 | 27% |
| On Field/Court | 25 | 67.6% |
| Off Field/Court | 12 | 32.4% |

Discussion

For many, many years, female athletes have been looked down upon by sports fans. They are tended to not be taken as serious athletes and are often stereotyped as being a lesbian. Previous research has documented that female athletes receive less coverage in news programs as well as magazines and newspapers. However, a study by Kane and Buysee (2005) opened eyes and presented data that suggested that maybe females are receiving equal coverage elsewhere. The passage of Title IX in the 1970's may have something to do with this. 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 retrieved 4 2006). Athletic programs at universities are one of the areas that are included in this act. In order for athletic programs at a university to be compliant with Title IX, three areas need to be addressed, which included athletic financial assistance, accommodation of athletic interests and abilities, and other program areas. Female and male athletes should receive financial aid proportionate to the amount of student-athletes each gender has. Also, an institution must either have a proportionate amount of female and male athletes to the amount of female and male students at the university, show a history of change in their athletic programs, or demonstrate that a university is accommodating to the interests of all athletes by offering sports that interest

all athletes, male and female. The "other program" area examines the availability of a "laundry list" of things such as adequate equipment, travel allowances, locker rooms and practice facilities, and publicity. If an institution demonstrates equality in certain areas such as the ones mentioned above, as well as provide adequate financial aid and accommodate to interests and abilities, they are considered compliant with Title IX (Curtis & Grant, 2006 retrieved 4/2006).

Collegiate sport media guides are a good area to obtain information where female athletes are taken as serious athletes who work hard to achieve in their respective sports. These findings led to the present research on collegiate athletic websites. Media guides are often only referred to by journalists covering a specific sporting event, but web sites are open to everyone and are often visited by many individuals. Hence, it was hypothesized that females would appear as serious athletes on these websites, as well as receive an equal number of articles that were relevant to their sport and athletic ability.

The findings of this study support both of those hypotheses. Females were depicted as serious athletes due to the fact that oftentimes, in their photos, they were featured in an active shot, in their uniform, and on the field or court. Also, hardly any stories were irrelevant to the sport, meaning very few of the stories had to do with personal lives or what they do with their spare time. Outcome stories did turn out to be the most popular type of story, mainly because there tended to be a lot of sports in season. There is also a highly competitive nature in collegiate athletics and winning is oftentimes highly valued, which is why outcome stories are so popular. It has to be noted if the team is doing well, so they can be supported by fellow students. Personal athletic accomplishments were also very common. Athletes are often thought of as elite

individuals, separate from the normal population. These types of stories add to that notion by highlighting how amazing certain athletes are. Academic accomplishments were very uncommon, however, possibly de-emphasizing the role of student-athlete.

Smaller schools were often less updated and featured fewer stories and pictures altogether. The reason for this could lie in the fact that they do not have the staff to constantly update the website and make it flashy for visitors, like larger schools have. Fewer people, outside of the own student body know about these smaller schools, so fewer people are likely to visit the website, which may result in sporadic, rather than frequent updates. Coaches were oftentimes the focus of stories and pictures, especially accomplishment stories, suggesting that good leadership is something that should be valued. On many websites, there would be one story featured on many pages, often dealing with some sort of charity event or personal accomplishments where many athletes were mentioned.

The results from the study imply that gender equality is becoming more and more common. It was interesting to notice that although the NCAA basketball tournament was in progress, and many schools had teams playing in the tournament, there was still equality. There could be many reasons for this however. First of all, there are more women's sports than men's sports, although not by much. The fact that there are more can result in more women's sports being in season and having more outcomes to report. Also, if a women's team is highly successful, they would be featured more on a website, with longer articles dedicated to the team. One possible reason for the apparent equality on these websites lies in the recruitment process for future athletes. Since websites are

open to anyone who can type a URL, many high school athletes are welcome to visit the site and learn about a school. Many collegiate teams do all they can to get the top recruiting class, so they have to do anything they can to make themselves look good. They can start by making their website look as if it is interested in all types of sport. A lot of space can be dedicated to women's sport just to set an impression that women's sport is valued there, which can help new recruits choose that particular school. The numerous amounts of outcome and accomplishment stories illustrate how good a particular program is, how good the athletes are, and how great the coach is. All of this is to make their school look good; it may actually have nothing to do with reality. These web sites might just give the wrong impression.

In order to get a better idea if college athletics is changing to become more equal, it is important to address the mass media, rather than just collegiate athletic websites. Average people tend to read popular newspapers, magazines, and mainstream web sites that, as previous research has suggested, still tend to leave women out of their coverage. It is easy to forget, when analyzing this data, that all of the institutions must comply with Title IX in order to receive federal aid from the government. One of the areas that can demonstrate this compliance is in the amount of publicity. In almost all of the universities, women's athletics seemed to be overrepresented compared to the amount of female athletes that are actually at the school. By filling the web sites with many articles dedicated to female athletics, the institutions are providing women with the publicity Title IX demands, while also keeping them away from mainstream media. Many of the schools also tended to offer more female sports than male sports, yet these sports are not the mainstream ones that people are often interested in, such as football or basketball.

The presence of these sports, offered only to females, require some articles on the website, which then result in, what seems as, more coverage for the female athletes, even though these sports could be considered "less important."

There are many limitations to this study, however. First of all, only nine schools were analyzed, which is not a representative sample. Schools from every region in every state in every conference in every division, etc. should be considered. Also, each website was only reviewed once, meaning that it may have been a good day for coverage on that particular site. If each site were to be reviewed numerous times, results may have suggested something different. Main stories were also the only ones reviewed, yet the archived stories could have suggested certain trends or altered the results in some way. Finally, all sports at a particular school were reviewed, even the ones not in season, meaning some stories were more than six months old.

As far as future research is concerned, many things can be done. As mentioned earlier, it would be important to look at many schools at different points in time, for numerous amounts of time. This can lead to more conclusive results and get a better understanding of the equality of athletic websites. Also, many sports were either male sports (football) or female sports (volleyball, often). It would be interesting to look at sports that both males and females participate in, such as basketball or soccer or baseball/softball, and compare how each sport is covered for each gender. Finally, to get a better understanding of how equal male and female athletes are depicted, it would be imperative to compare the stories featured on collegiate athletic websites to stories featured on major sport websites, such as espn.com or a newspaper website. A story considered to be important on a collegiate website may not even be given the time of day

on a major sport website, which is what many people visit throughout the day. Another way to measure how seriously female athletes are considered, is to look at attendance at competitions. The more people who go out and watch a live game to support their school's female athletes show that these athletes are taken more seriously as athletes.

In conclusion, this study has suggested that, as far as collegiate athletic websites go, a ray of hope is shining down on equality between males and females. However, there are many other aspects to consider before drawing any conclusions as to how male athletes are viewed as compared to female athletes. This study does begin to pave a path as to beginning to understand how the equality is emerging and suggests future research as to how equal these athletes really are.

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