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## A Content Analysis of Gender-Specific Media Coverage of Sport: NCAA Athletic Department Home Webpages

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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GENDER-SPECIFIC MEDIA COVERAGE OF SPORT:  
NCAA ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT HOME WEBPAGES

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts - Journalism and Media Studies

Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies  
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The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
May 2016

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## **Thesis Approval**

The Graduate College  
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

April 7, 2016

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entitled

A Content Analysis of Gender-Specific Media Coverage of Sport: NCAA Athletic  
Department Home Webpages

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## ABSTRACT

### **A Content Analysis of Gender-Specific Media Coverage of Sport: NCAA Athletic Department Home Webpages**

By

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Studies have found that media coverage of women's sports is inadequate when compared with coverage of men's sports. The results of these studies have revealed inadequacies in terms of amount of coverage as well as type of coverage. Findings demonstrate that there is a certain way media frame female athletes when they are covered. Female athletes are often portrayed in overly sexualized images, as feminine role models, as passive rather than active, and in sports that are considered gender-appropriate. These types of portrayals can perpetuate gender bias and stereotypes, undermine the true athletic ability of female athletes, and give the audience the idea that male athletes are more important than female athletes.

Past research, with few exceptions, has found inequitable coverage of female and male athletes in every media type studied, from print and television to the Internet. Some exceptions to the common findings include *not-for-profit* media, such as the *NCAA News*, and Internet-based publications. The current study combined the two aforementioned media types to determine if athletic departments that are affiliated with the NCAA offer more balanced coverage of female and male athletes on their official websites than has been found in past research.

The results revealed that although the type of coverage the athletes received was similar, the amount was not. Females were underrepresented in articles and photographs on NCAA

athletic department home webpages. The fact that the webpages analyzed by the current content analysis represent a more modern media type at not-for-profit, NCAA-affiliated institutions, did not lead to the overall balance in coverage that was originally expected.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Studies have found that media coverage of women's sports is inadequate when compared with coverage of men's sports (Hardin et al., 2002; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994; Weber & Carini, 2012). Evidence of this inadequate coverage has been documented across a myriad of media outlets including television, magazines, newspapers, and even the Internet. Inadequacies that have been found range from a disproportionately small amount of media coverage of women's sports compared to men's sports (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bishop, 2003; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Weber & Carini, 2012), to unrealistic depictions of female athletes that portray them in passive instead of active roles and in overly sexualized images that emphasize their feminine traits rather than their athletic ability (Duncan, Jensen, & Messner, 1993; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002).

Media scholars have disagreed on the motives behind this occurrence. While popular belief may be that the media solely give their audience what it wants, some scholars have reasoned that the manner in which the media present men's sports actually helps build interest and excitement while simultaneously silencing women's sports (Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Duncan, Jensen, & Messner, 1993; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). According to Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner (2013), better quality coverage, from commentary to technical aspects, portrays men's sports as more exciting and therefore, more important. The lack of quality coverage and coverage in general of women's sports may send a message to the audience that female athletes and their sporting events are secondary to men. Duncan, Jensen, and Messner (1993) posited that viewers of televised sports are subjected to gender-biased framing

that could cause them to construct meanings about female athletes that include stereotypes and inequities. According to Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004), the manner in which female athletics are covered by the media helps mold society's view of those athletics and could quite possibly create attitudes and values about which sports are appropriate for females. Therefore, media scholars have been led to question which came first; the lack of public interest in women's sports, or the lack of media attention.

### **Theoretical Background**

There have been a number of theoretical approaches taken in the study of media coverage of women's sports. Scholars have utilized these theoretical approaches in their research in an effort explain the difference in media coverage that exists between men's and women's sports. Some of these theories include: the brand equity perspective (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002); the resource-dependence perspective (Cunningham et al., 2004); gender order and its hegemonic forms (Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2005; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009); and framing (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Duncan, Jensen, & Messner, 1993; Hardin et al., 2002; Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2005; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994). Uses and gratifications perspective has been considered as well (Gantz & Wenner, 1991), yet this theory was applied to the study of viewing habits of the audience of televised sports, not as an explanation of the manner in which women's sports are covered by the media.

Cunningham and Sagas (2002) took the brand equity perspective when analyzing media coverage of women's sports. They posited that media coverage of women's sport was dependent on brand equity of the team, meaning economic forces rather than patriarchal ideology.

Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) employed the theory of gender order and its hegemonic forms in their study when they analyzed two Internet publications. They theorized that sport had been a primary source to help preserve hegemonic masculinity. Somewhat consistent with framing theory, the authors sought to determine what type of gender-specific descriptors were used for female and male athletes and if those descriptors reinforced stereotypes.

In 1994, Shifflett and Revelle took an innovative approach to studying the gendered portrayal of sports. Going off the assumption that a focus on men and a feminine portrayal of women is what the audience wanted and would pay for, they chose to study the *NCAA News*, a “not-for-profit” publication. The authors theorized that because the publication did not rely on market forces and advertising revenue, its sport coverage would be more balanced in terms of gender than coverage provided by “for-profit” media outlets (p. 145). This theory would turn into the resource-dependence perspective taken by Cunningham et al. (2004) in their reexamination of the *NCAA News*. Other scholars have recently taken the “not-for-profit” versus “for-profit” approach to studying gender differences in the media coverage of sport as well (Cooper & Cooper, 2009).

The current study will focus primarily on framing theory. One of the most common theories employed in the study of gender representation in sport media coverage is framing. According to Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004), framing theory suggests that media practices for representing gender have become standardized and therefore reinforce stereotypes. Framing refers to not only the lack in coverage that research has shown, but more specifically the type of coverage of women’s sports and female athletes when coverage is present. Gendered coverage by means of feminine and passive portrayals of female athletes has been discovered by

research including but not limited to Fink and Kensicki's (2002) examination of *Sports Illustrated* magazine and Buysse and Embser-Herbert's (2004) examination of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the current study is to conduct further research on gender-specific media coverage of sport. Per suggestion of Cunningham et al. (2004), the examination will focus on a not-for-profit media source by analyzing the home webpages of athletic departments affiliated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Although there is a significant amount of prior research on the subject of gender in sport media coverage, there is limited research available on the gender-specific coverage provided by intercollegiate athletic websites (Cooper, 2008; Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). Cooper and Cooper (2009) noted that a primary reason why this type of research is necessary is not only the not-for-profit aspect, but so too for the fact that it focuses on athletic departments that operate under the ethical constraints of Title IX due to the fact that they are part of their coinciding universities. Also, the Internet has become a major media source for fan consumption of sports and this mass consumption alone makes it essential for scholars to examine the coverage that is being provided (p. 1-2).

### **Title IX/Women in Sports**

Title IX is a component of the Educational Amendments of 1972 that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities including interscholastic or intercollegiate athletic programs (Heckman, 1992). Title IX grew out of the Civil Rights and



feminist movements of the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, as it was a part of the amendments to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Valentin, 1997). The preamble to the amendment states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational programs or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (p. 123-124). According to the United States Department of Justice, the principal objective of Title IX is to “avoid the use of federal money to support sex discrimination in education programs and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices” (DOJ, 2015, para. 21). In terms of education-based athletics, male and female athletes are required to have equal access to coaches, equipment, practice facilities, and scholarship money under Title IX (Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004). The amendment also requires that equitable promotions be provided to both groups of athletes (Cooper & Cooper, 2009, p. 2).

Women’s participation in sport has dramatically increased since the enactment of Title IX (Cunningham et al., 2004; Hardin et al., 2007; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2009; Kane, 1988). For example, in 1988, just 16 years after the passage of Title IX, the number of young women participating in all interscholastic sports had jumped from just 300,000 to 1.8 million (Kane, 1988, p. 88). When Congress passed Title IX in 1972, fewer than 32,000 women competed in intercollegiate athletics and women received only two percent of schools’ athletic budgets (NWLC, 2015). The current number is over six times that rate with a record 207,814 women competing in intercollegiate athletics in 2013-2014 (para. 2). Female participation in intercollegiate sports only recently caught up to pre-Title IX numbers of male participation, which was 170,384; the amount of female college athletes did not reach that number until 2005-2006 (para. 4). Although the amount of women participating in college athletics has increased

exponentially since 1972, there is still progress to be made, considering over half of the students at NCAA schools are women, yet they only make up 43 percent of all college athletes (para. 5). Women at NCAA Division I schools also receive only 28 percent of the total money spent on athletics (para. 6). According to Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004), more women are participating in college athletics and earning athletic scholarships because Title IX has encouraged school administrators to work toward equity in athletic spending. Athletic scholarships were nonexistent for women in 1972 and now at a typical NCAA Division I school, 42 percent of money spent on athletic scholarship dollars goes to women (NWLC, 2015).

Although Title IX compliance has forced athletic departments to provide general services and opportunities, another concern is media coverage of female athletes (Cooper, 2008; Cunningham et al., 2004; Kane, 1988). With the increased number of women competing in all levels of athletics, it is important that the media provide a realistic view of these athletes. According to Cunningham and Sagas (2002), women have received more favorable media coverage since the enactment of Title IX. Cooper and Cooper (2009) also cited Title IX as one of the primary reasons that research has shown more favorable coverage rates for women. This is demonstrated by Kane's (1988) study of media coverage of female athletes before, during, and after the implementation of Title IX. Results revealed that the proportion of coverage of female athletes in athletic versus nonathletic roles increased, yet feature articles gave significantly more coverage to women in "sex-appropriate" sports (Kane, 1988, p. 87). Although such research has shown an improvement in media coverage of female athletes, the proportion of coverage allotted to female athletes is still in most cases less than that allotted to their male counterparts (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bishop, 2003; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002).

Although there has been improvement in the coverage of women's sport since the enactment of Title IX, especially apparent in not-for-profit media outlets such as the *NCAA News* and intercollegiate athletic department websites (Cunningham et al. 2004; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002), according to Cooper (2009), Title IX compliance will not be fully achieved until female athletes are provided media coverage allocations equal to their NCAA participation rates.

### **Significance of the Current Study**

It is important to study how the media represent female athletes and sporting events because just like any other group, the media help shape society's beliefs about them (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Duncan, Jensen, & Messner, 1993). If those representations are misguided then female athletes and society as a whole are both put at a disadvantage. According to Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004), both sport and media construct stereotypes that maintain gender-inequality, so it is important to study the ways these two institutions interact with each other. Shifflett and Revelle (1994) argued that because media often serve to frame what is acceptable, expected, and desirable, inequitable coverage could potentially undermine the accomplishments and value of women in sports.

In addition to studying the way media and sport interact with each other, it is equally important to study the way institutions that operate under Title IX handle the two. According to Cunningham and Sagas (2002), because publicity was listed as a required item in an interpretation of Title IX, the failure of athletic departments to provide equitable publicity to a certain sport can create a legal dilemma for those institutions.

Cooper and Cooper (2009) added another significant reason for the inquiry into NCAA-affiliated athletic department websites. They posited that part of the importance of equitable

coverage by intercollegiate athletic departments is that they set gender coverage precedence for other independent media outlets.

### **Organization of Thesis**

Chapter One provided an overview of the concepts and theories involved in the research on gender-specific media coverage of sport, including Title IX, the brand equity perspective, the resource-dependence perspective, gender order and its hegemonic forms, and framing. The prior research and importance of further inquiry into this subject, especially in the area of not-for-profit media outlets that operate under the constraints of Title IX and modern media outlets such as the Internet, were highlighted as well. Chapter Two details previous scholarly literature that is especially pertinent to gender-specific media coverage of sport. Chapter Three discusses methods employed to conduct the current study. Chapter Four provides the results of the current research. Chapter Five provides further discussion of the findings as well as implications of those findings and considers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes an in depth review of previous research conducted on media coverage of women's sports. The lack of coverage of women's sports as well as the theoretical foundations behind that disparity are discussed. The theoretical foundations informing much of the previous research include: 1) the resource-dependence perspective; 2) the brand-equity perspective; 3) gender order and its hegemonic forms; and 4) framing, which is likely the most prevalent lens through which gendered media coverage of sport has been examined.

#### **Lack in Coverage**

One fact that the majority of scholars who have studied sport media coverage can agree upon is the overall lack of coverage of women's sports in the media compared to that of their male counterparts (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bishop, 2003; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009; Weber & Carini, 2012). This inadequacy has been found to exist in almost every form of media with few exceptions such as the *NCAA News* (Cunningham et al., 2004), intercollegiate athletic websites (Cooper, 2008; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002), and female-oriented online magazine *espnW* (Wolter, 2015), in which results proved to be at least somewhat equitable. While the overall consensus is that there is indeed a disproportionately large amount of coverage favoring male athletics, researchers do not always agree upon the cause of this inequity. The authors of each study have utilized theoretical foundations as explanations for and against the gendered coverage of sport that are discussed further in the following sections.

## Theoretical Foundations

### Resource-dependence Perspective

Cunningham et al. (2004) are some of the few researchers who found a slight exception to the standard of inadequacy in media coverage of women's sports. This was found through the authors' analysis of the *NCAA News*, a publication whose purpose is to report on the activities within the National Collegiate Athletic Association, or NCAA (p. 867). A possible explanation for this deviation from the usual results is the fact that unlike the most frequently examined *for-profit* media, *NCAA News* is a *not-for-profit* publication.

Cunningham et al. (2004) examined the *NCAA News* a decade after earlier research determined that its coverage of women's sports was inequitable when compared with its coverage of men's sports (Shifflett & Revelle, 1994). The purpose of this reexamination was to determine if the publication's coverage had improved in those ten years. The reexamination also took into account criticisms garnered by the earlier study and incorporated suggestions for improvement. Those suggestions included increasing the sample size and comparing coverage of women to a standard such as total number of female student-athletes in the NCAA. The authors expected that the writers for the *NCAA News* would be more aware of gender representation than they had previously been. They also expected that, as a *not-for-profit*, the publication would treat female athletes more fairly than its *for-profit* counterparts.

The authors examined 24 issues of the publication, accounting for each month in 1999 and 2001. They chose articles that focused solely on athletes, coaches, or their teams. Individual paragraphs of the articles were used as the unit of analysis. Paragraphs were coded for gender, content, location, and length in square inches. Photographs were also included in the research. They were coded for location, gender, content, and size, in addition to specific categories such as

competing, not competing, or head-shot. After analyzing the data with chi-square and ANOVA, the authors compared the publication's coverage of women to two different standards and yielded two different results. They determined that the percent of coverage (42.4%) was equitable when compared with the total percent of female athletes competing in the NCAA (42%), but was not equitable when compared with the total percent of women's teams competing in the NCAA (51%). The researchers also determined that coverage of women had increased since the previous study. In terms of photographic coverage, 39.7% of the photos featured women or women's teams and photographs featuring women were significantly larger than those featuring men ( $F(1, 895) = 8.28, p < .01$ ). Overall, the authors determined that coverage could be considered equitable or inequitable depending on the standard that it was compared to.

An important note on the study, as mentioned earlier, is that the publication that was examined was a *not-for-profit*, in direct contrast with most other research conducted on the topic, which examines *for-profit* media. Therefore, the partially equitable results were possibly a result of the idea that, as the authors stated, a *not-for-profit* would be expected to provide more representative coverage of women since it does not have to answer to the needs of its consumers. By consumers, the authors more specifically meant all of the "environmental entities upon which the organization is dependent," which also includes its advertisers (p. 862). This is consistent with the "resource-dependence perspective," one theory the authors used to explain coverage choices of media (p. 862).

Similar to Cunningham et al. (2004), Cooper and Cooper (2009) also examined an intercollegiate media source, although their research focused on a more modern medium, the Internet. They analyzed the overall gender coverage provided to each of the teams contained within the athletic departments on intercollegiate athletic websites (p. 4). The authors' purpose

was to study a *not-for-profit* media outlet with Title IX constraints due to affiliation with their coinciding universities. Due to those Title IX constraints, Cooper and Cooper (2009) stated that the athletic departments would be expected to provide equitable gender coverage on their websites.

The authors hypothesized that: 1) women would receive significantly less total overall coverage on intercollegiate athletic home webpages than men, when in comparison to coinciding NCAA athlete and team gender participation rates; and 2) women would receive significantly less non-scroll coverage on intercollegiate athletic home webpages than men, when in comparison to coinciding NCAA athlete and team gender participation rates (p. 4).

To conduct their research, Cooper and Cooper (2009) analyzed the content of 30 randomly selected NCAA Division I programs. Stratified samples of one week during each of the three sports seasons during the 2005-06 academic year served as the time frame. Four units of measurement were analyzed: 1) advertisements; 2) articles; 3) multimedia content; and 4) photographs. The units of measurement were coded for gender, location, and square-inch. The data were analyzed using chi-square analysis.

The results of the study demonstrated that men had significantly more coverage within each of the four units of measurement. Women only received 40% of the overall total article coverage. They also received less favorable locations, with women accounting for only 36.4% of the non-scroll space. The advertisement coverage provided to women was also significantly less than coverage provided to men when compared to overall female athlete ( $\chi^2 = 484.87$ , df 1,  $p < .05$ ) and team ( $\chi^2 = 1707.68$ , df 1,  $p < .05$ ) participation rates. The multimedia coverage area contained the least favorable coverage allocations for women, who only received 21.9% of the dedicated space, which was significantly less than the coverage received by men ( $\chi^2 = 254.50$ , df



1,  $p < .05$ ) (p. 7). In terms of photographic coverage, women received only 39.7% of the coverage, which matched photographic coverage of women in Cunningham et al.'s (2004) previous study.

When compared to NCAA gender participation rates of women (42.1% of athletes and 53.2% of teams), the results of the study revealed that they were underrepresented in comparison to men in each unit of measurement (p. 8).

According to the authors, although the results were disappointing when compared to gender participation rates, they can be considered somewhat promising when compared to previous content analyses such as Fink and Kensicki's (2002) study of *Sports Illustrated* magazine, in which women only received a dismal 10% of overall article and photographic coverage (p. 8). The results are similar when compared to other studies of *not-for-profit* media such as Cunningham et al.'s (2004) analysis of the *NCAA News*, although not quite as equitable. The fact that the study is more recent and focused on a more modern form of media such as the Internet is even more discouraging, given the hope of a gradual increase in equitable gender representation over time.

### ***Gender Order and its Hegemonic Forms***

More discouraging for female athletes than Cooper and Cooper's (2009) analysis of the Internet is a study conducted the same year by Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009). They examined two Internet sport publications, *ESPN Internet* and *CBS Sportsline*, to determine if the two popular sport news sites reinforced "hegemonic masculine stereotypes" with the use of gender-specific descriptors that had been found to be prevalent in other forms of media including newspapers and television (p. 479). They cited gender order and its hegemonic forms as their

theoretical basis, as sport has been considered a primary source to help preserve hegemonic masculinity. The authors sought to determine what type of descriptors Internet sportswriters used when writing about the athletes and if those descriptors were the same gender-specific descriptors that reinforced stereotypes.

Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) included all articles from the sites that were written about the NCAA Division I men's and women's basketball tournaments during a three-week period. The articles were coded for eight categories: 1) physical appearance; 2) athletic prowess; 3) athletic weaknesses; 4) skill level-accomplishments; 5) skill level-failures; 6) family role; 7) psychological strengths and weaknesses; and 8) humor.

After chi-square analysis was implemented to compare the data, it was determined that *ESPN Internet* had a significantly higher proportion of articles that covered women's basketball than *CBS Sportsline* ( $\chi^2 = 26.408$ ,  $(df) = 1$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). The authors also found that 72% of the descriptors used for all athletes were positive and in terms of gender-descriptors, the results contradicted previous research. Most of the differences between men and women were not statistically significant and those that were actually favored women. The results are promising in the study of the most modern media form, yet as the authors stated, cannot be generalized since only two websites were examined.

The study was not so promising in terms of amount of coverage. The two popular Internet sport publications echoed results of disproportion found in the previously mentioned media, as only 38% of *ESPN Internet* articles and an astonishingly low 6% of *CBS Sportsline* articles featured women. Therefore, the authors concluded that the results of the study both challenged hegemonic masculinity (in terms of the type of descriptors used to discuss female athletes) and reinforced hegemonic masculinity (in terms of an overwhelmingly unbalanced amount of

coverage favoring male athletes), and that the gendered nature of sport media content on the Internet remains unclear (p. 492).

Wolter (2015) also employed hegemonic masculinity as the theoretical framework for her analysis of the website, *espnW*, which is ESPN, Inc.'s first initiative developed specifically for female sports fans and female athletes (p. 169). The author's purpose for this analysis was to: 1) see how *espnW* conceptualized female fans as an audience; 2) discover whether *espnW* transcended ESPN, Inc.'s history and offered a more positive portrayal of female athletes; and 3) to see whether *espnW* as a digital product suite contributed to portrayals of female athletes as competent sportswomen (p. 169).

Wolter's (2015) research questions included: 1) What types of athletes in terms of sex, sport, level of sport, and team/individual sport are featured in photographs accompanying feature articles on *espnW*? 2) Do feature photographs on *espnW* showcase athletes in uniform, on the playing surface, and in action? 3) How do contributors write about athletes in terms of game/nongame reporting, reference to athleticism, and references to psychological/emotional strengths/weaknesses in feature articles on *espnW*? and 4) Are athletes' nonsporting lives in terms of references to physical appearance, family roles, or personal relationships referenced in *espnW* feature articles? (p. 174).

The author analyzed feature articles and their accompanying photographs from *espnW* as the unit of analysis. The sample was collected for the first six months of the website's existence, resulting in 437 photographs and 447 articles for examination. Wolter (2015) utilized coding categories established by previous research to code the articles and photographs. The photographs were coded for categories such as date, sport, category of sport, male/female, individual/team sport, uniform, pose presentation, court location, and thematic presentation (p.

174). Articles were coded for categories such as date, sport, category of sport, male/female, game/nongame reporting, individual/team sport, whether or not sexuality was addressed, and whether or not femininity was addressed (p. 175).

Wolter's (2015) results were extremely promising in the study of gender coverage of sport, yet possibly a result of the medium that was analyzed being so modern or for the fact that the website was specifically dedicated to women. The author found nearly no significant differences in the way female and male athletes were portrayed and found that female athletes were featured more often than male athletes in articles and photos. According to the author, the analysis showed that "ESPN, Inc.'s first attempt at a site dedicated to female athletes and fans is progressive and positively represents female athletes based on the quantitative measures used in the study" (p. 186).

Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005) discussed hegemony (in addition to framing) in their study of four women's sport magazines as well. According to them, the presentation of women as naturally and biologically less suited for sport than men preserves male hegemony in sport. They also noted that women's increased participation in sport has been considered a challenge to male hegemony and gender roles. They utilized hegemony in conjunction with framing theory to assist in explaining the reasons behind the framing of women's sports by the media. Their study is discussed in further detail in terms of framing theory in the next section.

Besides the anomalies of the *NCAA News* and *espnW*, research has consistently shown that the disparities in the coverage of women's sports are mirrored from one medium to the next. According to Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005), female athletes have been historically underrepresented in overall coverage despite increased opportunities and participation.

### ***Brand-Equity Perspective***

Cunningham and Sagas (2002) examined media coverage of intercollegiate athletics on university-sponsored Internet websites to further previous research concerning gender differences in sport coverage. The authors utilized the brand equity perspective as their theoretical background. They theorized that the coverage of women's sport was dependent upon the brand equity of that sport rather than patriarchal ideology and posited that a team with strong brand equity would receive a greater proportion of coverage than a team with poor brand equity. Cunningham and Sagas (2002) cited Aaker (1991) to explain that brand equity refers to the awareness, loyalty, and worth that are associated with a certain brand. In this case, the brand they were referring to was a sports team. Therefore, they theorized that the media would be more likely to cover a team if that team's awareness, loyalty, and worth were high rather than that coverage being dependent on gender.

Women's basketball and women's softball were studied because women's basketball was considered to have high brand equity while women's softball was considered to have low brand equity. Cunningham and Sagas (2002) put forth three hypotheses in their research: 1) women's basketball teams would receive better media coverage in terms of amount and timeliness of the coverage than would softball teams; 2) no significant differences would exist in the media coverage between men's and women's basketball teams; and 3) baseball teams would receive better media coverage than softball teams (pp. 137-138).

Cunningham and Sagas (2002) used content analysis as their research method. They used a stratified random sampling procedure to select the athletic departments that they analyzed. They randomly selected five schools from each regional division of the NCAA, resulting in 35 schools. The schools' websites were analyzed during two time periods; basketball season and

baseball/softball season. The university-sponsored websites served as the unit of analysis and team information and in-season variables were the two types of data that were collected. Chi-square analysis and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were used to analyze the data. The authors did not report on inter-coder reliability, which presents a weakness to their study.

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. While women's basketball teams received better coverage than softball teams, not all differences were significant. ANCOVA revealed that press releases for women's basketball teams were significantly longer than press releases for softball teams ( $F(1, 183) = 5.99, p < .05$ ), women's basketball teams received updated scores more often than softball teams ( $\chi^2 = 5.861, p < .05$ ), and women's basketball received a greater percentage of updated team statistics ( $\chi^2 = 9.795, p < .01$ ) and individual statistics ( $\chi^2 = 10.711, p < .001$ ) (p. 140).

Hypothesis 2 was fully supported. The coverage of women's basketball was comparable to men's basketball and even better in some instances concerning team information. Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. Although the team information was similar, baseball teams received longer press releases ( $F(1, 185) = 5.9, p < .05$ ), more updated scores ( $\chi^2 = 13.293, p < .001$ ), and more team ( $\chi^2 = 29.204, p < .001$ ) and individual statistics ( $\chi^2 = 29.204, p < .001$ ) than did softball.

Cunningham and Sagas (2002) posited that a team's brand equity was a greater indication of media coverage allotted to that team than was gender. By choosing women's basketball, a sport perceived as having high brand equity, they were able to find at least partial support for their hypotheses. Using the brand equity approach, they were able to demonstrate that sports with similar brand equity received like coverage. The limitations to the study were the relatively small sample size (35 schools) and the fact that only two sports were analyzed.

In addition to Cunningham and Sagas (2002), Cooper (2008) also analyzed intercollegiate athletic websites. He investigated the coverage given to similar male and female sport teams on those websites to address concerns about the promotional media coverage they provided to women and to add to the overall body of research on gender coverage provided by sport media. Although Cooper (2008) mentioned the idea of *not-for-profit* media such as intercollegiate websites and the *NCAA News* that has been linked to the resource-dependence perspective (Cunningham et al., 2004), brand equity was the theoretical approach utilized in the study.

Cooper (2008) hypothesized that: 1) men's similar sport teams would receive significantly more coverage than women's similar sport teams within the units of measurement examined during the study and; 2) men's similar sport teams would receive significantly more prime coverage (i.e., non-scroll, multimedia) than women's similar sport teams within the units of measurement examined during the study (p. 230).

To conduct research on intercollegiate athletic department websites, the author selected a random sample of 20 NCAA Division I schools that sponsored the six female and male similar sport teams that were to be analyzed. A random one-week sample from each sport season (a total of three weeks) was taken because the teams included in the study competed during different seasons. The sample resulted in 420 home webpages for analysis. Four categories were coded including: 1) articles; 2) advertisements; 3) multimedia; and 4) photographs. They were then measured for total amount and whether or not they were in prime coverage areas or not. A prime coverage area was considered as "non-scroll," meaning it was at the top of the page and the page did not need to be scrolled to locate it.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square analysis were used to analyze data. The data did not support hypothesis 1. Men's teams did not receive significantly more coverage than

women's teams and data even partially demonstrated that men's and women's teams received comparable coverage. However, analysis of variance did show significant differences in the length of advertisements provided to men's baseball teams compared to women's softball teams ( $F(1, 60) = 8.33, p < .001$ ) as well as a significant difference in the length of articles dedicated to those teams ( $F(1, 324) = 1.62, p < .001$ ). In contrast, women's swimming received significantly longer articles ( $F(1, 115) = 0.59, p < .001$ ) and advertisements ( $F(1, 39) = 0.10, p < .001$ ) than men's swimming (p. 233). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported, as there were only three significant differences in the non-scroll coverage between similar sport teams. Two differences were in favor of baseball over softball and one was in favor of men's golf over women's golf.

According to Cooper (2008), the data supported the notion that athletic programs have varying agendas when promoting the various nonrevenue sports teams. The study revealed the greatest differences in coverage between softball and baseball, a sport perceived as having higher brand equity. Baseball received a greater amount of coverage as well as more space within prime areas such as non-scroll locations. Besides baseball, the results of the study show more equitable coverage between men's and women's similar sport teams and in some instances, coverage of women's teams was more favorable.

According to the author, these results are important because they demonstrate that athletic departments are providing women and men with similar opportunities to brand their product. Some limitations to this study are that two highly popular sports, basketball and football, were not included, as well as the time frame only covering one year.

Evidence from the aforementioned studies reveals that brand equity may be a major factor other than gender in determining sport media coverage. Although it is possible that brand



equity may influence sport media coverage, more research should be conducted on the factors leading to one team having a higher brand equity than another.

### ***Framing Theory***

The most prevalent theoretical basis for studying the misrepresentations in media coverage of women's sports to date, is framing. This may be because other theories, such as hegemony and the resource-dependence perspective, can be incorporated into the discussion along with framing. The explanation of media coverage cannot be limited to one theoretical foundation.

Goffman (1974) defined framing as definitions of a situation being built up in accordance with principles of organization, which govern social events and our subjective involvement in them. He noted that individuals used certain "frameworks" to interpret the events in which they were applied (p. 24).

According to Tankard (2001), the media framing approach is important because it can offer an alternative to research solely on media bias or objectivity. It is a more sophisticated concept that can reflect the subtle differences when topics are presented in different ways. Framing recognizes the ability of a media presentation to define a situation and its issues (p. 96). The study of media framing is important According to Tankard, "because it can have subtle but powerful effects on the audience" (p. 96). The framing approach can help with the understanding of mass communication effects and offer suggestions for communications practitioners (p. 95).

Tankard explains framing further by stating three metaphorical uses for the term "frame." Two of the metaphorical uses relate to a picture frame. First, a picture frame singles out what is important to look at. Second, it sets the tone for how it will be viewed. The final use relates to

the frame of a house or building and the idea that that frame is the organizing structure used to construct it.

Several studies that have been conducted on women's sports coverage cite framing by the media as the reason for the misrepresentations of female athletes and sporting events (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bernstein, 2002; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013). Research has shown vast differences in not only the amount of coverage women's sports receive in comparison to men, but also the way female athletes and their sporting events are portrayed. In her meta-analysis of two decades worth of studies on the topic of media and their relation to and coverage of women's sports, Bernstein (2002) inquired, "If more media coverage means more sexualized images, is more necessarily better?" (p. 426). She determined that while coverage had improved, the type of coverage female athletes received still had a long way to go.

More than one study on broadcast television has revealed framing by the specific program or network investigated. When Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner (2013) investigated lack of coverage of women's sports in news media, they questioned the idea that it is solely audience demand that drives coverage and advanced the idea that media shape audience interest as well. They sought to prove that media coverage continued to build audiences for men's sports while silencing women's sports.

To compare the quality and quantity of the manner in which the media covered sports depicting men and women, Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner (2013) recorded and analyzed six weeks of televised coverage from ESPN's *SportsCenter* and sports segments of Los Angeles' local news. Four themes of coverage of women's sports emerged. Those themes were: 1) rare moments of respectful coverage; 2) sexualized gag stories; 3) fights, assaults and scandals; and 4) women as wives, girlfriends, or mothers (p. 216). While the moments of respectful coverage

were rare, the other themes that emerged supported the authors' claim that media assist in building interest in men's sports and silencing women's sports.

In terms of amount, the results revealed that the amount of coverage of women's sports on local news sports segments was lower in 2009 than in any previous year analyzed at 1.6% (p. 209). Further, the amount of coverage of women's sports on *SportsCenter* was also at an all-time low of 1.3% (p. 210). They found that most women's sports coverage was confined to a ticker at the bottom of the screen. Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner (2013) found the results of their study to be discouraging and stated that the longitudinal data collected by their study demonstrated that there was no reason to expect significant growth in the media coverage of women's sports, when in fact there was evidence to the contrary.

Adams and Tuggle (2004) examined ESPN's *SportsCenter* as well. They sought to compare coverage from 2002, to an earlier study conducted in 1995 (Tuggle, 1997). In doing so, they hypothesized that the increased presence of women's professional sports would lead to more awareness of women's athletics, which would lead to more equitable media representation of that participation. They sought to determine if the existence of two new women's professional basketball leagues facilitated an increase in coverage. One of their research questions was, "Has coverage of women's athletics increased on ESPN's *SportsCenter* compared to 1995?" (p. 241).

Framing was used as their theoretical foundation. They cited Gamson and Modigliani (1989) and Pan and Kosicki (1993) in explaining that framing theory suggests that practices for representing gender in the media--including sports--have become standardized, therefore reinforcing stereotypes (p. 240).

The authors recorded *SportsCenter* for four weeks and two days resulting in programming from 30 broadcast dates and 807 total stories. The stories were used as the units of

analysis and coded for categories such as: broadcast date; sport involved; story length; story placement; and sex of the participants. After analyzing the data with chi-square analysis and ANOVA, they determined that there was a statistically significant difference between coverage of male and female stories, ( $\chi^2(1, N = 794) = 731.29, p < .001$ ), and a statistically significant difference in the time devoted to stories based on the sex of the participants, ( $F(1, 793) = 3.88, p < .05$ ). Their hypothesis that the increased presence of women's professional sports would lead to more equitable coverage was not supported, as they discovered that there was even less coverage than existed in the 1995 study. According to Adams and Tuggle (2004), the scarcity of coverage of women's sports found in their research reinforced "male supremacy in athletics" and signaled that female athletes were not as deserving of regular coverage in sports as were male athletes (p. 247).

Duncan, Jensen, and Messner (1993) studied television broadcasts as well. They analyzed verbal commentary concerning the male and female athletes of televised tennis and basketball to determine the extent in which the commentary was gendered and sexualized. They sought to discover if commentators overtly trivialized and sexualized women's sports and individual athletes. They also questioned if commentators spoke about women's and men's athletic contests differently and to what extent they were gender marked. Finally, they wanted to find out if commentators spoke of individual male and female athletes differently.

The content analysis included recordings of the U. S. Open tennis tournament and the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament. After the data were collected and analyzed, it was determined that the overtly sexist commentary found in past research was not as prevalent. This did not mean that there were no differences found in the commentary concerning men and women, as two categories did emerge from the research. Those categories were gender marking

and “hierarchy of naming” by gender and partly by race (p. 125). Researchers found that women’s events were gender marked numerous times, such as referring to a basketball game as the “women’s championship,” while men’s events were never gender marked. This gender marking, they argued, presented men’s events as the norm, while women’s events were continually marked as other and in turn implied as inferior (p. 127). The second category, referred to as “hierarchy of naming,” was the idea that women and, in some cases, African American athletes, were “infantilized” by commentators who referred to them by their first names, while referring to white male athletes by their last names (p. 131).

Overall, Duncan, Jensen, and Messner (1993) found there were extreme differences in the way commentators spoke about men’s and women’s sporting events and athletes. They proposed that watching sporting events live is not the same as watching them televised because spectators who watch televised sports are subject to the “framing” of those events by commentators and production crews (p. 132). Therefore, as a result of gender-biased framing, the meanings the viewers construct will include gender stereotypes and inequities (p. 132).

In addition to broadcast media, magazines and other print media are not exempt from the idea of framing. Weber and Carini (2012) examined covers of *Sports Illustrated* magazine from 2000 through 2011. They sought to determine what percentage of the covers included females and how that percentage compared to the magazine’s first twelve years. They also investigated the manner in which females were portrayed. The sample included 716 covers from the years 2000 through 2011 and 588 covers from the years 1954 through 1965. In their examination of *Sports Illustrated* covers from the years 2000 through 2011, Weber and Carini (2012) not only discovered that images of women only appeared on 4.9% of them, but that women were depicted on more covers in previous years examined, 1954 through 1965.

Weber and Carini's (2012) results revealed significantly fewer covers depicting women in the more recent sample compared to the covers from earlier years, ( $\chi^2 = 24.968$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .05$ ). The authors not only found a significant shortage of covers featuring women, but also discovered that when they did appear, their participation in sport was minimized by sharing covers with men, being sexually objectified, being depicted only in sports considered feminine, and by the inclusion of random women not related to sport. According to the authors, if *Sports Illustrated* sought to achieve its original goal of being "the sports magazine," it would need to include more females on its covers, depict them in more diverse sports, and avoid covers in which women's participation in sport was trivialized (p. 7).

Fink and Kensicki (2002) also examined the magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, but included *Sports Illustrated for Women* in their study as well. *Sports Illustrated* was examined to determine if there had been a change in its coverage of women since previous research was conducted and *Sports Illustrated for Women* was analyzed to determine if the mandates for marketing femininity were so strong that they crossed over into a female-specific sport magazine.

In analyzing the content of the two magazines, Fink and Kensicki (2002) hypothesized that women would be depicted in fewer sport-related, or task-relevant, stories than men and that photographs in each magazine would depict women in passive poses while depicting men in active poses.

At the time the analysis was conducted, only nine issues of *Sports Illustrated for Women* had been produced so all of the articles and photographs were analyzed, yielding a sample of 1,075 total photos and articles. A random sample of *Sports Illustrated* from the same time period was chosen and yielded 1,775 photos and articles. Photographs were coded using four established categories including: 1) athletic action; 2) dressed but poised and pretty; 3) non-sport

setting; and 4) sexually suggestive (p. 325). The articles were coded using nine categories developed by the authors.

The authors found support for their hypotheses. In *Sports Illustrated*, men were depicted in more sport-related tasks and in more active poses than women. It was found that they were covered in a higher percentage of sport-related tasks and active poses than women in *Sports Illustrated for Women* as well. This drew researchers to the conclusion that little progress had been made in terms of the media's depiction of women as athletes rather than "feminine role models" or "trivialized sex symbols" (p. 330).

Bishop (2003) chose the magazine *Sports Illustrated* for his content analysis as well. His research replicated a previous study done by Reid and Soley (1979) to determine if coverage had increased with the popularity of women's sports. The researchers in the original study chose *Sports Illustrated* because the magazine claimed to offer the most comprehensive coverage of all sports and reached over three million readers (p. 187). The research examined how the magazine depicted the women it featured, in addition to determining if coverage of women's sports had increased (p. 188).

Issues of the magazine from five consecutive Olympic years were chosen as the sample for the longitudinal study. Feature articles from the first issue of the month for each year in which Olympics were held from 1980 through 1996 were analyzed. This totaled six years, 72 issues, and 569 articles. They were coded for categories including total number of articles per issue, sex of the featured athlete, number of pages per article, type of sport covered in each article, and the number of photos accompanying each article.

After review of the data, Bishop determined that *Sports Illustrated* had not yet reflected the increased popularity in women's sports. The photos of women accompanying the articles had

decreased since the previous study and often showed women in supporting or secondary roles. It was found that after finally seeing a small increase in coverage, women were almost absent from the most recent year studied.

Similar results were found with Hardin et al.'s (2002) study of *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. The authors replicated a previous study (Duncan & Sayaovong, 1990) to determine if female athletes received more favorable coverage by the magazine after the 1996 Olympics when compared with its coverage before the games. They examined the framing that was used by *Sports Illustrated for Kids* to create images of women and their athletics and attempted to determine whether that framing emphasized sexual difference. The research sought to answer whether or not sexual difference was conveyed in editorial photographs.

A content analysis was employed using 36 issues of *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, spanning three years as the sample. Each individual in the magazine's editorial photos served as a unit of analysis. The individuals were coded for such categories as: 1) photo domination; 2) sex; 3) photo angle; 4) motion in photo; 5) type of sport; 6) category of sport; and 7) leadership (p. 348-349). The authors coded the material after establishing inter-coder reliability that ranged from 90% to 100% across all categories of the training sample. Once data based on the coding scheme were collected, frequency distributions and chi-square analysis were used to analyze gender portrayals. A statistically significant difference was found between the way men and women were portrayed in *Sports Illustrated for Kids* ( $\chi^2=3.981$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Men were more prevalent in the magazine's photos in general, as well as being portrayed more often than women in leadership roles, team sports, and active poses. The only category that revealed little difference between men and women was camera angle. These findings were consistent with the



findings from the replicated study and in some cases more pronounced. The authors concluded that their findings suggested a clear pattern of differential treatment of gender.

According to Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005), a favorite frame of the media is to provide more coverage of women's sports that emphasize aesthetics. They examined three women's sports magazines to assess the reinforcement or rejection of sexual difference they possessed as gauged against the presentation of sexual difference in *Shape* (p. 105). The authors chose *Shape* as the standard for comparison because it was a popular title that represented traditional fitness discourse for women. The magazines that they analyzed were *Real Sports*, *Sports Illustrated for Women*, and *Women's Sport & Fitness*, two of which have folded since the analysis. They were expected to contest male hegemony because they were marketed as more active and sport-focused than *Shape*.

The authors' research questions were designed to ascertain visual reinforcement of sexual difference by depictions of women in passive roles and sports considered acceptable by feminine standards (p.110). Six issues each of the aforementioned magazines from 1999 to 2000 were selected as the sample. The editorial photographs of each magazine were examined and coded. The coding categories included gender, photo angle, and motion.

Overall, the results were mixed as the images in the magazines both reinforced and rejected sexual difference. As the authors expected, the newer magazines contested male hegemony more so than the established magazine, *Shape*.

To apply this research to an area of print media other than magazines, Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) analyzed the content of NCAA media guide cover photographs. They examined covers from two different time periods, 1989 through 1990 and 1996 through 1997. Their coding scheme focused on whether the athletes were depicted on or off their court or

playing field, if they were in uniform, if their poses were active or passive, and the overall theme of the photograph. Although they found that the amount of women and men depicted on the covers was almost equal, their specific research questions probed beyond that superficial level to analyze the actual ways in which those cover athletes were depicted. Men were shown on their court or playing field more often than women, dressed in their uniform more often than women, depicted in active poses more often than women, and portrayed as true athletes more often than women. There was a statistically significant difference in every category investigated. The authors determined that those findings would suggest that the portrayal of athleticism by the NCAA-affiliated programs that they analyzed was strongly dependent on gender.

Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004) examined campus media as well. They sought to assess whether Title IX had triggered equal coverage of men's and women's athletics in college and university settings. The authors used framing theory as their theoretical background.

Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004) argued that because student journalists that work for campus media grew up after the implementation of Title IX, they might be more likely than professional media practitioners to cover male and female athletes in a gender-equitable manner. To test their theory, four research questions were posed. Those questions included: 1) what is the ratio in campus media of stories featuring women's sports to men's sports; 2) what is the ratio in campus media of women interviewed about sports to men interviewed about sports; 3) what is the ratio in campus media of women reporting about sports to men reporting about sports; and 4) what is the ratio in campus newspapers to campus newscasts regarding coverage of male and female athletes in specific sports (p. 480).

The method of research Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004) used to conduct their study was a content analysis. They compiled a list of colleges and universities that produced

television newscasts, which amounted to 66 schools. Once the schools were selected, the authors contacted each school to request a VHS copy of one student newscast as well as a copy of their campus newspaper from around the same date. The date chosen was late in the spring semester to avoid news dominated by football or the NCAA basketball championships. The number of schools that complied with the authors' requests and sent sample material was 39. This resulted in 442 print and broadcast stories for analysis. The authors and two graduate students coded the material after establishing an inter-coder agreement rate of 92.4 %. They coded categories for number, length, type of story, sport covered, sex of athlete, sex of sports anchor/reporter, sex of persons interviewed, interview placement, job description of interviewee, number of words quoted, and length of time of sound bites used for television stories (p. 481). The data were analyzed using chi-square analysis and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

In response to their first research question, the authors found that college newspapers dedicated 72.2% of their sport coverage to male athletes and college television dedicated 81.5% of its sport coverage to male athletes. In both broadcast ( $\chi^2(1, N = 157) = 53.52, p < .001$ ) and print ( $\chi^2(1, N = 285) = 48.02, p < .001$ ), the differences were statistically significant. The authors found similar discrepant results for their second research question, as the first source quoted in the articles or newscasts was three times more likely to be male than female. The third research question produced similar results. The sex of the anchor/reporter was male 74.7% of the time in broadcast and 78.4% of the time in print. The final research question showed a discrepancy in male versus female coverage as well. More than twice as much space and time was dedicated to men playing baseball than woman playing softball. The researchers also found that football was consistently in the top five stories although the football season was months away. However, results revealed that when college sports media did cover female athletes, the quality of coverage

was equivalent to the coverage of male athletes in terms of space and time. According to the authors, women received relatively the same quality of coverage as men, yet the quantity could in no way be viewed as equitable. A key limitation to this study is that only one broadcast and newspaper from each school was examined.

### ***Summary and Implications of Literature in Current Study***

Differential treatment on the basis of gender has been discovered in most of the media analyzed to this point. Despite few anomalies, the overall body of research on the topic of women's sports coverage in the media continuously demonstrates inequity and inadequacy when compared to coverage of men's sports. There have been gradual improvements over the years since Title IX was implemented and increasing numbers of women have begun participating in sports at every competition level, yet plenty of room for improvement remains.

With that room for improvement comes the importance of understanding the more pertinent approaches for researching the topic. Framing has been found to be a productive theoretical approach to the research on media coverage of women's sports and female athletes (Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Weber & Carini, 2012). Framing goes beyond the lack of coverage and the superficial level of media bias, as it is more complex and adds a cognitive dimension (Tankard, 2001). The results of the aforementioned studies have shown reoccurring themes in the ways in which female athletes are depicted (such as inactive rather than active and sexual rather than athletic) that can provide useful suggestions for future producers of media content devoted to women's sports. Those studies grounded in framing theory have laid important groundwork and future inquiry will benefit by building on the themes that they have revealed.

There is also an importance for further study on the topic in areas other than framing. A deeper look in two areas that produced results inconsistent with past research would be an ideal place to start. Those areas include *not-for-profit* versus *for-profit* media and the Internet, its webpages in particular, which both produced results indicative of a positive change occurring in the media's portrayal of women's sports.

Research on the *not-for-profit* publication, the *NCAA News*, and intercollegiate athletic department websites produced results that indicated a status as such could be a predictor of a more realistic portrayal of women's sports than by media who are *for-profit* and must always answer to their consumers and/or advertisers. The results should not be generalized until an increased number of studies have replicated them, as there are other factors that could have played a role in the outcome.

The research conducted on the webpages of the most modern medium, the Internet, revealed promising results as well. While the popular sport news publications that were analyzed had a long way to go in the amount of coverage of women's sports, the depictions of women's sports and athletes proved equitable with regard to sport representation. As hopeful as these results are, they also should not be generalized until further study of the medium provides similar findings.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHOD

#### *Content Analysis*

Content analysis, which is the study of recorded human communications (Babbie, 2014), has been a particularly common research method applied to media coverage of women's sports. This method has not only allowed researchers to determine the overall amount of coverage of female athletes and their sporting events, but has gone further to enable them to uncover common themes in the way female athletes are portrayed throughout different types of media.

According to Babbie (2014), content analysis is an unobtrusive research method, that is, a method of studying social behavior without affecting it. This method is a simple way to gather comparable data on the medium being studied, whether it is broadcast, print, or the Internet. According to Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005), content analysis is commonly defined as an objective, systematic, and quantitative way to discover construction of messages. They also noted that it must be understood within its limits, as it cannot predict the interaction of a text with its audience. Although content analysis cannot predict how the audience will interact with the content being analyzed, it can help researchers gain a better understanding of the message that is being sent.

As discussed in the previous chapter, notable content analyses of broadcast television include: Adams and Tuggle's (2004) investigation of ESPN's *SportsCenter*; Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner's (2013) subsequent examination of ESPN's *SportsCenter* and Los Angeles' local news programs; and Duncan, Jensen, and Messner's (1993) analysis of the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament and U. S. Open tennis tournament. Print media that have been analyzed

include *Sports Illustrated* and its spin-off magazines (Bishop, 2003; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002), *NCAA News* (Cunningham et al., 2004), and NCAA media guide cover photographs (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). Internet sport publications, *ESPN Internet*, *CBS Sportsline* (Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009), and *espnW* (Wolter, 2015) have all served as the subject of content analyses in the study of women's sports coverage as well as intercollegiate athletic department home webpages (Cooper, 2008; Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002).

### ***Rationale for the Current Study***

A majority of the media analyzed to date has revealed the same troubling result; sport media do not cover male and female athletes in an equitable manner. According to Wolter (2015) media portrayals of male and female athletes are important because sport is a key place where gender norms are defined, circulated, and maintained. While few studies have shown improvement in gender-equitable coverage of sport, particularly studies of not-for-profit media and the Internet, further research is still very much warranted. The few studies that have shown positive results are just that, few. There are also other factors that possibly led to the partially equitable results in some cases. For instance, Wolter (2015) found that there were no significant differences in the portrayal of male and female athletes on *espnW* and that female athletes appeared more often in the feature articles on the website, yet *espnW* is dedicated specifically to female athletes and fans so results in favor of females might well be expected. Cunningham et al. (2004) found equitable coverage of female athletes compared to their NCAA participation rate in the not-for-profit publication, the *NCAA News*, yet as a publication with ties to universities bound by the restrictions of Title IX, those results should also not come as much of a surprise. As

for Kian, Vincent, and Mondello's (2009) study of Internet sport websites, while the results proved equitable in terms of gender descriptors used, the amount of coverage female athletes received still lagged far behind their male counterparts. Therefore, more research is needed to determine if a change is actually taking place in media coverage of sport especially within the webpages of the most modern media form, the Internet, or if a few outside factors have actually played a larger role in those studies that have demonstrated the somewhat equitable results.

Further research is also warranted because there is no way to be sure of such a change with so few studies on these specific media. Further study on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages is important because it combines the two aforementioned media, not-for-profit and the Internet, in a fairly new aspect. Although intercollegiate athletic department home webpages have been studied, there have been no studies that specifically examine the amount and content of feature news articles on those pages along with the type of photographs that accompany them. This kind of study will allow a more updated look at how NCAA-affiliated media outlets cover male and female athletes, and on the Internet specifically. The study will also help determine if framing female athletes to fit an acceptable image is so common a practice of the media that it continues to be done even in institutions that are not only expected to, but also mandated by Title IX, to provide equitable promotions to female and male athletes.

### *Theory*

The theoretical framework for this study is framing. This study will examine the portrayals of female athletes, as have past studies (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bernstein, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard, 2004), to determine the extent in which they are framed in photographs as



feminine or sexy, rather than strong and powerful athletes. It will also determine if the content of feature news articles differs depending on if the featured athlete, team, or coach is male or female, as well as determine the overall amount of coverage they receive. While the type of coverage female athletes receive is an important aspect of framing, the amount must be considered as well. Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2009) cited Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock (1991) to convey the importance of both “presence and absence” in framing, as they stated that powerful meaning can also be conveyed by what does not receive attention from the media (p. 477).

As previously discussed, the media framing approach is important because it can offer an alternative to research solely on media bias or objectivity (Tankard, 2001). It is a more sophisticated concept that can reflect the subtle differences when topics are presented in different ways. Framing recognizes the ability of a media presentation to define a situation and its issues (p. 96). In terms of sport coverage, the media have been found to frame female athletes not only as feminine role models, but also as less suited for sport than males (Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner, 2013). Using the established theoretical foundation of framing to analyze intercollegiate athletic department home webpages will allow the current research to determine if intercollegiate sport media are more balanced in their portrayals of female and male athletes than has been found in past research.

### ***Hypotheses***

Research has demonstrated that intercollegiate sport media coverage could be moving toward a more equitable representation of female and male athletes. This is evident in that more recent research on intercollegiate media, such as the *NCAA News* (Cunningham et al., 2004) and

intercollegiate athletic department home webpages (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Cooper, 2008), has shown more equity in terms of gender representation than earlier research (Shifflett & Revelle, 1994). The same is true for the Internet as a medium when compared with research conducted on older forms of media. Research on the Internet has shown more favorable coverage of female athletes (Kian, Vincent, & Mondello; Wolter, 2015) than has research on television or print media (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002). Therefore, the expectations for the current study are as follows in terms of null hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the amount of feature article coverage of female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

H<sub>2</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the content of information written about female and male athletes in feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

H<sub>3</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the amount of feature photograph coverage of female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

H<sub>4</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the type of portrayals of female and male athletes in photographs that accompany feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

## *Sampling*

The sampling process for the current study borrowed procedures from previous research in which intercollegiate media, both print and Internet, made up the sample. Most research on the subject utilized a stratified random sampling procedure. According to Babbie (2014), stratification is the grouping of units composing a population into homogenous groups before sampling. This improves the representativeness of a sample (p. 223). In the study of intercollegiate sport media, stratification has been employed using preexisting athletic conferences crafted by the NCAA. In terms of time frame, stratification has also been used to establish samples representative of certain athletic seasons.

Cooper (2008) examined athletic department home webpages of 20 different NCAA Division I programs, randomly selected from five athletic conferences: the America East Conference; the Atlantic Coast Conference; the Big Ten Conference; the Ivy League Conference; and the Pacific-10 Conference (presently the Pacific-12 Conference). The sampling took place during three separate one-week time periods during the 2005-06 academic year so that each athletic season was included. The sample resulted in 420 home webpages for analysis.

Cooper and Cooper (2009) collected data on the home webpages of 30 different athletic departments, randomly selected from the NCAA Division I database. The authors also used a stratified sample of one week during each athletic season: fall, winter, and spring. The sampling process resulted in 630 home webpages for analysis.

Cunningham and Sagas (2002) sought to acquire a sample representative of athletic departments from across the United States. Therefore, the authors randomly selected five schools each from the different districts included in the NCAA's regional classification scheme. The NCAA's classification scheme includes eight districts, but the authors chose to combine Districts

1 and 2 due to their small number of Division I programs. This resulted in five programs from all seven districts, a total of 35 programs for analysis. Data were collected during basketball season and again during baseball/softball season. The data that the authors collected were in-season variables and team information and the total sample resulted in 3,920 data sets.

In soliciting NCAA media guide cover photographs for their study, Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) contacted the schools contained within, what they deemed at the time, the “six most prestigious athletic conferences in the United States” (p. 78). Those conferences included the Big Ten, Big Eight, Pacific Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Southwest Athletic Conference, and Southeast Athletic Conference. The authors also chose the conferences to represent each portion of the United States.

In accordance with previous research on athletic department websites, in which the sample size ranged from 20 to 35 athletic departments, the current study analyzed data from 30 different NCAA Division I athletic departments. Five athletic departments were randomly chosen from a stratified sample of six preexisting athletic conferences. In addition to Cooper’s (2008) sample of five conferences, the Southeastern Conference (SEC) was added to include programs that represent the southeast portion of the United States. Therefore the six conferences analyzed were: the America East Conference; the Atlantic Coast Conference; the Big Ten Conference; the Ivy League Conference; the Pacific-12 Conference; and the Southeastern Conference. To generate a random sample of the five schools within each aforementioned athletic conference, the schools were listed in alphabetical order and assigned a number in that same order. Then, Random.org, a random integer generator on the Internet was utilized to generate five numbers contained within that group of numbers and the schools with the coinciding numbers were chosen as the random sample.

The sampling time frame was a convenience sample taken in the winter. A random sample was taken during a week in December to be representative of sports that are in play during winter such as men's and women's basketball, post-season football, hockey, skiing, and other various sports that are in- season at each particular school.

### *Unit of Analysis*

As previously stated, no study of intercollegiate athletic department home webpages to date has analyzed the content of feature articles contained within those webpages along with the type of photographs that accompany them to determine the manner in which female athletes are framed. Cooper (2008) analyzed the gender, amount, and location of articles, photographs, multimedia content, and advertisements on athletic department home webpages. Cooper and Cooper (2009) also analyzed the gender, amount, and location of the aforementioned four units of analysis. Cunningham and Sagas (2004) analyzed the in-season variables and team information contained within intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. Therefore, the unit of analysis of the current study differs slightly from previous research on the subject.

The unit of analysis for the current study is each feature article and each photograph that accompanies a feature article on the chosen athletic departments' home webpage. These feature articles, commonly ranging from three to ten total articles, are prominently displayed, usually in a rolling ticker at the top of the webpage, giving off the impression that the news represented by them is the most important news occurring within the school's athletics program at that given moment. The primary researcher collected these articles for analysis by copying their URLs and pasting them into a Microsoft Word document that served as the article database. The primary researcher collected the articles' accompanying photographs for analysis as well. The screenshot

tool for MacBook was utilized to capture the photos at which point they were saved into a folder that served as the photograph database. Cunningham et al. (2004) analyzed articles and photographs from intercollegiate media as well, yet this was an analysis of the print medium, *NCAA News*. Also, in terms of the articles, the authors utilized each paragraph as one unit of analysis rather than the entire article as the current study proposes to do.

### *Measures*

#### *Gender*

According Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004), gender stereotypes that maintain gender inequality are constructed and utilized by both sport and media. Past research on sport media has uncovered the differential treatment of athletes on the basis of gender numerous times (Bernstein, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004; Cooky, Hextrum, & Messner 2013; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002). Because of the possibility of sport media's role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and inequities, it is important to study the way the media continue to represent female athletes in comparison to their male counterparts. Therefore, gender is a key measure of the current study for both articles and photographs. Gender was coded as follows:

#### *Gender-Article*

Gender for articles was measured on the basis of female or male athletes, teams, or coaches. If the feature article was predominantly about a female athlete, team, or coach, the gender measure was coded 1. If the feature article was predominantly about a male athlete, team, or coach, the gender measure was coded 2. If the feature article provided equal or similar

coverage of males and females, it was coded 3. If the feature article provided gender indeterminate coverage, it was coded 4.

### *Gender-Photograph*

Gender for photographs was also measured on the basis of female or male athletes, teams, or coaches. If the feature photograph predominantly portrayed female athletes, teams, or coaches, the gender measure was coded 1. If the feature photograph portrayed predominantly male athletes, teams, or coaches, the gender measure was coded 2. If the feature photograph portrayed a similar or equal amount of male and female athletes, teams, or coaches, it was coded 3. If the feature photograph provided gender indeterminate coverage, it was coded 4.

### *Content-Article*

The current study borrowed the measures for content of feature articles from Cunningham et al.'s (2004) analysis of articles in the *NCAA News*. Those measures were: 1) factual information related to athletics; 2) factual information not related to athletics; 3) personal information related to athletics; and 4) personal information not related to athletics. The article was coded 1, for "factual information related to athletics" if the article predominantly contained information such as game recaps, game previews, team statistics, individual statistics, athletic honors, student-athlete honors, or athletic accomplishments. The article was coded 2, for "factual information not related to athletics" if the article was predominantly about facts such as team activities, school activities, university news, events, career, etc. The article was coded 3, for "personal information related to athletics" if it was predominantly about information such as leadership, emotional/physical strengths, relationships with teammates, other activities or causes

because of being an athlete, etc. The article was coded 4, for “personal information not related to athletics” if it contained information predominantly about family, personal life, personal background, hobbies, causes, etc. The articles were considered “predominantly” one of the aforementioned measures if that measure made up more than 50% of the article’s content. The current study sought to determine if the content of articles differed between male and female athletes and the previous categories assisted in making that determination.

### *Content-Photograph*

The measures for content of photographs that accompany feature articles have been accumulated through the established and relevant coding schemes of previous research including categories from Buysse and Embser-Herbert’s (2004) analysis of NCAA media guide cover photographs, as well as Fink and Kensicki’s (2002) examination of *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*. Those measures include: 1) true athleticism; 2) posed athleticism; 3) head shot; 4) non-sport setting; 5) student athlete; 6) sexual suggestiveness; 7) other; and 8) persons or objects other than athlete or coach (which will be excluded from final analysis).

The goal of equity in gender coverage of sport should be to portray all athletes as just that, athletes. In Buysse and Embser-Herbert’s (2004) analysis of NCAA media guide cover photographs, female athletes were less likely than men to be portrayed in uniform, on the court, or in action. If male athletes are portrayed more often in an athletic setting than female athletes, this could send the message that females are feminine role models first and athletes second. Therefore, the ideal portrayal of athletes was considered the “true athleticism” category and featured photographs that portrayed athletes in uniform and in action. Photographs that portrayed athletes in this manner were coded 1. The “posed athleticism” category featured athletes that



were in uniform, yet portrayed in non-athletic poses and photographs with this portrayal were coded 2. The “head shot” category included professional headshots of athletes or coaches and these photographs were coded 3.

The “non-sport setting” included any instance when the athlete or coach was involved in an activity other than sport such as media activities, community service, family activities, etc. and photographs with these depictions were coded 4. In Fink and Kensicki’s (2002) study of *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*, they found that photographs of female athletes depicted them in non-sport settings most often. This was problematic, they argued because “such removal of the female athlete from the sport setting and highlighting of her feminine rather than athletic qualities serves to reinforce the socially constructed, appropriate gender roles to which normal women should aspire” (p. 331). The authors also noted that this created a false reality in which women were viewed as sex symbols rather than the powerful, talented athletes they were.

The “student-athlete” category included athletes that were portrayed as students, such as carrying books and backpacks or studying and photographs with these depictions were coded 5. This category is not considered a “non-sport setting” because within the boundaries of the NCAA, athletes are considered students first and foremost.

The “sexual suggestiveness” category has been a popular portrayal of female athletes found in past research. Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) found a significant difference in their study of media guide cover photographs, as women were more likely than men to be portrayed in a sexually suggestive manner. Fink and Kensicki (2002) did not find a difference large enough to be significant, however they did note that female athletes comprised seven of the nine pornographic photos contained in their sample. Images of female athletes that depict them as sex

symbols rather than athletes can undermine their athletic abilities. Photographs that portrayed athletes posed in a sexually suggestive manner, dressed provocatively, or giving looks that could be considered sexual in nature, were coded 6. Photographs of athletes, teams, or coaches that did not fall into any of the aforementioned categories were considered “other” and coded 7. Photographs and graphics of persons or objects other than athletes or coaches were coded 8 and excluded from final analysis.

### ***Coding and Inter-coder Reliability***

According to Babbie (2014), coding is the process in which raw data are transformed into a standardized form suitable for machine processing and analysis. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) defined it as “placing a unit of analysis into a content category” (p. 152). As previously discussed, the unit of analysis for the current study is the feature news articles and their accompanying photographs on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. The units of analysis were categorized according to a combination of aforementioned categories that have been established by previous research on media coverage of women’s sports. A coding instrument was created for coders to use (see Appendices A/B) as well as coding instructions detailing the specific definitions of the categories in each measure (see Appendix C).

Inter-coder reliability is the level of agreement among independent coders who use the same coding instrument to code the same content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), the number of coders involved in a content analysis is typically small, ranging from two to six coders. The current study had two coders, the principal researcher and another graduate student. The principal researcher collected all data and distributed the data to the secondary researcher. As recommended by Wimmer and Dominick (2003), coder training

took place with both coders in which the coding instrument was used on sample material to eliminate methodological problems and analyze disagreements as they occurred. Once coder training was conducted, both coders coded a subsample of ten percent of the total sample. Data from the coder pretest were tested for inter-coder reliability utilizing Cohen's kappa statistic. An *a priori* reliability level of .70 or higher was established for all categories.

For photographs, 100 percent inter-coder agreement was found for the gender category. A .906 inter-coder agreement was found for the photograph content category. The one disagreement was discussed and an agreement was reached once the coding instructions were consulted. For the articles, 100 percent coder agreement was found for the gender category. An acceptable .730 inter-coder agreement was found for the article content category. The two disagreements were discussed to determine what, if any, ambiguities in interpretation of the coding procedure might have taken place. Once the coders consulted the coding instructions and came to an agreement, the lead researcher coded the remainder of the sample.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

According to Babbie (2014), reliability refers to the quality of a method of measurement to produce the same results upon repeated observation of the same phenomenon. That is, if the particular measurement technique were to be applied repeatedly to the same object, the same results would be yielded each time (p. 152). Reliability was reached in the current study by using measures and coding procedures that have been established by previous research.

Validity refers to a measure accurately reflecting what it intends to measure (Babbie, 2014). Therefore, if an intent of the current study was to measure the amount of coverage female

athletes receive on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages, recording the total amount of feature articles along with their photographs, measured what was intended to be measured. If the other intent of the current study was to measure the type of coverage female athletes receive, then using preexisting categories concerning media coverage of female athletes to analyze the articles and photographs also ensured that the study measured what it intended to measure.

### ***Analysis Plan***

The first and third hypotheses were tested utilizing comparisons of frequencies and percentages. The second and fourth hypotheses were tested utilizing chi square with a probability level of  $p < .05$  established *a priori*.

CHAPTER FOUR  
RESULTS

*Article Frequencies*

The data collected from the athletic department home webpages of 30 universities, from 6 different conferences, resulted in a total article sample of 176 articles ( $N = 176$ ). The largest number of articles came from the Ivy League Conference (18.8%) and the smallest number of articles came from the Pacific-12 Conference (12.5%). The school with the most articles (6.8%) was Brown of the Ivy League Conference and the school with the least articles (1.1%) was Oregon State of the Pacific-12 Conference. Conference frequencies are reported in Table 1 along with the mean number of articles per school.

**Table 1. Articles – Conference Frequencies and Means per School**

	Frequency	Percent	$\bar{X}$ School
Ivy League Conference	33	18.8	6.6
America East Conference	32	18.2	6.4
Big Ten Conference	32	18.2	6.4
Southeastern Conference	30	17.0	6.0
Atlantic Coast Conference	27	15.3	5.4
Pacific 12 Conference	22	12.5	4.4
Total	176	100.0	100.0

Females were represented in 33.5% of the total article sample, while articles that represented males made up 58% of the total sample. Females and males were represented equally in 4% of the articles and gender indeterminate articles made up the remaining 4.5% of the sample. The equal and indeterminate gender categories were excluded when testing hypotheses due to their low number of occurrences. Gender frequencies for the article sample are revealed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Articles – Gender Frequencies**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	102	58.0
Female	59	33.5
Indeterminate	8	4.5
Equal	7	4.0
Total	176	100.0

In terms of content, articles that represented “factual information related to athletics” made up by far the largest portion of the article sample at 85.8%. The second largest category represented was “factual information not related to athletics,” which made up 8% of the sample. “Personal information related to athletics” made up 5.1% of the sample and only 1.1% of the articles represented information that was “personal information not related to athletics.” The two separate personal information categories were collapsed into one category representing all articles that contained personal information before testing the hypotheses, due to the low number of articles containing any type of personal information. Content frequencies are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Articles – Content Frequencies**

	Frequency	Percent
Fact-Related to Athletics	151	85.8
Fact-Not Related to Athletics	14	8.0
Personal-Related to Athletics	9	5.1
Personal-Not Related to Athletics	2	1.1
Total	176	100.0

***Photograph Frequencies***

The total photograph sample included 185 photographs ( $N = 185$ ). The largest number of photographs came from both the Big Ten Conference and the Ivy League Conference, with 17.8% of the overall photographs each. The smallest number of photographs came from the Pacific-12 Conference with 14.1% of the overall photographs. The school with the most photographs (6.5%) was Brown, and the school with the least photographs (1.6%) was Yale, both of the Ivy League Conference. These results are displayed in Table 4 along with the mean number of photographs per school.

**Table 4. Photographs – Conference Frequencies and Means per School**

	Frequency	Percent	$\bar{X}$ School
Big Ten Conference	33	17.8	6.6
Ivy League Conference	33	17.8	6.6
America East Conference	32	17.3	6.4
Southeastern Conference	32	17.3	6.4
Atlantic Coast Conference	29	15.7	5.8
Pacific 12 Conference	26	14.1	5.2
Total	185	100.0	100.0

Females were portrayed in 32.4% of photographs. Males were portrayed in 55.7% of photographs. Only 2.2% of the photographs portrayed equal representation of females and males, while the remaining 9.7% were gender indeterminate. Photographs that portrayed equal representation were excluded before testing the hypotheses due to the extremely low number of occurrences. These results are displayed in Table 5.



**Table 5. Photographs – Gender Frequencies**

	Frequency	Percent
Male	103	55.7
Female	60	32.4
Indeterminate	18	9.7
Equal	4	2.2
Total	185	100.0

In terms of photograph content, the largest portion of the sample (77.8%) portrayed “true athleticism.” The second largest category portrayed was “posed athleticism” with 11.4% of the sample. “Non-sport setting” represented 8.4% of the sample, while “head-shot” made up the remaining 2.4% of the sample. No photographs were found that depicted the remaining categories, “student-athlete,” “sexually suggestive,” or “other.” The percentage of each content category was calculated after “photographs of people or objects other than athletes or coaches,” was excluded from analysis. Because of the low number of photographs portraying the head-shot category, it was excluded before testing the hypotheses as well. These results are displayed in Table 6.

**Table 6. Photographs – Content Frequencies**

	Frequency	Percent
True Athleticism	130	77.8
Posed Athleticism	19	11.4
Non Sport	14	8.4
Head Shot	4	2.4
Total	167	100.0
System Missing	18	
Total	185	

### **Hypotheses Results**

This section examines the results for each null hypothesis. There were four null hypotheses, two examining feature articles and two examining photographs. As the reader will recall, the hypotheses were as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the amount of feature article coverage of female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

Null hypothesis 1 was not supported. Female athletes were underrepresented in the amount of feature article coverage on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. After excluding equal and indeterminate coverage from the gender category, articles representing females made up 36.6% of the remaining sample, while articles representing males made up 63.4%. Rejecting the null hypothesis allows support for the corresponding research hypothesis.

Based on the results of this study, there is a difference in the amount of feature article coverage on female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

H<sub>2</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the content of information written about female and male athletes in feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

Null hypothesis 2 was supported. There was no significant difference in the content of information written about female and male athletes in feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. Cross-tabulation was conducted in SPSS to compare the gender and content categories of feature articles and no statistically significant difference was found in the content of information written about female and male athletes.

H<sub>3</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the amount of feature photograph coverage of female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

Null hypothesis 3 was not supported. Female athletes were underrepresented in the amount of photograph coverage on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. After the category for equal coverage was excluded for its small number, photographs portraying females made up 33.1% of the remaining sample, while 56.9% portrayed males. Gender indeterminate photos represented 9.9% of the sample. Rejecting the null hypothesis allows support for the corresponding research hypothesis. Based on the results of this study, there is a difference in the amount of photograph coverage of female and male athletes on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

H<sub>4</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the type of portrayals of female and male athletes in photographs that accompany feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages.

Hypothesis 4 was supported. There was no significant difference in the type of portrayals of female and male athletes in photographs that accompanied feature articles on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages. After eliminating equal representation from the gender category and head-shot from the content category due to their small numbers, cross-tabulation was conducted in SPSS to compare the two categories of photographs. No statistically significant difference was found in the way photographs portrayed female and male athletes.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### *Discussion*

Overall, the results of the content analysis on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages were mixed. While the *type* of coverage represented by both the articles and their accompanying photograph was similar concerning female and male athletes, the *amount* of coverage was not. As many past studies have demonstrated, even when the type of coverage is similar, female athletes continue to be underrepresented in terms of amount (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Bishop, 2003; Kian, Vincent, & Mondello, 2009). Likewise, when the amount is similar, the type of coverage has been found to be inconsistent (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). Symmetry in both type of coverage and amount of coverage between male and female athletes is a rarity that has been reserved for publications specifically dedicated to females, as Wolter (2015) found in her analysis of online publication, *espnW*. The fact that the webpages analyzed by the current content analysis represent a more modern media type at not-for-profit, NCAA-affiliated institutions, did not lead to the overall balance in coverage that was originally expected.

The good news is that when female athletes were covered on intercollegiate athletic department home webpages, they were treated similarly to their male counterparts. Both genders were portrayed in photographs primarily as true athletes and written about in articles mostly concerning factual information directly related to their athletics, as this is the most prevalent type of information disseminated by these particular webpages. Less encouraging though, is that while this study supports the idea that a trend may be headed away from framing female athletes as sex symbols, feminine role models, or only suited for certain sports, the fact that they are still

often covered less than males is a frame in itself. As previously discussed, meanings can be derived from what the media choose to *exclude* just as well as by what they choose to *include*. Excluding coverage of female athletes can send a message that female athletes and their sporting events are inferior to males and are less worthy of being covered. This can also reflect negatively on institutions that are bound by Title IX regulations, which require equitable promotions be given to all student-athletes.

### ***Further Analysis***

To try and gain a more fair perspective on the data, and per suggestion of previous research, the percentages of articles and photographs representing male and female athletes were compared to their respective NCAA participation rates. When compared to that standard, females were still slightly underrepresented by the articles and photographs analyzed.

According to Johnson (2015), male athletes outnumber female athletes in the NCAA, making up 56.6% of the entire student-athlete population, while females comprise the other 43.4%. The current study found that only 36.6% of articles and 33.1% of photographs on intercollegiate athletic department websites represented female athletes, ranging from 10.3% to 6.8% below their actual participation numbers. When compared to the percentage of woman's teams competing in the NCAA (53%) the difference becomes even larger (Johnson, 2015).

Besides being compared to NCAA participation rates, the data were also examined beyond the four hypotheses. Gender representation was analyzed in comparison to each athletic conference because it could be inferred that different conferences have varying agendas (i.e., geographic location, relying heavily on football as a main revenue generator, placing a high value on academic standards, etc.) that lead to different types of gender portrayals. Therefore,

cross-tabulation was conducted on gender and conference to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the amount of females versus males represented by each conference. All but one conference underrepresented female athletes. The Ivy League conference overrepresented females in articles ( $\chi^2(5) = 10.150, p = .071, n = 161$ ) and photographs ( $\chi^2(5) = 10.646, p = .059, n = 163$ ) to a point that approached statistical significance. This was an interesting finding and suggests that the overall results should be taken with caution due to the stratified nature of the sample.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

The results should not be overgeneralized due to other factors that may have contributed to the findings, such as conference and sample size. These findings suggest that future research may benefit by analyzing athletic conferences separately and that doing so may produce different results. For example, a study strictly on the Ivy League Conference may reveal more balanced results in terms of gender or possibly even results that favor coverage of female athletes. Likewise, if the Ivy League Conference were to be completely omitted from the current sample, the results favoring coverage of male athletes would be even more pronounced.

The relatively small sample size proved to be somewhat of a limitation to this study. Future research should include a larger sample to avoid having to exclude smaller categories before testing hypotheses. Future research may also eliminate categories that proved to be non-existent or occurred sparingly. A larger sample could be drawn over different athletic seasons, as done in past studies, to increase sample size and to include a more diverse group of sports.

The coding categories used proved to be a limitation as well. Certain categories were almost non-existent in the current data set and others were non-existent. For example, in coding

photograph content, the categories for sexually suggestive and student-athlete were non-existent. Those categories could be omitted, though there is still a case for future research to use the sexually suggestive category for rare instances, as past research has demonstrated that females are more likely to be portrayed in a sexually suggestive manner. This may be less of an issue in education-based athletics. In coding gender for both feature articles and photographs, equal and indeterminate coverage were both fairly limited as well. Future research could combine those categories into one “other” category, as to keep the focus solely on separate female and male representation.

In coding the content of feature articles, any type of personal information was limited. Future research could benefit from only using one category for personal information, if at all. A second limitation that arose with coding article content was the line between personal and factual information. Determining whether information written about an athlete was personal or factual proved to be a challenge. Looking at differences solely between sport-related information and non-sport-related information might prove more successful in future research.

The present study examined Internet webpages, which is only one type of new/digital media. Intercollegiate athletic departments are increasingly utilizing a variety of new/digital media to promote their athletics, including social media applications such as Snapchat, Vine, Twitter, and Instagram. Evidence suggests that while athletic department home webpages are still a popular way for fans to obtain information (Clavio & Walsh, 2014), fans that use the webpages are typically alumni and of an older demographic (Clavio, 2011). For this reason, future research would benefit from studying the newest forms of digital media that athletic departments are employing to promote their athletics to a wider audience. Taking a closer look at audience demographics for each new media type could also provide valuable information. To go



one step further, studying the demographics of content creators might also provide a better understanding of their coverage choices.

While this study helped to provide a better understanding of the message sent by feature articles and photographs on athletic department home webpages, it did not examine the reach of that content, as content analyses cannot predict how the audience will interact with the content being analyzed. Studying user analytics on athletic department home webpages could provide the information that a content analysis lacks such as which content users accessed most often and how long users remained engaged with that content. This information could help draw broader connections between the analyzed content and its audience. Analytical information could also prove useful to content creators.

Finally, surveying the creators of the content provided by intercollegiate athletic department home webpages could present future researchers with a clearer picture of the motivations behind that content creation.

### ***Conclusion***

This content analysis of a modern, not-for-profit, media type supported evidence that gender bias continues to occur in media representations of female athletes, regardless of legal restrictions or the modernity of the outlet. While some may argue that media outlets are adhering to the needs and interests of their audience, concern remains that by doing so, they are only continuing to build that particular audience. In turn, they are giving up the opportunity to build an audience for women's sports and even more troubling, helping to silence female athletes and their sport accomplishments altogether (Cooky, Hextrum, and Messner, 2013).

When sports fans are tasked with actively seeking out media content that covers women's sports, it is no wonder why the audience remains smaller than that of men's sports. Media coverage of men's sports, particularly the three most popular (football, basketball, and baseball), is always readily available. Fans are not charged with seeking out this content on their own, which reinforces their belief that only sports highly covered by the media hold importance in society. The media are largely guilty of first telling the audience that men's sports are most important and, second, constantly reinforcing that belief by bombarding the audience with coverage that primarily focuses on them.

Therefore, the media actively participate in a cycle that keeps certain men's sports at the top of a societal hierarchy. Because audience interest has already been built up for certain sports, and that interest drives revenue, the cycle will not be easily broken. Even when the audience is not paying for content, the producers of such content still may be under the assumption that their audience is typically interested in men's sports and therefore they are willing to provide more of that content. This may explain why the athletic departments included in the current sample were found to provide more coverage of men's sports. They may have had different motivations (e.g., recruiting, alumni donations, audience building), but surely their efforts in achieving their motivations were carried out at least partly with their target audience in mind.

While participation, and in turn media coverage, of female athletes has dramatically increased since the passage of Title IX, coverage has yet to become completely balanced. Media coverage of sports is driven with audience interest in mind, but just maybe the female and male athletes and their equal amounts of hard work and dedication, especially at the collegiate level, should be considered. All athletes are deserving of the equitable promotions that are required by Title IX. The opportunity to build audience interest where it has historically been lacking should

serve as motivation for content creators as well. Completely balanced and non-biased media coverage of female and male athletes may be a tall task, but it is one that media outlets, especially those that are education-based and therefore bound by Title IX, should strive for.

APPENDIX A

Code Sheet-Feature Articles

Coded by \_\_\_\_\_  
Article # \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Conference \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_

**FEATURE ARTICLES**

Gender:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Female
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Male
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Equal
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Indeterminate

Content:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Factual information related to athletics
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Factual information not related to athletics
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Personal information related to athletics
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Personal information not related to athletics

## APPENDIX B

### Code Sheet-Photographs

Coded by \_\_\_\_\_  
Photograph # \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Conference \_\_\_\_\_  
School \_\_\_\_\_

#### **FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHS**

Gender:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Female
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Male
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Equal
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Indeterminate

Content:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ True athleticism
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Posed athleticism
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Head shot
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Non-sport setting
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Student athlete
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Sexual suggestiveness
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Other
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Persons/Object/Graphic other than athlete or coach

## APPENDIX C

### Code Book

#### Definitions/Instructions

#### FEATURE ARTICLES

##### Gender

1. Female: Select this category if the theme of the article is predominantly female
2. Male: Select this category if the theme of the article is predominantly male
3. Equal Coverage: Select this category if the article represents equal coverage of males and females
4. Gender Indeterminate: Select this category if the gender represented by the article is indeterminate

##### Content-“Predominantly” would be considered over 50% of the article

1. Factual information related to athletics: select this category if the article is predominantly factual information related to athletics-this includes schedule, game recaps, game previews, team statistics, individual statistics, athletic honors, athletic accomplishments, student-athlete honors, etc.
2. Factual information not related to athletics: select this category if the article is predominantly about facts not related to athletics-such as team activities, school activities, media, career, university news, events, etc.
3. Personal information related to athletics: select this category if the article is predominantly about personal information that is related to athletics such as leadership, emotional/physical strengths and weaknesses, other causes or activities because of being an athlete, etc.
4. Personal information not related to athletics: select this category if the article is predominantly about personal information such as family, personal life, personal background, relationships, hobbies, causes, etc.

#### FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH

##### Gender

1. Female: Select this category if the person/persons in the photograph are predominately female athlete/s or coach/es
2. Male: Select this category if the person/persons in the photograph are predominately male athlete/s or coach/es
3. Equal Coverage: Select this category if there are a similar number of both male and female athletes/coaches in the photograph as to represent equal coverage
4. Other: Select his category if the gender of the photo is indeterminate

## Content

1. True athleticism: Select this category if the athlete is in uniform, in action, and/or competing-this includes pre-game or post-game, this includes photo shoots in which athletes are posed in action shots, this also includes coaches actively coaching on their playing surface
2. Posed athleticism: Select this category if the athlete is in uniform, but not competing in an actual athletic contest-this includes photo shoots in which athlete is not posed in athletic action, this also includes when an athlete or coach is photographed on their playing surface in an out of game context
3. Head shot: Select this category if the photo is a professional head shot
4. Non-sport setting: Select this category if the athlete is in a non-sport setting- this includes community service-type activities, media activities, family activities and other outings
5. Student athlete: Select this category if the athlete is portrayed as a student-this includes studying, in a school-like setting, schoolbooks, backpacks, ect.
6. Sexual suggestiveness: Select this category if the athlete is posed in a sexually suggestive manner, is dressed provocatively, or is giving a look that can be considered sexual in nature
7. Other: Select this category if the athlete/s or coach/es are portrayed in any other setting not relating to the previous categories
8. Persons/Object/Graphic other than athlete/coach: Select this category if the photograph depicts person/s or objects other than an athlete or coach or is a graphic rather than a photograph

## APPENDIX D

### Photograph Examples

Figure 1. Male-True Athleticism



Figure 2. Female-True Athleticism





Figure 3. Female-Posed Athleticism



Figure 4. Male-Posed Athleticism



Figure 5. Female-Non-Sport



Figure 6. Male-Non-Sport



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