

Fall 12-15-2011

Feminine Framing: Framing Theory and the Media's Portrayal of Female Athletes

Kamber Seay
Coastal Carolina University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Seay, Kamber, "Feminine Framing: Framing Theory and the Media's Portrayal of Female Athletes" (2011). *Honors Theses*. 113.
<https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/honors-theses/113>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College and Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.

Feminine Framing: Framing Theory and the Media's Portrayal of
Female Athletes

2011

By

Kamber Seay

Communication

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Communication

In the Honors Program at
Coastal Carolina University

December 2011

Abstract

The biased portrayal of female athletes by the media has been studied and discussed extensively. The Framing Theory hypothesis is used here to identify a correlation between the way female athletes are portrayed by the media and the way consumer's frame their opinions based on these portrayals. A brief public opinion survey was given to a random sample of the student population at Coastal Carolina University. Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 51 (77%) stated that they believe there should be more media focused on female athletes. Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 55 (83%) stated that they believe the media portrays male athletes differently than female athletes. Results suggest that consumers are aware that the media is biased in their portrayal of female athletes. Results also suggest that male athletes are better known than female athletes and are described differently by participants. The results of this study provide interesting correlations between the way female athletes are portrayed by the media and the way consumers perceive them. The results of this study may be beneficial to media consumers, athletes, product promoters and the media alike.

Feminine Framing: Framing Theory and the Media's Portrayal of Female Athletes

Based on research dealing with the media's portrayal of female athletes, it is possible and even likely that female athletes are portrayed in a different manner than male athletes, in a number of ways. This study seeks to find out what possible effects this difference in portrayals may have on media consumers. The study will use the framing theory, which suggests that the way people feel about news stories is based on the media's depiction of the events (Scheufele, 1999). This study suggests that the way people feel about female athletes and about coverage of female athletes is influenced by the way athletes are portrayed by the media. Framing theory thus may help to explain if there is a correlation between media consumption and perception of female athletes.

The research that follows suggests that female athletes are portrayed in the media less frequently than male athletes are. When female athletes are portrayed, they are generally shown participating in gender appropriate sports, shown in passive poses and are more sexualized than male athletes. This research will determine what effects these factors may have on the people who consume different types of media relating to male and female athletes. This research is important because, if viewers are negatively affected by the media's portrayal of female athletes, such results will illustrate that a change in coverage is needed. The following research proves that there is a difference in the media's coverage of male and female athletes but most of it does not explain what this means to consumers.

Review of Literature

Previous research that will be discussed in this section has focused on the mass media's portrayal of female athletes in the areas of television, magazines, newspapers, and as product endorsers. There are several common phrases used in many of the articles to describe media coverage of female athletes, such as *underrepresented*, *gender appropriate sports*, *passive poses*, *sexualization*, and *traditional gender roles*. *Underrepresented* refers to the lack of coverage of female athletes in

comparison to male athletes. The term *Gender appropriate sports* refers to sports that fulfill gender roles. For example, female athletes are portrayed as participating in gender appropriate sports when playing tennis, golf, or figure skating. *Passive Poses* are poses in which the athlete is standing in a non-active position, not actually playing a sport. *Sexualization* refers to athletes being depicted based on sexuality rather than on skill or talent.

Title IX is an important milestone in relation to this topic. Title IX was passed in 1972 and sought to put an end to discrimination in schools based on gender. Title IX states, "No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid." Much of the following research examines advancements in relation to Title IX. The legislation promoted equality among participation in sports but many researchers such as Grau, Roselli and Taylor (2007) hypothesize that this as far as it went. Title IX did not include equality in coverage by the media.

The following shows that while female participation in sports has increased since the passage of Title IX, in 1972, media attention continues to be scarce and biased concerning female athletes. Some research has examined effects that such coverage can have on media consumers. However, this area is lacking which creates a need for a study on the way it affects consumers. Much previous research has examined specific magazines, events, people, and television broadcasts. The research can be divided into three main themes based on type of coverage.

Television

Previous research dealing with the way female athletes are portrayed through television acknowledges that there seems to be some sort of bias. However, different articles vary on whether or not they believe coverage in general has increased. Angelini (2008) discuss how women are underrepresented in televised sports because they are perceived as non-athletic or lacking competitive spirit. Angelini studied how male and female athletes are portrayed differently by commentators, and

mainly what effects this had on audiences. The research question dealt with whether similar levels of physiological arousal would be measured while viewing sports featuring the opposite gender. The findings showed that physiological arousal decreased for both sexes while viewing female sports. This source is important because it somewhat explains why mass media feel the need to depict female athletes based on sexuality rather than talent. If neither gender is as physically aroused by viewing female sports, this may explain the perceived lack of necessity for media coverage of female sports. Media representatives can simply say that female sports do not provide as much entertainment.

Shugart (2003) examined media coverage of the 1999 US Women's soccer team and found that female athletes were gendered by the media using sexualizing strategies. The author stated that when female athletes are covered by the media, it is generally when they are playing "sex appropriate" sports that emphasize curves and sex appeal, thus demonstrating that female athletes have been portrayed based on sexuality rather than performance.

Angelini, Billings and Eastman (2008) discussed biased television commentary associated with golfer Michelle Wie in regards to her gender, age, and ethnicity. This article's main research question asked: "Were differences in explaining Wie's achievements attributable to the gender of the announcer?" The findings showed that female golfers were spoken about differently than male golfers and that Wie was treated like other female golfers in areas such as word choice and coverage.

Daddario (1994) uses the 1992 Olympics as an example of how rhetoric and portrayal of female athletes can reinforce a masculine sports hegemony. The author's research question was, what strategies do the mass media use in fashioning a masculine sports hegemony? The article focused on the area of language and visual footage in marginalizing female athletes. Daddario stated that female athletes were "blamed for their failings" and male athletes were treated as more of "movie stars" or were "idolized."

Carty (2005) stated that many recent "textual portrayals" of female athletes have questioned the

gains in participation in traditionally “non-feminine” sports. Textual portrayals refer to the messages in advertisements that Cary refers to as “ambiguous” and “contradictory.” The main research question of this study focused on whether coverage of female athletes emphasized sexuality rather than talent or skill. Most of the examples discussed and analyzed in the study deal with television commercials during important events. Cary states that the main problem with coverage of female athletes is a focus on sexualization rather than on skill or talent.

The articles all claim that female athletes are more highly sexualized by the media than male athletes. Further, there are certain sports that are seen as “more traditionally feminine” and are covered more often by the media. The articles also offer gender roles as a possible reason for why coverage of female athletes differs from that of male athletes. Several studies (Angelini, Billings & Eastman, 2008; Angelini, 2008) examined the impact on viewers and found that sexualization of female athletes had a negative impact on viewers (2008). The study by Angelini, Billings and Estman concludes: “Communication theorists have argued that the impact on viewers of repeated bias in announcing can be immense” (2008, p 64).

Magazines

The next theme deals with media coverage of female athletes in magazines and as product endorsers. Fink and Kensicki (2002) looked at *Sports Illustrated* to determine if there have been any changes in the coverage of women in the magazine. The authors also examined *Sports Illustrated for Women* to determine if it depicted women based on “femininity” rather than talent. They asked whether women were portrayed in a more passive manner than men in *Sports Illustrated*. This article examines how when female athletes are portrayed in media that is aimed towards females, the media does a much better job in portraying female athletes based on their talent rather than sexuality but this has still not crossed over into male-aimed media.

Grau, Roselli and Taylor (2007) argued that while women’s participation in sports has

increased as a whole since title IX, the use of female athletes to endorse products is at a minimum. The main research question dealt with whether female athlete endorsers are often suggestively clad. This study supported the argument that, in most magazines, female athletes do not get portrayed for their talent. 17 out of the 21 advertisements containing female athletes were considered suggestive, therefore supporting the author's hypothesis that female athletes have a greater likelihood of being suggestively or partially clad.

Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, and Hardin (2002) studied *Sports Illustrated for Kids* to examine whether there were changes in the type of coverage of female sports after the 1996 Olympics, which promised sweeping changes. The study asked "Is the increased stature and media attention on women's sports, gained during the 1996 Olympics, reflected in the photos used in SIK? And has there been any change in the degree to which sexual difference is conveyed in the magazine's photographs?" Men were found to outnumber women greatly in SIK with 76.3% of overall coverage. Men were also depicted in more team sports, more active poses, and more leadership roles than women. This study is important because it looks at the fact that there is an inequality in the way that females are covered by the media in relation to the most impressionable age group..

Kane (1988) examined if title IX had an impact on the way the media covers female athletes based on a study of *Sports Illustrated* in the periods before, during and after Title IX. The study questioned whether the extent and type of coverage of female athletes changed after the passage of Title IX. There was a significant increase in the number of female athletes portrayed after the passage of Title IX, but only in articles dealing with "sex appropriate" sports such as tennis and golf.

Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) examined NCAA Media Guides cover photographs to study how gender was portrayed differently regarding male versus female athletes. The article asked: are athletes portrayed on or off the court? Are they pictured in or out of uniform? Are they portrayed in an active or passive pose and What is the theme of the cover photograph? It was found that most female

athletes depicted on collegiate media guides were off the court and in passive poses.

Daniels (2009) examined whether “sexualized” photos of athletes in the media impacted body image of females who viewed the images. The study asked: do performance images of women athletes in action prompt less self-objectification in female viewers? Do sexualized images of women athletes trigger self-objectification in female viewers? How do reactions to sexualized athletes compare to those from general sexualized images of models? The females who viewed images of sexualized female athletes also described their own bodies in a more negative way. This finding is important because rather than just figuring out how male and female athletes are portrayed differently, it states the effects that this may have on viewers, whether negative or positive. This relates very closely to the research questions of the current study. More so than other findings, this study questions the effects this may have on viewers.

Cunningham, Fink, and Kenix (2008) discussed whether expertise and attractiveness of female athletes had an effect on perceived appropriateness of the endorser. This study proposed that athlete attractiveness and expertise influence perceptions of the athlete as an appropriate endorser for an event. The study found that female athletes of higher attractiveness and greater expertise will cause a better outcome for the event. However, the study also shows that a female athlete lacking in the area of expertise can be just as effective if she is attractive. These findings are important because they examine that the possible reason for the media's over sexualized portrayal of female athletes is because it is what the public will buy.

Much of the research dealing with portrayal of female athletes through magazines has overlapping findings. There are, however, some very original articles that seem to look at research from other perspectives. For example, the article by Daniels (2009) differs from the others in that it takes the approach that if sexualized pictures of female athletes can have a negative impact on viewers, more positive pictures would do just the opposite. This calls for a change in the way female athletes are

depicted because of the positive influence it could have on media consumers.

Many of these articles use different versions of Sports Illustrated in relation to various "milestone" events to determine the amount and type of coverage of female athletes (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin & Lynn & Walsdorf & Hardin, 2002; Kane, 1988). Research found that male athletes were pictured more often and in more active poses than female athletes. Much of this research uses milestones to mark changes in media coverage of female athletes. The 1996 Olympics and the passage of Title IX are just few examples of some events that should have marked major change.

Much research dealing with portrayal of female athletes through magazines had overlapping findings. These articles deal with whether attractiveness or sexuality of female athletes causes them to be used for product endorsements (Grau & Roselli & Taylor, 2007; Cunningham & Fink & Kenix, 2008). The outcomes in every case that studied media sexualization of female athletes were very similar.

Newspapers

The final theme deals with portrayal of female athletes in the form of newspapers. Hardin (2010) stated that while women's participation in professional sports continues to grow, the coverage of it continues to shrink. The study asked: why do women's sports lag behind men's so much when it comes to fan interest? And despite this gender chasm, does the news media have an obligation to cover them? Research found that there should be a women's sports beat simply because it is the right thing to do. This implied a sort of belief that there is not a great demand from the public for female sports.

Harridon and Secarea (2010) examine if the over-sexualization of female athletes influences perceptions of their abilities and gender roles. College students read a fake newspaper that described female athletes in either a sexualized or non-sexualized manner in order to see how this influenced perceptions of athletic ability. The study asked whether the "tawdry" depictions of the athlete influenced gender stereotyping, perceptions of sexuality, and general attitudes towards the athletes. The

study found that when female athletes were depicted in a more sexualized manner, they were perceived as more feminine and heterosexual.

Giuliano and Knight (2003) discussed how in order to make up for “the image problem” of female athletes the media will emphasize female athlete’s relationships with men. The authors stated that the media dismisses the ideas of homosexuality by emphasizing coverage of female athletes and their relationships with men and sometimes their families. Participants read a fictional newspaper article in order to determine if athletes were more favored when portrayed as clearly heterosexual.

Some of these studies were similar in that they used “fake” newspaper articles to gather research on the way viewers perceive gender roles dealing with female athletes (Harrison & Secarea, 2010; Giuliano & Knight, 2003). Giuliano and Knight (2003) claim that the media emphasize female athlete’s relationships with males in order to diminish the homosexual stereotypes. In contrast, Harrison, and Secarea (2010) claim that the media uses sexualization of female athletes to break the same stereotype. Hardin (2010) seems to stand alone from most research by taking the stand that the media may be justified in its lack of coverage of female athletes. Research explained a sort of circular process in which consumers read the beats dealing with female athletes less so editors produce less, causing consumers to read even less. Hardin examined whether the media actually has an obligation to cover female sports if it is not in the interest of the consumers. This was the first research to acknowledge the lack of coverage of female athletes and attribute it to a possible consumer problem.

Framing Theory

The framing theory argues that the media controls people's perceptions of different news stories and events. “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” (p. 104). This study seeks to find correlation between the media and consumer’s perception of female athletes. The framing theory supports the research questions because they ask whether people's mindsets are changed by the media. Scheufele states that the framing theory must be

measured along with the amount of media consumption in order to be accurate. He also says that the media has knowingly set its frames that they wish people to base their beliefs and ideas off of.

Chong and Druckman (2007) study the idea that people rarely have their own opinions, but rather opinions are created through *framing effects*. Chong and Druckman define this phenomenon as occurring “when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an even produce (sometimes large) changes of opinion” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). They state that the same issue can be framed through many different perspectives to make it have different meanings or importances. In this case female athletes are framed by the media to create different significances to the public.

Chong and Druckman (2007) further state that a large aspect of Framing Theory deals with the Conventional Expectancy Model. The conventional expectancy model's “general assumption [is] that an individual can place different emphases on various considerations about a subject” (p. 105). For example, there may be certain areas in which consumers may have strong feelings about female athletes but there may be some generally vague areas. If a survey question is asked about one of the vague areas, the individual will base their answer on a “subset of beliefs that are accessible at the moment” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 105). People will assign importance based on whether or not they already have a strong opinion on a topic.

Chong and Druckman (2007) assert that framing basically assigns meaning to areas that individuals do not have clearly defined opinions about. They state that framing is a gradual process that happens over periods of time. It takes time for people to develop a certain frame of thought on an issue. Media coverage communicates the way those in control of it want people to frame their opinions. This theory explains that people will frame issues that they are uncertain of from what is communicated to them in this case by the media.

Other theories, such as the Social Cognitive Theory state that people will believe what they believe based off of pre-existing notions or the way they were brought up. In contrast, this research

examines the ways which environment, or in this case media consumption, form opinion.

Rationale

Evidence from the literature above illustrates that female athletes are depicted in a different manner than male athletes by the media. Female athletes are portrayed in a more sexual manner and in more passive poses than male athletes, while male athletes receive more media attention in general than female athletes.

These studies suggest that the media is unbalanced in its portrayal of female athletes but do not explore correlations between how people view these athletes and those media images. Based on previous research and opportunities, this study offers eight research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are female athletes who are depicted based on sexuality more well known than those depicted based on talent?

RQ2: Do consumers judge female athletes based on talent or physicality?

RQ3: Do consumers desire more coverage of female sporting events?

RQ4: Do consumers approve more of female athletes that participate in "gender appropriate" sports?

RQ5: Are consumers aware that the media portrays female athletes differently than male athletes?

RQ6: Do consumers believe that female athletes participating in "gender appropriate sports" make better spokespeople for advertising campaigns?

RQ7: Is there a correlation between the amount of media consumed by a person and the way female athletes are viewed?

Methods

Population and Sampling

A sample of 66 people, including students and professors at Coastal Carolina University were asked to complete this survey. This includes 64 students between the ages of 18 and 24 and two

professors between the ages of 25 and 39. This sample represents the entire population of students and faculty at the University.

There are approximately 8,700 students at Coastal Carolina University of various ages, genders and races. This sample of 66 represents the entire population of students.

Students in randomly selected classrooms, in the Edwards Building, Wall Building and Kimbel Library were asked to take the survey. The survey was handed out Wednesday, November 9 and Wednesday, November 30. Students were given the option of whether or not to take the survey. Over 90% of these students chose to take part, which resulted in 66 completed surveys.

Instruments

A survey was the prime instrument used in this study (see Appendix A). The survey included nineteen closed-ended, multiple choice questions. Demographic questions were asked at the beginning of the survey to see which ages and gender are affected most. The questions following the demographic questions related directly to the research questions. The questions can be analyzed to study correlations mentioned in the research questions. The title of the study was not placed on the top so as not to create a bias while taking the survey.

Results

The first research question asked, "Are female athletes who are depicted based on sexuality more well known than those depicted based on talent?" Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 24 (36%) said that Anna Kournikova was most familiar. Every other female athlete choice (Melanie Oudin, Christie Kerr, Suzann Patterson, Lisa Leslie, and Tamika Catchings) were chosen under 19% of the vote as most familiar.

The second research question asked, "Do consumers judge female athletes based on talent or physicality? When asked to choose one adjective to describe Anna Kournikova, of the 66 consumers surveyed, 10.5% chose *talented*, 30% chose *sexy*, 18% chose *athletic* and 42.5% were unsure of who

she is. When asked to choose one adjective to describe Brandi Chastain, of the 66 consumers surveyed, 9% chose *talented*, 4.5% chose *sexy*, 9% chose *athletic* and 76% were unsure of who she is. When asked to choose one adjective to describe Serena Williams, of the 66 consumers surveyed, 35% chose *talented*, 3% chose *sexy*, 61.5% chose *athletic* and 1.5% were unsure of who she is. When asked to choose one adjective to describe Danica Patrick, of the 66 consumers surveyed, 32% chose *talented*, 20% chose *sexy*, 11% chose *athletic* and 36% percent were unsure of who she is.

The third research question asked, "Do consumers desire more coverage of female sporting events?" Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 51 (77%) stated that they believe there should be more media focused on female athletes. Of the 66 consumers surveyed 30 (45.5%) stated that if there were more media focused on female athletes they would read or watch it.

The fourth research question asked, "Do consumers approve more of female athletes that participate in gender *appropriate* sports?" This research question was not clearly answered through the survey.

The fifth research question asked, "Are consumers aware that the media portrays female athletes differently than male athletes?" Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 55 (83%) stated that they believe the media portrays male athletes differently than female athletes.

The sixth research question asked, "Do consumers believe that female athletes participating in "gender appropriate sports" make better spokespeople for advertising campaigns?" Of the 66 consumers surveyed, 26 (39%) said that a female Tennis Player makes the best spokesperson for an advertising campaign. This was followed by 23 people (35%) stating that a female Soccer Player makes the best spokesperson for an advertising campaign.

The seventh research question asked, "Is there a correlation between the amount of media consumed by a person and the way female athletes are viewed?" This question was unable to be answered by the survey.

Discussion

Results suggested that the most common way that people consume sports media is through television, followed by magazines and newspapers. The way consumers obtain their information is important because it is important to see how this correlates with perceptions of female athletes. If consumers believe that the media are biased in their portrayal of female athletes, it may be beneficial to know which medium would be the priority to change. A change in the way female athletes are depicted through television media seems to be the place to start. This goes along with much of the previous research dealing with television as a strong manipulator of athlete perception. For example, the study by Angelini, Billings and Estman (2008) explores the immense affects that biased announcing can have on viewers. If the affects of biased television announcing can be immense and people are consuming television more than any other medium, it seems that this area may need the most attention.

While it cannot be directly proven by this study that a certain athlete is depicted as more *sexual* than others, Anna Kournikova was described as *sexy* by a higher number of participants (30%) than any other athlete depicted in the survey. Also, Anna Kournikova was the only female athlete, included in the survey, to have the highest number of participants (36%) say that she was most familiar among the other choices. Research question 1 asked if female athletes who are depicted based on sexuality are better known than those depicted based on talent. There is a correlation in these results between a female athlete being described as “sexy” and also being well known by consumers. This is important to know because it may somewhat illustrate reasoning behind this sexualization. An athlete may be well known for sex appeal rather than talent, but media leaders may be more concerned with popularity and numbers rather than the reasoning behind these things. The media may depict an athlete the way they see fit to benefit themselves. This result correlates with the study by Harridon and Secarea (2010) that found that when female athletes were portrayed based on sexuality, they were viewed as more feminine and heterosexual. That study also gave reason as to why the media feel the need to over-sexualize

female athletes.

When asked to use one adjective to describe each individual athlete in a series of athletes, male athletes were overwhelmingly described as talented and athletic, while all but one female athlete was described as sexy or unknown. Research question 2 deals with whether consumers view female athletes based on talent or sex appeal. Also, the one female athlete, Serena Williams, that was not described as sexy or unknown, was described as "athletic" (61.5%) while all but one of the male athletes were overwhelmingly described as "talented". It can be argued that "athletic" can be viewed as a physical feature as well. When consumers knew who the female athlete was, they used physicality to describe the athlete. None of the male athletes were described based on physicality, rather talent alone. Also, an overwhelming amount of people said to be unsure of the identity of 3 out of the 4 female athletes. This suggests a bias in the coverage of female athletes in general. This result is not exactly backed up by any previous research but it fits with countless amounts of other research on the broader topic. The importance of this correlation reaches to viewers. If viewers are not receiving enough information or knowledge of female athletes, and they are made aware of this, there may be a desire to learn more without the help of media coverage.

51 people (77%) answered that they believe there should be more media focused on female athletes. However, only 30 (45.5%) said that if there were more media focused on female athletes they would watch or read it. The wording of the research question states "Do consumers desire more coverage of female sporting events?" To infer "desire" from these results may be too hasty. It seems to be that people believe more media focused on female athletes would be the right thing to do, but that it is not of personal interest to them. This correlates with the study by Angelini (2008) in which findings showed that physiological arousal decreased for both sexes while viewing female sports. Many consumers may simply not enjoy viewing female sports, thus creating a lower demand. Consumers believe that there should be more media focused on female athletes for those who want to watch it but,

possibly due to uncontrollable physiological reasons, do not wish to view it themselves. This is another result that may be informative as to why there is not more female athlete-based media. The results suggest that consumers themselves would not take advantage of it so what will make the media want to produce it?

Out of 66 people surveyed, 55 (83%) answered that the media portrays female athletes differently than male athletes. This seems to be something that people know but either are not concerned with or do not think about often. A high percentage of those surveyed are aware of the differences and biases in media portrayal of female athletes. There does not seem to be much precious research that directly asks consumers if they perceive a difference in portrayal. It seems to be important in one way because it suggests even greater that there is a difference in the way media portray female athletes. Further, it portrays that consumers are ignorant to this suggested lack of equality. It begs the question whether people know but simply do not feel strongly that it is a problem.

Of the people surveyed, 26 (39%) chose a tennis player as the best type of female athlete for an advertising campaign. Tennis is generally seen as a gender appropriate sport due to clothing style, grace and other factors as well. Research question 6 asked whether consumers believe that female athletes participating in "gender appropriate sports" make better spokespeople for advertising campaigns. Since tennis is often defined as gender appropriate, there is a correlation between female athletes participating in gender appropriate sports and consumers seeing them fit for advertising campaigns. Soccer players were the second choice with 23%. This begins the question of whether the media can make a sport gender appropriate. Soccer may not traditionally be seen as a gender appropriate sport but, based on research by Shugart (2003), the 1999 US Women's soccer team coverage may have begun to change that traditional view. Shugart found that coverage of this event emphasized curves and sex appeal therefore the athletes were *gendered* by the media using sexualizing strategies. This research may be support for the argument that soccer, due to media coverage, has become a gender appropriate

sport. If this is the case, there is even more of a correlation between female athletes playing gender appropriate sports and perception of them as an appropriate product endorser. Research by Cunningham, Fink, and Kenix (2008) discussed whether expertise and attractiveness of female athletes had an effect on perceived appropriateness of the endorser. This study studied female athletes as event endorsers rather than product endorsers but the outcome was similar. The study showed that the event had a better outcome when endorsed by an attractive female athlete. These results may be beneficial to promoters of products or events. The public is suggested to be more likely to approve of a product that is endorsed by a female athlete participating in a gender appropriate sport.

The findings of this study may be important to the media, consumers and product promoters. Nothing is proven through the survey but there seems to be a correlation between the way female athletes are depicted by the media and the way they are perceived by consumers.

Limitations

In conducting this study there are certain limitations that, if solved, could enhance the outcome. First of all, surveys cannot determine causality. Correlations can be made when conducting a survey but that is as far as the information can go. Also, surveys are difficult to control. When taking a survey people may display a lack of concern in general and therefore the answers may be skewed. Also, people may not understand certain parts of the survey; therefore they may leave an answer blank or select a random answer. This lack of control may have causes skewed or unrepresentative results.

Another limitation may have been the choices on the survey. If there were more answer choices, people would have more chances of knowing the athletes. In many cases the participant was unsure of who the athlete was in general. Different options may allow for clearer results.

A larger sample could be beneficial if the survey were conducted again. A larger, more representative sample may provide more interesting, clear results. As the survey stands, many of the results were very close in number since there was not as big of a number to divide. More males

participating in the survey would show a more representative sample as well. The two professors who completed the survey should have been left out if the survey is meant to represent Coastal Carolina University "students".

When most of the surveys were given out, question number 17 had answer choices that were separated between two pages. Many participants did not see the second group of answer choices until they already selected their answer. This may have caused the results of this question to be unrepresentative of the true opinion of participants.

Finally, some of the research questions were not able to be clearly answered by the survey questions. A few questions could be added to the survey in order to make every research question correlate with a survey question.

Although there are potential limitations with this survey, I am comfortable with the results and my interpretation of them.

References

- Angelini, J. R. (2008). Television sports and athlete sex: looking at the differences in watching male and female athletes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(1), 16-32.
- Billings, A. C., Angelini, J., & Eastman, S. (2008). Wie shock: television commentary about playing on the PGA and LPGA tours. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 19(1), 64-84.
- Buyse, J., & Embser-Herbert, M. (2004). Constructions of gender in sport: an analysis of intercollegiate media guide cover photographs. *Gender and Society*, 18(1).
- Carty, V. (2005). Textual portrayals of female athletes. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 26(2), 132-155. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J.N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, (10), 103-126.
- Cunningham, G., Fink, J., & Kenix, L. (2008). Choosing an endorser for a women's sporting event: the interaction of attractiveness and expertise. *Sex Roles*, 58(5/6), 371-378.
- Daddario, G. (1994). Chilly scenes of the 1992 winter games: the mass media and the marginalization of female athletes. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11(3), 275-288. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Daniels, E. A. (2009). Sex objects, athletes, and sexy athletes: how media representations of women athletes can impact adolescent girls and college women. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(4), 399-422. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Fink, J. S., & Kensicki, L. (2002). An imperceptible difference: visual and textual constructions of femininity in *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women*. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3), 317-339.
- Grau, S., Roselli, G., & Taylor, C. R. (2007). Where's tamika catchings? A content analysis of female athlete endorsers in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in*

Advertising, 29(1), 55-65.

Hardin, M., Lynn, S., Walsdorf, K., & Hardin, B. (2002). The framing of sexual difference in *SI for Kids* editorial photos. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3), 341-359. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Hardin, M. (2010). A shrinking sports beat: women's teams, athletes. *Nieman Reports*, 64(4), 63-64.

Harrison, L., & Secarea, A. M. (2010). College students' attitudes toward the sexualization of professional women athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 33(4), 403-426. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Kane, M. (1988). Media coverage of the female athlete before, during, and after title IX: *Sports Illustrated* revisited. *Journal of Sport Management*, 2(2), 87-99. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Knight, J. L., & Giuliano, T. A. (2003). Blood, sweat, and jeers: the impact of the media's heterosexist portrayals on perceptions of male and female athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 26(3), 272. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Scheufele, D.A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 103-122.

Shugart, H. A. (2003). She shoots, she scores: mediated construction of contemporary female athletes in coverage of the 1999 US women's soccer team. *Western Journal of Communication*, 67(1), 1. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What age group best describes you?

- 18 or younger
- 18-24
- 25-39
- 40 and above

Please check the single best answer for how often you consume the following types of SPORTS related media	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Frequently
---	-------	--------	-----------	-------	-----------------

3. Sports Related Television

4. Sports Related Magazines

5. Sports Related Newspapers

6. Sports Media focused on female athletes

7. Sports Media focused on male athletes

8. If there were more media focused on female athletes would you watch and or read it?

- Yes
- No

9. Do you believe there should be more media focused on female athletes?

- Yes
- No

10. Which name is **most** familiar to you?

- Andre Agassi
- Andy Roddick
- Anna Kournikova
- Melanie Oudin

11. Which name is **least** familiar to you?

- Andre Agassi
- Andy Roddick
- Anna Kournikova
- Melanie Oudin

12. Which name is **most** familiar to you?

- Phil Mickelson
- Nick Watney
- Christie Kerr
- Suzann Pattersen

13. Which name is **least** familiar to you?

- Phil Mickelson
- Nick Watney
- Christie Kerr
- Suzann Pattersen

14. Which name is **most** familiar to you?

- Lisa Leslie
- Dirk Novitsky
- Tamika Catchings
- Carmelo Anthony

15. Which name is **least** familiar to you?

- Lisa Leslie
- Dirk Novitsky
- Tamika Catchings
- Carmelo Anthony

16. Choose the ONE adjective that best describes the following athletes	Talented	Sexy	Athletic	Unsure who they are
a. Anna Kournikova				
b. Andy Roddick				
c. Brandi Chastain				
d. Michael Jordan				
e. Tiger Woods				
f. Serena Williams				
g. Danica Patrick				

17. Which of these athletes do you believe makes the best spokesperson for an advertising campaign?

- Andy Roddick
- Mia Hamm
- Serena Williams
- Michael Phelps
- Danica Patrick
- Alex Rodriguez
- Sean Johnson

18. Which type of **female** athlete do you believe makes the best spokesperson for an advertising campaign?

- Basketball Player
- Soccer Player
- Tennis Player
- Figure Skater

19. Do you believe the media portrays male athletes differently than female athletes?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure