

AN EXAMINATION AND INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN
IN SPORTS MEDIA

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BY

SUSAN E. MCKENNA

UNDER ADVISMENT OF

PROFESSOR ROBERT S. PRITCHARD, ADVISOR

AND

PROFESSOR JEFFERY NEWTON, CO-ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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INTRODUCTION

The status of women's sports is at an all time high. Women are playing in men's golf tournaments, professional women's sports teams are a reality, and more young women than ever before are participating in sports. However, the media coverage of women's sports and female athletes continues to lag behind their male counterparts.

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years on how men and women are portrayed in the media and advertisements across multiple mediums including magazines, television, and newspapers. Researchers have consistently found women athletes and sports are under-represented compared to the coverage of men's sports. The research in this area has examined both articles and photographs in newspapers, magazines, and television.

Overall, research on gender inequality in sports shows that females athletes and their respective sports are grossly under-represented. The research on this subject continues to grow and has now entered the phase where studies need to be replicated to determine if progress has been made and to further examine the effect this inequality is having on society. If the evidence continues to show that women's sports are treated as inferior to men's sports, this could be the reason why they have not reached their full potential. The further implications of this

inequality is that the media is perpetuating gender stereotypes that women have worked for decades to overcome.

In a March 2004 opinion article in the *Indianapolis Business Journal* commentator Susan Williams discusses the economic impact of hosting the Women's Final Four will have on Indianapolis. Williams states the economic impact of the 2003 Women's Final Four in Atlanta was \$26.7 million but the media has not responded as positively. Williams believes the, "...under-reporting indicates there is an under appreciation for the talent and skills of women athletes, not to mention an underestimation of the public's interest in women's sports." (*Indianapolis Business Journal* [Indianapolis], 1-7 March 2004).

In summary, conclusions will be drawn about how this effects decisions and influences the plans of public relations practitioners and how they can have a direct impact. Suggestions for future research will also be given.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature of gender inequality in sports focuses on two main areas: the superior amount of coverage that men receive over women in sports and the way women's sports in general, as well as individual female athletes, are portrayed in the coverage that does exist. The literature reviewed focuses on studies that examined print media, which is limited to newspapers and magazines. Researchers have examined articles, placement of stories and themes to delve deeper into this issue of inequality. One particular area of focus across all mediums has been photographs. A photograph can catch the reader's eye and lead them into a story. Also, since a picture is worth a thousand words, the emotion and subject matter of the photo can convey its own message and even perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes.

The research below is organized into two categories: research that examines general print media, for example the *Washington Post*, and research that looks at sports specific publications such as *Sports Illustrated*. Within the context of those two categories, the studies are discussed in chronological order.

Miller (1975) examined women's and men's roles in photographs from two newspapers, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. The study looked at every eighth issue of each paper from July 2, 1973 to June 27, 1974. The roles in which men

and women were depicted by the photographs were classified into 10 categories, one of which was sports figure.

In total, the sample of 46 issues yielded 2,168 pictures in the *Washington Post* and 1,493 pictures in the *Los Angeles Times*. Overall, photographs of men were more prevalent. The ratio of women's sports pictures to men's was 1 to 13. In total, only 5 to 6 percent of the pictures of women were located in the sports section of the papers, whereas nearly 25 percent of all the men's photographs were in the sports section.

In 1983, Miller's (1975) study was replicated by Roy Blackwood to see if any progress had been made in seven years. Blackwood (1983), like Miller, wanted to see if the photographic coverage of women in the media reflected their roles in society since newspapers are supposed to be a reflection of what is occurring in our society at a given time (Blackwood 1983).

Blackwood looked at every eighth issue of the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* from July 1, 1980 to June 26, 1981. His methodology was the same as Miller's, with one exception. Blackwood used the number of representations instead of the number of photographs. The sample of 92 papers yielded a total of 3,248 photographs resulting in 4,841 representations between the two papers.

He discovered only slightly more than 5 percent of photographs of women appeared in the sports section, but one-third of pictures of men appeared there. Overall, Blackwood

discovered that the roles of men and women depicted in the photographs of these selected papers have made little progress, despite the advancement of women in our society.

Hilliard (1984) focused his research on magazine articles that featured top male or female tennis players. Tennis players were chosen because both men and women compete in the sport and both play in high level, visible tournaments. The sample was 115 articles from June 1979 to September 1983 that were found in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. Hilliard found that more coverage was given to male tennis players than female players. He also found that men authored all the articles on major championships as well. In addition, he discovered that if an article discussed both male and female players, then males were discussed first.

In the articles about female tennis players, Hilliard uncovered some disturbing themes. These themes, such as the inability to develop their full talent, female player's co-dependence on others, and extreme emotional states such as depression, convey weakness in the female tennis players. These same themes were not found in the articles about male players. Male players were portrayed as determined, aggressive, honest and independent. Hilliard concluded that there was not only an imbalance of coverage, but also the coverage that did exist reinforced traditional views of masculinity and femininity.

Wann, et al. (1988) took a different approach and looked at university-sponsored newspapers instead of national publications. Wann, et al. compared the amount of coverage to three factors, the enrollment of the chosen universities, the number of athletes participating in varsity sports, and the total number of varsity sports on each campus. A small, medium, and large university was selected for the study. The sample for the content analysis was the Friday sports sections from each school newspaper from September 1, 1993 to February 28, 1994. Articles and photographs were coded as male or female and articles were further coded as to the number of lines each contained about male or female athletes.

As expected by the researchers, there was more coverage of male athletes and sports. This also held true when compared to the university's enrollment of males and females and the number of sports offered for each gender. However, when compared with the actual number of females competing in sports, the percentage of coverage was fair. Even so, overall the coverage favored males.

Judith George and Neal Watson (1989) examined sports coverage in the *Indianapolis Star* and the *New York Times*. A content analysis of 52 Saturday editions was performed. George and Watson found women's sports represented 2.7 percent of all the sports coverage in *The Indianapolis Star* and 2.2 percent in the *New York Times*.

Wayne Wanta and Dawn Leggett (1989) examined photographs from the 1987 Wimbledon tennis tournament. The researchers were looking at the photographs in terms of three variables: emotion, dominance and power. Wanta and Leggett thought female tennis players would be shown in more emotional states than males, female tennis players would appear more helpless than males, and men and women would be framed differently. In addition, the photographs would focus on the bodies of female players, but the faces of male players.

Two sets of photographs were analyzed in the study, photographs from the Associated Press (AP) wire service sent to the *Austin American-Statesman* and the Wimbledon photographs selected by eight newspapers. The eight newspapers were: *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Houston Post*, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and *Nashville Tennessean*. A total of 172 wire photographs were examined and the eight papers yielded 204 photographs. Each photograph was studied by four coders, two male and two female, who classified all the pictures in three ways: male or female, emotional or non-emotional, dominator or dominated, and the percentage of the photograph that was taken up by the athlete's head.

Male tennis players were shown in 63.4 percent of the AP photographs and females were shown in 36.6 percent. In the eight newspapers, 60.8 percent were of male players and 39.2 percent

were of women. Despite the difference in percent of coverage, all three of their hypotheses were rejected. This was the only study found in this review of the literature that showed the photographers and editors were not reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes.

Duncan (1990) examined the content and context of sports photographs in several national publications around two Olympic time frames, 1984 and 1988. The 1984 sample included the summer Olympic Games only and the publications were *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*. In 1988, photographs from the summer and winter games were selected from *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, *MS.* and *Maclean's*. This yielded 1,369 photographs that were then reduced to 186 photographs that suggested sexual difference of females compared to males. Duncan argues the female athletes who are the most glamorous and most made-up are the ones most often chosen for photographs and this selection of photographs emphasizes sexual difference.

There was no quantitative evidence cited in this article, only examples of photographs that reinforced Duncan's hypothesis. Examples of female athletes being shown with a pout on their lips, males exerting dominance over females and photographs that highlighted specific body parts on females were discussed. One of the pictures highlighted was of the Romanian gymnastic team photographed from behind and leaning over. This photo showed not only the gymnasts' bodies but emphasized their small stature.

Duncan also pointed out that more women are seen crying in sports photographs than men, even though men do break into tears in sports. Overall, Duncan concluded that sports photographs shape society's views of masculinity and femininity and often show women as the weaker gender.

One of the largest studies of newspaper coverage of men's and women's sports was undertaken by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (Duncan, Messner, and Williams 1991). Duncan, Messner, and Williams (1991) performed a content analysis on four newspapers that each represented a different section of the country. The newspapers selected were *USA Today*, *Boston Globe*, *Orange County Register*, and *Dallas Morning News*. Five key measurements were studied: the number of stories, length of stories, page placement, number of photographs, and number of stories with a photograph. The stories and photographs were coded into one of four categories: men-only, women-only, both and neutral. The Monday through Friday editions from July 2, 1990 to September 28, 1990 of each paper were examined.

Duncan, Messner, and Williams discovered a significant statistical difference in the number, length, and placement of men's and women's sports articles and photographs. Their results stated men-only sports stories outnumbered women-only stories 23 to 1 and women-only stories accounted for just 3.5 percent of all stories. Even when stories about men's and women's sports were combined with the women-only stories, the percentage of stories

about women's sports was only 15.5 percent. When articles about baseball and football were subtracted, women-only stories were still outnumbered by men's stories by a ratio of 8.7 to 1. As for photographs, 92.3 percent of all photographs were of men and photographs of male athletes outnumbered female athletes by a ratio of 13 to 1.

In each of the four papers, less than 5 percent of all sports stories were about women. In total only 301 stories found were women-only stories, compared to 6,877 men-only studies. Of the four papers, *USA Today* had the highest number of women's sports stories and photographs.

George Griffith and Ashleigh Griffin (1999) conducted a follow-up study to George and Watson (1989). Once again, 52 Saturday editions of *The Indianapolis Star* and *New York Times* were examined. Griffith and Griffith discovered 8.6 percent of the sports coverage was devoted to women in *The Indianapolis Star* and 6.7 percent in the *New York Times*. Photographs of women athletes in *The Indianapolis Star* accounted for 9.8 percent of the photographs in the sports section and 8.9 percent of the pictures in the sports section of the *New York Times* were of women. The 1999 study did show increased coverage of women's sports, but the increase in coverage once again does not reflect the growth of women's athletics. Female athletes represent nearly 40 percent of all high school, collegiate and Olympic

athletes but the media coverage does not reflect this percentage (George 2001).

Jones, Murrell, and Jackson (1999) believed that the coverage of women in sports reinforced traditional gender stereotypes. Their sample for content analysis was six newspapers from 1996, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and seven newspapers from 1998. The papers from 1998 were *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Washington Post*. In addition, the sample included issues of *Sports Illustrated* from these two years. The researchers then selected articles that described the U.S. Olympic basketball, gymnastics, hockey, soccer, and softball teams who were all gold medal winners. There were a total of 67 articles that were coded. The articles were sorted into gender appropriate sport categories and then each passage from the articles were coded in two ways: task relevance and depiction of gender. Task relevance was classified as describing the athlete's performance in reference to the gold medal, performance not related to the gold medal, or no relevance to the gold medal. Gender depiction was coded as either stereotypical female characteristic such as beauty, stereotypical male characteristic such as physicality, or if the passage compared a female athlete to a male athlete.

Jones, Murrell, and Jackson found task-relevant comments were more common in passages about female-appropriate sports such as gymnastics. In addition, there were more comparisons of female athletes to male athletes when the articles were about females playing male-appropriate sports such as basketball. They concluded, "female athletes are judged and evaluated using traditional beliefs about gender whether they are competing in traditional gender-appropriate or in a nontraditional gender inappropriate sport." (Jones, Murrell, and Jackson 1999, 189).

Urquhart and Crossman (1999) looked at only one newspaper, Canada's *Globe and Mail*. Even though the researchers only examined one publication, their timeframe for analysis was from 1924 to 1992, centered on the Winter Olympic Games. They coded 1,184 articles and 528 photographs on the basis of five variables: size of article or photograph, type of article or photograph, sport, location, and source.

Concurrent with previous research, Urquhart and Crossman found that females were under-represented and were shown more often in sex-appropriate sports. Four times the number of articles (647 to 144) were about men and men were shown three times more (346 to 131) than women in pictures. In addition, male reporters were responsible for six times the stories of female reporters. In terms of length of articles, though, the mean size of articles about female athletes was larger, but articles and pictures of male athletes appeared on the front two

pages of the sports section 41 percent of the time versus 7.1 percent for women.

Reid and Soley (1979) studied the coverage of women's sports in *Sports Illustrated* from 1956 through 1976 to see if there had been a significant change in coverage over those twenty years. Issues of *Sports Illustrated* were selected in six four-year intervals for a total of 72 issues. Photographs were excluded from the study, and only the feature articles in the first issue of the month were analyzed. There were a total of 424 feature articles that spanned 2,224 pages. Reid and Soley discovered the percentage of articles about women had not changed significantly over those twenty years even though women's participation in sports increased during the same time frame.

Rintala and Birrell (1984) executed a content analysis of *Young Athlete* magazine. *Young Athlete* targets impressionable readers from ages 12 to 22 and has been published since 1975. Rintala and Birrell hoped to discover the prevalence of female role models for young girls in the context of this one media outlet. They posed two research questions: do male athletes receive more coverage than females and does the gender representation of athletes in *Young Athlete* accurately depict young peoples' participation in sports. From these research questions, 10 specific hypotheses were formed. The sample included all issues of *Young Athlete* magazine from September 1975 through October 1982. Photographs and covers were analyzed

separately from articles. The 3,287 pictures were coded by sport, number of people, and gender of the people in the photograph. Articles were coded by topic and author gender.

The researchers found males were twice as likely to be pictured in the magazine and men wrote the majority of the articles. Females were pictures more in aesthetic sports and males were shown in high-risk and strength sports. As compared to actual sport participation, Rintala and Birrell discovered that the representation of males and females does not reflect the actual number participating in recreational sports. Once again, females were under-represented, especially in the area of team sports. In reference to the number of girls participating in high school sports, the coverage was quite fair. Nearly 33 percent of all high school athletes are female and 33.2 percent of the high school athletes in *Young Athlete* were female.

Title IX, the 1972 federal court decision that prohibits discrimination based on sex in educational institutions that receive federal funding, opened doors for women athletes and afforded them opportunities that were not possible before. Kane (1988) conducted a content analysis of 1,228 issues of *Sports Illustrated* from 1964 - 1987 to examine the impact of Title IX on media coverage. Kane specifically looked at feature articles that exclusively covered females and evaluated them based on extent and type of coverage. Type of coverage took into consideration coverage of sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate

sports for women. Examples of sex-appropriate sports are gymnastics, figure skating, swimming and tennis. Sex-inappropriate sports include basketball, racing, softball and wrestling.

Kane (1988) found no significant increase in the total number of articles in the time periods during, 1972 - 1979, and after, 1980 - 1987, Title IX. She did however find that more articles were written about women in athletic roles than non-athletic roles, which could be related to the passage of Title IX. In addition, Kane found more articles were written about women in sex-appropriate sports. She concluded that, ". . . *Sports Illustrated* is sending a clear message as to which sports are considered acceptable and valued within women's athletics." (Kane 1988, 96).

Margaret Duncan and Amoun Sayaovong (1990) conducted a content analysis, which focused only on photographs in *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. The sample consisted of 459 photographs from six 1989 issues. The photographs were coded into the following categories: photo domination (dominant or nondominant), gender (male or female), angle of the photo (straight, down or up), style of photograph (passive or active), type of sport (individual or team), category of sport (neutral, aesthetic, high risk, or strength), and leadership (owner, official, or coach). Duncan and Sayaovong found photographs of men outnumbered women

by a 2 to 1 ratio (68 percent versus 28 percent) and men were twice as likely to be pictured in an active pose.

Angela Lumpkin and Linda Williams (1991) analyzed *Sports Illustrated* feature articles from 1957 - 1987. The study yielded a sample of 3,723 articles. Multiple characteristics of the identified articles were studied including author of article, gender, race and sport that the article covered and number of pictures in the article and overall length of the article. The study found 91.8 percent of the articles were written by men. Ninety percent of the articles were about men compared to 8 percent about females. The remaining articles featured both sexes. Baseball, football and basketball were the sports that were covered the most often. African-Americans were featured in 22.4 percent of the articles. On article length, Lumpkin and Williams found articles about males and whites were longer than those about females and blacks. Males had a total of 845 column inches compared to 141 column inches devoted to females. Overall, Lumpkin and Williams "...concluded that *Sports Illustrated* perpetuates and reinforces traditional images and stereotypes of blacks and women in sport." (Lumpkin and Williams 1991, 30).

Salwen and Wood (1994) examined the covers of *Sports Illustrated* in four three-year intervals, beginning with 1957 and ending with 1989. In total the sample was 504 covers, which yielded 827 identifiable people. An "identifiable person" was defined as someone who was the center of attention and clearly

identified. Covers with more than four identifiable people were excluded. Each person was coded male or female, athlete or non-athlete, active or non-active.

As Salwen and Wood suspected, there were fewer females than males on the covers, 55 females and 782 males. Interestingly the largest number of females on the covers was found in the 1950's, therefore the researcher's hypothesis that there would be an increase in females on the cover over time was not supported. In addition, more male athletes than female athletes were depicted in active poses.

Fink and Kensicki (2002) studied *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*. *Sports Illustrated for Women* was created in 2000 and only lasted two years. At the time the study was conducted nine issues of *Sports Illustrated for Women* were available. The study examined both photographs and articles. Since the sample size of *Sports Illustrated for Women* was much smaller than the *Sports Illustrated* content, all photographs and articles in the *Women* edition were analyzed. This yielded a sample size of 1,075. A random sample of *Sports Illustrated* content from 1997 - 2000 was selected, yielding a sample size of 1,775 photographs and articles. The photographs were coded into four categories: athletic action, dressed but poised and pretty, nonsport setting, or pornographic. The articles were classified into nine categories: personal, victim, sport related, system critique, sport struggle, sport victories, health-personal,

health-sport, or fashion. Three coders were used to conduct the content analysis. Fink and Kensicki found only 10 percent of the photographs and articles in *Sports Illustrated* featured women. In addition they found 56 percent of the photographs of females were in nonsport action whereas 66 percent of male photographs were coded as athletic action. *Sports Illustrated for Women* was also found to have more articles regarded personal health.

Hardin et al. (2002) replicated Duncan and Sayaovong's (1990) study and looked at the editorial photographs in *Sports Illustrated for Kids* from July 1996 to June 1999. This particular timeframe was selected since it was after the 1996 Olympic Games. The 1996 Olympic games are significant because they have been called "the gender equity Olympics." One reason cited for this is American women won more medals than American men during the 1996 Olympic Games. The researchers had hoped this wave of increased media coverage would continue and the Games would serve as a turning point in the coverage of women's sports.

Hardin et al. coded the photographs into the same categories Duncan and Sayaovong (1990) had defined in their study. Hardin et al. found the ratio had increased to 3 to 1. Men were pictured in 76.3 percent of all the photographs. In addition the researchers found men were photographed in more active poses than women and shown in more leadership roles.

Women in leadership roles were almost non-existent as men were shown in 97 percent of the leadership role photographs.

Hardin et al. findings were consistent with Duncan and Sayavong's 1990 study that they were attempting to replicate. Just as Reid and Soley (1979) found even though more women than ever were participating in sports, the coverage was not reflecting that change.

Bishop conducted a more recent study (2003) to follow up on Reid and Soley's (1979) previous work. Bishop examined feature articles in the first issue of each month beginning in 1980 to 1996. In total 569 articles from 72 issues were reviewed. The results revealed a slight increase in the percentage of feature articles on women in 1992 and 1994 but revealed a decline in 1996. Their *t* test revealed that the change was not significant in comparison to what Reid and Soley (1979) previously found. Unlike the Reid and Soley research, Bishop included photographs that accompanied the articles. The study revealed a drop in photographs from 1994 to 1996, 9.8 percent to 4.4 percent respectively. It was noted that more women appeared in the earlier issues; the amount of women did not increase with the passage of time.

Lumpkin studied both gender and the ethnicity of individuals on the cover of Sports Illustrated from 1990 - 1999, with an entire sample size of 520. Males were pictured on the cover 87.9 percent of the time compared to 6 percent for females.

The female covers also included 10 swimsuit issue covers. The study revealed African-Americans were pictured more often on the cover in the sports of basketball, boxing, and track and field but overall European Americans were favored on the covers. Even though African-Americans were pictured on the cover often, it was not equable based on their level of participation in the dominant sports. The highest number of females on the cover in a given year was five in 1992 and females were most often pictured in the sport of tennis.

The majority of the literature on gender inequality in sports in print media coverage has been conducted in the past twenty-five years. Even in this relatively short time span, studies have been replicated, building on previous research. An example is Blackwood's (1983) study, which replicated Miller's (1975) photographic content study seven years later to see what, if any, progress had been made. In addition, Hardin et al. (2002) replicated Duncan and Sayavong's (1990) study and discovered the same result. Bishop's (2003) study replicated Reid and Soley's (1979) study and revealed that rapid progress has not been made. These studies are significant to the body of knowledge on this subject because they are discovering that over time, progress is not being made. The following study tests to see if any progress has been made in the past decade. This research tests four hypotheses which were developed based on a review of the literature.

The hypotheses are as follows:

H1: More men than women will be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.

H2: Women will be shown in posed positions more often than athletic action.

H3: Women will be shown in posed positions more often than men.

H4: Women who are featured on the cover will be shown in gender appropriate sports more often than gender inappropriate sports.

METHODOLOGY

The dominant methodology in the research on gender inequality in sports is content analysis. All the studies discussed in the review of relevant literature used content analysis as their dominant methodology. This method is popular since it is a way to quantify the messages being produced by the media. "Content analysis is the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the content of documents, including print media and broadcast media coverage" (Dozier and Broom 1990, 139). In addition, this particular methodology is effective for comparing results from multiple time periods. "If measurements are to be made over intervals of time, comparisons of the numerical data from one time period to another can help simplify and standardize the evaluation procedure" (Wimmer and Dominick 2003, 141).

The sample for this research is all covers of *Sports Illustrated* produced from January 1990 through December 1999, which represents the entire decade of the 1990's. The cover is the most prominent feature of a magazine. (Salwen and Wood 1994). Previously, Salwen and Wood studied three decades of *Sports Illustrated* covers. This research encompasses the next decade to build on Salwen and Wood's research to see if women have made any progress on *Sports Illustrated* covers.

However, this study is not an exact replication of Salwen and Wood's research. The differences are in the hypothesis

tested and the categories of coding. Salwen and Wood tested six hypotheses and three referenced a specific time frame. Four specific hypotheses are tested in this study. The hypotheses were developed based on the review of related literature. The hypotheses are:

H1: More men than women will be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.

H2: Women will be shown in posed positions more often than athletic action.

H3: Women will be shown in posed positions more often than men.

H4: Women who are featured on the cover will be shown in gender appropriate sports more often than gender inappropriate sports.

To test the first hypothesis that more men than women will be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* each cover was coded as male, female, both, or other. Male or female was decided on based on appearance. Both was used if both males and females appeared on the cover. Other was used if the cover did not feature a person. These categories differ from Salwen and Wood. The number of people will only be a factor in the both category. When there was more than one prominent person on the cover, if they are of the same sex they were only counted once in the appropriate gender category. For example if there were four men on the cover, the cover was classified as male, not four

males. To be counted as a person, the face of the person or more than half of their body needed to be shown in order to be counted. People blurred out as part of the background were not considered.

The second hypothesis is women will be shown in posed positions more often than athletic action. This is similar to Salwen and Wood's active and non-active classification. Posed position was classified as one that does not picture an athlete engaged in their respective sport. An athlete shown with sporting equipment but not using the equipment was classified in this category in addition to athletes pictured in a non-sport setting. Athletic action was considered as athlete playing their sport.

The third hypothesis is women will be shown in posed positions more often than men. This examined all the posed cover shots to discover if women were portrayed more as models and less as athletes.

The final hypothesis is women who are featured on the cover will be shown in gender appropriate sports more often than gender inappropriate sports. The list of gender appropriate sports was based on Kane's (1988) list of sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate sports for female participation. Therefore the gender appropriate sports for women are as follows: cycling, diving, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, horseback riding, racquetball, figure skating, speed skating, downhill skiing,

water skiing, surfing, swimming, synchronized swimming, tennis, track, and volleyball.

The sample size for the research was all covers of *Sports Illustrated* produced from January 1990 through December 1999, which totaled 515 issues. The independent variables in this study are *Sports Illustrated*, men, women, type of sports, and photograph setting. The dependent variable is the concept of more coverage. One female coder, the author, was used to code the magazine covers. There was no inter-coder reliability coefficient since only one coder was used. The coder had complete understanding of all operational definitions.

FINDINGS

The sample size for the research was all covers of *Sports Illustrated* produced from January 1990 through December 1999. This sample size yielded a total of 515 covers. Four years had 52 published covers (1990, 1996, 1997, and 1998). The remaining six years only had 51 published covers (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1999).

On the 515 cover, 456 covers featured males on the cover, which represents 88.544 percent. Thirty-two covers featured females on the cover, accounting for only 6.214 percent. Ten covers were classified as having both male and females on the covers, representing 1.942 percent. Of the 515 covers, 17 were classified as other, meaning no people were pictured on the cover which was 3.301 percent of the covers.

Table 1

Classification of Sports Illustrated Covers by Year

Year	Male	Female	Both	Other	Covers
1990	46	3	1	2	52
1991	49	2	0	1	51
1992	45	5	0	1	52
1993	45	4	0	2	51
1994	41	2	6	2	51
1995	44	3	1	3	51
1996	48	4	0	0	52
1997	45	2	1	4	52
1998	49	3	0	0	52
1999	44	4	1	2	51

Out of the 515 covers, 498 covers featured people. Of the 498 covers that featured people, 456 featured males and 32 featured females, which is 91.566 percent and 6.426 percent respectively. If the number of covers that featured females only is added to the number of covers that featured both that represents 42 covers out of the 498 covers that featured people. This results in females being pictured on 8.434 percent of covers.

Of the 32 issues with females on the cover, 10 issues were the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue. These issues all featured at least one female and no males. This means only 22 of the 515 covers featured females, which is 4.272 percent.

In addition to male, female, or both, the people on the cover were classified as active, posed or non applicable. Three hundred and thirty nine of the 515 covers, were classified as active and 161 were classified as posed. Fifteen were coded as non applicable, neither active nor posed.

Table 2

Active vs. Posed on Sports Illustrated Covers, 1990 - 1999

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Active	34	41	39	32	34	30	31	31	34	33
Posed	14	10	11	17	15	19	20	20	18	17
N/A	4	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	1
Total	52	52	51	51	51	51	52	52	52	51

Males were pictured as active more often than posed. There were 323 active male covers and 131 posed male covers for a total of 454 covers. In total males were shown as active 71.145 percent of the time, whereas males were shown posed 28.855 percent of the time.

Table 3

Male Active vs. Posed on Sports Illustrated Covers, 1990 - 1999

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Male Active	32	40	38	31	29	29	31	30	33	30
Male Posed	13	9	7	14	12	15	16	15	16	14
Male Total	45 ^a	49	45	45	41	44	47 ^b	45	49	44

^a1990 total of males does not match overall total of males for that year since one cover is group of young fans, neither active nor posed.

^b1996 total of males does not match overall total since one cover was classified as both.

Of the 32 female covers, 10 covers were classified as active and 22 were classified as posed. In total females were shown active 31.25 percent of the time and shown posed 68.75 percent of the time. Ten of the 22 posed covers were the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue. If the swimsuit covers are subtracted from the total number of covers, women were shown posed 45.455 percent of the time.

Table 4

Female Active vs. Posed on Sports Illustrated Covers, 1990 - 1999

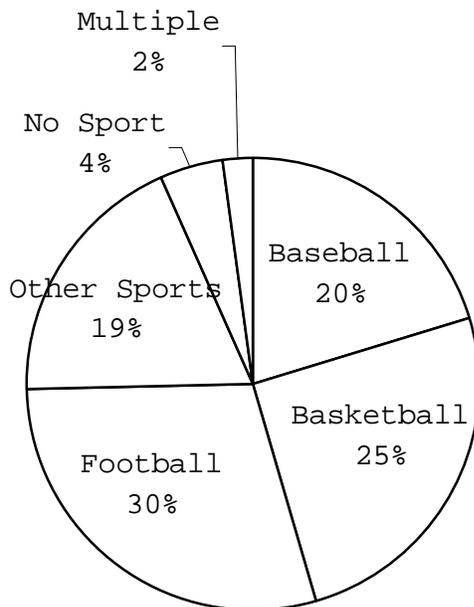
Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Female Active	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	2
Female Posed	1	1	4	3	2	2	4	1	2	2
Female Total	3	2	5	4	2	3	4	2	3	4

Athletes were featured on 442 of the 515 covers. Of the 442 athletes 19 were female, accounting for 4.525 percent of the athletes. Non-athletes were featured on 36 covers, 13 were female. Non-athletes featured people such as team owners and coaches. If a former player was featured due to their current role such as a coach they were coded as a non-athlete, not player. Twenty-five covers featured both athletes and non-athletes and 12 covers were non applicable.

In the 1990's fifteen different sports were represented on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. A particular sport was shown on 481 covers. In addition, 11 covers featured multiple sports. Twenty-three covers did not feature a sport on the 515 total covers. The top three sports featured were football, basketball and baseball, 151 covers, 129 covers and 105 covers respectively. Boxing, tennis and golf were the next three highest sports with 23, 20 and 18 covers respectively.

Figure 1

*Types of Sports featured on Sports Illustrated Covers,
1990 - 1999 (by percentage)*



Other sports depicted on the covers were hockey (9 covers), track and field (9 covers), soccer (4 covers), figure skating (3 covers), speed skating (3 covers), skiing (3 covers), swimming (2 covers), auto racing (1 cover) and cycling (1 cover).

The sport that was shown most often with women was tennis. Eight female coded covers represented the sport of tennis, which represents 40 percent of the tennis related covers. This is the highest percentage of any cover. Six of those covers showed active females and two were shown posed. Figure skating and basketball were the next two most popular sports shown on female coded covers at three covers each. The three covers that featured figure skating only featured females and was the only

sport to not feature males. Two figure skating female covers were posed, one was active. Of the three female basketball covers, one was active and two were posed. The other sports that showed females were speed skating (1 cover, active), track and field (2 covers, posed), baseball (2 covers, posed), boxing (1 cover, posed) and soccer (2 covers, 1 posed, 1 active).

Table 5

Percentage of Coded Female Covers by Sport

Sport	Total	Women	Percentage
Baseball	105	2	1.905%
Basketball	129	3	2.326%
Boxing	23	1	4.348
Figure Skating	3	3	100%
Speed Skating	3	1	33.333%
Track & Field	9	2	22.222%
Tennis	20	8	40%
Soccer	4	2	50%

The first research hypothesis was more men than women will be featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. This hypothesis was proven true. Women were only shown on 32 covers whereas men were shown on 456 covers. Both were shown on 10 covers. This means females were only featured on 6.214 percent of the covers, significantly less than males.

The second hypothesis stated women will be shown in posed positions more often than athletic action. This was proven true.

Women were shown in athletic action 31.25 percent of the time and 68.75 percent of the time women were shown in posed positions.

The third hypothesis was also proven true. The hypothesis stated women will be shown in posed positions more often than men. Women were shown in posed positions 68.75 percent of the time whereas men were shown in posed positions 28.855 percent of the time.

The fourth and final hypothesis was women who are featured on the cover will be shown in gender appropriate sports more often than gender inappropriate sports. In total women were only shown in eight different sports. Four of those sports are gender appropriate according to Kane's classifications and four were not. The gender appropriate sports that females were shown in were: tennis, speed skating, figure skating, and track. The other sports that women were featured in were: baseball, basketball, boxing and soccer. Since the results were equal and not greater, this hypothesis was proved false.

DISCUSSION

Past research on gender inequality in sports shows that females athletes and their respective sports are grossly under-represented. This study concurred with prior findings and therefore reinforces the previous research. Possible explanations for this imbalance are given based on the findings of this research. The coverage does not reflect the success of women's sports in the past two decades. Future research needs to focus on the reasons for this trend and how it impacts the communications field.

The top three sports featured on the covers of *Sports Illustrated* were football, basketball and baseball, 151 covers, 129 covers and 105 covers respectively. Women currently are not allowed to play professional football or baseball. Therefore there were 280 covers that did not even have the opportunity to feature female athletes for most of the decade. This is more than half the covers published in the decade, 54.369 percent. Interestingly, these are the three sports that were also most covered in feature articles from 1954 - 1987 according to Lumpkin and Williams previous research (1991). It seems that Sport Illustrated has had this pattern of sports coverage since its inception.

An opportunity for women to play professional basketball was created in 1996 with the creation of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). League play began in 1997.

Although, there was no cover devoted to the creation of this new, national sports governing body it did provide another professional sport for women. However, the only time female basketball players were featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated during the nineties was in July 22, 1996 for the Olympics. A female non-athlete was featured on the cover March 2, 1998 when Pat Summitt, coach of the Tennessee Volunteers was shown. This was a strong cover as it compared Pat Summitt to John Wooden as possibly the greatest collegiate coach of all time. This suggested that women and men are equal, a positive step for the magazine.

Two covers in the nineties did show women and the sport of baseball. One of these covers was a very strong cover of Marge Schott, owner of the Cincinnati Reds on May 20, 1996. This cover is powerful since it shows a close up photo of Schott smoking a cigarette. Schott is shown in a position of power and not represented or characterized as weak. The other was the July 12, 1993 cover that feature two pitchers widows Laurie Crews and Patti Olin after their husbands suffered a tragic death. This portrayed the women as weak and sad, not in a position of power.

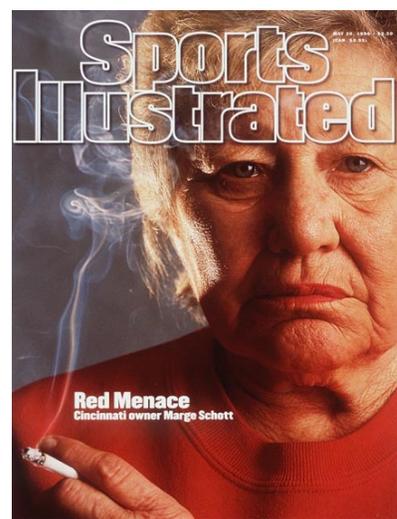


Figure 2

Marge Schott Sports Illustrated Cover, May 20, 1996

Often women featured on covers were not featured for their athletic prowess but for scandal or other drama that occurred in their personal life. For example, the January 17, 1994 cover featured Nancy Kerrigan not for her Olympic and other figure skating accomplishments but her scandal. Her whole face is not even pictured and the dark cover has words that read, "Why me? Why Now? Why?". It depicts her as not a strong athlete but rather a weak woman.

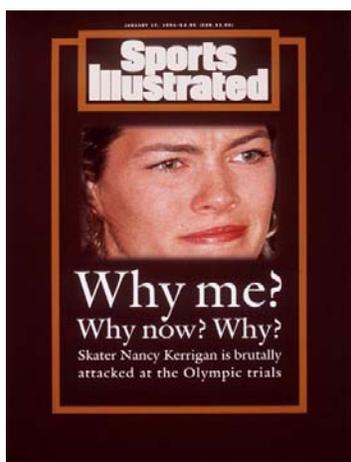


Figure 3

Nancy Kerrigan Sports Illustrated Cover, January 17, 1994

Monica Seles graced the cover of Sports Illustrated three times, all in the 1990's (1990, 1993, 1990). Two of the three times the cover story was not about her athletic prowess but for drama in her personal life. The headline of the August 23, 1993 issue asks "Why Mary Pierce Fears For Her Life?" and shows a forlorn looking Pierce clutching her tennis racquet. The story that follows inside talks about an abuse restrained father, not her on court accomplishments.

There were multiple men that graced more than one cover of Sports Illustrated including Michael Jordan, Mike Tyson, Tiger Woods and Peyton Manning. The only woman to be featured on more than one cover was Bonnie Blair. Blair was also the only woman named as "Sportswomen of the Year" in the entire decade. In the Olympic year of 1992, women saw their first ever back-to-back covers. Bonnie Blair was featured, then Kristi Yamaguchi, followed by the swimsuit issue. Women appeared to be featured more in Olympic years than non-Olympic years.

Even in the small number of women featured on Sport Illustrated covers there were some standouts. On the September 15, 1997 cover, Venus Williams was shown in an active state and was being featured for her outstanding atheism. She was however shown in the gender appropriate sport of tennis.

The under-representation of women in Sports Illustrated has multiple ramifications on the profession of public relations. The gatekeeping function is becoming less relevant today's diversified media mix world. As more people get their news and information from varied sources different agendas have the opportunity to come to light. Although, *Sports Illustrated* still appears to be the foremost and looked to as the authority in sports and has been throughout time. *Sports Illustrated* covers are iconic. Nearly all the covers are posted online with other content, signifying their importance. Their under-representation of women is shaping the message of the importance

of females in athletics. This is corroborated in by Bishop (2003) who stated, "Without coverage from 'mainstream' media such as *SI*, women's sports may be unable to build sustained audiences."

The messaging proliferated by the under-coverage of women in *Sports Illustrated* is affecting all aspects of communication in the sports realm. There are fewer female sports reporters, commentators, writers, photographers and public relations professionals than males. This research did not study the cause of this fact but it could be because women do not believe these opportunities exist for them in the sports field. Males are commonly accepted in this field therefore women may not feel this is a career option for them.

The fact that there are less female sports journalists could explain why there are fewer stories about women. In addition, there could be fewer stories about women being pitched by public relations professionals to reporters and editors. Another question arises, "Is the journalist covering women's sports based on its merit or simply to advance the field of women's sports?" The coverage could do both.

This underrepresentation of women in sports also carries over to other communication-related fields. For example, the patterns of media buyers could be impacted by this inequality. Media buyers may be attracted to *Sports Illustrated* dominant male focus. Buyers may be open to advertising more diverse products

if women were seen in a more equitable light. If more women were featured in *Sports Illustrated* it may impact the marketability of the magazine. Impacts could be felt positively or negatively in this area. More research is needed to indicate the type of impact this would have.

It is possible *Sports Illustrated* feels that it is responding to their readers appropriately. According to *Sports Illustrated's* 2008 advertising rate card the magazine has a circulation of 3,150,000. Testing could have been done by the publication to see how their more 3 million readers, who are predominantly male, respond to both female and male covers. According to a 2005 article in *The Indianapolis Star*, some newspapers do not give as much space to women's sports because the paper's editors believe women are less athletic and less interested in the content. This is based on a survey of 285 newspapers in the southeastern United States that was conducted in 2003. Eighty-nine percent of the surveyed editors believed their sections met the needs of their readers and 44 percent believed women had no interest in sports. (The Indianapolis Star [Indianapolis], 2 June 2005). The editors of *Sport Illustrated* may feel the same way which could point to a reason for the under representation of women in their publication.

The Women's Sports Foundation refutes this claim and believes there is no evidence to support the claim that female athletes are covered less often because women are not as

interested in sports. The Women's Sports Foundation is a national non-profit organization that was founded in 1974 by Billie Jean King. The Foundation points to several data sources on their web site (<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>) to back-up their position that there is no evidence that women are less interested in sports.

According to the Foundation's web site, there is nationwide data from the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles that indicates women make up 38 to 42 percent of all sport and physical activity participants. The Foundation also quotes a 1983 study conducted by themselves and Miller Lite that concluded 70 percent of 1,100 people surveyed would be equally interested in watching women's and men's sports.

The Women's Sports Foundation claims to be recognized by the media as the expert resource on all women's sports issues. The Foundation has issued guideline for media images. "At a time when society is extremely critical of words and images that are disrespectful to women, media companies and corporations using images of active women in their electronic and print advertising, are in need of guidelines that will keep them from making errors that carry significant public relations liabilities and possibly, economic liabilities with female consumers."

Public relations practitioners and other communication professionals should be knowledgeable and heed these guidelines to ensure female athletes are being portrayed fairly. The

guidelines offer twelve questions to ask of the photograph before publishing. Examples of the questions are, "Does the woman look like an athlete?; Are any significant body parts missing?; Would you be comfortable if the girl or woman in the advertisement was your daughter, mom or a female friend?".

Existing research illustrates the discrepancy between the coverage of males and females in the sports industry. An idea for future research to examine how this is impacting public relations is to delve into how many public relations professionals concentrate on sports and how many are females. This research could be expanded to the number of female writers, editors and photographers and measure what type of impact this has. In addition, front office staffs of profession sports teams could also be studied.

Even in light of the documented inequality there are some indications towards a positive change. ESPN has announced it will offer equal prize money to male and female athletes competing in the 2009 X Games. This compliments the findings that women were not more likely to appear in sports that had typically been classified as gender appropriate sports. The X Games has both women and men competing in the same sports including skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding and surfing. The results in this area only were equal. Perhaps this movement will extend to other sports and lead to greater equality and coverage of women in sports.

Public relations professionals have the ability to make an impact in the coverage of women's sports. Practitioners can advocate more often for the coverage of women's sports. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) suggests more creativity and unusual methods may be needed to elicit coverage of women's sports in their Public Relations Manual: Promoting Women's Intercollegiate Sports (1980). The NCAA suggests women's sports results should be reported as hard news but a feature story angle is the "best assistance of highlighted program coverage." The manual encourages public relations professionals to be close with coaches, attend practices and learn hometowns of the athletes they are promoting. One creative idea given in the manual to promote women's sports is to, "schedule the coaches on half-time shows of broadcasted men's sports events." (NCAA, 1980). Other tactics suggested for coverage are using public service announcements, community appearances by players and coaches, radio giveaways and community calendars. According to the manual, "the most successful women's sports publicist is one who can communicate the legitimacy of women's intercollegiate athletics to the media and to the public." (NCAA, 1980). This manual illustrates how public relations professionals can work to decrease the documented inequality in coverage. Public relations practitioners can have a direct impact in shaping the type and tone of the coverage of women's sports.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to examine how women are depicted in sports media. Previous researchers have consistently found over time that women athletes and sports are under represented compared to the coverage of men's sports. Fink and Kensicki states, "...such underrepresentation can result in the symbolic annihilation of the female athlete." (2002) Research on this subject has grown in the past 25 years. It has entered the phase where studies need to be replicated to determine what progress has been made and to further examine the effect this inequality is having on our culture and implications for public relations practitioners in the development of strategic plans and tactical media relations activities.

This current research that built on previous decades once again showed that more men than women are being depicted on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. The content analysis revealed that men were 14 times more likely to be on the cover than women. It also showed that women were also twice as likely to be shown in a posed position rather than in active, athletic action. It did not however support the claim that women were more likely to be shown in gender appropriate sports. The results in this area only were equal.

This study specifically tested progress in the past decade. It built on a previous study by Salwen and Wood (1994), which examined *Sports Illustrated* covers from three decades (1950's -

1980's). It showed progress was made from the 1960's - 1980's but not fast-paced progress. Also, the results showed a decline compared to the 1950's.

Overall the research concluded women continue to be underrepresented in the sports arena which is frustrating given the increased opportunities that women have to participate today. According to Bishop's (2003) research, "SI does not yet reflect the growing popularity of women's sports. There has not been a significant increase in the feature coverage of women's sports in the 20 years of SI published since Reid and Soley (1979) conducted their study." The evidence has also continued to show that women's sports are inferior to men's sports by not being pictured as often and in athletic action. This is important since it seems to have significantly impacted the potential of women's sports. As Bishop (2003) states, "Without coverage from 'mainstream' media such as SI, women's sports may be unable to build sustained audiences."

The coverage of women's sports does not reflect its success in the past two decades. Public relations practitioners can have a direct impact in shaping the type and tone of the coverage of women's sports. Public relations professionals can be advocates for increased coverage of women's sports by using creative strategies and tactics to seek more coverage.

This type of research will need to continue to be replicated to see if public relations professionals have had an influence in the years to come. Other avenues of for future research are documenting the number of women who work in the sports communication field and what impact they have had in past years and what their impact is in the future.

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