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Leveling the Playing Field? A Content Analysis of ESPN.com and ESPNW.com's Online Coverage

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Leveling the Playing Field?
A Content Analysis of ESPN.com and ESPNW.com's Online Coverage

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to compare sports coverage provided by the male-centric website ESPN.com and its affiliated female-centric website ESPNW.com. The amount and type of coverage provided for female athletes was the primary focus of this study. Results suggest that ESPNW.com provides an outlet for increased coverage of women's sports, but the type of coverage provided to female athletes is not equivalent to that of their male counterparts. These results supported findings in previous studies on mass media coverage of women's sports, specifically coverage on the emerging field of Internet coverage.

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I. Introduction

It has been more than 40 years since Title IX legislation was passed, a bill that made

equality in the United States' education system enforceable and granted certain protections for

sexual harassment. Due in part to Title IX, as of 2014, 47.1% of all NCAA Division I, II, and III

student-athletes are female (Lapchick, 2014). This number demonstrates the dramatic rise in

female student-athletes, a population that stood at 2% when Title IX was enacted in 1972

(American Association of University Women, 2001). Sporting opportunities for women have

also grown outside of the collegiate ranks, with multiple women's professional sports leagues

operating in America. Moreover, the 2015 women's World Cup was the largest women's

sporting event with 24 different national teams competing.

However, coverage of women's sports by the sports media has not matched this growth.

Historically, across all forms of traditional mass media, less coverage is provided to women's

sports, with fewer stories and shorter stories on female athletes published (Koivula, 1999; Sagas,

Cunningham, Wigley, & Ashley, 2000; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Crossman,

Vincent, & Speed, 2007; Kian, Mondello, & Vincent, 2009; Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Often, the

coverage that is provided represents female athletes in an ambivalent way, diminishing their

sporting achievements by shifting focus away from their athletic success (Klein, 1988; Messner,

Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Kane, 1996; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson 1999;

Kim, Walkosz, & Iverson, 2006; Daddario & Wigley, 2007). Therefore, historically there have

been major ethical concerns about the amount and type of coverage of women's sports.

This ambivalence toward female athletes has been investigated through framing theory,

which is the theory that certain ideas can be communicated through news coverage by making

them more salient in the coverage. Past studies have found that applying framing theory can

make the difference in coverage of male and female athletes more apparent by highlighting the way female athletes are covered in comparison to males (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Smith, 2014; Wachs, Cooky, Messner, & Dworkin 2012). Studies have also found that female athletes are often framed by stereotypes, such as those of motherhood, physical attractiveness, or emotional weakness.

Among the ethical issues regarding the coverage of women's sports, the stereotypical coverage of female athletes communicates to the media consumer that female athletes are lesser athletes than male athletes, and implies that the sports arena is a place reserved for only men. However, there does seem to be some change in this stereotypical representation of female athletes in online sports coverage. Although studies have shown that just like traditional mass media - television, newspaper, and magazines – the Internet provides less coverage of female athletes, this coverage has been equally ambivalent, or trivial, for male and female athletes (Kachgal, 2001; Kian et al., 2009).

While the Internet provides a promising future for the coverage of women's sports, if it is still ambivalent coverage then is any progress really being made? Kian et al. (2009) found that ESPN.com, the online home of the self-proclaimed worldwide leader in sports, provided less online coverage of females during the 2006 NCAA's March Madness tournaments, with only 37.6% of articles about female athletes. ESPN's creation of ESPNW.com in 2009 was perhaps a move to remedy the corporation's lack of coverage for female sports. As stated in the "ESPNW Fact Sheet" on ESPN's Media Zone (n.d.), ESPNW.com "strives to be the premiere site for women's sports." Considering that the 94% of ESPN.com users are men (ESPN, n.d.) it seems to suggest that ESPNW was created to be the equivalent sports coverage site for women.

While ESPNW.com provides a female-centered site for sports coverage, does it provide coverage without ambivalence? Has coverage of women's sports improved, avoiding the ethical concerns raised in past research? Has the creation of ESPNW.com created an excuse for the more frequently visited ESPN.com to provide less coverage for female athletes? The proposed study is a content analysis comparing online sports coverage of ESPN.com and ESPNW.com using quantitative and qualitative data to measure the amount and type of coverage female athletes receive as compared to male athletes. Past research suggests that male athletes receive upwards of 70% of sports coverage in the media (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Kian et. al, 2009) while female athletes only receive up to 28% of coverage (Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Kachgal, 2001). Quantitative measures include the source of the article (ESPN.com or ESPNW.com), the day, month, and time collected, the gender of the subject, if the subject is an individual or team, the type of sport, and the length of the article in words (Kolbe & Muehling, 1992). Qualitative measures include the task-relevance and the presence or absence of ambivalent framing in the article. Task-relevance is defined as the presence or lack of sport-specific information and focus in an article (Crossman et al., 2007). Ambivalent framing is defined as cues that take away from the athletic accomplishment of the athlete (Kachgal, 2001). An exploratory qualitative analysis of frames that emerge from the text is also conducted in this study.

Previous studies, such as Fink and Kensicki's 2002 study of *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*, have used content analysis methods to compare sports coverage between female- and male-centered sports media; however, only three studies have extended this to the continually developing medium of online sports coverage (Kachgal, 2001; Kian et al., 2009; Wolter, 2015). Also, only two content analysis studies have examined coverage on ESPNW.com since its creation in 2010 (Wolter, 2015a; Wolter, 2015b) as a "destination for women who are

passionate sports fans and athletes" (Stableford, 2010, n.p.). However, neither of these studies compared ESPNW.com online coverage with that of ESPN.com.

Furthermore, while many studies focus on female sports coverage during the Olympics or other major sporting events, few studies have examined the "regular, everyday" sports reporting (Caple, 2013, p. 274) done by news outlets. Therefore, this study examines the headline articles of ESPN.com and ESPNW.com when no major international sports tournaments occur, focusing on the everyday sports coverage from August to December during the regular seasons of the NBA, NHL, MLS, NFL, WNBA, NWSL, NWHL, as well as NCAA men's and women's fall sports. The results of this study will provide insights as to whether the coverage of women's sports varies between regular and female-centered sports media, and assess if women's sports are receiving equal coverage. Just as Title IX leveled the playing field for women's participation in sports, has ESPN's creation of a women-centered sports website leveled the playing field for women's sports coverage?

II. Literature Review

A. Underrepresentation

Underrepresentation of women's sports coverage has been documented over time across all forms of mass media. Crossman et al. (2007) found in a content analysis of Wimbledon coverage in three newspapers that females (32.2 square inches, SD = 22.6) and males (32.6 square inches, SD = 25.5) received a similar amount of coverage in terms of average column inches. However, males (5,247 total square inches) received more coverage overall with just under 2,000 more square inches of total of column space than females (3,747 square inches). Godoy-Pressland (2014) analyzed coverage of the Sunday editions in five national British newspapers over a two-year period of 2008 through 2009 and found articles about women's

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athletics accounted for just 3.6% of all articles reviewed (826 of 22,954) compared to men's athletics, which constituted 93.8% of all articles reviewed (21,530 of 22,954).

Bishop's (2003) findings examined this lack of coverage in magazines, finding in a content analysis of *Sports Illustrated* feature articles from 1980 to 1996 that the percentage of feature articles about women was never above 10%. While the percentage of feature articles about women were at an all-time high of 9.6% in 1994, there was a steep decline to just 3.3% in 1996, the proclaimed "Year of the Woman." Fink and Kensicki's (2002) content analysis included all articles within a random sample of *Sports Illustrated* magazine issues from 1997 to 2000, finding that just 10% of all articles reviewed covered female athletes or female-specific sports (81 of 817).

The dearth of coverage for women's athletics also extends to television and Internet sports coverage. Koivula's (1999) content analysis of Swedish sports news broadcasts found that of the 1,131 minutes of sports coverage reviewed, just 11.7% covered women's sports (132 of 1,131 minutes). Adams and Tuggle (2004) found that the sports specific programs ESPN's SportsCenter and CNN's Sports Tonight ran 96.4% of stories about males (778 of 807) compared to 1.9% of stories about females (16 of 807). Sagas, Cunningham, Wigley, and Ashley's (2000) content analysis of university websites' coverage of school baseball and softball teams showed that baseball teams received more coverage than softball with 89.2% of baseball teams' sites providing updated scores during the season, while 79.2% of softball teams' websites provided updated scores.

Online, Kachgal's (2001) content analysis of sports coverage on ESPN.com, CBSSportsLine.com, and CNNSI.com found 82% of stories were about male athletes (232 of 284) while just 18% of stories were about female athletes (18 of 284). This number has increased

over the years. More recently, Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) found that 27.7% (69 of 249 articles) of NCAA March Madness articles for ESPN.com and CBS SportsLine online tournament coverage reported on the women's tournament, which is an improvement of almost 10% since Kachgal's study. However, it still lagged far behind coverage of the men's tournament, which was at 72.3% (180 of 249 articles), or more than double the women's.

Overall, past research suggests that there are indeed ethical issues regarding underrepresentation of female athletes in sports coverage. Female athletes typically receive from as low as just 2% to as high as 28% of total coverage across various media of sports coverage (Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Kian et. al, 2009). This is far less than their male counterparts, who consistently receive from 70% to 90% of total coverage by various forms of sports media (Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Kachgal, 2001).

B. Task Relevance

In addition to an underrepresentation of female athletes in sports coverage, the coverage female athletes receive is not about their athletic achievements. Examples include their role as a mother, or as a wife, or their role in activities outside of their sport. This focus on information about the subject outside of athletics is related to the task-relevance of the article, or the relevance of the information in the story in relation to the subject and athletics. As defined by Klein (1988), task-relevant articles for athletes have a sport-specific emphasis (i.e. focusing on the competition, the results, or training) whereas non task-relevant articles focus on information not relevant to sport (i.e. information about the athlete's personal life).

Klein's (1988) content analysis of four West German newspapers found that 55.6% of women's articles had more sport-specific information, compared to 66.2% of men's articles. Jones et al., (1999) found similar data in their content analysis of print media about gold medal

winning U.S. women's teams at the 1996 and 1998 Olympics, with just 36.9% of articles about the women's basketball, soccer, and hockey teams containing task-relevant information.

More recently, Fink and Kensicki (2002) found that 20% of the stories about female athletes in *Sports Illustrated* were non-sport related compared to 8% of stories about male athletes. Content about female athletes was focused on their personal lives, personal health, struggles against adversity outside of the sporting arena, or fashion instead of their athletic achievements. Cunningham, Sagas, Sartore, Amsden, and Schellhase (2004) had similar findings in their content analysis of *NCAA News* observing that 27.1% of articles about female athletes in 2001 were non-task relevant while 25.7% of articles about male athletes were non-task relevant.

Past research shows that while a majority of articles about female athletes may typically be task-relevant, with 50% to 80% of articles about female athletes containing task-relevant information, this still lags far behind male athletes (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Klein, 1988). Male athletes typically receive sports coverage that is task-relevant 60% to 90% of the time (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Cunningham et al., 2004).

C. Framing Theory

In today's society the media plays a crucial role in informing the public, directing attention to certain topics, and thus shaping cultural attitudes (Vincent, 2004). Two communication theories explain this role: agenda setting and what second-level agenda research has called framing. Agenda setting is selecting and giving prominence to certain news stories while providing less coverage to others, and can be detected in what the media selects as newsworthy occurrences. However, as pointed out by Adams and Tuggle (2004), agenda setting is closely related to framing, as "the very act of selecting certain events to cover…constitutes framing" (p. 240). In the selection of news stories to be covered, and the amount of coverage to

dedicate to those stories, the media essentially tells the public what to think about. This has continued into the Internet age, where deciding how many stories to cover on the site, and what prominence to give them in homepage placement directs certain stories to the attention of the audience (Groshek, 2008).

Framing theory, as defined by Entman, is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (1993, p. 52). Essentially, framing theory is the idea that the way issues or subjects in news reports are characterized by the media has an influence on how the audience understands and views those issues or subjects (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This study focuses on how ESPN.com and ESPNW.com portray the stories they are covering through various frames they use to present the information to the audience.

Framing theory has been employed in ethics studies to uncover intended or unintended biases in the reporting of news. This is because the way the story is framed places emphasis on a certain piece of information to make it more meaningful or noticeable, and studying the way a story is framed can illuminate the message the media wants an audience to take away from the piece (Entman, 1993). Here, the media not only informs the audience what stories to think about, but how to think about them. As reported by Media Tenor, media consumers "see the world as it is shown to them in the media" (as cited in Groshek, 2008, p. 57). These frames the media use to construct the worlds the audience sees often reinforce existing ideologies within society; therefore, it can be interpreted that sports coverage of female athletes may include frames that enforce stereotypes or other intended or unintended biases (Wachs, Cooky, Messner, & Dworkin, 2012).

An example of this is the Reese and Buckalew study (1995), which revealed the use of framing in shaping the public perspective of the Gulf War. Reese and Buckalew found that

television coverage of the war at a local station in Austin, Texas shifted starkly from peace minded objections to a heavily pro-troops stance and essentially "wrapped itself in the U.S. flag" (Reese & Buckalew, 1995, p. 45).

This was achieved through three frames: conflict, control, and consensus. The conflict frame used drama to create the idea that anti-war protesters were anti-America because of their stance, and therefore in the wrong. The control frame used the idea of social order in an attempt to show that anti-war protestors were a threat to the safety of the public and a danger to the social order of the viewer's city or neighborhood. Finally, the consensus frame showed anti-war protestors as enemies to community solidarity and outcasts that didn't want what was best for the community as a whole. Through all three of these frames, anti-war protestors were presented to the audience as fighters themselves instead of people in favor of peace.

First, the station framed the peace minded dissenters against the pro-troops side in a manner that created the illusion that peace protestors were metaphorically fighting against U.S. troops or were in direct conflict with the President by protesting the U.S.'s war efforts. The use of the conflict frame minimized the "anti-war stance by positioning it opposite…a patriotic side," which presented it as an anti-American view (Reese & Buckalew, 1995, p. 47). Reporters also painted the peace protestors as a "threat to social order" through control framing, which showed the protestors as an enemy of the police (Reese & Buckalew, 1995). The station focused on stories of the community coming together, which effectively disregarded questions about President Bush's policy and instead steered public focus to solidarity. The result of the framing performed by local and national news during coverage of the Gulf War contributed to President Bush earning one of the highest public approval ratings for any sitting president, despite a strong

initial negative reaction to the U.S. involvement in the Gulf, and questions about the policy enacted by the President.

This practice extends to sports as well, as the way sports are covered by the media influences the societal beliefs about professional sport and assists in making those beliefs mainstream (Vincent, 2004). Vincent and Crossman (2012) stated that, sports discourses can "define, normalize, influence, and reflect mainstream societal beliefs about gender, race, class, and national identity" (p. 87). The best example of this is in newspapers. In many cases, editors often include stories to reflect widely held national beliefs or values in order to attract the largest possible readership, as the consumers would be reading stories that fit with their ideologies of the world (Vincent & Crossman, 2012).

Sports have been considered a man's world since their inception. An example of this is Wimbledon, which, as stated by Vincent (2004), like many sporting events, was originally created to "reinvigorate the ideology of their (socially elite white males) 'natural superiority' over race- and class-subordinated groups of men and women" (p. 436). This is supported by Vincent's (2004) study of newspaper coverage of the 2000 Wimbledon Championships; he found that women tennis players were consistently framed as emotionally weak or dependent on their boyfriends who were in the crowd supporting them. Framing the tennis players in this way, instead of focusing on their athletic accomplishments at the Championships, enforces the ideology that women are more emotional than men and dependent upon them. Often in coverage of women's sports, this stereotype that women are lesser than their male counterparts is perpetuated through framing.

Studies have found that framing theory can be extended to convey meaning not only by what does receive media attention - generally male athletes and sports - but also by what does

not receive media attention. When women's sports do not receive coverage, which studies have shown is a trend in the field of sports coverage, the message is sent that women's sports do not matter (Adams & Tuggle, 2004). An example of this is Vincent and Crossman's (2012) study of *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* coverage of the 2010 Olympics gold medal winning men's and women's Canadian hockey teams. Despite both teams winning gold for their country, where sport of hockey is unmatched in national popularity and prominence, the men's team accounted for 72% of articles in both newspapers, while the women's team had only 27% of articles devoted to them (Vincent & Crossman, 2012).

ESPN.com had nearly 84 million unique visitors during December of 2015 alone, which was the 28th highest of any digital media property for that month. Therefore, it's assumed that framing on ESPN.com may influence many sports consumers (comScore, 2016). If each of those 84 million users visited the site and saw no coverage of women's sports, they can easily interpret that men's sports hold a much higher importance. Considering that ESPNW.com's all-time high for unique visitors is a mere 8.1 million, and is ESPN's home for most of its women's sports coverage, it is assumed that fewer sports consumers are being exposed to coverage of women's sports or athletes (ESPN, 2015). Based on the number of users visiting the site, ESPN.com is assumed to have more power to set the agenda than ESPNW.com.

D. Ambivalent Framing

One key category of framing studies that explains how female athletes are marginalized is the ambivalence frame, which trivializes, patronizes, and sexualizes female athletes (Klein, 1988; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Kane, 1996; Kinnick, 1998; Shugart, 2003). Kachgal (2001) defines ambivalent framing as "undercutting positive messages about female athletes with suggestions of weakness, or the use of patronizing language, images, and other cues that

diminish the achievement of female athletes" (p. 10). For example, women are often stereotyped as emotional, which extends to female athletes. At the 2000 Olympic Games, where a study of ABC Online coverage during the games found that 63% of remarks about emotions were in reference to female athletes as opposed to just 37% for male athletes (Jones, 2004).

The ambivalence frame presents another major ethical issue regarding the type of coverage afforded to female athletes. This frame takes away from the successes of female athletes by downplaying their achievements and places more value on their stereotypical role as women as opposed to their role as athletes (Shugart, 2003). This kind of framing is accomplished through four sub-frames that construct and emphasize a perceived reality within the story: weakness, status, appearance, and gender-reference.

Weakness sub-frame. The weakness sub-frame focuses on the depiction of the subject as being weak physically, emotionally, and/or mentally. Stereotypically, women have been presented as more emotional, and physically or mentally weaker than men; this can extend to the sporting arena, which is often considered a "highly emotional and stressful context" (Caple, 2013, p. 283). An example from a study on the 2004 Olympic Games, which found that emotional framing of female athletes was present in the Spanish press (Crolley & Teso, 2004), is that there were many references to female athletes "crying" or "in tears"; however, the caption below a photograph of a male cyclist wiping away his tears simply described the athlete as "exhausted" from his race (Crolley & Teso, 2004, p. 159).

Kinnick's (1998) content analysis of sports coverage in five U.S. newspapers during the 1996 Olympic Games found that reporters characterized female athletes as emotionally weak in 10% of profiles as compared to 7.5% of profiles on male athletes. In a 2006 study (Billings, Craig, Croce, Cross, Moore, Vigodsky, & Watson) of Annika Sorenstam's run in the men's 2003

PGA Colonial Tournament, it was found that sportscasters made more comments about composure when describing Sorenstam than male golfers, meaning "Sorenstam was depicted as succeeding for reasons other than her athletic skills" (p. 111). Also, sportscasters were more likely to comment on Sorenstam's emotions than the emotions of male golfers, and also more likely to compare Sorenstam to other men golfers (Billings et al., 2006). Daddario and Wigley (2007) found that commentators during the 2004 Olympic Games emphasized the emotional and psychological weaknesses of female athletes, "often attributing competitive losses to anxiety or stress" (p. 38).

Previous research suggests that the weakness sub-frame is more likely to be present in articles about female athletes, with the frame appearing in over 30% of sports coverage in mass media (Jones, 2004; Kinnick, 1998). This is different for male athletes as past research suggests that weakness is mentioned in less than 10% of coverage (Kinnick, 1998).

Status sub-frame. The status sub-frame places an emphasis on the familial, romantic, or other personal relationships of the subject. Banet-Weiser (1999) noted that "female tennis players are often depicted as 'playing for' their love interest in the stands" (p. 414). Another example is former WNBA player Sheryl Swoopes. After Swoopes had her child, televised coverage of her games would "continually return(s) to shots of the sideline, where the baby and the father watch the game" (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 415), constantly reminding the viewer that Swoopes is first and foremost a mother and a woman.

Content analysis of five U.S. newspapers during the 1996 Olympic Games found the marital status of female athletes was discussed in 35% of articles compared to 20% of articles on male athletes (Kinnick, 1998). In a study of the ABC Online coverage of the 2000 Olympic

Games coverage, Jones (2004) found that of the 79 total statements describing the athletes'
relationships, more than 50 percent were in reference to female athletes.

Past research has found varying results on the use of the status sub-frame in describing
female athletes. Jones' (2004) study found that more than 55% of articles about Olympic women
on ABC News online were described by their familial role or relationship status, whereas Kian et
al. (2009) found in their study of online coverage that just 3.3% of descriptive statements about
female athletes mentioned their status. As for male athletes, the results of past research also vary,
with Jones' (2004) study finding articles that mention status in 46% of coverage, and Kian et al.
finding 6% of descriptive statements about male athletes to be status related.

Appearance sub-frame. The appearance sub-frame focuses on the personal appearance
or looks of the subject, implying that the athlete being discussed is less talented than others. For
example, Knight and Giuliano (2002) found that athletes with coverage that focused on their
attractiveness were viewed as less talented than athletes with coverage that focused on their
athleticism.

Klein's (1994) content analysis of four West German newspapers found that all four
papers mentioned the appearance of female athletes more than male athletes. The newspaper *Bild*
mentioned the appearance of female athletes the most of all four, with 56.2% of articles
compared to 18.6% of articles about male athletes. Kinnick (1998) found in her content analysis
of five U.S. newspapers during the 1996 Olympic Games, that reporters more often mentioned
the looks of female athletes (9.1%) than male athletes (2.2%). For example, there were constant
references to the blonde hair and musculature of Brandi Chastain as well as articles declaring
Mia Hamm a "glamor girl" during the press coverage of the 1999 U.S. Women's National
Soccer Team after its World Cup championship win (Shugart, 2003, p. 8).

However, there appear to be changes occurring in the use of this sub-frame. Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009) found in their content analysis of online NCAA basketball coverage for both the men's and women's tournaments that physical appearance was mentioned 378 times in 180 articles about male athletes, compared to just 51 times over 69 articles about women's athletes.

Past research suggests that over the past decade the use of the appearance frame has declined, with appearance mentioned 10% of the time in article about female athletes (Kian et al., 2009; Kinnick, 1998). For male athletes, past research shows that appearance is mentioned less than 10% of the time in coverage (Kinnick, 1998).

Gender reference sub-frame. The gender reference sub-frame places significant emphasis on the gender of the subject or the activity of the subject (i.e. women's basketball as opposed to just basketball). In this sense, the story is not about sports or people competing in sports, but instead the gender of the participant. This can also be accomplished by referencing the first name of the participant as opposed to her family name, or using a noun phrase that is gendered, such as woman or female (Caple, 2013).

In a content analysis of televised news sport coverage, Koivula (1999) found that 60.9% of the stories about female athletes were gender marked compared to only 5.2% of stories about male athletes being gender marked. In a study of commentary on a coed tennis match, Halbert and Lattimer (1994) found that commentators referred to the gender of the female athlete five times more than the male athlete, gender marking the female tennis player 11 times, and the male tennis player just two times. Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) found in their study of the coverage of the men's and women's NCAA Final Four games that gender marking occurred an average of 16.3 times in women's games and zero times in any men's game, meaning that

women's games were consistently mentioned as part of the NCAA Women's Final Four as opposed to just the NCAA Final Four for men's games.

More recently, in a study of Spanish press coverage of the 2004 Olympic Games, Crolley and Teso (2007) found that the female sports were almost always marked for gender. For example, the Spanish women's hockey team or Spanish women's handball team was always used, while sports that were left unmarked, just using Spanish hockey team or Spanish handball team, were understood as the men's teams (Crolley & Teso, 2007).

Past research suggests that articles about women will mention their gender a majority of the time, with around of 60% of articles referencing their gender (Crolley & Teso, 2007; Koivula 1999). Past research supports that the gender of a male athlete or sport team is typically not mentioned in coverage, and if mentioned is done so less than 10% of the time (Crolley & Teso, 2007; Messner et al., 1993).

III. Hypotheses

A. Underrepresentation

Previous research revealed major ethical concerns regarding the coverage of female athletes. First, women's athletics receive less coverage in newspapers, magazines, television, and on the Internet, with men receiving up to 90% of coverage as compared to women (Koivula, 1999; Sagas et al., 2000; Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Bishop, 2003; Crossman et al., 2007; Kian et al., 2009; Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Consistent with these findings, it is anticipated that females are expected to receive less coverage on ESPN.com than males, in terms of both the number of articles and the length of the articles in words (Kolbe & Muehling, 1992).

Hypothesis 1: ESPN.com will have more articles on males than on females.

Research has also shown that media outlets that specifically target a female audience provide more coverage of females (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). These findings lead to the prediction that ESPNW.com, a media outlet created specifically to target a female audience, will provide more coverage of females than ESPN.com, a media outlet with a historically male based audience, in terms of the number of articles.

Hypothesis 2: ESPNW.com will have more articles on females than ESPN.com.

B. Task-Relevance

Another ethical concern from past research involved task-relevance. Multiple studies have shown that the percentage of task-relevant articles (that focus on the sporting achievements or work of athletes and teams) about females is less than those for males, with females typically receiving 50% to 80% of task-relevant coverage across mass media compared to 60% to 90% for male athletes. (Klein, 1988; Jones et al., 1999; Fink & Kensicki, 2002). In line with these previous findings, more task-relevant articles about females are predicted to appear on ESPNW.com than ESPN.com, and the highest percentage of articles about females on ESPNW.com will be task-relevant articles. Task-relevant articles are those that only contain information pertaining to athletics.

Hypothesis 3: There will be fewer task-relevant articles about females on ESPN.com than there will be on ESPNW.com.

Hypothesis 4: The frequency of task-relevant articles will be higher than the frequency of non-task-relevant articles on ESPNW.com

C. Ambivalent Framing

Ambivalent framing is another ethical issues regarding the coverage of women's sports. Past studies on the ambivalent framing in coverage of female athletes revealed that articles about

females are more likely to ambivalently frame female athletes (Klein, 1988; Messner et al.,1993; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Kane, 1996; Jones et al., 1999; Kim et al., 2006; Daddario & Wigley, 2007). This is done through various sub frames (i.e. focus on familial role or personal relationships, gender marking, discussing emotional or mental state, and focus on appearance or personality). This takes away from their athletic achievements or trivializes their sporting successes as being less than those of male athletes.

Previous research has shown that articles about females are more likely to include the sub-frames of weakness, status, appearance, and gender-reference than males. Therefore, it is predicted that the percentage of ambivalently framed stories will be higher for females than for males. (An ambivalently framed story is any story that received an ambivalence score greater than 0. See Appendix B).

Hypothesis 5: The total number of ambivalently framed articles about females will be higher than articles about males.

The articles will also be analyzed to see whether any themes or frames that were not found in past research appear in the content. For example, there may be other types of frames that present female athletes in a negative or unethical way that have not yet been defined. Therefore, the following research question is posed.

Research Question 1: What frames or themes, if any, emerge from the textual analysis of online coverage on ESPN.com and ESPNW.com.

IV. Methods

To test these hypotheses, a content analysis was conducted of home page headline articles from ESPN.com and ESPNW.com from one composite week per month from August 2015 to December 2015. Hester and Dougall (2007) advocated for the effectiveness of constructed week

sampling for online news content analysis as a single constructed week "allows reliable estimates of content" (p. 811). For each day of the composite week, articles were collected three times throughout the day in the morning (between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. central time zone), afternoon (between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. central time zone), and evening (between 6 p.m. and 12 a.m. central time zone) to reflect the daily change in sports content on online websites throughout the course of one day (Kachgal, 2001).

The selection of headline articles is based on Groshek's 2008 study of CNN and CNN International's online news coverage, with this study focusing on the desktop browser version of the "front page" of ESPN.com and ESPNW.com and the top five stories taken from the "top headlines" section on each website. The "top headlines" section on each site is located directly under the masthead of each homepage and typically includes images and headlines with links to story continuations (Kachgal, 2001). The top headlines sections are the most newsworthy stories a consumer sees when he or she logs on to view the website. Articles in the top headlines section that require payment or membership to access (i.e. Insider articles on espn.com) are not included in this study, as ESPNW.com does not have an equivalent pay for access system on its website. Headlines that link to content that does not include a text article are not included in this study, as the length in words cannot be determined and adequately compared across different types of media such as videos, infographics, or polls. Headlines that link to stories originally from *ESPN the Magazine* are not counted, as these stories were not originally web content and this study focuses on Internet content only.

Online articles are measured quantitatively to determine the amount of coverage given to female athletes in comparison to male athletes. The source of each article (ESPN.com or ESPNW.com) is recorded so that the percentages across both sites can be compared. The day of

the week the article was collected is also recorded for each article. The first measure of the amount of coverage is the number of articles afforded to each gender. Crossman et al. (2007) placed articles into categories based on the gender of the athlete or athletes playing the sport covered so the following categories are used: female articles, male articles, other articles, or both (See Appendix A, section C). Articles are coded for whether the subject and focus of the article represent an individual or a team, and the type of sport being covered (See Appendix A, section D). This is modified from Tuggle and Owens' (1999) study of the 1996 Olympic Games, in which the coverage of individual or team sports at the Olympic Games was documented.

The final measure of the amount of coverage is the length of the articles for each gender. Kolbe and Muehling (1992) measured the length of the article as the number of words in the article because the formatting on the different websites may render the number of lines an inaccurate measure of length. The number of words is comparable across websites and stories regardless of formatting (See Appendix A, section F). In addition, the word count is recorded due to the impact that article length can have on the attitudes of the public because longer articles indicate more importance placed upon the subject by the media (Mastin, Choi, Barboza, & Post, 2007).

The first measure of the type of coverage is whether the article is task-relevant. Klein (1988) defines a task-relevant article as one that contains sport specific information (i.e. the competition itself, training, or results of the competition) while a non-task-relevant article contains a focus on non-sport specific information (i.e. personal or social lives, appearance, mental or emotional state). This study uses Cunningham et al.'s (2004) task relevance measure that categorizes articles based on their inclusion of information related to athletics, information not related to athletics, or both be it personal, factual, or both (See Appendix B, section A).

The second qualitative measure of the type of coverage is the presence or absence of ambivalent framing, which is determined by the presence or absence of the four ambivalent sub-frames: weakness, status, appearance, and gender-reference. Then the total number of sub-frames present in each article is tabulated, with scores ranging from 0 to 4 for each article to scale its degree of ambivalence (Kachgal, 2001; See appendix B, section B).

For the exploratory qualitative analysis of new frames featuring female athletes that may appear, articles coded as male, female, or both are measured to determine the type of coverage afforded to the subjects of the articles. The unit of analysis for the qualitative frames is the descriptor phrase. Adapted from Smith's 2014 study of framing in softball and baseball, 16 categories of descriptive phrases were used for coding possible new frames featuring or about female athletes in this study (See appendix B, section C, Articles coded as "other" will not be included in the qualitative analysis.)

V. Coding Procedures

In order to ensure results do not represent the subjective interpretation of the author, a second coder, a full-time graduate student, coded 10% of the sample. A pilot study where both the researcher and the independent coder code 10 randomly selected articles from ESPN.com and ESPNW.com was conducted in order to ensure a more reliable analysis, and any differences in coding were discussed as part of training (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). The assistant was also given definitions and examples of the coding categories as well as oral and written instructions (Neuendorf, 2002).

VI. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical summaries such as mean, standard deviation, frequency count, and simple percentages are used for all variables of interest that were coded for in the articles. Chi-

square tests are used to illustrate differences between the observed amounts of female and male athlete articles, ambivalent framing in female and male athlete articles, and percentage of task-relevant female and male articles and the expected amounts (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

VII. Results

A total of 573 articles were coded. It should be noted that 1 article in the sample with a female subject was on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com, and was not included in calculations due to complications it created in statistical tests. In the adjusted sample of 572, almost two-thirds of the articles were from ESPN.com (65%) and about one-third were from ESPNW.com (35%). ESPN.com updates its headline articles more frequently during the day so there were fewer repeat headline stories collected during the morning, afternoon, and night collection times (See Table 1). Overall, the total number of distinct articles about females was 31% (or 177 of 572 total articles) while most articles were about males at 62% (or 352 articles). There were only 31 articles (5%) where the subject was not male or female, and 12 articles (2%) about both males and females.

Table 1

Articles Collected by Day Part and Source

Time Period	ESPN.com	ESPNW.com
Morning	156	127
Afternoon	113	47
Night	102	27

Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

Averages of the quantitative variables were taken for each website in order paint a more accurate portrait of an average article that a visitor to either ESPN.com or ESPNW.com would encounter should they select one of the headline articles on those sites (See Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Table 2

Key Factors of Average Article on ESPN.com

Variable	Most Frequently Occurring Variable	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Articles Collected from ESPN
Month	November/December	78	21%
Day	Tuesday	62	17%
Time	Morning	156	42%
Gender of Subject	Male	344	93%
Individual or Team Sport	Individual Sport	301	81%
Type of Sport	Football	235	63%

Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

Table 3

Average Article Length on ESPN.com

Variable	Shortest Article in Words	Longest Article In Words	Average Length of Article
Length of Article	82	5,102	2,592

Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

Table 4

Key Factors of Average Article on ESPNW.com

Variable	Most Frequently Occurring Variable	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Articles Collected from ESPNW
Month	September	45	22%
Day	Tuesday	35	17%
Time	Morning	127	63%
Gender of Subject	Female	171	85%
Individual or Team Sport	Individual	136	67%
Type of Sport	Basketball	45	22%

Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

Table 5

Average Article Length on ESPNW.com

Variable	Shortest Article in Words	Longest Article in Words	Average Length of Article
Length of Article	116	4,244	2,180

Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that ESPN.com would have more articles on males than females. The hypothesis was supported because ESPN.com had more stories about males than females. There was a lower frequency of female articles on ESPN.com than ESPNW.com, X^2 (1, N = 572) = 424.94, p = .00, with only 6 articles about females coded from ESPN.com (3%). The vast majority of articles about female athletes were on ESPNW.com (97%).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that ESPNW.com would have more articles on females than ESPN.com. This hypothesis was supported, as ESPNW.com had more articles about females than males. There was a higher frequency of articles about male athletes on ESPN.com than on ESPNW.com, X^2(1, N = 572) = 433.77, p = .00 (See Table 6).

Table 6			
Articles Collected by Gender and Source			
Gender	ESPN.com	ESPNW.com	Total
Male	344	8	352
Female	6	171	177
Note. This table only accounts for 572 of the 573 articles coded. It does not account for the article that appeared on both ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.			

Hypothesis 3 predicted there would be fewer task-relevant articles about females on ESPN.com than on ESPNW.com. This hypothesis is supported, as there were a higher number of task-relevant articles on ESPNW.com than ESPN.com. Of the 6 articles with a female subject on ESPN.com 5 (83%) had task-relevant information. On ESPNW.com, 52 of the 171 articles with a female subject (30%) had task-relevant information. However, the data should be interpreted with caution, as there were only 6 total articles with female subjects collected from ESPN.com.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the frequency of task-relevant articles would be higher than the frequency of non-task-relevant articles on ESPNW.com. This hypothesis is not supported, as there was a higher percentage of non-task-relevant articles about females on ESPNW.com than task-relevant articles. Of the 201 articles from ESPNW.com, 140 contained non-task relevant information (70%) and 61 contained task-relevant information (30%). Further statistical tests could not be run on the data, as several cells had fewer than five occurrences.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the total number of ambivalently framed articles about females would be higher than articles about males. Hypothesis 5 is supported, as the total

number of ambivalently framed articles was higher for females than males. For females there was a total of 106 articles that scored a one or higher on the ambivalence scale (See Table 7), compared to just 40 for male athletes, and the differences were significant, $X^2(4, N = 542) = 131.76, p = .00$.

However, the number of articles about female athletes that scored as highly ambivalent or should be interpreted with caution, as there were only 6 instances. Articles scored as heavily ambivalent should also be interpreted with caution, as there was only 1 instance. Some ambivalence, or a score of 1, was the most frequently received score among articles with a female subject, with 72 total occurrences. Of the four sub-frames, the status sub-frame was the most frequently seen in articles with a female subject. The status sub-frame appeared in 30% of articles (or 53), $X^2(1, N = 542) = 49.4, p = .00$.

The status sub-frame positions the subject of the article by her familial or personal relationships. An example of this can be found in the article "Which Player Should Win the WNBA Regular-Season MVP Award." When discussing the arguments for why WNBA player Brittney Griner should be MVP, her "tumultuous" personal life and her "suspension for a domestic violence incident involving then-fiancée Glory Johnson" are mentioned. Another article, which discussed why Juli Inkster was the right choice to captain the U.S. golf team to the Solheim Cup, suggested that Inkster's sense of humor was key to leading the team by saying "you don't survive three decades on a tour, a significant chunk of that span while raising two daughters, without a sense of humor." The article went on to mention that Inkster is "juggling a family and a job gracefully." This was also seen in an article entitled "Beating Big Sister Bittersweet for Serena," which opened with "as she folded her younger sister into her arms

Tuesday night, Venus Williams smiled big, consoling Serena in a moment she knew was somehow tougher for the winner."

Table 7		
Ambivalence of Articles with Female Subject		
Ambivalence Score	Occurrences	Percentage of Articles with Female Subject That Showed Ambivalence
No Ambivalence	72	41%
Some Ambivalence	72	41%
Moderate Ambivalence	27	15%
High Ambivalence	6	3%
Heavy Ambivalence	1	.5%

Only 40 of 352 or 11% of articles about male athletes were ambivalently framed (See Table 8). These numbers should be interpreted with caution, as there were no instances of high or heavy ambivalence, and just two instances of moderate ambivalence. There were 38 male articles with some ambivalence. The most frequent ambivalent frame for males was also status (6%), $X^2(1, N = 542) = 59.72$, p = .00. It should be noted that no male articles were coded for the ambivalence frame of gender-reference, and only three male articles were coded for the ambivalence frame of appearance.

Table 8

Ambivalence of Articles with Male Subject

Ambivalence Score	Occurrences	Percentage of Articles with Male Subject
No Ambivalence	312	89%
Some Ambivalence	38	11%
Moderate Ambivalence	2	.6%
High Ambivalence	0	0%
Heavy Ambivalence	0	0%

Finally, several prevalent themes emerged from the textual analysis of online coverage. For female articles, the most frequently occurring theme was the talent, which occurred in over half of the articles (64%). Other themes of significance were experience, dominance, emotion, background, and other (See Table 9).

Table 9

Occurrences of Prevalent Themes in Articles About Females

Frame	Occurrences	Percentage of Articles with Female Subject
Talent	114	64%
Experience	72	40%
Dominance	45	25%
Emotion	48	27%
Background	51	29%
Other	78	44%

For male articles, the themes of significance were similar: talent, experience, emotion, and other. However, these themes were significant because they occurred less than expected. The talent frame, which occurred in 115 female articles, only appeared 81 times (23%) in male articles, $X^2(1, N = 542) = 87.31$, $p = .00$. It can be inferred from this that articles about male athletes focus more on the facts of the performance of the athlete, the statistics or results of the game (See Table 10).

Table 10

Occurrences of Prevalent Themes in Articles About Males

Frame	Occurrences	Percentage of Articles with Male Subject
Talent	81	23%
Experience	59	17%
Emotion	47	13%
Other	93	26%

Based upon the constant comparative technique for qualitative data analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014), an exploratory analysis of these categories of themes that were prevalent in articles about female athletes were further examined to discover if any prominent theoretical frames appeared to recur in the articles. Another potential ambivalent sub-frame emerged from the analysis, the diversion frame.

The diversion frame attempts to divert the attention of the reader away from the athletic achievements or skill of the subject by pivoting the focus of the article to the background or backstory of the athlete. The diversion frame attempts to make female athletes more relatable to those who aren't high-level athletes by showing that they are just like the rest of us. For example, one method of expressing this frame attributes the success or talent of the player to traits the player gained from tragedy or her background This frame suggests that it is not enough for female athletes to be talented or extremely successful at the sport they play, there must be more to their story than just being good at sports.

This not only minimizes their sporting achievements but suggests that females must do more, overcome more, or be more relatable in order to be deemed newsworthy by the sports media. This frame appeared in 20 of the 114 articles coded for the theme of talent. Some representative examples of the diversion frame from ESPNW.com articles are shown below.

(August 10th) Article on the success of rookie pitcher Allyson Fournier mentions: "So like a great many fans in stadiums across the league this summer, Fournier approached [Lauren] Chamberlain after the game and asked for a picture. She posted the resulting image of them together, with all the necessary exclamation marks and emojis…"

(August 25th) Article on the Florida Gators' star volleyball players Alex Holston and Rhamat Alhassan mentions: "She [Holston] and Alhassan…are mature beyond their years. Both lost parents young."

(August 28th) Article on All-Star football player of the Independent Women's Football League, Sharon Vasquez mentions: "Every morning during football season she packs practice gear for herself alongside the lunches and gear for her kids…"

(August 31st) Interview with national yoga champion Andrea Nikki Ortiz asked: "How do you manage to train for such an exacting competition and work a full-time day job as an interior designer?"

(September 11th) Article on professional soccer player Erika Tymrak mentions: "Another backpacking trip awaits when the playoffs conclude…her boyfriend again her travel partner."

(September 18th) Article on professional basketball player Brittney Griner's playoff game performance mentions: "If Griner can write herself another happy ending to this season, it will be an impressive comeback considering its rocky start…Griner has found herself making regular appearances in the tabloids…covering her contentious divorce proceedings."

VIII. Discussion

As the majority of articles on ESPNW.com were about females (85%), this suggests that ESPNW.com provides an outlet for women's sports to be covered. While it is supported that women's sports are being given coverage online through ESPNW.com, there is uncertainty in how many people are actually seeing that coverage. Fewer users visit the ESPNW.com site, meaning it can be inferred that fewer users read stories about female athletes as there were only six articles about females on the ESPN.com site.

The results also suggest that the coverage of females on ESPNW.com is typically less in-depth than the coverage of male athletes on ESPN.com. The average story length on ESPN.com was 2,592 words, with the longest story being 5,102 words. In contrast, the average story length on ESPNW.com was 2,180, with the longest story at 4,244 words. It appears that female athletes receive less in-depth coverage, perhaps suggesting to readers that female sporting accomplishments are not as important as those of male athletes.

In this case, ethical questions are raised. Does devoting a website solely to cover women's sports do more harm than good? Potentially, this further ambivalently frames female athletes, as it seems that they are not worthy of being covered on the main ESPN.com site and must be shunted to the side for their own, less in-depth, coverage. Furthermore, the coverage the women's athletes actually are receiving doesn't always focus purely on their athletic feats or abilities, suggesting that much of the coverage of female athletes is unrelated to sports.

While the gender-reference, weakness, and appearance frames appeared less often than the status frame, the occurrences of these frames are worth discussing. The gender-reference frame appeared 51 times. This frame relies on explicit identification of the athlete as a female, or referring to their sport as women's tennis as opposed to just tennis. One example of this is in the

article "Who Are the WNBA Front-Runners in Breanna Stewart Sweepstakes," in which it is mentioned that the expectations for Stewart's future in professional basketball is "a lot of pressure to put on a 21-year-old woman in her first professional gig." Dealing with high expectations coming into your first season of professional basketball would be inferred to be pressure-filled, regardless of your gender.

The physical, emotional, or mental weakness of a female subject of an article was covered in 26 articles. One article, "Yani Tseng Showing Best Signs Yet of Emerging from Deep Slump," employed this frame, stating that golfer Yani Tseng's number one ranking "became a yoke of pressure" and that after missing nine tournament cuts she has "suffered largely in silence" while trying to "resurrect her game" with the help of a sports psychologist. Another article, which focused on Serena Williams' low motivation after her US Open loss, commented that "Williams was understandably upset and brief with her comments following the Vinci loss." And while the golfer Lydia Ko was praised for how she "thrived under pressure" to win the Evian Championship, it was noted that her opponent Mi Hyang Lee "crumbled."

While there were fewer occurrences of the appearance frame (18 occurrences), consistent with past research suggesting the use of this frame is declining (Kian et al., 2009; Kinnick, 1998), the occurrences were still notable. One article, "Female Drivers Changed the Fortunes of One Racing Company," described driver Milka Duno as one "who was known more for her Sofia Vergara looks than her skills behind the wheel." Another article, about the Rangerettes dance team that performs annually at the Cotton Bowl, fully described the appearance of the dancers. At one point the article says, "put simply, being pretty is important." This was after the article described the strength and athleticism of the dancers.

With the examples that coverage of females on ESPNW.com is not always handled the same way ESPN.com handles its coverage of men's sports, should the increased coverage for women's sports be considered a step forward? In an ethical sense, articles that cover female athletes in a stereotypical way can be seen as doing harm. When female athletes are not covered in the same manner as male athletes, it is not equality, even if they are receiving the same amount of coverage from their respective sites, ESPNW.com and ESPN.com.

There were several limitations to this study. It should be noted that there was one error in data collection. The data for Tuesday in the composite week for the month of November came from a Tuesday in the month of December. In future research, this mistake should not be repeated and all composite week data for each month should come from that individual month. Furthermore, results of this study could be different if the collection of articles was done outside of the Fall (August to December) of 2015. This time period was used to examine the "regular, everyday" sports reporting (Caple, 2013, p. 274) of major news outlets that was not examined as frequently in past research. However, in future research, sampling should include the spring and summer during years with no major international tournament or competition to include several "regular, everyday" periods during the year. Or researchers could sample both periods of regular coverage and coverage of major tournaments and competitions.

For future research, more than the headline articles could be investigated. The placement and number of female articles on the ESPN.com homepage was not a focus of this study; however, further research should provide more accurate statistics on ESPN.com's coverage of women's sports. Furthermore, how frequently ESPN.com updates its headline articles to reflect breaking news or event results throughout the day compared to ESPNW.com could be studied. Future research should examine whether the creation of a separate site for women's sports has

led to a decline in the amount of coverage women receive on the much more frequently visited ESPN.com since ESPNW.com's introduction in 2009. Additionally, an investigation of whether a positive correlation exists between the amount of coverage granted to a particular sports league and ESPN's ownership of the television rights to that league may explain why certain leagues appear to receive more coverage than others on ESPN platforms.

Future exploratory frame analysis in online articles about female athletes is suggested to see if more additional frames exist on other online sports news networks. In conjunction with this, the gender of both the writer and/or the editor of the story could be studied. This may explain differences in the ambivalent coverage of female athletes. Also, as more people use news applications on their phones or tablets instead of an online browser, research into the differences in coverage and frames used to present female and male athletes on the ESPN app (ESPNW has no such application) is needed. A study comparing the differences in sports reporting online and in phone applications should also be conducted.

A. Ethical Issues

The results of this study raise ethical concerns about the coverage afforded to female athletes. The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics (2014) clearly states that journalists have an ethical obligation to minimize harm. The code explains that "ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues, and members of the public as humans deserving of respect," (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014, Minimize Harm section, para. 1). Certainly, sports journalists are professional journalists and should be bound by this code as is any other journalist.

However, when considering the non-task relevant or ambivalent coverage that is provided to female athletes historically and in this study, it appears that sports journalists are not

minimizing harm in their articles. Seeing the ambivalent and negative representations of female athletes potentially hurts women, girls, and in larger part, society. In addition, as articles about female athletes tend to be shorter, non-task relevant information may comprise a greater proportion of an article, exacerbating this ethical issue.

For example, in a previously mentioned article about Brittney Griner's playoff game performance, instead of focusing solely on the excellent performance by Griner, the article shifted to her off the court contentious divorce proceedings. Certainly one could read this article and see Griner in a positive light. The idea that she is fighting through off the court adversity and still finding a way to play excellent basketball and win games is a common narrative. However, the other interpretation of this article includes the vilification of Griner. An interpretation of the frame of this story is that Griner isn't doing what she needs to do as a wife and clearly is focusing too much on sports instead of her marriage, which is why she has to get a divorce. While not all would have this interpretation of Griner, opening the door for that possibility is dangerous and unethical. The reality is that if someone interprets the story in this way, it is harmful.

Furthermore, the finding that ESPN.com rarely provides coverage of female athletes, and provides no link to the ESPNW.com site, may cause harm to members of the public. In addition, articles about females tend to be shorter than articles about males. Should a young woman log onto ESPN.com and see no representation of female athletes, a negative message is communicated to that viewer. Are women's sports too boring or not good enough to be featured on the home page of the leading sports outlet in the United States? Should women leave athletics to the men? Then, if she logs onto ESPNW.com and sees that the articles are shorter and tend to feature non-task-relevant, ambivalent information, this reinforces the perception that women's

sports are not important. This lack of representation may be quite damaging for and discouraging to young girls that want to become athletes when they grow up. The lack of coverage, type of coverage, and less in-depth coverage sends the negative, unethical message that perhaps sports are not for women.

IX. Conclusion

The creation of ESPNW.com as an online space devoted to coverage of women's sports is an achievement in itself, as there are no other major sports networks (i.e. NBC Sports Network, CBS Sports, or Fox Sports) that have a separate and independent site specifically for coverage of women's sports. However, articles on women's sports are still not represented on ESPN.com. Furthermore, ESPN.com does not bring any attention to the existence of ESPNW.com as a site, doing nothing to drive traffic to the site that carries the vast majority of articles on women's sports. In essence, this continues to leave a significant hole in the coverage that women's sports receive.

Headline articles on ESPN.com focused more on the pure results and statistics of sports, or the latest news from the sports world. As for ESPNW.com, aside from reporting the results and performances of sports, athletes were often discussed in terms of their backgrounds or through feature stories. ESPNW.com headline articles also included articles about what athletes were doing on social media, a Christmas sports gift guide for readers, and analysis of a Netflix television series. These types of articles were nowhere to be seen on its male centric counterpart ESPN.com.

Female athletes still do not receive the same type of coverage as male athletes, even in a female centric sports outlet. A significant portion of the coverage of women's sports on ESPNW.com was not specifically related to sporting achievement or skill; female athletes are

still framed ambivalently in articles, and the coverage they receive is less in-depth than that provided to male athletes. Why does this continue to occur? One potential explanation is the notion that the media knows what the public wants to read. Past research suggests that the framing of stories is constructed to reinforce what the public or audience believes and wants to hear or see (Entman, 1993; Vincent & Crossman, 2012). The idea behind this practice by the media is that it will maintain and/or expand their number of consumers. Applied in the case of ESPNW.com, more people will visit the site and read its articles if the stories reflect what the consumers what already believe. In this case, the issue is the widely held societal belief that women's sports are less athletic and boring in comparison to men's sports.

However, this societal belief may be changing. Women's sports have grown over the past decade, and the argument that people care about women's sports can be made. For instance, the women's World Cup final set the record as the most watched soccer game in United States history (Sandomir, 2015). Furthermore, there are currently four active professional women's sports leagues in the United States, showing sports media certainly isn't lacking female athletes and teams to devote coverage too, and women's sports certainly aren't lacking fans.

While EPSNW.com is a positive step forward for the amount of coverage women's sports receive, efforts should be made to make its coverage more similar to how ESPN.com covers male athletes and sports. Ethical concerns should also be addressed, in that sports journalists are clearly obligated to provide more in-depth, positive coverage of female athletes that does not paint them ambivalently or as lesser to male athletes through ambivalent sub-frames. ESPN.com should provide a clear, prominent link to ESPNW.com or feature coverage of female athletes on its site. As Internet coverage of female athletes continues to grow into a more definable Internet space, articles should focus on the athletic achievements and talents of female athletes.

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Appendix A

Quantitative Article Coding Guide

A. Source of article: whether the article came from ESPN.com or ESPNW.com

    1. *ESPN.com:* Articles collected from ESPN.com are coded as 1

    2. *ESPNW.com:* Articles collected from ESPNW.com are coded as 2

    3. *Both:* Articles that ran on both sites are coded as 3

B. Day of the week: The day of the week the article was collected

    1. *Monday:* Articles collected on Mondays are coded as 1

    2. *Tuesday:* Articles collected on Tuesdays are coded as 2

    3. *Wednesday:* Articles collected on Wednesdays are coded as 3

    4. *Thursday:* Articles collected on Thursdays are coded as 4

    5. *Friday:* Articles collected on Fridays are coded as 5

    6. *Saturday:* Articles collected on Saturdays are coded as 6

    7. *Sunday:* Articles collected on Sundays are coded as 7

C. Month: The month the article was collected

    1. *August:* Articles collected in August are coded as 1

    2. *September:* Articles collected in September are coded as 2

    3. *October:* Articles collected in October are coded as 3

    4. *November:* Articles coded in November are coded as 4

    5. *December:* Articles coded in December are coded as 5

D. Time collected: The daypart in which the article was collected, in military time

    1. *Morning:* Articles collected during the timeframe of 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM are coded as 1000

2. *Afternoon:* Articles collected during the timeframe of 2:01 PM to 6:00 PM are coded as 1400

3. *Night:* Articles collected during the timeframe of 6:01 PM to 12:00 AM are coded as 1800

E. Gender of article (Crossman et al., 2007)

1. *Female*: articles in which the focus or subject(s) is women, athlete or non athlete, women's sports or sport leagues

   i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

2. *Male*: articles in which the focus or subject(s) is men, athlete or non athlete, men's sports or sport leagues

   i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

3. *Other*: articles that are about ideas or opinions, equipment used for sport, fantasy games surrounding sport, and do not focus on a subject that is a person, team, or league

   i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

   ii. If coded as other, do not proceed with any qualitative coding for that article

4. *Both*: articles that mention both men and women, athletes or non athletes, men and women's sports or sport leagues

   i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

F. Individual or Team Sport (Tuggle & Owens, 1999)

1. *Individual(s)*: The subject and/or focus of the article is one to three individual athletes, regardless of if they compete in an individual or team sport

i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

2. *Team*: The subject and/or focus of the article is a team, league, or university as a whole, or multiple teams, leagues, and universities

    i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

3. *Type of Sport*: The type of sport that the subject plays, or is being discussed in the article

    i. *Football*: Articles about football are coded as 1

    ii. *Soccer*: Articles about soccer are coded as 2

    iii. *Baseball*: Articles about baseball are coded as 3

    iv. *Softball*: Articles about softball are coded as 4

    v. *Basketball*: Articles about basketball are coded as 5

    vi. *Hockey*: Articles about hockey are coded as 6

    vii. *Volleyball:* Articles about volleyball are coded as 7

    viii. *Tennis:* Articles about tennis are coded as 8

    ix. *Boxing, Fighting, or Wrestling:* Articles about boxing, fighting, or wrestling are coded as 9

    x. *Track & Field or Running:* Articles about track and field or running are coded as 10

    xi. *Racing:* Articles about motor vehicle racing are coded as 11

    xii. *Golf:* Articles about golf are coded as 12

    xiii. *Yoga:* Articles about yoga are coded as 13

    xiv. *Olympic Sports Not Track & Field:* Articles about Olympic sports that are not track and field are coded as 14

xv. *Dance or Cheerleading:* Articles about dance or cheerleading are coded as 15

xvi. *Extreme Sports:* Articles about extreme sports are coded as 16

xvii. *Gymnastics:* Articles about gymnastics are coded as 17

xviii. *Field Hockey:* Articles about field hockey are coded as 18

xix. *Multiple Sports:* Articles about multiple sports are coded as 19

G. Length of article (Kolbe & Muehling, 1992): the length of article will be determined by counting the total number of words in the article

Appendix B

Qualitative Article Coding Guide – Exploratory Frame/Theme Analysis

A. Task relevance (Cunningham et al., 2004)

    1. *Information related to athletics*:

        i. Factual information related to athletics: Article focuses on information strictly relating to the events of a sport or the statistics of the subject throughout the sporting season, such as height and weight, contract details, league rules

            1. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

        ii. Personal information related to athletics: Article focus is the subject's past and/or present achievements or failures in the sport, training methods, their opinions about their sport or other sports, or any personal insights related to their sport or other athletes, such as league suspensions or rule violations, on field behaviors, and injuries

            1. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

    2. *Information not related to athletics:*

        i. Factual information not related to athletics: Article includes information that is measurable but unrelated to the subject's participation in athletics, i.e. academic standing, age, birthplace, or physical characteristics that are not athletic in nature, such as physical description that goes beyond basic height and weight numbers

            1. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

      ii. Personal information not related to athletics: Article focuses on

information about the subject's relationships, life outside sports, interest in

activities that aren't sports, such as lawsuits or other legal issues, off the

field fights or feuds, and illnesses

        1. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

  3. *Both:* articles that contain both information about the subject that is related to

athletics as well as information not related to athletics

      i. If present coded as 1, if absent coded as 0

B. Ambivalent Framing (Kachgal, 2001)

The presence of ambivalent framing is coded using Kachgal's (2001) measure of the

presence or absence of the four sub-frames discussed in the literature review: weakness,

status, appearance, and gender reference. If a sub-frame is present in the article it is

marked yes it is coded as 1 and is coded as 0 if absent.

  1. Scoring Questions

    a. Question 1 (weakness sub-frame): Does the article imply the subject

struggled based on physical, emotional, or mental weakness, not due to

injury or illness?

    b. Question 2 (status sub-frame): Does the article refer to the subject's

familial, romantic, or other personal relationships?

    c. Question 3 (appearance sub-frame): Does the article refer to the physical

appearance or looks of the subject beyond their basic height and weight

numbers?

d. Question 4 (gender marking sub-frame): Does the article refer to the gender of the sport (i.e. women's basketball instead of basketball) the subject plays, or the gender of the subject itself?

    i. If both the men's and women's gender is mentioned code as 0

2. Ambivalence Scores

    i. *No ambivalence:* articles that receive a score of zero based upon the score tabulated from binomial questions about sub-frames

    ii. *Some ambivalence:* articles that receive a score of one based upon the score tabulated from binomial questions about sub-frames

    iii. *Moderate ambivalence:* articles that receive a score of two based upon the score tabulated from binomial questions about sub-frames

    iv. *High ambivalence:* articles that receive a score of three based upon the score tabulated from binomial questions about sub-frames

    v. *Heavy Ambivalence:* articles that receive a score of four based upon the score tabulated from binomial questions about sub-frames

C. Qualitative Content Analysis – Possible Frames/Themes in Coverage

As the stories are analyzed, I'll look for recurring themes or frames of coverage. The goal is to identify whether there are differences in how female athletes are covered in the stories across both websites. Smith (2014) and Billings and Eastman's (2002) categories are used for possible analysis, but the articles are evaluated for other themes or content categories as well. The goal is to explore whether new frames or variables may be found that could be used in future research. If present the frame is coded as 1, if absent it is coded as 0.

1. *Concentration*: focus, lack of focus, distractions

2. *Strength-based athletic skill*: power, strength, muscle

3. *Talent- or ability-based athletic skill*: skill, talent, ability

4. *Composure*: fortitude, poise, calmness

5. *Commitment*: hard-work, effort

6. *Courage*: guts, won't back down

7. *Experience*: veteran, rookie

8. *Dominance*: easy victory, blowout, another level

9. *Intelligence*: knowledge, smart, understanding

10. *Outgoing or extroverted*: personality, talkative, fun

11. *Modest or introverted*: shy, quiet, withdrawn

12. *Emotional*: sad, frustrated, happy

13. *Attractiveness or appearance*: beautiful, handsome, pretty

14. *Size or parts of body*: small, big

15. *Background*: how they grew up, how they got into sport

16. *Other*: anything that does not fit into the previous categories