

Will a New Medium for Sports News Offer Less Trivialization of Female Athletes?
Examining Descriptors and Traditional Stereotypes in Internet Articles on the NCAA
Women's and Men's Basketball Tournaments.

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This study examined descriptors given to women's and men's basketball players, coaches, and teams during the 2006 NCAA Division I women's and men's tournaments by two online sport media outlets: ESPN Internet, CBS Sportsline. The primary purpose of this research was to determine if the gender-specific stereotypes that research has shown are reinforced through television and traditional print media coverage of female and male athletes were present in Internet sport journalism. This study included all 249 byline articles on March Madness published over a 26-day period during the spring of 2006 in the two outlets. Results contradicted the gender-specific stereotypes found in previous studies on sport media coverage of female and male athletes.

Introduction

Each spring, much of the United States population catches college basketball fever. March Madness, the nickname commonly used to describe The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I women's and men's basketball tournaments has become ingrained in U.S. culture (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002). It also serves as the major cash cow for the NCAA. In 1999, CBS Television agreed to pay the NCAA \$6.2 billion for exclusive rights to televise the Division I men's tournament for 11 years (Ginnetti, 2007). The NCAA derives roughly 90% of its total revenues just from this three-week men's tournament (Matheson & Baade, 2004). However, there has been little academic research that examined media coverage of March Madness. All of the published research that could be located on media coverage of NCAA Division I basketball focused exclusively on television (Billings et al., 2002; Duncan & Brummett, 1987; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Eastman, & Billings, 2001; Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1996).

In general, those studies found that telecasts and broadcast commentary of March Madness reinforced hegemonic masculinity in sport by trivializing and sexualizing women's basketball players, coaches, and teams, while also often comparing their

abilities to men's basketball players, coaches, and teams. (Billings et al., 2002; Duncan & Brummett, 1987; Eastman, & Billings, 2001; Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999; Messner et al., 1996). Masculine hegemony can be defined as the general acceptance of masculinity as the primary characteristic of Western society that places women in positions below men (Pedersen, 2002). Numerous scholars have noted mass media and sport are two of the forces that help preserve masculine hegemony in the Western world, while also helping to uphold antiquated definitions of gender (e.g., Davis, 1997; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker, & Whisenant, 2005).

The presence of masculine hegemony has been prevalent in research on sport media coverage of female and male athletes regardless of the type of sport, level of competition, or media outlet examined. In general, sport media provide far more coverage of men's sports than women's sports. Moreover, the limited coverage of women's sports by sport media often trivializes and minimizes the accomplishments of female athletes through qualitative portrayals, images, descriptors, and narratives regardless if examining newspaper and magazine content, or television and radio broadcasts (Bishop, 2003, Hargreaves, 1994; Kane, 1996; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003; Pedersen, Whisenant, & Schneider, 2003).

However, there is little research on media coverage of women in sport via the Internet (Real, 2006). Online sport sites are especially popular during the three weeks encompassing March Madness (Real, 2006). Nielsen/Net ratings estimated 20 million unique visitors to sport Internet sites for the primary purpose of following March Madness in 2004 (Real, 2006). However, the only published U.S. academic studies on Internet sport media coverage and gender have focused on university-sponsored Web sites (Cunningham, 2003; Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2000). Thus, this study provided an exploratory examination on the writing styles used by online writers. However, the primary purpose of this study was to see if Internet sportswriters also reinforce masculine hegemony through the use of gender-specific stereotypes and descriptors that are prevalent in broadcast, magazine, and newspaper sport coverage (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002; Higgs, Weiller, & Martin, 2003; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002).

Internet Coverage of Female Athletes

Research of sport coverage provided on the Internet – also called the World Wide Web – is in its infancy (Real, 2006). In fact, there is no set standard as to what qualifies as sport media coverage on the Internet. Beck and Bosshart (2003) noted the many different types of content the Web offers sports fans, including its service as an encyclopedia, a publicity vehicle for teams and athletes, and a venue for media-conglomerates, such as ESPN and CBS, to strengthen their domination of sport media.

The only two articles produced by U.S.-based authors on Internet coverage of female athletes both centered on university-sponsored coverage of sports offered to both women and men. Cunningham (2003) found university Web Sites provided more coverage of the “gender-appropriate” sport of women’s tennis than of men’s tennis teams at the same schools. In contrast, Sagas et al. (2000) discovered university Internet sites provided higher quality and more detailed coverage of the gender-appropriate sport of men’s baseball than the gender-inappropriate sport of women’s softball.

An Australian-based study examined the American Broadcast Company’s (ABC) Internet coverage of the 2000 Olympic Games. Jones (2004) found few female role models were shown on ABC’s Web pages. In addition, when women were covered, masculine hegemony was reinforced as “...stereotypical descriptions often characterized adult females as emotionally vulnerable, dependant adolescents. Male athletes were never infantilized and were far less likely to be described in emotive terms.”

Research on Media Coverage of College Basketball

Every published research article located for this study on media coverage of women’s and/or men’s college basketball focused on television as the medium of distribution. In the first published research articles to examine media coverage of both college women’s and men’s basketball, Duncan and Brummett (1987) found broadcast commentary generally trivialized and devalued female players. Even though basketball is a team sport, broadcasters focused their analysis on individuals more for the women’s game and on the physical prowess of the athletes more for the men’s games (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988).

In studying television broadcast commentary for the 1989 women's and men's NCAA Division I Final Fours, Messner et al. (1996) found less sexist language in the overall commentary than previous studies. However, Messner et al. (1996) still found that announcers infantilized female athletes and were ambivalent in discussing their accomplishments. Billings et al. (2002) analyzed gendered broadcast commentary of the 2000 NCAA Division I women's and men's Final Fours. Female players were more likely than male players to be evaluated for their personality, looks and appearance, and personal background. Eastman and Billings (2001) examined the impact of gender in 66 televised women's and men's college basketball games, finding announcers were more likely to make references of physical liabilities when discussing female players, particularly in reference to foot speed (Eastman & Billings, 2001).

Research Questions

Two overriding research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What types of descriptors and writing styles do Internet sportswriters use when writing about NCAA Division I women's and men's basketball tournaments?

RQ2: Are the gender-specific stereotypes and descriptors found in broadcast commentary of women's and men's college basketball, as well as nearly all types of media coverage of female and male athletes, also found in online stories on March Madness?

Methodology

Every article in the population was read and coded, and a content analysis was used to determine the descriptors in Internet articles on the NCAA women's and men's basketball Division I tournaments. Content analysis is an unobtrusive or non-reactive method used by social scientists that has been applied to nearly every form of communication, such as newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, speeches, literature, etc. (Gunter, 2000; Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 2004). Forming a systematic coding of a

text or narrative is paramount to beginning a content analysis (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989; Krippendorff, 2004; Nuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). However, looking for specific examples of these textual elements could lead to differing interpretations by different researchers. Thus, many researchers (e.g., Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Nuendorf, 2002) argued intercoder reliability should be used in a content analysis, where two or more coders are used to assure results are not the subjective interpretations of one researcher.

Sampling Selection

Despite the popularity of March Madness, most online sport publications do not staff all or even a majority of the games due to financial considerations, opting instead to publish stories or articles produced by national wire services, such as the Associated Press. As shown in Table 1, the most popular sport Web site among online visitors is the ESPN Internet network, with an average of nearly 16 million unique visitors per month (ComScore Network, 2005). As the most popular sport Internet site and since its television network has the telecast rights to all of the NCAA Division I women's basketball tournament, ESPN was chosen as one of the two Internet sites to examine for March Madness coverage in this study.

Table 1 The 10 Most Popular U.S. Sport Internet Sites (ComScore Network, 2005)

Rank	Internet Website	Unique Visitors (in millions) April 2005
1.	ESPN.com	15,994
2.	MLB.com	11,242
3.	Fox Sports on MSN	11,237
4.	Yahoo! Sports	9,456
5.	NFL Internet Group	7,898
6.	AOL Sports	7,578
7.	SI.com	5,393
8.	SportsLine.com	5,067
9.	NBA Internet Network	4,744
10.	NASCAR.com	4,143

The other Web Site examined for this research was SportsLine.com, which had more than 1 million unique visitors log onto its Web pages devoted to the 2004 NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament (Real, 2006). Even though this Site ranked only eighth among the most popular Internet sport sites (ComScore Network, 2005), CBS SportsLine was selected because it is affiliated with CBS Sports television, the official home of the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament.

Units of Analysis

This research included ESPN Internet and CBS SportsLine articles on March Madness published after 6 p.m. on March 12 up until 7:59 a.m. on April 6, 2006. These articles included game stories, game previews, notebooks, columns, summaries, news stories on the tournament or its players/teams, tournament trend stories, as well as features on players, teams, and coaches included in the tournament. The entire population of articles falling under these parameters published in both media outlets over this 26-day period were examined in this research. Articles or portions of articles on other tournaments in college basketball or stories outside of the scope of the tournaments were not examined. The primary coder and lead author of this study, a former professional sport journalist for 10 years with internet journalism experience, determined which stories focused on the NCAA Division I tournaments for this analysis before any coding procedures were undertaken.

Nearly all college basketball articles with bylines (name of an author) from the selected outlets were included in this study. Articles not attributed to individual authors, such as those generated from wire services and press releases, were not examined. Without having spatial limitations, Internet sites, including CBS SportsLine, often publish hundreds of non-attributed stories and press releases each day. Only the text of articles was coded in the a priori coding. Scouting reports, Web blogs, chat board discussions, and posted feedback left for authors on Internet articles were not included in this study. Stories from the two Internet outlets published under the sports heading, under the men's college basketball heading, and under the women's college basketball heading, as well as the NCAA tournament sections under both Web Sites, were examined. Both Internet Sites were thoroughly checked twice daily for new articles. Attempts were made

to access any articles related to the women's or men's tournaments by checking under multiple-page headings and looking under columnists' archives. Included among the online articles for examination were subscriber-only stories or inside members' articles. Subscriptions allowing access to all content for both Internet sites were obtained for the duration of this research. This was paramount to this research, since most articles by ESPN Internet staff columnists are only accessible to ESPN.com subscribers.

Coding Procedures

In creating a priori categories to examine for gender-specific descriptors in Internet media coverage of female and male basketball players, coaches, and teams, this content analysis followed some of the procedures employed by previous sport media researchers (Harris & Clayton, 2002; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Vincent, Pedersen, Whisenant, & Massey, 2007). The text of articles were coded for the following descriptive categories: (1) physical appearance, sexuality, attire; (2) athletic prowess, strength; (3) athletic weaknesses, limitations; (4) positive skill level, accomplishments; (5) negative skill level, failures; (6) family role, personal relationships; (7) psychological strengths, emotional strengths; (8) psychological weaknesses, emotional weakness; (9) humor.

Sport statistical information was not coded unless it included a descriptor. Therefore, even though it may seem impressive a player had nine rebounds in a game; this stat line was not included for examination unless a writer used a descriptor to describe the stat line such as "a dominating nine rebounds." Depending on the team and player, someone recording nine rebounds in a game could be considered a career night or an average performance. Therefore, one of the goals of this study was to examine how writers or the individuals they quoted described specific performances.

Previous media content analyses indicated articles would be more likely to describe female athletes with descriptors on their physical appearance/attire, family role/personal relationships, athletic weaknesses/limitations, negative skill level/failures, psychological/emotional weakness, or by adding humor. In contrast, previous research indicated writers would be more likely to describe male athletes with descriptions of their athletic prowess/strength, positive skill level/accomplishments, and

psychological/emotional strength (Billings et al., 2002; Elueze & Jones, 1998; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Messner et al., 2003; Messner et al., 1996; Vincent, 2004; Vincent et al., 2007).

Intercoder Reliability

A second coder was used for the initial examination of all articles in this content analysis to add intercoder reliability; thus assuring results were not the subjective interpretation of a single researcher (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf). In a mini-pilot study/training session for this content analysis, both coders examined 10 selected articles on women's and men's basketball from three Florida newspapers. For the pilot study, the two researchers only coded for nine set categories: (1) physical appearance, attire; (2) athletic prowess, strength; (3) athletic weaknesses, limitations; (4) skill level, accomplishments; (5) family role, personal relationships; (6) heterosexuality; (7) psychological, emotional strength; (8) psychological, emotional weakness; (9) humor.

Scholars argued intercoder reliability in content analyses should be near 90% (Carey, Morgan, & Oxtoby, 1996). Intercoder agreement between the two researchers in the pilot study was 90% or higher for eight of the nine a priori coding categories. The only problems emerging from the pilot study were difficulties in coding passages under the heading heterosexuality, as the two researchers agreed on less than 50% of the codes under this category. In addition, even after discussion, neither researcher was able to separate heterosexuality as a code for any passage in the examined texts from the code of family role, personal relationships. Therefore, the coding category for heterosexuality was not used in this study.

Following the pilot study, a total of eight categories remained, although a ninth was added before coding to differentiate between positive and negative connotations under the category for skill level/accomplishments. In addition, the lead researcher decided to add a separate sub-category under physical appearance/attire that dealt more with the type of athletic information often found in sport stories and game programs. For example, one could argue that passages written about an "undersized team" or a "tall shooting guard" should fall under physical appearances/attire. However, this study was more interested in uncovering classic examples of physical appearances and/or attire,

such as writing that a player had “pretty, blonde hair” or “wore a suit and tie” to the arena.

Data Analysis

After completing all of the initial coding for descriptors independent of each other, the two coders met for a total of seven days over three different periods to discuss their findings. When there was a disagreement between coders on how a passage in an article should be coded, this passage was not used for examination in this study.

Results

First, this section presents results from the total number of articles with bylines published by each media outlet under each area of study. Results from the a priori coding include the total number of descriptors for each category and the mean number of codes per each category examined. No tests for statistical significance were included in this research, because the entire population of March Madness articles published in these four outlets were examined. A total of 8,001 codes were identified by at least one of the two coders. However, 657 codes were identified by only one coder and not agreed upon by the other coder. They were discarded from the study, leaving a total 7,344 codes for the 249 articles. Thus, the intercoder reliability rate was 91.8%.

General Results

A total of 249 Internet articles on March Madness were examined from the selected media outlets as shown in Table 2. From the entire population of articles, 68.3% (n=170) were published on ESPN Internet. Articles on men’s basketball accounted for 72.3% of the population (n=180). ESPN Internet published 92.8% of all articles on the women’s tournament from the two outlets. A total of 64 (37.6%) of 170 articles from ESPN Internet were on the women’s tournament, while just 6.3% of CBS SportsLine articles focused on the women’s tournament.

Table 2 Focus for all Internet Articles by Media Outlet

	CBS SportsLine	ESPN Internet	Total Internet
Number of Articles on Men's Basketball	74	106	180
% of Articles on Men's Bkb.	93.7%	62.4%	72.3%
Number of Articles on Women's Basketball	5	64	69
% of Articles on Women's Bkb.	6.3%	37.6%	27.7%
Articles on both Genders	0	0	0
% of Articles on Both Genders	0%	0%	0%
Total Articles	79	170	249
% of Total Articles	31.7%	68.3%	100%

Results from a Priori Coding for Descriptors

Table 3 displays results for all descriptors, including quotes, from the 249 total articles in the population. Overall, articles were far more likely to include positive descriptors on the athleticism, skill level, and accomplishments of athletes, coaches, and teams than negative descriptors. Including quotes, positive descriptors on athleticism, or skill level accounted for 72% of all descriptors on athleticism or skill level.

The online sources averaged 29.5 codes for each article. Columns, player analysis, game breakdowns, and personal opinions of the writers were common in the Internet articles examined. The average codes for all CBS SportsLine and ESPN Internet articles were similar in many categories as shown in Table 3. However, ESPN Internet writers were more than twice as likely to include descriptors of family roles/personal relationships per article than CBS SportsLine writers, who used nearly twice as many descriptors per article on sport lingo for personal appearance, such as writing “undersized forward” or “extremely tall front line.”

Table 3 Total Codes for all Internet Articles Based on Outlet

Category	ESPN Internet 170 Articles		CBS SportsLine 79 Articles		All Internet 249 Articles	
	Total	Mean	Total	Mean	Total	Mean
Physical Appearance, Attire	275	1.6	109	1.4	384	1.5
Physical Appearance, Attire (in quotes)	39	0.2	6	0.1	45	0.2
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo	207	1.2	171	2.2	378	1.5
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo (in quotes)	17	0.1	6	0.1	23	0.1
Athletic Prowess	1,089	6.4	473	6.0	1,562	6.3
Athletic Prowess (in quotes)	120	0.7	93	1.2	213	0.9
Athletic Weaknesses/Limitations	427	2.5	201	2.5	628	2.5
Athletic Weaknesses/Lim. (in quotes)	51	0.3	50	0.6	101	0.4
Skill Level/ Accomplishments – P	1,371	8.1	507	6.4	1,878	7.5
Skill Level/ Accomplishments – Positive (in quotes)	232	1.4	121	1.5	353	1.4
Skill Level/Failures – Negative	490	2.9	223	2.8	713	2.9
Skill Level/Failures – Negative (in quotes)	75	0.4	32	0.4	107	0.4
Family Role/ Personal Relationships	236	1.4	50	0.6	286	1.1
Family Role/Personal Relationships (in quotes)	100	0.6	21	0.3	121	0.5
Psychological/Emotional Strength	185	1.1	74	0.9	259	1.0
Psychological/Emotional Strength (in quotes)	70	0.4	33	0.4	103	0.4
Psychological/Emotional Weakness	63	0.4	52	0.7	115	0.5
Psychological/Emotional Weakness (in quotes)	21	0.1	7	0.1	28	0.1
Humor	31	0.2	15	0.1	46	0.2
Humor (in quotes)	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0
Total for all Articles	5,100	30.0	2,244	28.4	7,344	29.5

Results based on focus for CBS SportsLine articles are shown in Table 4. Within articles on CBS SportsLine, stories on men’s basketball were far more likely to include descriptors of athletic prowess/strength than those on women’s basketball. Of course the few number of total CBS SportsLine articles on the women’s basketball tournaments (n=5) limits comparisons.

Table 4 Total Codes for all CBS SportsLine Articles

Category	Men’s Basketball 74 Articles		Women’s Bkb. 5 Articles		All CBS SL 79 Articles	
	Total	Mean	Total	Mean	Total	Mean
Physical Appearance, Attire	105	1.4	4	0.8	109	1.4
Physical Appearance, Attire (in quotes)	5	0.1	1	0.2	6	0.1
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo	165	2.2	6	1.2	171	2.2
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo (in quotes)	6	0.8	0	0.0	6	0.1
Athletic Prowess	464	6.3	9	1.8	473	6.0
Athletic Prowess (in quotes)	90	1.2	3	0.6	93	1.2
Athletic Weaknesses/Limitations	190	2.6	11	2.2	201	2.5
Athletic Weaknesses/Lim. (in quotes)	45	0.6	5	1.0	50	0.6
Skill Level/Accomplishments – Positive	478	6.5	29	5.8	507	6.4
Skill Level/Accomplishments – Positive (in quotes)	114	1.5	7	1.4	121	1.5
Skill Level/Failures – Negative	212	2.9	11	2.2	223	2.8
Skill Level/Failures – Negative (in quotes)	30	0.4	2	0.4	32	0.4
Family Role/ Personal Relationships	49	0.7	1	0.2	50	0.6
Family Role/Personal Relationships (in quotes)	18	0.2	3	0.6	21	0.3
Psychological/Emotional Strength	70	0.9	4	0.8	74	0.9

Psychological/Emotional Strength (in quotes)	32	0.4	1	0.2	33	0.4
Psychological/Emotional Weakness	47	0.6	5	1.0	52	0.7
Psychological/Emotional Weakness (in quotes)	7	0.1	0	0.0	7	0.1
Humor	15	0.2	0	0.0	15	0.1
Humor (in quotes)	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total for all Articles	2,142	28.9	102	20.4	2,244	28.4

Table 5 displays the a priori coding results for ESPN Internet articles based on focus. ESPN Internet articles on men’s basketball included an average of more than 3.5 times as many descriptors on physical appearances/attire and personal roles/family relationships than women’s basketball articles published on ESPN Internet. Excluding descriptors in quotes, positive skill level/accomplishments were more prevalent in women’s basketball articles than men’s basketball articles on ESPN Internet.

In examining the a priori coding results between online media outlets as shown in Tables 4 and 5, women’s basketball articles on ESPN Internet included an average of nearly three times as many codes per article on physical strengths/athletic prowess than CBS SportsLine articles on women’s basketball. Once again, though, the small number of women’s basketball articles (n=5) published on CBS SportsLine limits comparisons on women’s basketball coverage between the two outlets. Coding results on men’s basketball between the two online media outlets were remarkably similar. However, men’s basketball stories on ESPN Internet included an average of nearly three times as many codes per article on family roles/personal relationships than those published on CBS SportsLine.

Table 5 Total Codes for all ESPN Internet Articles

Category	Men's Basketball 106 Articles		Women's Bkb. 64 Articles		All ESPN.com 170 Articles	
	Total	Mean	Total	Mean	Total	Mean
Physical Appearance, Attire	235	2.2	40	0.6	275	1.6
Physical Appearance, Attire (in quotes)	33	0.3	6	0.1	39	0.2
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo	140	1.3	67	1.0	207	1.2
Physical Appearance Sport Lingo (in quotes)	13	0.1	4	0.1	17	0.1
Athletic Prowess	706	6.7	383	6.0	1,089	6.4
Athletic Prowess (in quotes)	97	0.9	23	0.4	120	0.7
Athletic Weaknesses/Limitations	286	2.7	141	2.2	427	2.5
Athletic Weaknesses/Lim. (in quotes)	40	0.4	11	0.2	51	0.3
Skill Level/ Accomplishments – Positive	799	7.5	572	8.9	1,371	8.1
Skill Level/ Accomplishments – Positive (in quotes)	171	1.6	61	1.0	232	1.4
Skill Level/Failures – Negative	317	3.0	173	2.7	490	2.9
Skill Level/Failures – Negative (in quotes)	60	0.6	15	0.2	75	0.4
Family Role/ Personal Relationships	202	1.9	34	0.5	236	1.4
Family Role/Personal Relationships (in quotes)	79	0.7	21	0.3	100	0.6
Psychological/Emotional Strength	113	1.1	72	1.1	185	1.1
Psychological/Emotional Strength (in quotes)	40	0.4	30	0.5	70	0.4
Psychological/Emotional Weakness	42	0.4	21	0.3	63	0.4
Psychological/Emotional Weakness (in quotes)	17	0.2	4	0.1	21	0.1
Humor	25	0.2	6	0.1	31	0.2
Humor (in quotes)	0	0.0	1	0.0	1	0.0
Total for all Articles	3,415	32.2	1,685	26.3	5,100	30.0

Summary and Discussion

Overall, both Internet outlets predominantly covered the men's basketball tournament. Nearly all of the coverage on the women's tournament came from ESPN Internet. This was not surprising since the ESPN television networks broadcasted the entire women's tournament. CBS Television is the home of the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament. CBS SportsLine, which often cross promotes for its television station, paid little attention to the women's tournament, since just five (6.3%) of the 79 CBS SportsLine articles in this study focused on women's basketball.

Findings from previous content analyses on sport media coverage indicated articles would be more likely to describe female athletes with descriptors on their physical appearance/attire, family role/personal relationships, athletic weaknesses/limitations, negative skill level/failures, psychological/emotional weakness, or by adding humor. In contrast, previous research indicated writers would be more likely to describe male athletes with descriptions of their athletic prowess/strength, positive skill level/accomplishments, and psychological/emotional strength (Billings et al., 2002; Elueze & Jones, 1998; Harris & Clayton, 2002; Messner et al., 2003; Messner et al., 1996; Vincent, 2004; Vincent et al., 2007). However, it was uncertain if these trends would emerge from this content analysis due to women's college basketball's increasing popularity and the examination of a new form of media content in the Internet (Real, 2006; Reynolds, 2004).

The a priori coding results of this study contradicted the gender-specific stereotypes found in previous media studies. Surprisingly, eight of these nine assumptions listed above were unsubstantiated for online articles. The lone assumption that was upheld was articles on men's basketball included a higher average number of codes for athletic prowess/strengths. Interestingly, online writers were more likely to have included descriptors for physical appearances/attire and personal relationships/family roles when covering men's basketball than women's basketball. This contradicted previous media studies on gendered coverage, nearly all of which found descriptors on physical appearances or personal lives used more often in media commentary on female athletes than male athletes (e.g., Davis, 1997; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Kane & Parks, 1992; Messner et al., 1996; Vincent, 2004). The majority of the

findings of this study on descriptors used did not fully support the presence of masculine hegemony in Internet sports articles on March Madness.

Still, some findings were expected. The men's tournament did receive the vast majority of the overall coverage (72.3%). Within articles on CBS SportsLine, stories on men's basketball were far more likely to include descriptors of athletic prowess/strength than the few SportsLine published on women's basketball. Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) found similar results when comparing television commentary of women's college basketball with commentary on men's college basketball.

The unexpected results from the a priori coding of this research suggest online writers for at least the two examined media outlets may recognize female basketball players for their athleticism and skill level as much as they do for male players. They also provided more praiseworthy coverage of female athletes and did not reinforce masculine hegemony the way many media studies have shown has been done through coverage of women's sport in magazines, newspapers, and television stations (e.g., Bishop, 2003, Hargreaves, 1994; Kane, 1996; Messner et al., 2003; Pedersen et al, 2003). However, these results should not be generalized, since articles from only two media outlets were examined, and one of those two – ESPN Internet – had a vested interest in providing more and better coverage to the women's tournament, since its host television network carried the women's tournament.

Recommendations for Future Research

There need to be additional studies to determine if masculine hegemony is present in Internet media coverage of women and men in sport, since this was the first known American study to examine gender-related Internet sports coverage. In general, research on Internet sport media coverage is in its infancy (Real, 2006). Therefore, exploratory studies on Internet sports coverage in a variety of areas would seem in order. These studies could examine content within specific Web sites on varying sports, or analyze content from multiple Internet sites on either one sport or a variety of sports. Exploratory studies on Internet sports coverage could also examine for quantitative and qualitative differences between mainstream sport sites covering a variety of women's sports and men's sports, such as CBS SportsLine and ESPN Internet, when compared to the more

sport-specific or team-focused sites, such as the host sites for the NBA and the WNBA, or the numerous college and professional team sites available for paid subscriptions on Rivals.com and scout.com.

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