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Media Framing of Female Athletes and Women's Sports in Selected Sports Magazines

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MEDIA FRAMING OF FEMALE ATHLETES AND WOMEN'S SPORTS IN
SELECTED SPORTS MAGAZINES

by

STACEY NICELY

Under the Direction of Dr. Merrill Morris

ABSTRACT

In order to determine how female athletes and women's sports are framed in sports magazines, a textual analysis was conducted on three popular sports magazines (*ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated*). The researcher analyzed the texts within these three magazines and found four emergent themes commonly applied to women in sports: mental weakness, male reference, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity. The research found both consistencies and inconsistencies in the thematic framing utilized among the three publications. The textual analysis also revealed a tendency for the sports media to reference individual sports more than team sports. Knowing the exact frames utilized in these magazines, allows the researcher to suggest solutions that may alleviate the negative portrayals of female athletes and women's sports in sports magazines. The results from this study also provide a foundation for those who wish to further explore and raise awareness on this issue.

INDEX WORDS: Media Frames, Female Athletes, Women's Sports, Mental Weakness, Male Reference, Motherhood and Sisterhood, Celebrity

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STACEY NICELY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1	Introduction	1
2	Media Frames	4
	Media Frames in Sports	6
	Media Frames Regarding Female Athletes and Women's Sports	8
	Effects of Media Framing on Female Athletes and Women's Sports	17
	Research Questions	19
3	Methods	20
	Texts	22
	Procedure	24
4	Findings	26
	Reoccurrence of a Past Theme	27
	Mental Weakness	27
	New Emergent Themes	30
	Male Reference	30
	Motherhood and Sisterhood	35
	Celebrity	39
	Framing Consistency	43
	Individual Versus Team Sports	45
5	Discussion	48
	Mental Weakness	50

Male Reference	53
Motherhood and Sisterhood	55
Celebrity	57
Appearance and Over-Sexualization	58
Publications	61
Individual Versus Team Sports	65
Suggestions	67
Limitations	71
Future Research	72
6 Conclusion	74
References	78
Appendix: Texts Analyzed	85

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Various factors may contribute to how the sports media portray female athletes and women's sports. Within these media portrayals, which are presented to the public through media frames, biased messages may emerge that are spread throughout society. While past research has been conducted on media frames, it has mainly focused on general issues, such as politics, patriotism, national crisis, and activism (Shen, 2004; Moshe, 2004; Neiger & Zandberg, 2004; Reber & Berger, 2005). This project is one of the few that focuses on female athletes and women's sports. Female athletes and women's sports are often under-represented and unfairly framed in the media when compared to their male counterparts, which may be interpreted by the mass audience as a sign that women are inferior in the sports domain. This study will explore this issue through an in-depth examination of how female athletes and women's sports are framed in the popular genre of sports magazines.

The importance of studying media frames of female athletes and women's sports is best illustrated by the influence these frames have on children and young female athletes. Media frames can damage children's athletic promise by discouraging them from participating in seemingly gender inappropriate sports (Baker & Horton, 2003). Children should not be dissuaded from participating in any activity due to media frames that portray a gender bias; instead, they should be encouraged to try new things and pursue their athletic talents no matter what the sport. Unrealistic media frames of female

athletes and women's sports harm young females by giving them an unattainable image of the athletic idols they look to for social comparisons (Ward, 2004). The media's emphasis on appearance rather than athleticism may cause young women to focus more on looks than athletic ability, which will hinder their potential to become successful athletes. Many female athletes may also experience role conflict due to the frames they, as well as the general public, are exposed to in the media (Martin & Martin, 1995). Female athletes constantly battle to adhere to the feminine social role, as well as the masculine athletic role that accompanies all levels of sport (Martin & Martin, 1995). These stereotypical roles are portrayed in the media frames imposed upon society, and they are contributing to the role conflict experienced by many young females. It is important to understand the media frames utilized in sports magazines, so the public, especially young athletes, will have the knowledge they need to identify these frames and counteract the damaging effects they may cause.

The most frightening aspect of media frames is that oftentimes, the audience is unaware the media define and frame the issues and information they are exposed to, which magnifies the power and influence the media have over the generally uninformed public (Reber & Berger, 2005). The frames used in sports magazines have the ability to influence an individual's opinion about female athletes and women's sports by emphasizing or reducing the amount of focus given to certain areas of information (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). The influence the frames have on the public is often unnoticed because the portrayals are so commonly shared and accepted in today's culture. The frames learned and originated in sports magazines are often transferred to other areas of the audiences' lives, which affects how they view women in sports, as well

as in other social domains (i.e. workplace) (Eastman & Billings, 2001). Luckily, research has shown that by manipulating media frames, public attitudes can change concerning a particular issue (Bronstein, 2005). With a better understanding of what frames are used to portray female athletes and women's sports, it may be possible to increase public awareness concerning the framing issue, counteract these damaging frames, and change the public's opinion regarding female athletes and women's sports.

This project focuses on texts that feature female athletes and women's sports, but will not compare male and female coverage. The main goal of this research study is to understand exactly how female athletes and women's sports are framed in sports magazines. In order to demonstrate the need for this study, the literature review will outline the general concept of media frames, discuss specific ways the media frame female athletes and women's sports, and explain the effects these frames may have on children and female athletes.

CHAPTER TWO

Media Frames

Media frames have the ability to influence public opinion in the way they transfer information from a media source to social and individual consciousness (Entman, 1993). These frames serve as the structures through which individuals interpret and organize information (Reber & Berger, 2005; Scheufele, 2004). Media framing involves the selection and salience given to various pieces of information, allowing certain attributes to be highlighted and others to be excluded in a communications context (Knight, 1999; Entman, 1993; Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Increasing the salience given to certain attributes influences the audiences' personal opinions regarding a given issue by making it more likely they will process and store it to memory (Scheufele, 2000; Entman, 1993). Frames can also be used to divert attention to or even omit select pieces of information, which is just as influential as highlighting specific areas or characteristics of a story (Entman, 1993). The danger in understating or omitting information is that it limits the alternatives or knowledge the public is exposed too (Entman, 1993). The way the media frame a sport and/or athlete has the potential to impact the audiences' beliefs and attitudes regarding that sport or athlete (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002).

It is rare to see overt measures of sexism in sports coverage, but through framing it is still possible for biased messages to slip through media filters (Eastman & Billings, 2001). According to framing theory, the three functions of media frames are: selection (who/what to show), emphasis (how much to show), and exclusion (what not to show)

(Billings, 2004). The framing theory also emphasizes that media have the power to shape a story in a positive or negative manner, with the negative portrayals having a stronger influence on the audience than positive portrayals (Billings, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001). The theory recognizes that information can be presented in numerous ways, and that how it is arranged and distributed through the media impacts how the public comprehends and uses the information they have been given (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997).

Media frames can be found in four areas of the communication process (Entman, 1993). First, frames can be found with information communicators who are influenced by their own frames and schemas when deciding what information to publish and highlight. Secondly, frames can be found in the presence or absence of certain attributes within the actual text. The simple placement or repetition of certain frames in a text is enough to increase the likelihood that an individual will store it to memory. The third location in the communication process where frames can be found is with the receiver. Frames can affect the thoughts and insights generated by the public by determining what information they are exposed to and confirming or disconfirming previously stored beliefs. Lastly, today's culture is overwhelmed with frames commonly shared and accepted by the social majority (Entman, 1993). Many of these frames have been spread throughout society due to the consistent exposure and omission of information in the media. One reason media frames have become so common within social culture is because they can be found in all levels of the communication process.

Media producers and editors do not necessarily utilize media frames to purposely misrepresent or manipulate the public, but instead to concisely and effectively report a

story using a limited amount of space (Nelson et al., 1997). Members of the media use familiar frames to help the public make sense of the information they are being given (Bronstein, 2005). Frames allow the media to report a story that requires little or no effort by the public to comprehend because the consumers automatically recognize the commonly used frames, which prevents journalists from having to explain new or unfamiliar information. Media decisions on what aspects of a female athlete or women's sport to emphasize or exclude, and the manner in which these subjects are featured influence the gender messages being portrayed.

Media Frames in Sports

Sports fans are exposed to numerous articles and images regarding athletes throughout the course of a season (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). Consequently, the media frames of these athletes are passed on to the viewing audience and consciously or subconsciously stored in their memories (Eastman & Billings, 2001). If these messages include gender misrepresentations, the audience may take this perceived "general knowledge" regarding the sports world and apply it to their general attitude about these groups in a societal context (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005, p. 69). The repetition of biased media frames has a negative influence on passive viewers who may transfer these portrayals from a sports context into the real world.

The impact media framing and portrayals have on sports fans moves beyond sports into a real world context. This is especially dangerous because the sports media are in a position to frame an issue or portrayal that will be broadcast to a mass audience

(Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). The way an issue or athlete is portrayed may influence viewers and subconsciously affect the way they feel about different gender groups in a non-athletic context (i.e. business or educational environment) (Eastman & Billings, 2001). The specific ways in which a member of the media frames a message or athlete will impact how the message is perceived and used by the audience.

Mainstream media frames are often blamed for contributing to the way society views marginalized groups and its members (Ward, 2004). The “hidden racism and sexism” found in media portrayals has an impact on younger generations who look to the media for socialization (Eastman & Billings, 2001, p. 187). Young adults and children are the most vulnerable consumers because they have fewer social experiences and a weaker ability for critical thinking than adults (Hardin et al., 2002; Ward, 2004). So they are more likely to be socialized and affected by sports media frames of female athletes and women’s sports (Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, & Sebastian, 2002). They are also more likely to adopt the biased messages embedded in these portrayals (Nathanson et al., 2002). It is important to gain a greater understanding of sports media frames, especially because of their apparent ability to influence and shape children’s gender perceptions.

Media messages, such as the ones present in the framing of female athletes and women’s sports, can shape how children develop their ideas about gender roles (Nathanson et al., 2002). As early as first grade, children develop ideas about the “gender-appropriateness of athletics,” which influences their “perceptions of and participation in athletic activities” (Harrison & Lynch, 2005, p. 228). Boys are more likely than girls to believe they are skilled athletes, make sports a higher priority, and have a higher overall enjoyment of sports (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). This trend has also

been found in young adults at the high school level. A survey of high school students found that only about 9% of girls, as compared to 36% of boys, wanted to be remembered as a star athlete (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). These results show that not only are children aware of gender roles at an early age, but they are also aware of how these roles apply to athletes and athletic participation.

Media Frames Regarding Female Athletes and Women's Sports

Sports media producers often frame sports coverage based on gender. From high school athletics to the Olympics, there is a favoritism shown to male athletes through the significant amount of media recognition and coverage their sports receive when compared to their female counterparts who are often underrepresented in the sports media (Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Fink & Kensicki, 2002). The audience may see this under-representation of female athletes as a sign that women's sports are not as significant or exciting as men's sports (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). This imbalance portrays the idea that female athletes and women's sports are inferior when compared to men's sports and male athletes (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). Past research has found consistent inadequacies in the media coverage of female athletes in various mediums, such as television, newspapers, and magazines (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Billings & Angelini, 2007).

Many studies centered around the general comparison between sports coverage allotted to male and female athletes focus on the Olympic Games. The Olympics provide researchers with one of the few athletic competitions in which both male and female

athletes and sports are covered in one athletic frame (Billings & Angelini, 2007). These Olympic studies have revealed that Olympic telecasts in 1992 (Barcelona), 1994 (Lillehammer), 1996 (Atlanta), 1998 (Nagano), 2000 (Sydney), 2002 (Salt Lake City), and 2004 (Athens) broadcast male sports significantly more than female sports (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings & Angelini, 2007). In the 2002 Olympic broadcasts, men's sports received over six and a half hours more coverage than women's sports, which was the largest gender gap found in the past five Olympic Games (Billings & Eastman, 2003). It should also be noted that despite the imbalance in media coverage, the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta were described as the Games of the female athlete partially because 34.4% of the competing Olympians were women, which was the highest percentage in Olympic history (Kinnick, 1998). Past studies that have focused on the Olympic Games have discovered a gender imbalance in the coverage given to male and female athletes and sports.

In general, an estimated 95% of sports coverage in the United States is dedicated to male athletes and men's sports (Kinnick, 1998). Approximately 85% of sports coverage found in selected newspapers focused on male sports, and 90.8% of feature articles in *Sports Illustrated* are devoted to male athletes, with only 8% dedicated to female athletes (Kinnick, 1998). In the summer of 1995, an analysis of ESPN's *SportsCenter* and CNN's *Sports Tonight* found that only 5% of the analyzed media coverage featured women's sports (Billings, Angelini, & Eastman, 2005). Five years later, the same basic analysis was conducted, and the only change was a slight increase in *Sports Tonight's* coverage of female athletes and women's sports from 5% to 7%

(Billings et al., 2002). There is still a significant difference in the amount of coverage allotted to male and female athletes.

The gender inequality found in sports media is often illustrated in the language used by sports journalists. Language used by the sports media provides the “conceptual frame for the sports experience” (Eastman & Billings, 2001, p. 183). Unfortunately, “the language of sport” is often filled with stereotypes passed down from predecessors (Eastman & Billings, 2001, p. 198). Language is very influential in how gender is framed throughout mass media, and in turn may affect audience interpretations of female athletes and women’s sports (Taylor & Hardman, 2004). The “mental frame” sports media provide through its language can be especially dangerous when applied to a non-athletic context (Eastman & Billings, 2001, p.183). When the sports media shift the focus of a text from an individual as an athlete to an individual as a person it causes the audience to transfer the media frames regarding that athlete from an athletic arena to his/her role in society (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). The language used by the sports media has the ability to negatively frame female athletes and women’s sports.

The issue surrounding language and the media frames of female athletes and women’s sports has regained public interest after controversial statements made by radio host Don Imus regarding the Rutgers’ women’s basketball team. During his April 4, 2007 broadcast, Imus referred to the Rutgers’ women’s team as “nappy-headed hos” (ESPN, 2007, April 14). Unfortunately, while this statement did get him fired from CBS, the damage his remarks caused had already been done. Imus, a well-known radio personality known for his sometimes vulgar and biased comments, was once named one of Time magazine’s 25 Most Influential People in America, and he is a member of the

National Broadcasters Hall of Fame (ESPN, 2007, April 14). Due to his overwhelming popularity and influence among the general public, his comments may be accepted as general knowledge and applied to these athletes and the female population as a whole in an everyday social context. On the surface his comments negatively framed the Rutgers' women's basketball team, but his statements may have also influenced his audiences' general perceptions of female athletes as a whole.

Blame for his comments has been placed on Imus himself, as well as American culture for developing language that is so degrading to women (ESPN, 2007, April 14). A major debate that has emerged involves the influence of hip-hop lyrics on the demoralizing language that has become acceptable in today's culture (Lapchick, 2007; Oprah, 2007). This debate is so intense that individual sports writers, as well as Oprah Winfrey, are weighing in on the issue (Lapchick, 2007; Oprah, 2007). Oprah dedicated her April 16, 2007 (episode entitled: After Imus: Now What?) and April 17, 2007 (episode entitled: After Imus: The Hip-Hop Community Responds) television shows to the Imus controversy (Oprah, 2007). While, some individuals are looking to music lyrics as the societal culprit, some blame should also be placed upon the sports media who frame female athletes and women's sports in an inferior and objectified manner that encourages sexist attitudes, such as the one displayed by Imus. Although, not designated as a member of the sports media, Imus' comments regarding the female athletes embodies the negative language frames that are common throughout sports magazines. The Rutgers' women eventually accepted Imus' apology, and they remain hopeful that his racist and sexist comments against their team will serve as a catalyst for change (ESPN, 2007, April 14).

The gender-based media frames found in language are also evident in photographs. Photographs often illustrate “the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women athletes,” which implies that female athletes are inferior and not athletically accomplished (Hardin et al., 2002, p. 346). Many studies have found that male athletes are photographed significantly more than female athletes (Kinnick, 1998; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Billings et al., 2005). Research has also found that when female athletes are featured in photographs, they are often shown in a passive manner while their male counterparts are portrayed as active (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Billings et al., 2005; Kinnick, 1998). Sports photographers and editors can frame the importance of gender in sports through the male to female ratio of pictures that appear in a magazine and whether or not the men or women are portrayed as passive or active in those pictures (Hardin et al., 2002).

Most research involving photographic images and gender differences in athlete framing focuses on *Sports Illustrated* (Hardin et al., 2002). In this publication, men dominate over women throughout the entire magazine, including photographs and articles (Hardin et al., 2002). In 1996, the cover of *Sports Illustrated* featured a female athlete four out of fifty-three times, and a longitudinal study of the magazine from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s found that women’s sports columns are shorter and have fewer pictures per article than men’s columns (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). Past research indicates there are many photographic framing techniques used in *Sports Illustrated* that allow male athletes to be featured more often than female athletes.

The media also differ in how they frame female and male athletes in terms of attractiveness versus achievement, which devalues female athletes by emphasizing their

appearance over athletic accomplishments (Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Carty, 2005). Past studies have found that female athletes are often described based on their physical appearance, as opposed to male athletes who are recognized for their athletic build and athleticism (Kinnick, 1998; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings et al., 2002). This trend of female appearance versus male athleticism was found in media coverage of the 1994, 1996, and 1998 Olympics, the 1999 U.S. Open Tennis Tournament, and the 2000 men and women's Final Four Tournaments (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings et al., 2002). It is not unusual for female athletes to be described in terms of their appearance, while their male counterparts are described for their athleticism and athletic accomplishments.

In the media, female athletes are often portrayed as feminine and heterosexual, while men are characterized as powerful and dominant (Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Kinnick, 1998). By emphasizing feminine traits, it almost seems as if the media is protecting female athletes from being portrayed as too masculine (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). For example, the media portray Gabrielle Reese and Anna Kournikova as attractive women first and athletes second (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). In the 1999 edition of *The National Sports Review*, Kournikova was featured in a "Divas in Sport" section, which included a list describing the top 10 reasons the readers loved her (Carty, 2005). Nine of the ten reasons referred to her attractiveness and her fashion sense, and only one mentioned her athletic ability (Carty, 2005). This type of media framing devalues women's abilities as athletes because it focuses on their appearance and femininity, as opposed to athletic achievement.

Past research suggests that general audiences do not like articles that emphasize beauty over athletic talent, which puts female athletes at an immediate disadvantage. If sports media consumers have a negative opinion about the nature of an article, they will transfer those feelings on to the subject of that article. Knight and Giuliano presented 92 undergraduate students with two articles about an athlete and asked them to evaluate the text and the athlete (2001). One article emphasized physical attractiveness by describing the athlete as one of “People Magazine’s ‘Fifty Most Beautiful People’ ...,” while the other highlighted athleticism and characterized the athlete as one of “Sports Illustrated’s ‘Fifty Up-and-Coming Athletes” (Knight and Giuliano, 2001). The results indicated that the article emphasizing appearance was liked less than the one focused on athletic ability, which supports the notion that media frames can affect the audiences’ perceptions of female athletes (Knight and Giuliano, 2001).

Some research has also discovered that sports journalists have a tendency to emphasize a female athlete’s mental health as a contributing factor to her athletic performance (Kinnick, 1998). Scholars have recognized a trend in the sports media that portray female athletes as weak (i.e. mentally, emotionally, and/or physically). An analysis of television coverage of the 1992 Winter Olympics, revealed that commentators often associated female athletes’ weaknesses with a mental or emotional issue, such as lack of focus or self-confidence. Members of the sports media highlight this mental weakness by emphasizing female athletes’ dependency on others, emotionality as opposed to mental toughness, and past failings. In regards to failing, previous research found that when a man lost an athletic competition it was attributed to the strength or intelligence of his opponent, but sports journalists blamed a female’s loss on mental flaws

(i.e. lack of confidence or aggression) (Kinnick, 1998). In comparison to male athletes, when a female athlete is recognized for her success, it is less likely to be attributed to talent and commitment, which is another mental aspect of athletics (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings & Angelini, 2007). This portrayal implies that female athletes are less committed to sports than their male counterparts. These findings illustrate a tendency for the sports media to highlight mental weaknesses, such as lack of confidence and lack of commitment, in female athletes.

The sport an athlete plays will also influence the way he/she is perceived and framed in the sports media (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Sports have been broken down into three different categories: male appropriate (e.g. basketball, football), female appropriate (e.g. ice-skating, gymnastics), and neutral (e.g. golf, softball) (Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999). When female athletes are featured in a publication, the most coverage goes to those in more so-called female appropriate sports, which often emphasize elegance and poise, such as ice- skating and gymnastics (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Hardin et al., 2002). An analysis of NBC's coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympics discovered that little coverage was given to women's sports that required a large exertion of power or extensive physical contact, which are actions traditionally thought of as male appropriate (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). The media tends to over-represent women who participate in supposedly female appropriate sports, while under-representing women in what are considered more male appropriate sports (Kinnick, 1998).

Newspaper and magazine articles often treat female athletes differently depending upon whether they participate in female appropriate or male appropriate sports. Athletes who violate the traditional gender appropriate roles are likely to be perceived in relation

to the sport they play (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Women who play football and basketball are perceived to be more agentic than women in female appropriate sports. In contrast, men who participate in cheerleading are likely to be viewed as more communal than men in male appropriate sports (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Despite athletic success, females who participate in male appropriate sports are still described in the media with more task irrelevant than task relevant comments when compared to female athletes in female appropriate sports (Jones et al., 1999). For example, a journalist may emphasize a female lacrosse (male appropriate sport) player's scholastic achievements (task irrelevant), while a gymnast (female appropriate sport) would be praised for her athletic ability (task relevant). These differences in media coverage may have an impact on how a female athlete views herself or her sport.

Research has also found there is a difference in how the sports media frame individual sports as opposed to team sports. Female athletes in team sports are under-represented due to the emphasis placed on individual sports where the media focuses on the athletes' "beauty and grace" (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Jones et al., 1999, p. 190; Kinnick, 1998). The aforementioned analysis of NBC's coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympics also revealed that most of the Olympic coverage featuring female athletes centered around individual sports (i.e. swimming, diving, gymnastics) as opposed to team sports (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Media frames and coverage of female athletes and women's sports is often influenced by the gender appropriateness and individual versus team dynamic of the featured sport.

Effects of Media Framing on Female Athletes and Women's Sports

Media frames can affect the gender attitudes youth have regarding sports participation. Children are in the process of being socialized, and with that come stereotypes regarding the gender appropriateness of certain sports (Baker & Horton, 2003). If young girls become familiar with stereotypes that suggest females are less athletic than males, they may feel discriminated against or choose not to participate in athletics for fear of failure (Johnson, Hallinan, & Westerfield, 1999). This is an especially damaging effect because it prevents both boys and girls from even attempting to participate in certain sports.

Looking to successful athletes for social comparisons can have a negative effect on a youth's self-esteem because they will see how these athletes are framed and feel inadequate in comparison (Ward, 2004). Young girls may see the media's emphasis on female athletes' attractiveness versus athletic achievement and become more critical of their body image and appearance as opposed to actual skill. Women may also feel cheated and inferior due to the under-representation of female athletes in the media. Finally, women who participate in a male appropriate sport may suffer from decreased self-esteem due to the challenges (i.e. stereotypes, discrimination) that may arise from the masculine connotations associated with these sports. These represent a few of the ways media frames of female athletes and women's sports may affect self-esteem.

Role conflict is another concept affected by how female athletes and women's sports are framed. Approximately 25% of female athletes may feel some type of role conflict due to the challenges of fulfilling both a typically masculine athletic role and a

feminine social role (Martin & Martin, 1995). Female athletes are constantly balancing their identities between those of a female athlete and those of a traditional female ideal (Kauer & Krane, 2006). Those athletes who fail to comply with the feminine identity are faced with stereotypes and discrimination (Kauer & Krane, 2006). Currently, there is slightly more acceptance of female athletes, but there is still a media focus on femininity and heterosexuality over athletic achievement (Carty, 2005).

In dealing with role conflict, female athletes use defense mechanisms to narrow the gap between fulfilling the role of a traditional athlete and a traditional woman. For instance, female athletes may try to fulfill a traditional feminine role by wearing make-up on the field or emphasizing their heterosexuality (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Greendorfer & Rubinson, 1997). Those athletes who are lesbians or bisexual often try to avert their sexuality by lying about whom they are dating or limiting the amount of information they share with others (Kauer & Krane, 2006; Lenskyj, 1997). These are mechanisms female athletes utilize to handle the role conflict associated with media frames of female athletes and women's sports.

Sports-related texts are highly consistent in how they frame female athletes and women's sports. While male athletes are portrayed as masculine and powerful, female athletes are presented in a more sexualized manner, which emphasizes their beauty over their athleticism. Media coverage of women is also influenced by the gender appropriateness of the sport or athlete being featured. These media frames have a negative influence on female athletes and the overall general attitude regarding women's sports. This is why it is so important to study the media frames being used in sport's

magazines. The results from this project will help educate individuals, especially female athletes, on how women are framed in these magazines.

Research Questions

The framing literature and the research into the portrayals of female athletes and women's sports suggest four research questions for the study:

- R1:** Which themes, if any, from past research are found in the magazines (i.e. mental weakness, appearance)?
- R2:** What new themes emerge in the textual description of female athletes and women's sports?
- R3:** Is the thematic framing consistent among all three magazines?
- R4:** What patterns emerge regarding individual versus team sports in the magazines?

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

As the research questions indicate, the aim of this study is to discover framing themes and patterns that emerged from three sports magazines' content in their coverage of female athletes and women's sports. The aim is not to understand the effects of media frames on female athletes or to provide a description of how sports journalists use media frames, which is why interviews and focus groups were not conducted. A qualitative method was best suited for this study because of the project's focus on the interpretation of data (Walker & Myrick, 2006). It was also unnecessary to use quantitative methods because the purpose of the project was not to determine how many times a frame was used, but to describe what those frames were. For example, the researcher was not interested in how many male references were used, but was focused on who those male references were. A textual analysis allowed the researcher to do this by focusing on the specific textual elements used to describe female athletes and women's sports, as well as examine other concepts or phrases associated with these literary components (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998). This methodology enabled the researcher to thoroughly examine the selected texts for emergent themes in the magazines' content (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). A textual analysis was best suited for the research questions examined in this study.

There are three significant steps a researcher must be aware of when conducting a textual analysis (Stern, 1996). The first step requires the researcher to identify all of the

textual elements and literary attributes found within a text. Next, from these elements, the researcher constructs a provisional meaning based on what he/she found in the text. This can be accomplished through the categorization of the literary attributes found in the initial search. Finally, after the first two steps have been completed, the researcher can begin deconstructing a deeper meaning of what was found in the text. The deconstruction of meaning will also allow the researcher to suggest cultural assumptions that may be associated with the textual elements found in the analysis (Stern, 1996). These are the three main components associated with conducting a successful textual analysis.

In this particular study, a textual analysis enabled the researcher to understand how sports magazines frame female athletes and women's sports. In order to fully understand the meaning of a text, it is critical to both identify and describe the frames and characteristics within that text, which is the primary goal of a textual analysis (Entman, 1993; Frey et al., 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In order to fully comprehend the material, the researcher had to identify more than just the location or number of times a frame was used in the text. It was the researcher's goal to qualitatively describe these frames and determine their meaning through the use of textual analysis (Hansen et al., 1998).

Through these content descriptions, researchers can make inferences about message producers and receivers, as well as the basic context of the message being imposed upon the general audience (Frey et al., 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These descriptions and themes provided a better understanding of how female athletes and women's sports are portrayed in sports magazines. A textual analysis provided the most

insight into the media frames and patterns being used to portray female athletes and women's sports because it focused on the actual content of the magazines.

Texts

Many research studies have focused on one particular sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, but this project analyzed three magazines to determine the emergent themes present in the sports magazine genre (Hardin et al., 2002; Knight & Giuliano, 2001). Three sports magazines, *ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated*, were examined in this study. *ESPN Magazine* has approximately 1.9 million subscribers, *Sporting News* is the oldest sports magazine in America with a circulation over 715,000, and *Sports Illustrated*, with a circulation of approximately 3.23 million, is considered "the most influential sports publication" (ESPN, 2007; Sporting News, 2007; Bosman, 2006; Hardin et al., 2002, p. 345). These are three of the most well-known regularly distributed sports magazines in the United States.

These magazines were chosen based on their availability to the public, as they were the only three non-specialty sports magazines available at a local Walden Books, Target, and Barnes and Noble. These establishments were chosen because they are well-respected national franchises with numerous locations in the metro Atlanta area, so they provided a basic sampling of the sports magazines read by the general public in both Atlanta and the country as a whole. The final research analysis collectively examined these three texts to discover themes that emerged in how sports magazines frame female athletes and women's sports.

It was not possible to conduct a census of the sports magazines, so a limited selection of issues was chosen for the analysis (Frey et al., 1992). All issues of the magazines between April 7, 2007 and June 7, 2007 were included in the analysis. *Sports Illustrated* and *Sporting News* are weekly magazines, and *ESPN Magazine* is a bi-monthly publication, which means 22 issues were analyzed. The project did not include special editions that were printed during this time.¹ From the 22 issues analyzed, 91 articles and/or textual segments referenced a female athlete or women's sport. Of these 91, 46 were in *Sports Illustrated*, 4 were from *Sporting News*, and 41 were found in *ESPN Magazine*. It should be noted that the sole criteria for a text to be analyzed was that it had to at least reference a female athlete or women's sport, which may explain the large number of texts analyzed. Many of the 91 articles are not cited in the findings section because they only referenced a female athlete or women's sport, they were short (some no more than a sentence) and did not contain a descriptive frame, or they did not provide good examples of the emergent themes found within these publications. These 22 issues represented a limited selection of publications examined to illustrate how female athletes and women's sports are framed in the sports magazine genre.

The magazines were limited to these issues because this was the time frame the researcher actively collected data for the research study due to restricted finances and availability. After an extensive search for past issues of these three magazines, it was determined that a larger sample would be a financial burden and would require more resources than were available at the present time. A search of local school and public libraries, the publishing companies, and personal sources were unable to turn up a

¹ One issue of *Sporting News*, dated April 23, 2007, was not used in the analysis. This edition is a special issue dedicated to the then upcoming NFL draft, and was not normally distributed in local Walden Books, Target, or Barnes & Noble stores.

representative sample of all three magazines. Therefore, the research was limited to a select number of issues published within the aforementioned time frame.

Procedure

In order to effectively analyze these magazines and uncover the emergent themes, the researcher set some research criteria in order to narrow the amount of text that was examined. The majority of text in these magazines featured current female athletes, so the researcher chose to focus on these women as opposed to former and non-athletes mentioned in these magazines. Within this distinction, the featured female athlete or women's team performed at the high school, college, amateur, or professional level. The second research criterion was that advertisements were also not used in the analysis. This included retail advertisements, advertisements for articles or information found on the internet (i.e. espn.com, si.com), and advertisements for upcoming televised games or other sports related programs. Thirdly, letters from viewers were not included in the research because while published by the magazine, they were not written by a member of the publication's staff. Including these would have also caused confusion because they often referenced stories from previous issues that were not part of the current research sample. Finally, information found in the table of contents was not considered because the researcher was more interested in the actual articles and textual segments than the reference made to them in the table of contents. These research criteria allowed the researcher to conduct a more focused textual analysis to determine the media frames utilized in these magazines.

The textual analysis revealed information that was not overtly stated or highlighted in the magazines' content. This methodology allowed the researcher to discover underlying frames and patterns that were not recognizable on a superficial level (Scott, 2005). An in-depth analysis of the texts revealed specific ways in which the sports media highlight certain aspects of female athletes and women's sports while downplaying or ignoring others (Shah, 1999). After the underlying frames and patterns were discovered the researcher was able to interpret possible meanings and/or cultural relevance to what had been revealed in the magazines' content. The textual analysis allowed the researcher to determine specific thematic frames and patterns utilized in selected sports magazines to portray women in the sports industry.

A textual analysis of *ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated* provided a better understanding of how female athletes and women's sports are framed in sports magazines. It was important to conduct this research because these magazines are read by millions of individuals who are exposed to the messages and frames within its pages. The results of this study revealed the frames used by these popular sports magazines to portray female athletes and women's sports. It is the hope of the researcher that the findings will make readers more aware of the thematic framing utilized in these magazines, and allow female athletes and women's sports to finally gain the respect and credibility they deserve within the sporting world and its magazines.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The textual analysis of *ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated*, reveals some significant information pertaining to the themes and patterns found within these three magazines. The researcher discovered four emergent themes, but only one of the themes, mental weakness, is previously mentioned in past research. The three new themes include male reference, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity. An analysis of the thematic framing consistencies among all three magazines was also conducted, and it revealed that the publications are both inconsistent and consistent in the frames utilized within its content. *ESPN Magazine* and *Sports Illustrated* are consistent with each other in how they frame female athletes and women's sports, but *Sporting News* is unlike either of the other two magazines, which can be significantly attributed to the minimal amount of texts in this publication that reference a female athlete or women's sport. A final analysis, which focuses on women's individual versus teams sports, reveals a larger representation of individual sports, as opposed to team sports, found in the magazines. The researcher conducted a textual analysis to examine the thematic framing and patterns found among the sports magazines.

Reoccurrence of a Past Theme

RQ1: Which themes, if any, from past research are found in the magazines (i.e. mental weakness, appearance)?

Mental Weakness. Mental weakness is a theme noted in past research, and it involves the use of descriptive words and phrases to suggest mental weakness in female athletes. The articles use many descriptions and/or quotations that imply a female athlete is not mentally prepared or capable of handling the mental stress involved in athletic competition. These mental references range from questioning an athlete's motivation and desire to commenting on a female's loss of confidence and/or focus. These are all implications that a female athlete can not handle the mental pressure or is not in the right mental state of mind to successfully compete in athletics.

Some of the references to mental weakness are more blatant than others. A brief segment in *ESPN Magazine* announces that LPGA golfer Brittany Lincicome is climbing up the ranks of professional female golfers (Leaderboard, May 7). The writer suggests this may be because the rest of the golfers are choking, which is a reference to the inability to take the pressure of being successful in a sport (Leaderboard, May 7). A similar reference to mental weakness is made in the same publication approximately a month later (Higdon, June 4). In an article discussing male and female athletes in tennis, the writer explains that French tennis player Amélie Mauresmo is "ready to overcome home-court nerves" this year, but then she is taken off the tour for two months due to appendicitis (Higdon, June 4, p. 99). Upon her return to tennis the writer states, "...her

head and conditioning are question marks” (Higdon, June 4, p. 99). The writer’s concern about the status of her mental game is a blatant reference to mental weakness. These articles contain obvious references to the mental state of these female athletes.

The lack of drive and intensity are common issues related to mental weakness. In two separate references, the desire of a WNBA team is questioned, which shows a lack of mental focus and ambition (Hodes, May 21; Voepel, May 21). In one particular article, Lisa Leslie is not pleased with the intensity she sees during a team practice for the Los Angeles Sparks (Hodes, May 21). Leslie is not able to participate because she is pregnant, but once she determines the energy level is not acceptable she calls her team over and gives them a pep talk. After Leslie’s talk, the team’s energy rises and the intensity of their practice increases (Hodes, May 21). Another article concerning the WNBA, explains that Bill Laimbeer, “...was quickly frustrated by the [Detroit] Shock’s lack of hunger and focus...” in its 2004 season (Voepel, May 21, p. 103). Intensity, hunger, and focus are all mental aspects that will affect a female athlete’s ability to successfully compete in her sport. References of this nature that highlight flaws or weaknesses in female athletes’ mental games are common in these sports magazines.

Mental weakness is a major focus of an article that features tennis pros Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova (Wertheim, April 9). The article mentions that both injury and apathy cause Williams’ play to suffer last year, and that her own mother questions her commitment to tennis. This season Williams makes a successful comeback and she credits her motivation, saying that when she is motivated she’s unbeatable (Wertheim, April 9). This implies her disappointing play last year is at least partially caused by a lack of motivation, which is a mental aspect of the game. In the same article,

words and phrases associated with mental weakness are also used to describe fellow tennis star Maria Sharapova (Wertheim, April 9). One of the first statements concerning Sharapova states that, "...confidence is a fragile commodity..." which in context suggests her lack of success this year is due to her lack of confidence (Wertheim, April 9, p. 18). Further in the article, the writer also describes her serve as being in the breakdown lane, which according to him is a "...sure sign of a fractured psyche" (Wertheim, April 9, p. 18). A lack of confidence and a fractured psyche are both phrases that are associated with a weaker mind set. This article provides numerous references to mental weakness for two of the top professional female tennis players.

The *ESPN Magazine* article that features Cheyenne Woods also provides many references to mental weakness (Friend, April 9). When the writer notes that Cheyenne drops to 91st in the national junior rankings, he also highlights a few reasons as to why this may occur. Some of the reasons he lists relate to her mental state of mind; for instance, he suggests she may be too reserved, too polite, too laid back, and too shy (Friend, April 9). The implications one may reach from these descriptions suggest that Woods does not have the mental game required to be a successful golfer. The writer also states that the public is anxious to see Cheyenne on the LPGA Tour, but now that her grandfather is gone that may not happen because "...Cheyenne doesn't seem to dream that big" (Friend, April 9, p. 109). This conclusion implies that without her grandfather, Cheyenne lacks the mental wherewithal to strive for a goal as big as the LPGA tour. The perception is that she lacks the motivation and mental strength to achieve athletic success by herself. This article illustrates the concept of mental weakness that is often associated with female athletes.

Mental weakness is the only emergent theme that is also mentioned in past research related to the framing of female athletes and women's sports. In many of the analyzed articles, the writers reference motivation, confidence, and desire in relation to the mental game of female athletes. While, some articles blatantly question the mental strength of these athletes, others reference these concepts with a more subtle approach. Whether direct or indirect, reference to mental weaknesses is a common trend found throughout these sports magazines.

New Emergent Themes

RQ2: What new themes emerge in the textual description of female athletes and women's sports?

Male Reference. In these magazines, it is not uncommon for an article that features a female athlete to reference a close male figure in her life. The male reference most often ranges from a brother to a boyfriend to a coach. Sometimes the writers introduce these men as mere references, while other times they portray them as having a significant influence on the athletic performances of these athletes. In these sports magazines, articles or textual segments concerning female athletes and/or women's sports often include a male reference.

In regards to male references, writers sometimes mention females in conjunction with their brothers who are also successful athletes. In a Leaderboard ranking in *ESPN Magazine*, there is a brief segment that highlights the athletic success of the Parkers

(Leaderboard, April 23). It mentions a successful victory for Candace Parker's college basketball team, the University of Tennessee, which is then followed by a statement crediting her brother, Anthony, with helping the [Toronto] Raptors get into the NBA playoffs (Leaderboard, April 23). Another article that references the brother of a female athlete is found in *Sports Illustrated* (The List, April 23). This section announces that both Steven and Brittany Gray will attend Gonzaga University (The List, April 23). It also mentions Steven's success as Washington's "...3A player of the year..." as well as the fact that Brittany is the high scorer on her team this season (The List, April 23, p. 42). Brothers are just one of the male references writers use in these sports magazines.

Boyfriends and fiancés' are another popular male reference found in sports magazines. In *ESPN Magazine's For Love or the Game* segment, a female athlete's boyfriend and a female colleague are asked questions about the female athlete to see who knows her best (Love or the Game, May 7; Love or the Game, June 4). In both segments of the game, snowboarder Gretchen Bleiler's and LPGA golfer Cristie Kerr's boyfriends prove to know more about the female athletes than their female colleagues (Love or the Game, May 7; Love or the Game, June 4). Another boyfriend reference occurs in an article that highlights Rutgers' college football player Ray Rice (Berra, May 7). In the article, which focuses on Rice's talent and athletic accomplishments, it mentions that his girlfriend is Matee Ajavon, a Rutgers' women's basketball player. In regards to Ajavon, the writer refers to a moment during the trophy ceremony for her selection as the Big East tournament's Most Valuable Player, where she publicly campaigns for her boyfriend to win the Heisman trophy (Berra, May 7). Writers often mention the love interests of female athletes in articles about their sport or talent.

Sports Illustrated also has some articles that reference boyfriends and fiancés' of female athletes. In an article that discusses French swimmer Laure Manaudou, the writer chooses to include a few statements pertaining to her personal life (Cazeneuve, April 9). He mentions that after she breaks the world record in one of her swimming competitions, she raises her left hand to display the word LOVE, which she has written on her palm as a message to her boyfriend. The writer also discusses the boyfriend she has during the Athens Olympics when she wears a t-shirt displaying his name (Cazeneuve, April 9). The writer references Manaudou's ex- and current boyfriends in conjunction with acknowledgments concerning her talent as a competitive swimmer.

Also appearing in *Sports Illustrated* is a reference to Laila Ali's fiancé in a segment entitled *WHO'S Hot/WHO'S Not* (WHO'S Hot, May 7). The list includes Ali in the Hot category, and the first sentence reads, "Her fiancé, ex-NFL receiver Curtis Conway, must be proud" (WHO'S Hot, May 7, p. 23). The male reference in this instance comes at the beginning of the segment, and it mentions not only his relationship to Ali, but it also notes his role as an ex-NFL player. When writing an article concerning female athletes, sports writers have a tendency to reference the women's' boyfriends or fiancés'.

Fathers are another common male reference in articles pertaining to female athletes. The father references range from a simple statement or quote to a brief description of an athlete's dad's coaching philosophy. *Sports Illustrated* prints an article about Jessica Long, a Paralympic swimmer, whose legs are amputated below the knee at a young age (Cazeneuve, April 23). The lone mention of her father is a quote about his daughter's ability to inspire and live fearlessly (Cazeneuve, April 23). The mention of

her father in this article is a simple reference used to describe her character. Another segment that mentions an athlete's father references a car race, in which both father and daughter compete (WHO'S Hot, May 7). The writer mentions that Ashley Force beat her father, John Force, who is also a successful racecar driver (WHO'S Hot, May 7). The quote from her father states, "I'm O.K. with it because she's my baby" (WHO'S Hot, May 7, p. 23). His quote puts the focus back on her role as his daughter, as opposed to her role as a fellow competitor. In these examples, the fathers are mentioned as simple references to the female athletes.

Finally, teen surfer Courtney Conlogue, is featured in an article that often references her father and coach, Richard Conlogue (Markazi, April 16). The article begins with a description of Courtney practicing a surfing maneuver, which her father, watching from ashore, critiques in saying that she did not perform well and would only score a five in a real competition. The article also highlights Courtney's limited time in the water due to an emphasis on academics and her father's philosophy, which is that the limited practice time strengthens her love of the sport because if she practices too much, she may lose the fun and enjoyment in surfing (Markazi, April 16). In this article, the writer emphasizes the role the father has on the athlete's athletic performance.

Another male reference found in these magazines is that of the male coach. In an article describing Tori Anthony's transition from her role as a gymnast to that of a pole vaulter, the writer mentions both the male Athletic Director who encourages her to take up vaulting and her private coach, Bob Slover (Moscatello, April 30). The article includes a quote from her coach that discusses the courage Anthony possesses as a gymnast and how that translates into the courage she has as a pole vaulter (Moscatello,

April 30). Another example of referencing a male coach is found in an *ESPN Magazine* article concerning IndyCar driver Milka Duno (Stevens, April 23). The writer mentions that fellow IndyCar drivers and crew members (mostly male) question Duno's ability on oval tracks due to her inexperience, and they fear she may be a danger to herself and other drivers. Fellow female IndyCar driver Sarah Fisher comes to her aid by saying that with the right coaches and training Duno will be a successful driver. The article goes on to mention some of the male coaches and/or teammates that will help mold Duno into a quality racer (Stevens, April 23). Coaches are another prevalent male reference found in sports articles concerning female athletes.

Numerous male references are also found in the aforementioned article concerning Cheyenne Woods (Friend, April 9). The most common male references in this article concern both her relationship with her grandfather, Grandpa Earl, and her uncle, professional golfer, Tiger Woods. The article begins with the story of her grandfather's passing, and the writer mentions that when Grandpa Earl only has weeks to live there is nothing for Cheyenne to do but smile and admire her uncle's Masters trophies. The story continues with a description of how Cheyenne becomes interested in golf at a very young age, and that her grandfather feels she may be the female Tiger, the sequel to one of the most popular figures in golf (Friend, April 9). From then on Cheyenne and her grandfather spend their time "re-creating Tiger Woods" (Friend, April 9, p. 104). Cheyenne's male coach, Mike LaBauve, is another male reference who sees the similarity between her and her uncle. (Friend, April 9). Among other things, he claims Cheyenne has a lot of the same mental qualities found in Tiger and the way he plays the game. Not only are these men referenced in the article about her, but the

statements suggest she is being trained to emulate one of these male figures (Friend, April 9). There is no shortage of male references in this article highlighting the golf talents of Cheyenne Woods.

Male reference is a common theme found throughout the magazines examined in this research project. These references include figures such as the athletes' brothers, boyfriends, fathers, and coaches. The mention of these male figures can range from that of a brief statement to the point where they can emerge as a secondary focus of the article, as is the case with Cheyenne and Tiger Woods. The male reference is often found throughout sports magazines in articles pertaining to female athletes in a wide range of sports.

Motherhood and Sisterhood. The representation of motherhood and sisterhood is another new theme that emerges during the textual analysis. Many articles related to female athletes and women's sports either highlight the women's personal role as a mother or mention the athletes' mothers and/or sisters. This theme is not limited to one particular level of athlete, it is common among high school, college, amateur, and professional female athletes. The representation of both motherhood and sisterhood is evident throughout the sports magazines in this study.

The concept of motherhood is a common theme in the articles concerning female athletes. An article on a page dedicated to the WNBA² discusses Lisa Leslie³ and the fact she is pregnant (Hodes, May 21). The article begins with Leslie, approximately eight months pregnant, watching her team, the Los Angeles Sparks, practice from the side

² Women's National Basketball Association.

³ Leslie is arguably the most popular WNBA player.

lines. It goes on to explain that the leagues most successful team is now without its star player, but that Leslie will still continue to attend practices until her doctors tell her otherwise (Hodes, May 21). *Sports Illustrated* also focuses on motherhood when it prints a textual segment on the birth of Fantasia Goodwin's⁴ daughter (Born, May 7). The story reveals that Goodwin hides her pregnancy and plays competitive basketball until two months before her baby is born. The article further explains that Goodwin plans on returning to the Syracuse University basketball team next season to finish out her senior year (Born, May 7). Finally, there is a very brief sentence in *ESPN Magazine* that announces the University of Nebraska at Kearney's women's basketball coach gives birth five hours before she attends a women's game (All News, April 9). This sentence highlights the coaches' role as a mother, as well as that of a female women's basketball coach. References to pregnancy and new motherhood are not unusual in these magazines.

The reference to motherhood in these magazines is not limited to pregnancy and giving birth. A segment concerning Austrian tennis player Sybille Bammer, states that she is the first mother to enter the top 30 in over 15 years (Higdon, May 7). The article points out that the 27-year-old athlete is the mother of a five-year-old daughter. (Higdon, May 7). Another reference to motherhood is found in an article focused on the WNBA, which states that Taj McWilliams-Franklin requests a trade from the Connecticut Sun to the Los Angeles Sparks to be closer to her family (Voepel, May 21). She wants to play on a team that allows her to spend more time with her daughter, who attends college in Arizona (Voepel, May 21). The maternal focus of female athletes is common throughout the content of these sports magazines.

⁴ Goodwin is a women's basketball player for Syracuse University.

The mothers of female athletes are also recognized in sports magazines. In the articles that revolve around the Rutgers'⁵ controversy, writers mention the struggles and/or loss of two of the athletes' mothers (McDonell, April 23; Kinkhabwala, April 23). A letter from the editor emphasizes that Rutgers' player, "...Matee Ajavon's mother cleaned houses..." to earn the money to relocate Ajavon and her sisters to the United States from Liberia (McDonell, April 23, p. 12). We also learn in an article concerning the controversy that the mother of Rutgers' player Dee Dee Jernigan passed away last year from breast cancer (Kinkhabwala, April 23). Both of the writers of these articles reference the mothers as a way to describe the female athletes' and their family situations.

As is the case in the Rutgers' article, it is not unheard of to read about the passing of a female athlete's mother. Text that accompanies a *WHO'S Hot* segment in *Sports Illustrated* mentions that Morgan Pressel honors her mother, who passed away from breast cancer, after Pressel becomes the youngest woman to win an LPGA title (*WHO'S Hot*, April 9). Another athlete, 14-year-old Dakota Dowd, is also mentioned when her mother passes away, "...after a four-year battle with cancer..." (*To Know List*, June 4; *Died*, June 4, p. 24). Last summer, Dakota is allowed to participate in a LPGA tournament, so her mother can watch her play in a professional tournament before she passes (*Died*, June 4). It is typical for writers to reference the death of female athlete's mothers.

Another aspect of this emergent theme is the emphasis on sisters in sports magazines. These magazines often highlight sisters who are both successful and

⁵ The Don Imus/Rutgers' controversy receives some press during this time period, so there are a few articles that defend the character and integrity (task-irrelevant) of the Rutgers' women's basketball team.

accomplished in their respected sport. Both *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* report on two sisters who both throw a no-hitter on the same night at the same sports complex (Siblings of the Week, April 30; All News, May 21, p. 34). An emphasis is placed on the coincidental nature of the fact the Coker sisters are simultaneously able to achieve a no-hitter (Siblings of the Week, April 30; All News, May 21, p. 34). *Sports Illustrated* also references female twins who play high school lacrosse (Lemire, May 28). The purpose of their reference is to discuss their success and participation in both athletics and acting (Lemire, May 28) Aforementioned Morgan Pressel is mentioned in conjunction with her sister, Madison, who recently becomes one of the United States' top 100 junior golfers (Sobel, May 7). This sister act is mentioned because they are both successful female golfers. Golf is also the sport chosen by the Kostina sisters (Kroichick, May 7). The Kostina sisters are two Russian golfers currently on the LPGA Futures Tour with hopes of becoming the first LPGA golfers from their country (Kroichick, May 7). Serena and Venus Williams are another set of athletically successful sisters mentioned in *ESPN Magazine* (Higdon, May 7). The focus of this reference is to say they are ranked No. 12 (Serena) and No. 22 (Venus) on the international list of the top 50 female tennis players (Higdon, May 7). The sports magazines reference these sets of sisters because they are all successful athletes.

A common theme that emerges from the textual analysis is the representation of motherhood and sisterhood. Sports writers often highlight female athletes' roles as both an athlete and a mother, as well as mention the athletes' own mothers in some type of mother-daughter context. For example, articles often mention athletes' mothers to illustrate how they affect the athletes' lives, whether it is through tragedy or by serving as

their support system. The articles also focus on the athletic prowess of sisters, and the accomplishments these siblings achieve. These concepts are evident throughout the issues analyzed for this research project.

Celebrity. The focus on the celebrity status of female athletes is another new theme that reveals itself throughout the research. Famous female athletes are often described in both an athletic and celebrity role. Women in sports magazines are commonly recognized for their popularity and entertainment accomplishments, as well as their athletic feats. This celebrity coverage can range from what television shows the athletes are on to what famed events they attend. Reference to celebrity status is another trend that is consistently found in the magazines researched for this project.

Laila Ali is one of the female athletes most often mentioned in a celebrity context. Two different segments reference her participation in *Dancing with the Stars* (WHO'S Hot, May 7; Apocalypse, May 28). The first segment, *WHO'S Hot/WHO'S Not*, lists her under the hot column, and part of the reasoning is that she makes it to the final six on the popular dance show (WHO'S Hot, May 7). This is mentioned along with her 24-0 record as a boxer and her status as one of People Magazine's 100 Most Beautiful people (WHO'S Hot, May 7). There is also an announcement in a later issue that reports she will undergo knee surgery due to the rigorous physical demands of *Dancing with the Stars* (Apocalypse, May 28). In these magazines, the references to her participation in this hit reality show outweigh the references to her athletic career.

The sports magazines also reference another reality show, *Fast Cars and Superstars*, which features at least two female athletes (The Beat, April 9; McGee, June

4). This television show teaches stars how to race on an official track with one driver being eliminated each week (The Beat, April 9; McGee, June 4). One particular article mentions that Gabrielle Reece⁶ appears as one of the contestants, while another article also lists Serena Williams as one of the superstars (The Beat, April 9; McGee, June 4). Reece and Williams are chosen for this television show based on their status as superstars, as opposed to their athletic talent. The article that lists Serena as a contestant takes us through one of her first rides around the track with her NASCAR instructor (McGee, June 4). Not only do the celebrities have to practice on the track, but they also complete hours of classroom training (McGee, June 4). *Fast Cars and Superstars* is another reality show featuring female athletes that gains almost as much attention in these magazines as *Dancing with the Stars*.

Television shows and movies are a popular celebrity outlet for many female athletes. An issue of *ESPN Magazine* includes an article entitled *Suds Appeal* to recognize female athletes who have appeared on Soap Operas (Suds Appeal, June 4). In this article, two current female athletes are mentioned as having appeared on a daytime soap opera. Jeanette Lee, a professional billiards player, was on *One Life to Live* in 2003, and figure skater Tara Lipinski appeared on *The Young and the Restless* in 1999 (Suds Appeal, June 4). Another textual segment mentions that figure skaters Nancy Kerrigan, Peggy Fleming, and Sasha Cohen also appear on screen, the big screen, in a cameo for Will Ferrell's movie *Blades of Glory* (Alipour, April 9). It is common for sports writers to reference television shows and movies in which female athletes appear.

Sports Illustrated features an article on a set of female twins who "...mix showbiz with lacrosse" (Lemire, May 28, p. 24). They play lacrosse at Corona del Mar

⁶ Reece is a professional volleyball player and a former model.

High in California, and their acting resumes include roles on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Drake & Josh*, and *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide* (Lemire, May 28). In the article, their acting accomplishments are mentioned before their athletic achievements, which include Addison as their team's top scorer, and her sister, Alex, as a defensive stopper. In order to play lacrosse, the twins choose to give up some of the flexibility that allows them to act and enroll in a regular high school (Lemire, May 28). These examples illustrate how sports magazines often highlight the celebrity status of athletes at the expense of mentioning their athletic skills and accomplishments.

The best and most popular female athletes are the ones whose celebrity status is most often highlighted. For example, Laure Manaudou is a successful French swimmer who is described as a "phenom" (Cazeneuve, April 9, p. 65). Manaudou is recognized in an article that mentions her athletic talents, as well as some examples of her celebrity status (Cazeneuve, April 9). The writer reveals that Manaudou appears on the cover of a weekly magazine three times and uses her free time to attend popular celebrity events. She attends the famed Cannes Film Festival, as well as Formula One races (Cazeneuve, April 9). The sports writer highlights Manaudou's celebrity status in combination with her athletic abilities.

Besides Manaudou, there are three other individual athletes whose celebrity status is often brought to the readers' attention. *Sports Illustrated* features Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova in an article that discusses tennis comebacks, but in this segment their celebrity status also makes the cut. (Wertheim, April 9). In regards to Williams, the writer states, "...During her time away [from tennis] she played the role of starlet and fashionista, but ultimately she realized her greatest talent lay on the tennis court..."

(Wertheim, April 9, p. 18). This statement highlights her role as a popular celebrity in conjunction with her role as an athlete. Entering the tennis season, Sharapova is described as, "...the It Girl, a teenager fresh off winning the U.S. Open" (Wertheim, April 9, p. 18). This statement emphasizes the fame she experiences since winning the 2006 title. *Sports Illustrated* also publishes an article about the Indy 500, and in it the writer mentions that for the third straight year, Danica Patrick sold more merchandise at the race than any other driver (Anderson, June 4). The writer also refers to her as a marketable star, and makes reference to the amount of media coverage she receives before the race (Anderson, June 4). These female athletes are not only described in athletic terms, but the writers also characterize them as celebrities in these sports magazines.

Sports magazines often mention the celebrity status of popular or well-accomplished female athletes. The writers portray these women as fulfilling both the role of an athlete and a starlet. Some of these women gain their celebrity status through entertainment outlets, such as television shows, movie roles, or magazine covers, while others are primarily famous for achieving great success and notoriety in their sport. An emphasis on female athletes' celebrity status is a common theme that emerges throughout the textual analysis.

Framing Consistency

RQ3: Is the thematic framing consistent among all three magazines?

The researcher conducted an analysis on the texts analyzed in this research project to determine if the thematic framing utilized in these magazines is consistent among all three publications. Throughout the texts analyzed the researcher looked for references made to mental weakness, male references, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity status. If two or more aspects of mental weakness, motherhood and sisterhood, or celebrity status are found in one article it is counted twice because the researcher is interested in how many aspects are referenced and not just in how many articles they can be found. For example, if a writer discusses an athlete's lack of commitment and later mentions her lack of confidence, they are each counted as separate references to mental weakness. In terms of male reference, each male reference within an article or textual segment is counted, but if the same male reference is mentioned two or more times throughout the text he is only counted once. For example, in the article featuring Cheyenne Woods, her uncle and grandfather are both mentioned numerous times, but they are each only counted once (Friend, April 9). The researcher is more concerned with how many male references are mentioned, as opposed to how many times each male reference is mentioned within one article. This enables the researcher to determine how often these magazines utilize these frames, and not just in how many articles they can be found.

The results reveal the frames utilized among all three magazines are inconsistent, but there are similarities found between *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine*. In reference to the collective inconsistency, it should be noted there are only four articles in the *Sporting News* issues analyzed for this study that reference female athletes and women's sports, which affects how this publication compares with the other two (To Know List, April 30; To Know List, June 4; Biz Quiz, May 28; DeCourcy, May 14). Of these four articles or textual segments, three of them reference one of the four emergent themes (motherhood and sisterhood, celebrity, and male reference) (To Know List, June 4; The Biz Quiz, May 28; To Know List, April 30). The inconsistencies among the three sports publications is not necessarily because *Sporting News* does not utilize these frames, but more so because the magazine publishes a very minimal selection of texts that reference female athletes and women's sports.

Sports Illustrated and *ESPN Magazine* are similar in how they utilize all four frames. In terms of motherhood and sisterhood and male reference, the two publications are identical in the number of times they each reference these themes. They are also similar in mental weakness, with *ESPN Magazine* citing this reference slightly more than *Sports Illustrated*. The opposite is true of celebrity status, with *Sports Illustrated* referencing this thematic frame a little more often than *ESPN Magazine*. Collectively, the publications are inconsistent in how they frame female athletes and women's sports, but the researcher did find some thematic framing similarities in an individual comparison between *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine*.

Individual Versus Team Sports

RQ4: What patterns emerge regarding individual versus team sports in the magazines?

The researcher examined all of the references pertaining to individual and team sports found in the texts analyzed. Any reference to a current female athlete or women's sport was noted and used in the initial analysis. If the writer mentions a set of sisters or a pair of teammates who play the same sport, they are each separately accounted for in the analysis. Similarly, if two or more teams are mentioned in an article, they are also both counted separately. This analysis allows the researcher to examine the patterns associated with how the sports media represent women's individual and team sports

The researcher examined all of the analyzed texts to find the general breakdown of individual versus team sports. The initial analysis includes references to women's individual or team sports in both non-sports related and sports related articles.⁷ This analysis determined that the two most common women's sports mentioned in the magazines are tennis (twenty-four references) and basketball (fifty references), which represents both an individual and team sport.⁸ Besides these two sports there are ten others mentioned in the magazines: golf (21), track and field (21), racing (15), softball (9), swimming (6), soccer (5), gymnastics (5), ice-skating (5), lacrosse (3), and boxing

⁷ Non-sports related articles did not include any task-relevant statement in regards to the female athlete or women's team, while the sports related articles did include at least one task-relevant statement. If an article or textual segment included both a task-relevant and irrelevant statement it was considered sports related.

⁸ It should be noted that the large number of basketball references may be attributed to the fact that women's college basketball had just ended and the WNBA season was just beginning when these magazines were collected. There could have been additional interest in this sport because journalists were wrapping up one season and getting ready for another.

(3). Seven of these represent a women's individual⁹ sport and three of them represent a women's team sport, bringing the overall total to eight individual sports and four team sports.

An analysis was also conducted on individual versus team sports with articles that are strictly sports related. In sports relevant articles, track and field (19) and tennis (19) are the most commonly referenced individual sports, and basketball (41) is the most common team sport. The remaining sports include: golf (15), racing (13), softball (8), soccer (5), swimming (5), gymnastics (4), and lacrosse (3). Of these seven sports, four are individual and three are team sports. As a whole, the ratio of individual versus team sports in sports related articles is six to four. The results from both analyses reveal that while both individual and team sports are represented in these magazines, there is a tendency for the sports media to reference individual sports more often.

A textual analysis of the 22 issues provided information pertaining to the emergent themes, the consistency of the thematic framing, and the individual versus team patterns present among all three sports magazines. Mental weakness is the only theme to emerge that has been recognized in past research, while new emergent themes include male reference, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity. A general analysis also revealed some inconsistencies and consistencies with the thematic framing present in these magazines. *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* are very similar in the thematic framing utilized in their magazines, but *Sporting News* is drastically inconsistent when compared to the other two publications. Finally, an examination of the analyzed texts found a tendency for the sports media to reference individual sports more often than team

⁹ In this analysis, car racing, track and field, and gymnastics are considered individual sports. While these sports are sometimes associated with an official team, the athletes still receive individual scores and compete for individual points and medals.

sports. During the textual analysis, the researcher discovered some significant framing themes and patterns utilized in *Sports Illustrated*, *ESPN Magazine*, and *Sporting News*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

A textual analysis of the selected sports magazines revealed some of the more prominent ways these magazines frame female athletes and women's sports. It is important to recognize the frames utilized in these magazines in order to gain a better understanding of what the readers are exposed to on a regular basis. If the magazines repeatedly frame female athletes and women's sports in a negative manner, it is very likely their subscribers will also inherit a negative perception of these athletes. Sports magazines have the power to influence readers' opinions about female athletes and women's sports based on the messages they send the public through their framing methods. This research project provides a basic understanding of how female athletes and women's sports are framed in the world of sports magazines.

It is important to note that the thematic frames and patterns used to portray female athletes and women's sports in sports magazines may differ from those utilized in broadcast commentary and newspapers. The distinct characteristics of each particular medium may affect which themes emerge from its content. For instance, broadcast commentary differs from both magazines and newspapers in that it is more visual and current, which may impact the themes utilized by the commentators. Themes portrayed in live broadcasts are dependent upon the commentators who are called upon to quickly provide the public with an explanation of what is occurring in a competition (Eastman & Billings, 2001). This fast-paced environment often causes broadcasters to speak without

thinking, which may allow themes to emerge that would otherwise be censored by editors or journalists in print media (Eastman & Billings, 2001). The pure nature of broadcast commentary may generate different themes than those found in magazines and newspapers.

Magazines and newspapers are similar in their under-representation of female athletes and women's sports, but the two mediums may differ in how they specifically frame these subjects based on the different styles utilized by these publications (Kinnick, 1998). Unlike sports magazines, newspapers usually only dedicate one section of its publication to the sporting world. Therefore, sports writers have a limited amount of space to include as much information as possible for their readers. The space restriction causes the writers to focus on more task-relevant, as opposed to task-irrelevant, facts in their articles because they need to relay as much information about a game or athlete as they can fit within their textual boundaries. The frames utilized in a newspaper would not necessarily be the same ones found in this study because magazines do not have the same restrictions.

The emergent themes found in the current study are all descriptive and task-irrelevant, but the frames found in newspapers are less likely to be descriptive and more likely to revolve around formatting issues. These formatting themes may involve the number of articles dedicated to women, the length of these articles, the number of photographs featuring female athletes, and/or the graphic elements used to highlight women's articles (Kinnick, 1998). Sports magazines are strictly dedicated to sports coverage and they are typically a lot longer than the sports pages found in newspapers, which provides writers with the opportunity to be more creative and diverse with what

they publish. Many of the articles or textual segments analyzed in this study were non-sports related, and some were as short as one sentence, which is not typical of sports articles found in newspapers. The difference in style among all three mediums may affect the themes that emerge when each is separately analyzed to determine how they frame female athletes and women's sports. It is premature to assume the four emergent themes found in this study (mental weakness, male reference, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity) are also present in broadcast commentary and newspapers.

Mental Weakness

The sole theme to emerge that is consistent with past research on framing and female athletes is that of mental weakness. Earlier studies found that the sports media have a tendency to emphasize weaknesses in women, one of them being mental weakness (Kinnick, 1998). Past research revealed that the media often do this by focusing on an athlete's past failings and blaming these failings on mental weaknesses (Kinnick, 1998). In this study, the researcher found two instances where the writer mentioned the failings or the drop in performance of female athletes (Leaderboard, May 7; Friend, April 9). LPGA golfer Brittany Lincicome is noted for her rising success as a professional golfer, but the writer then suggests her success could be because so many of her competitors are choking (Leaderboard, May 7). Instead of simply applauding her athletic success, the writer took it one step further and credited her success with the inability of her opponents to handle the pressure. Not only did this article mention the other athletes' failings, but it attributed their failings to a mental weakness (Leaderboard, May 7).

The article featuring Cheyenne Woods also provides an example of blaming an athlete's failings on mental issues (Friend, April 9). The writer states that Cheyenne has dropped to 91st in the national junior rankings, and he/she suggests her struggles may be because she is too reserved, too polite, too laid back, and/or too shy (Friend, April 9). This implies that she has failed because she does not have the mental game to be a successful athlete. When the sports media highlight mental weaknesses in female athletes they are implying that women do not have what it takes to be well-rounded athletes.

Similar to past research, the researcher also found that the sports media focus on female athletes' lack of both focus and confidence when they lose (Kinnick, 1998; Voepel, May 21; Wertheim, April 9). In a textual segment discussing the WNBA, the writer utilized a quote from WNBA coach Bill Laimbeer that stated he, "...was quickly frustrated by the [Detroit] Shock's lack of hunger and focus..." in 2004 (Voepel, May 21, p. 103). This quote implies the team was not successful because they were not mentally ready and/or focused on playing basketball. Maria Sharapova's athletic struggles are blamed on her lack of confidence as well as her fractured psyche (Wertheim, April 9). By highlighting these two mental weaknesses, the writer is insinuating that Sharapova is not mentally prepared or capable of being a successful athlete. These articles support previous findings that a female athlete's loss is often attributed to a lack of both focus and confidence.

Another mental issue noted in past studies is that of commitment (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings & Angelini, 2007). Female athletes are less likely than male athletes to have their successes attributed to athletic skill and

commitment (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings & Angelini, 2007). The researcher did not find an instance where a female athlete's success was attributed to commitment, but it should be noted there was a comment made about the commitment of a female athlete. In an article featuring Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova, the author mentions that Williams' performance last year was so disappointing that her mother questioned her commitment to the sport (Wertheim, April 9). This is another example of the sports media highlighting mental issues in reference to female athletes.

Emphasizing mental weaknesses in female athletes is incredibly belittling because it suggests they do not have the mental toughness required to be successful athletes. In the sports articles, women's dedication and intensity are often questioned, which may lead readers to believe that females are not mentally prepared or capable of reaching the full potential of a successful athlete. These references may also influence individuals to believe that females do not have as much desire to play sports as male athletes. The magazines examined during the textual analysis were not shy about questioning the mental toughness of the female athletes featured in the articles. If these opinions are printed regularly, such blatant statements pertaining to a woman's mental game may have a strong influence on how readers view female athletes as a whole. This theme calls into question the desire, motivation, confidence, and mental toughness of female athletes as it pertains to sports.

Male Reference

Referencing male figures who are well-known to the female athletes is another distinct way the sports media frame women. In many of the analyzed articles, these male references took away from the athletic accomplishments of the female athletes being featured (Cazeneuve, April 9; WHO'S Hot, May 7). Laure Manaudou was noted in *Sports Illustrated* for her success as a swimmer, but that was overshadowed by the references to her current and past boyfriends (Cazeneuve, April 9). The writer mentioned that she wrote the word LOVE on her hand during a competition in dedication to her current boyfriend, and that a few years earlier she had supported her then boyfriend by wearing a t-shirt with his name on it to the Athens Olympics (Cazeneuve, April 9). The emphasis placed on her dedication to her boyfriends makes her seem juvenile and childish. After reading about these references to her personal life, it is hard to focus on the fact that she is now a world record holder (Cazeneuve, April 9).

Laila Ali's athletic success also becomes secondary when her fiancé is mentioned in a textual segment entitled *WHO'S Hot/WHO'S Not* (WHO'S Hot, May 7). The segment is only five sentences long, and the first sentence in the segment is a reference to her fiancé, as opposed to a reference to her success as a boxer. The first sentence states, "Her fiancé, ex-NFL receiver Curtis Conway, must be proud" (WHO'S Hot, May 7, p. 23). The sentence not only mentions that he is her fiancé, but it also states that he was a professional football player, which to an extent places his athletic achievements before Ali's. As short as the textual segment already is, it would have been nice if all five sentences focused on Ali and her achievements.

The final article cited under male reference is a feature story on Cheyenne Woods (Friend, April 9). This article has numerous male references, but the two main references are her grandfather, Grandpa Earl, and her uncle, Tiger Woods (Friend, April 9). This article was slightly disturbing because it often discussed how she was being trained to be Tiger's female counterpart (Friend, April 9). Cheyenne and her grandfather worked on "re-creating Tiger Woods" because he felt she was the sequel to her uncle (Friend, April 9, p. 104). In the article, she is compared to Tiger in terms of talent, mentality, and game play (Friend, April 9). This article is frustrating because not only are there numerous male references that detract from Cheyenne's athletic success, but a large portion of the article appears to focus on how she compares to Tiger.

The inclusion of male references in articles about female athletes make it appear that women cannot be successful without a male support system and that they depend on that support to achieve success in their sports. In some of the researched articles, the women are highly accomplished and amazing athletes, but the writer still feels the need to throw in a reference to their boyfriends or fathers. These references do not allow these women to stand alone as legitimate athletes because they are rarely mentioned by themselves. Eliminating the male reference in sports articles would also eliminate the suggestion that female athletes need male influences in their lives to achieve athletic success.

Motherhood and Sisterhood

Highlighting the role of motherhood and sisterhood in sports magazines is a way for editors to include a feminine spin on the female athletes described in their magazines. It is uncomfortable for the public to view males and females outside of their gender roles, so these magazines describe female athletes in their maternal and familial roles in order to balance the masculine nature of athletics. Perhaps, as suggested in regards to appearance, the focus on motherhood is the publishers' way of protecting female athletes from being portrayed as too masculine (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). The emphasis on motherhood and sisterhood, as opposed to athleticism, give these athletes a sense of femininity that is more conducive and familiar to cultural perceptions of gender roles.

In the sports magazines, references were often made to female athletes and their roles as mothers. This allowed the women to be portrayed as more feminine because they were being described in their maternal roles. Both Lisa Leslie and Fantasia Goodwin were mentioned in reference to their roles as both a new mother and a mother to be (Hodes, May 21; Born, May 7). While not a new mother, Taj McWilliams-Franklin is also mentioned in conjunction with motherhood (Voepel, May 21). McWilliams-Franklin requested a trade to the west coast in order to be with her daughter who was attending college in Arizona (Voepel, May 21). This request indicates she is putting her role as a mother before her role as an athlete, which may prevent readers from viewing her as a dedicated player. References to motherhood enable the sports media to portray a feminine side of female athletes that is not always present in athletic competition.

Though not as common as references to motherhood, the textual analysis also revealed an emphasis placed on sisters in sports magazines. Sisters were most often mentioned when both were notably successful in their chosen sports. *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* reported on a pair of sisters who consecutively threw no-hitters on the same night in the same sports complex (Siblings of the Week, April 30; All News, May 21, p. 34). These sisters made headlines because of the coincidental manner in which their no-hitters took place. By far, the most popular sisters mentioned in these magazines are Serena and Venus Williams (Higdon, May 7). The focus of their reference is to reveal where they are ranked on the list of top 50 international female tennis players (Higdon, May 7). Sisters are not as commonly mentioned as mothers in sports magazines, but they are still often referenced when both siblings have achieved great success in their sports.

While the often task-relevant reference to sisters is somewhat acceptable, the fact that a female athlete is a mother should not be an issue in a magazine that is dedicated to sports. A woman in such a magazine should be featured for her athletic accomplishments, but by diverting the focus from her sport to her role as a mother, the writers are also minimizing the amount of praise and respect she gets for her athletic talent. Eliminating references to non-relevant feminine aspects of a female athlete's life and re-focusing media coverage to only include sports related information may help characterize female athletes as genuine competitors worth as much respect as male athletes.

Celebrity

Another original theme to emerge from the textual analysis is that of celebrity. Much of the focus placed upon female athletes' celebrity status falls upon the various television shows or movies in which they have appeared. There were references to both Laila Ali's appearance on *Dancing with the Stars* and Gabrielle Reece and Serena Williams' participation in *Fast Cars and Superstars* (WHO'S Hot, May 7; Apocalypse, May 28; The Beat, April 9; McGee, June 4). This highlights these female athletes' roles as both figures in pop culture as well as their popularity in athletics, because they would not have been chosen to appear on these shows if they were not at least somewhat popular in the sports world. Reference was also made to female athletes who had appeared in soap operas, as well as the mention of an appearance made by Nancy Kerrigan, Peggy Fleming, and Sasha Cohen in a Will Ferrell movie (Suds Appeal, June 4; Alipour, April 9). When writers focus on a female athlete's celebrity status (i.e. television and movie roles), they tend to sensationalize them, which makes it difficult for the public to focus on their athletic credibility.

Another article referencing celebrity status featured a set of female twins who were accomplished in both athletics and acting (Lemire, May 28). These sisters played on their high school lacrosse team and had appeared on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Drake & Josh*, and *Ned's Declassified School Survival Guide* (Lemire, May 28). In the article, the writer listed their acting accomplishments before their athletic achievements, which makes it appear the writer is more interested in their acting than their athleticism (Lemire, May 28). Discussing their athletic talent in conjunction with their acting

abilities makes it difficult for readers to focus on the task-relevant aspects of this article, especially when they are mentioned after the task-irrelevant information.

Emphasizing female athletes' roles as celebrities in conjunction with their roles as athletes allows editors to sensationalize these women, which makes it harder for the public to view them as legitimate athletes. When sports writers or columnists highlight a female athlete's celebrity accomplishments or label a woman a starlet, as they did Serna Williams, it becomes difficult for a sports fan to take her seriously as a genuine athlete (Wertheim, April 9). It is hard to respect a female athlete for winning professional tennis tournaments if readers hear more about her life on the red carpet than they do about her tennis career. The amount of references in regards to female athletes and celebrity reality shows, television and movie roles, magazine covers, and swanky events shifts the readers' focus away from the athlete's skill and athletic achievements onto the women's fame and superstardom. Eventually, the readers will be more interested in hearing about athletes' celebrity accolades and less about those related to sports. This is a dangerous trend because of the increased sensationalism it may cause which will generate even more disrespect and criticism of female athletes and women's sports.

Appearance and Over-Sexualization

One theme the researcher expected to emerge based on previous research was the emphasis on appearance and over-sexualization in regards to female athletes, but the textual analysis did not reveal strong evidence of this trend. According to past research, female athletes are more likely than male athletes to be framed in terms of their physical

appearance (Knight & Giuliano, 2001; Carty, 2005; Kinnick, 1998; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings et al., 2002). There are some references to appearance and attractiveness in the analyzed sports magazines, but not enough to claim a common theme. For instance, a segment about Laila Ali notes that her fiancé should be proud of her because she is a good boxer, made it to the final six on *Dancing with the Stars*, and she is listed among People Magazine's 100 Most Beautiful People (WHO'S Hot, May 7). The most common female athlete mentioned in regards to appearance is Serena Williams, and unfortunately they are all related to her size (Deitsch, April 16; Reilly, May 21). In an interview with *American Idol* winner Kelly Clarkson, Clarkson claims to love Williams because she is not too skinny, and a columnist in a later issue states that one of the sentences never heard in the English language is, "Do you have that in a size 2 for Serena?" (Deitsch, April 16; Reilly, May 21, p. 84). In both of these segments the focus is taken off of Williams' talent and placed on her appearance. If this occurs on a regular basis in these sports magazines the focus will soon be taken off a female's athletic talent and placed solely on her looks.

The over-sexualization of female athletes is also implied in some of the selected sports magazines, but not enough to declare it a common trend. *Sports Illustrated* printed a segment that mentions the resignation of the male Boston College's women's hockey coach (Resigned, May 7). The reason given for his resignation is the accusation that one of his players sent sexually explicit text messages to him, which raises questions of an inappropriate relationship with his players (Resigned, May 7). The accusation that a female athlete sent her coach sexually explicit text messages strongly portrays the impression that she is over-sexualized. Three other segments found in the research

mention sexy or nude photos of female athletes, which includes the announcement that Amanda Beard¹⁰ will be in the July issue of *Playboy* (Leaderboard, June 4; Leaderboard, May 7; All News, May 21, p. 46). When female athletes are referenced in this manner, the focus is often placed on their looks and sexuality, which detracts from their genuine athletic talent. This is a category of reference that is present in the sports magazines, but the researcher did not feel there were enough references to classify it as a frame.

The researcher was surprised appearance and over-sexualization did not emerge as strong themes within the contents of the sports magazines. While pleased with the lack of reference to appearance, it is important to question why these frames did not emerge. One major reason this could have occurred is that some of the findings discussed in previous research were based on studies involving telecasts, as opposed to print media (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings et al., 2002). Some of the broadcast commentaries analyzed in earlier studies include the Olympics, the 1999 U.S. Open Tennis Tournament, and the 2000 men and women's Final Four Tournaments (Billings & Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2005; Billings et al., 2002). Telecasts are more of a visual medium than magazines and newspapers, which may effect how commentators discuss appearance. Commentators may be more apt to discuss a female athlete's looks because they know the public has a visual image of that athlete and will relate to and understand the comments made about her appearance. Since print media is more of a textual than visual medium, it may be more difficult or unnecessary for writers to discuss an athlete's appearance. The researcher is hopeful the lack of reference to appearance and over-sexualization is a sign of progression in terms of how female

¹⁰ Beard is an Olympic swimmer.

athletes and women's sports are framed, but it is very important to be cautious of this assumption because it could be attributed to other factors.

Publications

Through the research process, the researcher was not only able to categorize the four major themes present in the selected sample, but also discovered some information about the magazines themselves. For example, *Sporting News* lacked any mention of a female athlete or women's sport in four issues of its magazine, and these four do not include the special edition that was not analyzed due to its dedication to the then upcoming NFL draft. An analysis of the remaining issues only revealed four references to a female athlete or women's sport, and they are all only mentioned to reference someone or something else (To Know List, April 30; To Know List, June 4; Biz Quiz, May 28; DeCourcy, May 14). The limited number of articles referencing female athletes and women's sports affects the thematic framing consistency among the analyzed publications. *Sporting News* is inconsistent with *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* in the number of references it makes to all four emergent themes. The overall lack of reference to female athletes and women's sports is an overt framing mechanism utilized by *Sporting News*, but luckily, this publication also has the lowest circulation of all three magazines, so at least fewer people are influenced by the omission of female athletes and women's sports (Sporting News, 2007).

While un-related to female athletes or women's sports, there is an interesting article printed in the magazine's May 14, 2007 issue (Crossman, May 14). This article

listed the best athletes to ever wear numbers 0 to 99, and in order to find an athlete for each number, "... [they] considered guys in the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, college football, college basketball and NASCAR" (Crossman, May 14, p. 16). The contributors did not even consider female athletes in this ranking, which for some numbers includes the winner, contenders, and athletes worth mentioning (Crossman, May 14). In the introduction to the ranking, the writer states, "...But 100 fabulous integers does not mean 100 fabulous athletes. Frankly, some guys are just holding the numbers until someone better comes along" (Crossman, May 14, p. 16). They filled some numbers with mediocre athletes who do not deserve to be listed instead of venturing into the wide world of female athletes and women's sports.

After completing the research phase of this project, it became obvious that of the three magazines, *Sporting News* shows the least interest in female athletes and women's sports. In comparison to *Sporting News*, *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* print more articles and segments that recognize and highlight female athletes and women's sports. They do not publish near the amount of articles on females as they do males, but at least they make the attempt to include women in their magazines. Readers' of these two magazines will at least be exposed to more female athletes, so they may begin to take women more seriously in an athletic context if they are able to learn more about them and their sports. While *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine* may utilize thematic frames in their coverage of female athletes and women's sports, at least they include them in their publications, which is more than can be said for *Sporting News*.

While the two publications do have some similarities, *Sports Illustrated* does differ from *ESPN Magazine* in some of the features and characteristics it contains that

focus on female athletes and women's sports. The most task-relevant and gender neutral section in all of the selected sports publications is found in *Sports Illustrated* in a segment entitled *Faces in the Crowd* (Faces in the Crowd, April 9, April 16, April 23, April 30, May 7, May 14, May 21, May 28, June 4). This segment lists three males and three females who have excelled in their sport.¹¹ Task-relevant accomplishments range from setting national records to becoming the Southeastern Conference Gymnast of the Year (Faces in the Crowd, April 9; Faces in the Crowd, April 23). This section also equally represents both individual and team sports among its female athletes, who range from the high school to the amateur level. In the selected texts for this analysis, *Faces in the Crowd* represented 15 individual and 16 team sports. This textual segment is task-relevant, gender neutral, and it equally represents women's individual and team sports.

The researcher was also surprised to find a number of references in *Sports Illustrated* that focused on women in more aggressive traditionally male sports (i.e. rugby, flag football). These sports are not only traditionally played by men, but they are some of the more physical of the so-called male appropriate sports. A study of NBC's coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympics revealed that women in sports that required extreme physical contact or large exertions of power were rarely covered (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Most media coverage goes to female athletes in traditionally female sports, so it is nice to see that *Sports Illustrated* has made a progressive step in exposing its readers to women in non-traditional sports (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Hardin et al., 2002).

While not analyzing photographs, the researcher did note two pictures featured in a section entitled *Picture This* that show women participating in two of these traditionally

¹¹ While most individuals list only one sport, there are a few with two or three sports listed by their name.

male sports (Picture This, May 14; Picture This, May 21). The first picture is of the Stanford versus UC Davis women's rugby national semifinal game, and the second photo features the UCLA and Stanford women's water polo teams playing in the NCAA finals (Picture This, May 14; Picture This, May 21). Rugby and water polo represent two traditionally male appropriate sports that require both physical contact and great exertion.

Along with these pictures, there are also some textual examples of females being recognized in traditionally male sports. There is a woman featured in the aforementioned *Faces in the Crowd* section that, "...is the International Powerlifting Federation's alltime highest ranked female..." (Faces in the Crowd, April 23, p. 38). Powerlifting is a sport usually not associated with female athletes, but in this issue she is one of the three female athletes chosen for this segment. Finally, in two separate sections, *Sports Illustrated* mentions female athletes who play flag football, which is another contact sport associated with male athletes (The List, May 14; Anderson, May 7). One section highlights the game play of two female athletes in a flag football state title game, while the other article discusses the increasing popularity of the sport in Florida (The List, May 14; Anderson, May 7). The second article is a longer segment that briefly explains how flag football became an established high school sport and provides a short overview of the official rules (Anderson, May 7). The inclusion of women who play the more aggressive so-called male appropriate sports is another characteristic that sets *Sports Illustrated* apart from the other two publications.

Individual Versus Team Sports

In both the initial analysis of non-sports and sports related articles and the secondary analysis of just sports related articles, the research revealed that the magazines reference individual sports more often than team sports. The consistent under-representation of women's team sports and the common emphasis placed upon individual sports is a pattern often found in past research (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Jones et al., 1999; Kinnick, 1998). This pattern prevents female athletes in team sports from gaining the recognition given to women in individual sports because the general public is less likely to be exposed to articles or media coverage pertaining to their sport.

The under-representation of women in team sports is disappointing, but the researcher did notice a promising trend among the individual sports that are referenced. Previous research has revealed that an emphasis is placed on women in female-appropriate sports that highlight their "beauty and grace," but in this study many of the individual sports mentioned are considered either neutral or male appropriate (i.e. golf, softball, basketball) (Hardin et al., 2002; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Jones et al., 1999, p. 190; Kinnick, 1998). In the current study, when both non-sports related and sports related articles were analyzed, the individual sports mentioned are golf, car racing, track and field, boxing, swimming, gymnastics, tennis, and ice-skating. In the researcher's opinion, gymnastics and ice-skating are the only sports that would fall into the traditionally female appropriate category (Jones et al., 1999). In the sports related analysis, the individual sports referenced are track and field, car racing, golf, swimming, gymnastics, and tennis, with gymnastics being the only so-called female appropriate sport

(Jones et al., 1999). So, while individual sports are more represented than team sports, they are not as traditionally female appropriate as past research suggests. The media inclusion of female athletes in individual sports that are not so-called female appropriate is encouraging because it recognizes women who participate in more neutral and/or traditionally male appropriate sports, which is a progressive step from what past research has found.

It is important to note that the sports mentioned could have been affected by the time of year the magazines were collected. Some sports, whether individual or team, may not have been mentioned because they were not in season, and others may have been mentioned more often than usual because they were in season. For instance, sports journalists had a lot of basketball related information to cover during the time these magazines were collected because women's college basketball had just concluded and the WNBA's season was about to begin, which may explain why basketball was mentioned twice as often as any other sport in both analyses. It could also be attributed to the fact that basketball is a team sport, so an article about a particular team is likely to mention more than one player. Another explanation for why basketball may have been highly represented is based on the newsworthy events that surrounded the Rutgers' controversy. At least two articles mentioned the Rutgers' women's basketball team, and some of its' players, in relation to the Don Imus situation (McDonell, April 23; Kinkhabwala, April 23). If this controversy had not occurred, basketball would probably not have been mentioned as often. The amount of references to both individual and team sports could be affected by various factors, such as whether or not the sport is in season, whether it is a popular sport, or whether something newsworthy is happening within that sport.

Suggestions

After discovering some of the frames used to describe female athletes and women's sports, it is the responsibility of the researcher to make some suggestions to help alleviate the framing issues that are currently present in sports magazines. Many of these frames used by members of the sports media are handed down from past generations of journalists. Some of the same frames and patterns found in past research are still utilized in the sports magazines analyzed for this project, which suggests that little progress has been made in breaking sports journalists of the gender based framing habits of their predecessors. In order to stop the framing trend that now exists it is important to teach sports journalists the significance of gender neutral publishing. One suggestion is to mandate a class that focuses on female athletes and women's sports for students interested in sports journalism. This would expose them to research highlighting the current frames and patterns used in magazines, which will make them more conscious of the issue when they write their own articles. Introducing students to this information will educate them on gender neutral writing styles before they become permanent fixtures of the sports media.

Research on classes concerning sports journalism found that 55 colleges and universities (14.2%) in the United States with journalism and/or mass communications programs in the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication directory either teach or plan to teach a sports journalism course, but none of these classes focus on female athletes and women's sports (Creedon, 1993). Approximately 44% of these classes are taught by individuals with experience in sports reporting, and 50

of the surveyed teachers have experience in or a basic understanding of reporting in newspapers, magazines, radio and/or television (Creedon, 1993). The respondents' prior experience and knowledge of the sports media field will enable them to pass down the knowledge and skills they were taught both in the field and by their journalistic predecessors. Unfortunately, this includes the negative thematic framing techniques used to describe female athletes and women's sports. However, this issue can be corrected if the sports journalism teachers are also schooled in how female athletes and women's sports are framed by the sports media, which will allow them to teach their students how to recognize and refrain from utilizing these frames in their own writing styles.

Another problem with the current structure of sports journalism courses is that the majority of these classes (76%) are only open to junior and senior undergraduate students (Creedon, 1993). In order for the sports journalism classes to be more beneficial, they should be offered earlier in the journalism curriculum before students have developed a specific writing style. The respondents to this survey were also asked if they hold class discussions on how women's sports should be covered in the sports media, and approximately 20 of the teachers stated that their students are taught that sports reporting is "gender neutral" with no distinction between men and women's sports (Creedon, 1993, p. 48). The researcher is curious to know how the teachers define "gender neutral" and what examples their students are given on how to achieve this neutrality in their reporting.

When asked if they use a textbook in their sports journalism classes, thirty-seven teachers responded yes, and of the 18 who did not use books, many utilized newspapers, television, and/or radio to educate their students (Creedon, 1993). Using resources from

current sports media is harmful to students because it exposes them to the negative frames already used in regards to female athletes and women's sports, and since they are receiving these messages in a classroom they will assume this is the proper way to report on these topics. In regards to those teachers who require textbooks, approximately 73% of them use one of three text books: *Sports Reporting* by Bruce Garrison with Mark Sabljak (1985), *Contemporary Sports Reporting* by Douglas A. Anderson (1985), or *The Sports Writing Handbook* by Thomas Fensch (1988) (Creedon, 1993). Of these three textbooks, only one, *The Sports Writing Handbook*, includes a chapter on how to write about women in sports, and it is two pages long (Creedon, 1993). These findings suggest the curriculum for sports journalism courses are not designed to educate students on how to cover female athletes and women's sports, which is why the researcher strongly suggests mandating a class that addresses these issues for all students who plan to become members of the sports media.

Aside from future sports journalists, it is also important to make the general public, especially sports fans, aware of the frames used in these magazines. If they are educated on how female athletes and women's sports are framed in sports magazines they can become more aware of the gender messages to which they are exposed. This may allow readers to ignore or minimize the influence the negative frames have on them and instead focus on the parts of an article that highlight task-relevant information. With any hope, some of the general public may also chose to boycott the magazines that fail to recognize female athletes and women's sports (i.e. *Sporting News*), which will get the attention of the publishers who may decide to change the way they cover these topics. An analysis of the media habits of those members of the public who subscribe to these

magazines would need to be conducted to determine the best way to distribute information on the media frames currently being utilized. This will allow for the information to reach a larger, more specialized audience who can relate to the findings. It is important to educate the public, especially sports magazine subscribers, on this issue because they are the ones most affected by the messages sent through these media frames.

The researcher also suggests directly contacting these publications to educate them on the frames utilized in their magazines. If they are made aware of the problem and think it could impact their sales they may be willing to make some changes. The researcher understands this is an idealistic solution, but publisher awareness in conjunction with other elements, such as a consumer demand for change and/or public awareness of the issue, may persuade publishers to change how female athletes and women's sports are framed. The editors could simply increase the number of female related articles that are published in each issue, or train proofreaders on what frames to look for in an effort to cut back on the negative frames currently found in these magazines. The sports writers and publishers of these high profile magazines may not be aware of the exact frames utilized in their magazines, so with a little education and understanding of what is being printed they may become more conscious in terms of the articles they write and the text they publish.

A textual analysis of the selected sports magazines revealed more about these publications than just the four emergent themes. It did provide a lot of insight into how female athletes and women's sports are framed, but the information gathered during the research also provided a general comparison of how each magazine approached female

athletes and women's sports. An analysis of the texts also revealed that the sports media have a tendency to reference more women's individual sports, as opposed to women's team sports. Finally, through the discovery of some of the exact frames used in these magazines, the researcher is able to suggest solutions to counteract or alleviate the framing issues presently found in these publications. The textual analysis of the selected sports magazines revealed frames and patterns currently utilized in these publications.

Limitations

There is one major limitation the researcher recognized while using textual analysis as the primary research method. A textual analysis provides an in-depth qualitative description of the framing methods used in these magazines, but it does not provide an accurate number of times each frame is used. This research project did not focus on quantitative findings, but it could be beneficial to have this information for future research. If the researcher can identify the frames that magazines utilize more often, he/she will know which framing mechanisms to which the public is more exposed. This will allow the researcher to make a more informed suggestion as to how to counteract the frames based on which ones are more prominent in sports magazines.

There are also a few personal limitations the researcher encountered in this project that revolved around issues of money and time. Due to financial restrictions, the researcher was only able to analyze 22 magazines. If money had not been an issue, it would have been ideal to analyze a year's worth of one or more of these publications. Time was an issue because of the looming deadlines that needed to be met. In order to

meet these deadlines, the researcher was limited to magazines collected within a two month time-period. As mentioned earlier, it would have been favorable to analyze a year's worth of magazines because then all sports seasons would be accounted for, and one could analyze how the magazines frame each sport individually. The issues analyzed may have neglected certain sports because they were not in season so there was nothing to report. Finances and time were the most significant personal limitations encountered by the researcher.

Future Research

As a spin-off of this project it would be interesting to have a similar analysis of the photographic elements found in sports magazines. There are many active and inactive photographs in the magazines that could have been analyzed in this research project. An analysis of photographs would provide a separate understanding of what themes and patterns emerge from the photographic elements used to accompany the texts and provide a comparison to what themes emerged in the written portions of the magazine.

Another research suggestion is to focus on the Internet websites associated with these magazines.¹² It would be interesting to see if the same frames used in the published magazines are also utilized on the Internet. The researcher is also curious to see how particular sports categories are formatted and/or highlighted on these sites. Are all women's sports listed after men's sports? Do any of the highlighted feature stories

¹² These are the three websites associated with these sports publications: <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/>; <http://espn.go.com/>; <http://www.sportingnews.com/>.

involve female athletes or women's sports? Do any of the featured pictures or photo albums include female athletes or women's sports? The information that can be gathered from this type of research study will be beneficial because of the increasing popularity of the internet, especially when compared to written publications.

Finally, it would be interesting to see how sports magazines frame specific sports. For instance, do magazines frame the WNBA differently than they frame the LPGA tour? This would require a textual analysis with research criteria that only focuses on one or two sports. This would reveal whether or not these magazines more positively frame one sport over another. There are many possibilities to this suggestion because a researcher can explore one sport, one individual sport compared to another individual sport, a team sport compared to another team sport, or an individual sport compared to a team sport. This information would be interesting because of previous claims that magazines emphasize individual sports more than team sports.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

A textual analysis revealed many characteristics about the way female athletes and women's sports are framed in sports magazines. The current research study found four emergent themes, but only one, mental weakness, was mentioned in previous research findings. The remaining three frames include male reference, motherhood and sisterhood, and celebrity. Collectively, these are the four frames that emerged in terms of how sports magazines portray females in the sports world. Unfortunately, these frames do not highlight the talent and athleticism of female athletes, and this omission can have a negative impact on how the general public views women and their sports. Not only are female athletes negatively framed in regards to their roles as athletes, but in one publication, *Sporting News*, they are hardly mentioned. This prevents readers from learning about female athletes and women's sports, and this negligence makes them less likely to view these women as legitimate athletes because they are not exposed to articles about their athletic accomplishments.

Although there are a lot of negative aspects to the way females are framed in these magazines, there are some positive findings as well. An analysis of the texts analyzed determined that the sports magazines reference individual sports more than team sports, but few of the individual sports mentioned are considered traditionally female appropriate, which does not coincide with past research (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Jones et al., 1999; Kinnick, 1998; Hardin et al., 2002). This implies that female

athletes in both neutral and male-appropriate individual sports are currently receiving more media coverage and recognition than they have in the past. *Sports Illustrated* also features some segments that highlight women in traditionally more aggressive male appropriate sports (i.e. rugby, flag football), which is not a common theme among sports magazines. While the frames discovered during the textual analysis negatively portray female athletes and women's sports, the research also reveals some positive trends and characteristics in regards to how some of the magazines approach female athletes.

One of the most surprising findings in this study was the lack of reference to female athletes and women's sports in *Sporting News*. The researcher would assume that a national publication would have some sort of criteria to prevent such a large gender gap from occurring in its magazine. It is disappointing that readers of *Sporting News* do not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the athletic talents and accomplishments of so many female athletes. If they were exposed to more articles or textual segments highlighting these women and their achievements, the readers may come to appreciate the talent and skill these women possess. It is hard to encourage the support and recognition of female athletes and women's sports if some sports magazines barely acknowledge their existence.

Many suggestions have been made as to the cause of the consistent, sometimes overwhelming, media dominance of men in the sports world. It seems appalling that in the United States, approximately 95% of the sports coverage is devoted to male athletes and men's sports (Kinnick, 1998). In an era where the popularity of female athletes and women's sports is supposedly rising, one would not expect such a large gender gap in current sports coverage. Some suggestions for this gender imbalance focus on

marketability and appeal (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Kinnick, 1998). The cause for both the gender gap in coverage and the thematic framing differences among female and male athletes can at least be partially attributed to the fact that the sports audience is predominately male (Kinnick, 1998). Therefore, it is important for the magazines' publishers to please their target audience and write about topics that will appeal to male subscribers. Unfortunately, most male readers would prefer to read about men's sports, so there is very little demand for the inclusion of female athletes and women's sports in these sports magazines. Culturally, men's sports and male athletes are more popular among the general public, so in order to make money and sell magazines the publishers have to print what their readers demand.

Despite the general male dominance in sports coverage, the researcher does present some suggestions to help alleviate some of the negative frames used to portray female athletes and women's sports. It is important for sports journalism students to understand how women are framed in sports and to educate themselves on ways to avoid utilizing these same frames and patterns in their own reporting. The general public should also be aware of the way women are portrayed in sports magazines because they are the ones being exposed to these frames, and they are most often consciously unaware of the influence these frames and patterns may have on their opinions of women in sports. Finally, although it may be an optimistic suggestion, it is important to notify the publishers themselves about the frames used in their magazines. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, if they were aware of exactly how they portray female athletes maybe they would make some changes in what they publish. This will probably only happen if the publishers see this issue affecting their bottom line, but it is a suggestion that may be

worth discussing. These suggestions will not eliminate the thematic framing utilized in these sports magazines, but it is the researcher's hope they will at least begin to make a difference and allow female athletes to gain some of the respect they deserve.

Hopefully, both the negative and positive trends found during this project will help generate ideas among the public and the media as to how these framing issues can be alleviated. For journalists, the changes could be as simple as not mentioning that a female athlete is a mother or that her brother was a star athlete. In regards to the public, they could be more cautious of supporting publications that are so drastically lacking in media coverage of female athletes and women's sports. Publications will take action if they feel the issue will cost them both customers and money. The public should also make themselves aware of the frames they are exposed to, so that when they are faced with a sports article they can mentally distinguish between the task-relevant and task-irrelevant aspects of that text. It is the hope of the researcher that the results of this study will encourage the general public, especially sports fans, to become more educated media consumers and pay more attention to the frames that may subconsciously influence their attitudes toward female athletes and women's sports.

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Appendix: Texts Analyzed

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- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, April 23). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (17), 38.
- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, April 30). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (18), 32.
- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, May 7). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (19), 42.
- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, May 14). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (20), 39.
- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, May 21). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (21), 40.
- Faces in the Crowd. (2007, May 28). *Sports Illustrated*, 106, (22), 34.
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