Playing Like a Girl: Women’s Sports and the Media (Research Paper)

Abby Massengale

Spring Hill College

**Table of Contents**

Introduction……………………………………………………………………………………pg. 4

Literature Review……………………………………………………………………………...pg. 7

Methodology…………………………..……………………………………………………..pg. 14

Results………………………………………………………………………………………..pg. 19

Conclusion…………………………………………………………………………………...pg. 26

References……………………………………………………………………………………pg. 30

Appendices…………………………………………………………………………………...pg. 33

**Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to obtain qualitative data from Spring Hill College students’ opinions on women’s sports and the depiction of female athletes in the media. An increase in female participation in sports has prompted a study to divulge into the sports world to better understand the coverage techniques as well as depiction techniques from the sports media. The secondary research supported two theoretical underpinnings, essentialism and the cultivation effect theory, as the basis for why women’s sports is underrepresented as well as why female athletes are depicted in a sexualized manner. Through three focus groups consisting of 24 Spring Hill College students who previously had a prior interest in sports before the study; qualitative data was collected to find common themes and trends in the responses from participants. By utilizing essentialism and the cultivation effect theory within the study the primary data that was collected had theoretical underpinnings to be analyzed against. After discovering secondary research as well as conducting and analyzing primary research, the findings proved that a dominant male ideology in the sports media is actively shaping and cultivating participant’s opinion on women’s sports and female athletes in the media.

**Introduction**

Sports have always been considered a male dominated realm. The Women’s Sport Foundation reports that 40% of athletes in the United States are females (“Women play,” 2011). By turning on the television or looking in a sports magazine such as *Sports Illustrated*, it would be nearly impossible to even know women make up almost half of all athletes participating in sports. Communications Scholar Michael Messner and Associate Professor Cheryl Cooky conducted a 10 year study to detect the gender of televised sports. In 2011 they found the percentage of airtime for men’s sports was 96.3% while airtime for female sports was 1.6% (Messner & Cooky, 2010). This drastic difference in coverage time begs the question: why are women’s sports not covered as much as men’s sports? Additionally, there is also a trend in the print medium as well as in the advertising medium to misrepresent female athletes by portraying them as sexual beings rather than athletes. Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport Mary Jo Kane argues it is not the athletic side of the female athlete that receives buzz, but the sexual persona (Kane, 2011).

There is a disconnect in the televised, print, and advertising media with regards to women’s sports. If 40% of athletes are female, why are women’s sports only receiving 1.6% of televised coverage? Why are female athletes being placed on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in a bikini sucking their thumb when they are professionals of their respective sports? In 2013 the Women’s Media Center found that 94% of sports editors were men. Additionally, the report stated that 90% of assistant sports editors were men as well as 89% of reporters were also men (Klos, 2013). The male gender is the dominant control of what sports related material the public is exposed to.

The sports media are able to cultivate public opinion and perception on women’s sports. Dr. Lisa Schroeder elaborated on how the cultivation effect theory plays a predominant role in the sports televised medium. The cultivation effect theory states that the public can be socialized to believe that what is continuously shown on the television is a concrete part of reality when in actuality it is a false sense of reality. (Schroeder, 2005). If female athletes make up 40% of all athletes and only receive 1.6% of airtime there is a distorted reality present in the sports televised medium. Messner argued the male-dominant hierarchy is the force behind the sports media and the decisions made. This male-dominated sports media seeks to adhere to their own interests rather than split coverage time between men and women’s sports (Messner, 2010). Furthermore researchers J. Steinfeldt, Zakrajsek, Carter, and M. Steinfeldt(2011) argue that athletes possess traits that are also associated with masculinity such as aggression and power. Since these traits of masculinity do not align with traditional societal norms of femininity it would be considered taboo for females to adopt these traits. However, in today's society traditional gender roles and societal norms are slowly being broken, so the sports media needs to find a counterbalance. According to Messner essentialism is a method of differentiating males and females from one another. Essentialism is the assumption that biology places members in different groups based on similarities (Messner, 2011). This idea is a continuous occurrence in how female and male athletes are differentiated. If all males are considered to be strong and aggressive, then females are not able to have these qualities. This form of separating genders explicitly shows the traditional societal norms of gender rising to the surface. However, those who are in the media claim they are giving the public “what they want to see” (Messner & Cooky, 2010). Is this really what the public wants to see or is it a dominant ideology shaping public opinion?

**Purpose**

This research studied the opinions and reactions of Spring Hill College students towards women’s sports and female athletes in the media. This research sought to attain primary data regarding how Spring Hill College students feel about women’s sports and female athletes’ depiction in the media. This research was necessary to better understand the differing opinions between the media and scholars.

**Rationale**

With women making up close to half of all athletes actively participating in sports, it is almost unfathomable that women’s sports only accounts for less than 2% of sports media coverage. More so, the coverage granted to women’s sports is typically portraying female athletes as hyper-feminized beings rather than athletes. Messner claims essentialism is used by the largely male controlled sports media to differentiate and separate men from women in unequal ways (Messner, 2011). More so, Dr. Lisa Schroeder claims the media have created a false sense of reality by constantly exposing the public to one way without offering another viewpoint (Schroeder, 2005). It is important to know if the media’s claim that they are “giving the people what they want” is true or if a largely male controlled sports media is exercising total control over what sports coverage is shown and in what manner.

**Research Question**

The research question for this study asks: What are Spring Hill College student’s opinion and reactions on women’s sports and the depiction of female athletes in the media? This research centers on Spring Hill College students and what their preferences are when it comes to women’s sports and female athletes in the media.

**Literature Review**

**Title IX**

Women have participated in some form of recreational activities for hundreds of years. Research by S.J. Bandy claims that as early as the Eighteenth Century there has been a movement for women to become more actively involved in recreational activities (Bandy, 2005). However, before 1972 there was not much female participation in sporting events. A section of the Education Amendments of 1972 known as Title IX became the catalyst for a significant increase in female athletic participation. According to the United States Department of Justice Title IX is “a comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity” (“Title IX,” 2014, para.1). Title IX gives equal opportunity to both female and male students to partake in sports as well as equal share of athletic scholarships and facilities. The National Women’s Law Center conducted a study to see if an increase in female sport participation had occurred since the enactment of Title IX. In 1972, the year Title IX was enacted, only 295,000 girls in the United States were participating in high school sports. During this same year there were 3.67 million boys participating in high schools sports. However during the 2010-2011 school year, almost 20 years after Title IX was enacted, it was reported that the number of males participating in sports had increased to 4.5 million while female participation had greatly increased to 3.2 million (“The next,” 2012).The percentage of female participation in high school sports increased by about 980% during these 20 years.This increase shows the major impact Title IX has had on female participation in sports.

**Sports Televised Medium**

Although there has been a significant increase in female participation in athletics, there has not been an increase in coverage from the sports televised medium. There is not a correlation between the increase in female athletic participation and media coverage. Messner and Cooky found that in 2004 the airtime given to women’s sports actually declined from 6.3% to 1.6%, the lowest woman’s sports coverage has ever been. This low percentage of coverage time directly contrasts the 980% increase in female participation since the enactment of Title IX. In addition to the small percentage of airtime given to women’s sports it was also found that 100% of televised sports news begins with a men’s sport story (Messner & Cooky, 2010). This one-sided medium coverage is present in both professional and collegiate sports coverage. The Women’s Sports Foundation reported that during March of 2009 there were 60 stories on NCAA collegiate men’s basketball and zero stories covering women’s collegiate basketball (“Women play,” 2010).Dr. Lisa Schroeder discusses what is known as the cultivation effect theory. Dr. Schroeder references the cultivation effect theory which she states was originally proposed by Gerber et al. (1977), the cultivation effect theory claims that people are socialized by the television continually portraying a distorted reality to society (Schroeder, 2005). If sports coverage predominantly focuses on men’s sports then the public becomes conditioned to only think of men’s sports as having importance. It is not the choice of the public to only view coverage of men’s sports but rather the media developing and facilitating a false sense of reality to the public. It may not seem as though female athletes ever receive media attention, but there are instances in which female athletes are given public recognition. Sports scholar, Janet Fink, claims that “sex-appropriate” sports such as tennis or golf have higher chances of receiving coverage than sports containing more masculine attributes such as rugby or basketball (Fink, 1998).Not only do these “sex-appropriate” sports contain stereotypical female attributes such as grace or poise, the uniforms of these sports are also feminine. William Lee Adams wrote an article which discussed the World Badminton Federations choice to make it mandatory that all female players must be wearing a skirt while competing. This choice was made “to ensure attractive presentation of badminton” (Adams, 2011). However, not every female athlete fits this mold of a heterosexually attractive woman. Those female athletes who do not fit this mold tend to receive less coverage than those female athletes who appeal to a male audience. Researchers Goodman, Duke and Sutherland claim that when covering women’s sports the media tends to prefer to show heterosexually attractive female athletes than female athletes who would be considered homosexual by appearance (Goodman et al., 2002).Although women’s sports receive little to no coverage via televised medium, there is a somewhat larger amount of coverage given by the print medium. However, this coverage focuses less on the female as an athlete and uses their sexual attributes to gain popularity.

**Sports Print Medium**

The print medium tend to give a greater amount of recognition to women’s sports than the televised medium, but not for athletic achievements. Messner and Cooky argue that if female athletes are to be given coverage it is more common than not that they are portrayed as wives, girlfriends or mothers rather than as athletes. They refer to it as the “packaging” of female athletes as hyper-feminized and hyper-sexualized beings (Messner & Cooky, 2010). These roles as wives, girlfriends, or other stereotypical feminine roles reinforce traditional stereotypes that women are subordinate to men. On sports magazine covers such as *Sports Illustrated* female athletes are usually photographed in revealing clothing that expresses their sexuality rather than their athleticism. Researchers Jennifer Knight and Traci Giuliano conducted quantitative research of students at Southwestern University to see if the attractiveness of a female athlete can affect the public’s perception. The results of the research showed that female athletes are more associated to their attractiveness than male athletes. More so, female athletes whose coverage was mainly based off of their attractiveness were viewed to be less talented and less aggressive than athletes who did not receive coverage based off their attractiveness (Knight & Giuliano, 2001). This research shows that female athletes are depicted in a manner that brings their sexuality to the forefront and neglects their athletic capabilities.

The portrayal given by the print medium to the public seeks to place women in subordinate roles to their male counterparts. Goodman et al. (2002) argue that when female athletes are visually represented it is usually in more submissive roles than male athletes and doing sexual actions such as biting their lower lips or sucking their fingers. These images suggest female athletes have to utilize their sexuality to achieve athletic recognition. Kane points to the “sex sells” strategy that has permeated the sports media to blame for this sexualization of female athletes. Kane claims:

“Scholars have long argued that a major consequence of the media’s tendency to sexualize women’s athletic accomplishments is the reinforcement of their status as second-class citizens in one of the most powerful economic, social and political institutions on the planet” (Kane, 2011, para.4).

This is a direct contrast to the sports media’s portrayal of male athletes.  Are not all athletes equal? Does the gender of an athlete predict poor athletic performance? In addition to the sexualized nature of female athletes in the print medium, this same trend of sexualization is present in advertisements.

**Sports Advertising Medium**

The sexualization of female athletes has also transitioned into advertisements. *Huffington Post* columnist Emma Gray wrote an article which states the sexualization of female athletes in advertisements is actually hindering, and not helping women’s sports. Gray claims one of the reasons female athletes do not receive many endorsements is because the female athletes are not depicted in a way that appeals to the audience of their specific brand (Gray, 2012). Gray quotes Professor Antil in a press release stating: “The way female athletes are being used as endorsers negatively impacts their effectiveness and reduces wider opportunities for other female athletes” (Gray, 2011, para. 3). Not only are these sexualized advertisements working against the female athlete depicted; but these advertisements are also narrowing the future opportunities for other female athletes. Research shows that the core demographic for women’s sports is women. More so research shows that women have a negative response to these sexualized advertisements of female athletes (Gray, 2012). Former writer and producer for *The Atlantic* Lindsay Abrams also quotes Professor Antil on the core demographic of women’s sports, “When you promote sexuality and beauty, the average woman has a hard time relating to that” (Abrams, 2012, para. 7). Additionally only utilizing female athletes deemed “attractive” in advertisements is negatively impacting advertisements rather than creating successful campaigns. Researchers George B. Cunningham, Janet Fink, and Linda Jean Kenix wrote an article focusing on how the attractiveness and expertise of a female athlete can impact an endorsement. The secondary research of the article shows that the public has a predisposition of enjoyment of “sex appropriate” sports. Most female athletes that are associated with “sex appropriate” sports are typically sexualized in advertisements (Cunningham et al., 2008). More so, the sport itself becomes only recognizable by the single or handful of attractive female athletes that participate in the sport. Within the various types of media there is a continuous tendency to sexualize female athletes and women’s sports as a whole. Messner and Cooky (2011) remark that the media claim they are simply “giving the people what they want,” and that it is because of public opinion that female athletes and women’s sports are covered the way they are. But, a closer look at the inner workings of the media gives some insight into the choices and decisions that are centered on women’s sports.

**Gender in Media**

The influence the media have on the American public spans a multitude of outlets. With an increase in technology the media have become a more present force in the lives of humans. Fink (1998) believes the media construct our belief system, “The images we see, the words we hear and read, and the type and amount of coverage provided to certain events are all in the hands of the media” (p.1). The media have the power to decide how a particular message, story, or event is perceived or interpreted. However, although the media have the power to influence the public, there is a stronger force that is influencing the media. The Women’s Media Center shows that up to 90% of all those in the highest positions of the sports media are male (Klos, 2013). This significant amount of male presence in the sports media can be linked to a larger male-centered ideology that dictates American culture. Messner and Dunbar (1999) found that, on average, female broadcasters at large-scale sporting events will typically receive about three and a half minutes of coverage time out of an entire three hour time slot. Sports and masculinity have many connecting core values which would typically be considered taboo for a female to possess. J. Steinfeldt et al. (2011) conducted research and found that specific traits such as aggression, competition and toughness that are attributed to athletes are also values associated with masculinity. Messner argues that sports are more than just entertainment for an audience. Sports seek to bring values and core beliefs held by society to the surface. If this statement is true then the sports world of today would show that women’s sports are inferior to men’s sports. Messner claims through essentialism the dominant male ideologies of the sports media are able to hinder change for women’s sports. By claiming a biological difference between a male and a female, the media are able to sustain the masculine dominance in power (Messner, 2011). Researchers Dana Berkowitz, Namita Manohar, and Justine Tinkler (2010) state that gender scholars widely view gender as a social construct that is continually constructed and performed during interactions. These researchers claim that gender is not preexisting or internalized but rather shaped through daily interactions within a specific culture (Berkowitz et al., 2010). Messner attributes this dominant masculine ideology to hard essentialism. Messner defines hard essentialism as, “...the shared belief that women and men are naturally and categorically different and should thus be sorted into different and unequal spheres that reflect their natures” (Messner, n.d., p.18). There are several ways that women and men can be categorized into “different and unequal spheres.” One of these ways is the sexualization of female athletes versus the non-sexualization of male athletes. Female athletes and women’s sports are forced to adhere to an unequal nature of sexualization and enhancing their femininity in order to receive the little coverage allotted to them. While in contrast, male athlete’s and men’s sports are able to rely on pure athletic talent and a dominant masculine gendered sports media for their coverage. Messner and Cooky comment that the media claim they are simply “giving the people what they want” when it comes to women’s sports coverage and female athletes (Messner & Cooky, 2010). However, scholars argue that through the persistent habit of cultivating the public’s beliefs, a dominant male ideology is overpowering the sports media. This disconnect between the media and scholars formulate the research question: What are Spring Hill College student’s opinion on women’s sports and the depiction of female athletes in the media?

**Research Conclusion**

Women’s sports are continually being underrepresented by the sports media. More so, the portrayal of female athletes as sex objects and not athletes undermines their athletic capabilities. Is this what the Spring Hill College students want to see or is it a media construction based on male-centered ideologies?

By utilizing essentialism and the cultivation effect theory the ideologies of the predominantly male gendered sports media have been sustained. The male dominant ideology present in sports places women in an inferior position and men in a superior one. Messner and Cooky remark that the media have claimed they are only supplying the public with what they would like to see (Messner & Cooky, 2010). However, with the significant increasing in female participation in the sports sector there is a disconnect in the media’s claim and the rebuttals made by scholars.

**Methodology**

The researcher conducted and studied three focus groups to gather primary data on the participant’s opinion of women’s sports and the depiction of female athletes in the media.

The researcher conducted three focus groups at Spring Hill College. The focus groups lasted one hour in duration and took place in the bottom floor study room of Burke Memorial Library on Spring Hill College’s campus. The researcher had a facilitator conduct the focus groups to ensure a bias was not present during the focus group sessions. During the focus groups the researcher typed responses and took general notes while the facilitator conducted the session. In addition to the researcher taking notes, an Apple 5 IPhone recorded the entire focus group session to ensure accuracy of the quotations. Only the researcher has access to the focus group recordings and the recordings will be erased at the end of the study. The researcher has transcribed all three focus group sessions (see Appendix A) so that the primary data can be utilized for further research while at the same time keeping the participants anonymous.

The participants asked to participate in the focus groups are Spring Hill College students who have a prior interest in sports before the focus groups were conducted. The researcher chose this specification because students who have a previous interest in sports are more inclined to follow sports coverage and therefore would have a strong knowledge of the material to be discussed within the focus groups. These students were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in a focus group centered on sports. If the student agreed to participate in the focus group an e-mail was sent to the student (see Appendix B) containing a consent form (see Appendix C) and informing them of the time, date, location and subject matter of the focus group. The consent form attached to this e-mail contained information that was pertinent to the study. In the consent form the participant was informed that their identity would remain confidential and that he or she could leave the focus group at any time. The participants were asked to print out and bring in a signed copy of the consent form to the assigned focus group they were to participate in.

The focus groups consisted of eight individuals, four males and four females, to ensure equal representation. In total there were 24 participants consisting of 12 males and 12 females. The focus groups consisted of freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors of Spring Hill College. As stated previously these participants were chosen because they had a prior interest in sports before the focus groups were conducted.

The focus group questions and images (see Appendix D) were submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E). The researcher asked the Institutional Review Board for an expedited review, since the primary research that will be conducted focuses on individual behavior. Once approval had been granted by the Institutional Review Board the first focus group was conducted on March 5, 2015, the second on March 6, 2015 and the final focus group on March 11, 2015. The focus groups were conducted in the following manner: first the facilitator welcomed participants and thanked them for their time and participation. Next the facilitator collected signed consent forms from participants and reminded participants that their identities will remain confidential as well as that they may leave the focus group at any time of their choosing. Next the facilitator asked the first eight questions individually to participants and allowed for a group discussion to take place. After the first eight questions were asked the facilitator showed participants five images depicting female athletes and women’s sports teams. After each participant had the opportunity to view the images the facilitator asked participants the last three questions. Once the participants had discussed the 11 questions the facilitator, once again, thanked the participants for their participation and concluded the focus group.

The majority of the focus group questions focused on participants’ opinions towards women’s sports and female athletes’ depiction in the media. In total, each focus group was asked 11 questions and shown five images. Some questions yielded open ended responses that either highly supported or highly did not support the research question: What are Spring Hill College students’ opinion on women’s sports and female athletes’ in the media?

To yield these opened ended responses needed from participants the researcher had developed 10 open-ended questions as well as one dichotomous question. The dichotomous question acts as the initial question for the focus group: “*Did you play a sport as a child?”* The other 10 questions are to gain more in-depth, pure qualitative data from participants. Questions such as *“What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a women’s basketball game?”* or *“Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s?”* were to engage participants in conservations that seek to bring their opinions regarding women’s sports and depiction of female athletes in the media to the surface. In addition, the researcher chose five images of female athletes that included one women’s sport team to show participants. From these images the researcher hoped to engage participants in a discussion on the sexualization of female athletes by the media.

Once all the focus groups were conducted and the qualitative data had been transcribed, a thematic analysis was conducted to narrow down findings and outcomes. According to R.E. Boyatzis a thematic analysis structure aids researchers in discovering themes or patterns in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998).

Once the focus groups had been transcribed the researcher reviewed the focus group sessions multiple times to detect recurring themes and keywords to develop two tables (see Appendix F and Appendix G). The answers from participants yielded two varying types of themes and therefore two tables were implemented to ensure the qualitative data could be properly analyzed. One table was developed for participants’ opinions while the other table was developed for participants’ reaction. Questions such as *“What would make you want to watch a woman’s sporting event”* and *“How do you think the public would react if network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered women’s sports as much as they did men’s?”* were placed in the opinion thematic analysis table. These questions were placed in the opinion thematic analysis table because the questions yielded opinionated responses on the subject matter. However, questions such as *“Think of the phrase ‘you play like a girl,’ how does that make you feel?”* along with some questions regarding the images shown were placed in the reaction thematic analysis table. These questions were placed in the reaction thematic analysis because these questions contained information that allowed for an initial reaction before a response was given to be present.

The two tables yielded two different sets of keywords to be able to pinpoint themes present within the qualitative data. Some of the keywords utilized for the opinion thematic analysis table are: competitive, backlash, more physical and anti-climactic. From these keywords the researcher was able to develop themes for the opinion thematic analysis table. The themes for the opinion thematic analysis table are the following: positive opinion (PO), negative opinion (NO) and other (O). However, different keywords were implemented for the reaction thematic analysis table. Some of the keywords chosen for the thematic analysis table are negative connotations, hyper feminine, upsetting and shocked. From these keywords the researcher developed and implemented the themes for the reaction thematic analysis table which are: positive reaction (PR), negative reaction (NR) and other (O).

After these themes were identified and implemented the researcher created two separate scoring sheets; one for opinion thematic analysis (see Appendix H) and one for the reaction thematic analysis (see Appendix I). The responses used for the scoring sheet was one response per focus group that stood out from the others and expressed profound thought from the other responses to a given question. The scoring sheets consisted of columns with the themes from the specific thematic analysis table and rows where “X” will be placed if the quotation taken from the transcription matched any given theme present. At the bottom of the table a total was taken to see if one theme, or multiple, were present in the participants’ responses. From these totals the researcher was able to develop a better understanding if the participants’ responses highly supported or highly did not support the research question.

**Results**

After the primary data was transcribed and analyzed, specific trends and themes arose from participants’ responses. Is there a dominant ideology within the sports media shaping and cultivating opinion? Or is the underrepresentation and sexualization of female athletes something that is demanded from society? The results found from the qualitative data are the following:

When asked *“Did you play a sport as a child?”* all 24 participants answered “yes” and began to list sports they had previously played. The researcher could infer from all 24 participants answering “yes” to this question that the answers provided during the focus group sessions would be accurate and coming from individuals who are familiar with sports and also inclined to follow sports coverage.

The question, *“State three adjectives that you would associate with sports,”* produced the same answers within all three focus groups. All of the adjectives mentioned by participants that were believed to be correlated with sports are also traits that are associated with the male gender. The main adjectives that were present in all focus groups were adjectives such as aggression, physical and strength. These are also adjectives that are typically associated and highly regarded by the male gender. This direct correlation shows the essentialism that is present in sports. As previously stated Messner believe hard essentialism is “...the shared belief that women and men are naturally and categorically different and should thus be sorted into different and unequal spheres that reflect their natures” (Messner, n.d., p.18).If men are perceived to be strong and aggressive and these are also adjectives that are typically associated with sports it is applicable to claim that essentialism is prevalent in the participant’s responses. This theoretical underpinning of essentialism also directly correlates with the question, *“Think of the phrase ‘you play like a girl,’ how does that make you feel?”* By most participants this phrase was considered to be negative and not a strong association to sports. Participant 1 from focus group one comments, “Well as a boy playing a sport you don’t want to be compared to a girl. Because guys are always, well at least around us, we have to be better.” To be associated as having the playing capabilities of a girl is considered to be negative and is not a direct correlation with what is considered to be athletic. Participant 4 from focus group two claimed that hearing this phrase is associated with being “emasculated.” This participant felt as though one could lose their credibility within their gender simply by being compared to a female while participating in athletic activities.

When asked *“Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s?”* most participants in the three focus groups provided similar answers. Participants typically responded that men’s sports are more physical in nature and more entertaining to watch. Participant 5 from focus group one commented “I think they (men’s sports) have a tendency to be a lot more physical, which people like. And, um a lot of times I think they have a tendency to be more fast-paced. Especially in our culture, I think that’s something we like and value. And like to see.” Other participants from both this focus group and the two others responded similarly to this response. Other participants stated men’s sports were more entertaining, more intense and harder hitting than women’s sports and that this is what the public would want to see in sports coverage. These responses support both theoretical underpinnings of essentialism and the cultivation effect theory. If men’s sports are constantly what the sports televised medium is showing to the public then the public is cultivated to believe that men’s sports are the echelon of the sports world. If the public is only exposed to the male gender on television then they will perceive it as the best quality of sports coverage therefore placing women’s sports in a lower level of sports coverage. Additionally essentialism seeks to place women and men in unequal spheres. If men’s sports are regarded as more physical, hard hitting and entertaining than women’s sports are automatically assumed to be slower, less entertaining and anti-climactic than men’s sports. The results from this question show both theoretical underpinnings are present in participants’ responses.

The question *“The Women’s Sports Foundation found that only 2% of network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered female athletic events, how does that make you feel?”* first produced a reaction from participants, and then a justification of the percentage stated in the question. Participants expressed shock when informed that women’s sports make up less than 2% of network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* coverage. However, after being informed of this statistic, participants began to justify why women’s sports receive less than 2% of sports coverage. Participant two from focus group three remarked that it is women’s collegiate sports that tend to receive more coverage. However Participant 1 from focus group three commented that the only collegiate women’s sport that does receive recognition is softball during the College World Series but this is only one week out of the entire year that collegiate women’s sports are receiving a great deal of coverage. The media have the power to influence a society and define a culture, even if this culture is simply perceived by an audience. If women’s sports only account for less than 2% of network news coverage and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* coverage while female athletes simultaneously make up 40% of all active participating athletes; then there is a component missing from this equation. The cultivation effect theory was found to be present in participant’s answers regarding sports media coverage of women’s sports. Participant 6 from focus group one claims that there is a high demand within society to want to see more physical activity and this high physical activity and aggression is present in men’s sports. However if women’s sports are shown less than 2% of the time with men’s sports being shown over 90% of the time it is nearly impossible to show the public anything different than men’s sports. The media has cultivated a reality of how viewers should think about sports.

When participants were asked *“How do you think the public would react if network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered women’s sports as much as they did men’s?”* produced differing opinions across the three focus groups. Some responded like Participant 3 from focus group one “I think there would be a problem with it (equal coverage). I mean in my opinion, I think men’s sports are just more exhilarating. Like, I mean I prefer watching men’s sports because they get into the game more. They’re more physical. Um, how do I say it? They make a lot more money too.” This statement shows both essentialism and the cultivation effect theory. If men’s sports are perceived to be more physical and more entertaining to watch than women’s sports are unequally placed in a sphere where women’s sports are not as entertaining or physical in nature. Additionally if the dominant gender in the sports media is male, then a strong male ideology will cultivate viewers of televised sports to demand more men’s sports shown than women’s. However, other participants responded that equal coverage of both men and women’s sports would not create a backlash from the public. Participant 7 from focus group three responded “Because they are starting to integrate women into a lot more sports coverage just with news bases, you know? So it is slowly changing to be not as stereotypical of a guy’s thing.” This response and one similar to this disprove the theoretical underpinnings of essentialism and the cultivation effect theory. Responses such as these show that women and men are not placed in unequal spheres and that the sports media’s constant showing of male sports would not cause a backlash from the public if the coverage was to be made equal.

The question *“What would make you want to watch a woman’s sporting event?”* yielded two types of responses from participants within all three focus groups. One majority answer was if women’s sports were just as physical and hard hitting as men’s sports. Participant 5 from focus group one answered “I think if it (women’s sports) was faster paced. Sometimes you watch and it’s just so slow.” Other participants that answered similarly to this remarked they would watch a woman’s sporting event if the competition was good. Responses such as these show essentialism, indicating that a men’s sporting event is more physical and competitive than a women’s sporting event. However, another major response from participants was that they would watch a woman’s sporting event if the women were in a large scale event such as the Olympics. Participant 2 from focus group two remarked “It’s like when they (women) represent the nation like the Olympics and anytime in the World Cup. Such sporting events are not constant, usually occurring every four years on average. More so both of these events are on an international scale, inferring that within the United States men’s sports are what are predominantly watched on a more frequent basis.

However there are specific women’s sports, known as “sex appropriate” sports that do receive a majority of the coverage that is allotted to women’s sports. Fink claims that these sports receive the majority of women’s sports coverage because they possess female traits such as poise or grace within their nature. When asked *“What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a women’s basketball game?”* a majority of participants agreed that the clothing of the sport played a major factor in the sport’s popularity. Participant 3 from focus group three commented that “All the girls in spandex” was the reason women’s volleyball receives more popularity over women’s basketball. Additionally Participant 8 from focus group one commented “It (volleyball) seems more feminine. So it feels more comfortable for us to watch because its women doing something feminine.” This shows essentialism playing into preference in women’s sports. If women are to be associated with feminine qualities than a sport geared towards this nature will receive more recognition than a sport more associated with masculine qualities. Women’s basketball was found to be unpopular amongst the focus group participants for its tendency to align with masculine qualities. Participant 2 from focus group two remarked “…when you’re watching basketball you think like elbows to the face and like stuff like that like some guys don’t want to see the aggressiveness of it like want to feel emasculated when watching sports.” To witness women taking on traits such as aggression and actually becoming physical within a sport is considered a taboo not just for the sports world but also within the nature of gender. Women’s volleyball is only one sport of many women’s sports that seeks to enhance the feminine nature of the sport in order to receive more coverage and popularity over other sports that adopt more masculine traits within their nature.

The images that were shown to participants identified with the “sex sells” strategy proposed by Kane. The five images shown to participants yielded mostly reactions across all three focus groups. The images that received the most recognition during the focus groups were numbers one, two and three. A majority of participants believed that these images over sexualized the athlete while simultaneously neglected to reflect any athletic capabilities. However Participant 4 from focus group two stated that the depiction of female athletes in a sexual manner is simply supplying a demand within society. They remarked “Ok I’ll try. Biologically speaking I know men and women have different preferences and are attracted to different things. You know like if you want to sell a magazine to a man you have to follow a marketing strategy different than if you want to sell a magazine to a woman. So depending on what market you’re trying to appeal to and it’s just responding to a reality that might be more than a social construct and it might be something that’s biologically engrained in us or parts of our nature. So I don’t see it as something deliberately degrading I just feel like it’s a money making scheme that it’s responding to a reality whether it be genetic or acquired through the environment.” Participant 4 saw these images as a marketing strategy to appeal to a largely male audience. However, Gray (2012) previously remarked that the main audience for women’s sports is female. Additionally Abrams (2012) further supports this claim when she references Professor Antil’s remarks that the core demographic that watches women’s sports, females, respond negatively to the sexual depictions of female athletes. Participant 3 from focus group one commented that the athlete in image number one looked as though she was in a sexual position. Additionally Participant 7 from focus group three expressed shock to the slogan “Only the ball should bounce,” from image two. This sexualization of women’s sports and female athletes within the images reflected negatively on the focus group participants. Other words used by participants when describing the images were degrading, sex symbols and damaging. These trends of sexualization and hyper-femininity were present in a majority of answers from participants regarding all questions asked within the focus groups. The majority of responses given by participants across the three focus groups supported the theoretical underpinning of essentialism. Female athletes’ must enhance and overly expose their femininity and sexual nature to receive recognition because male athletes and men’s sports do not need to rely on this to receive the large amount of recognition they have. Men’s sports and male athletes receive recognition as athletes without having to sexualize themselves or their respective sport. However, women’s sports and female athletes must be in an unequal nature with regards to depiction and therefore must rely on something else to receive recognition: their sexuality and femininity.

The last question asked during the focus groups was *“What messages do these images send to the public?”* The majority of responses across all focus groups were the same in nature. Participants mostly responded by saying the images sent degrading, and unrelated sports responses to the public. Participant 8 from focus group one responded “I think it’s (the images) showing like that your athleticism is number two to your femininity and your attractiveness.” As previously mentioned by Gray (2012) the sexualization of female athletes and women’s sports actually is hindering and not helping growth in coverage and fan base. In regard to image two (see Appendix E) Participant 6 from focus group three commented “You know like they should, if they start doing equal coverage like having ESPN highlights and you saw her with a racket in her hand you wouldn’t think like well she’s got nice breasts.” This last question shows both theoretical underpinnings being utilized. If male athletes do not need their sexuality to receive coverage, then the avenue is open for female athletes to do so. More so, if this is the only way female athletes and women’s sports are being depicted to the public than the public will perceive this as a part of reality that female athletes and women’s sports are nothing short of overtly sexual and only seek to exploit their feminine nature.

**Conclusion**

Since Title IX was passed in 1972, women’s sports have seen an astronomical increase in female participation. So much so that female athletes make up 40%, almost half, of athletes actively participating in sports. However, the sports media have not increased, but decreased the coverage of women’s sports to less than 2% of total coverage. Additionally, female athletes also have become viewed and depicted as sex symbols rather than as athletes for their respective sports. According to the media, this is what the public wants to see and they are simply fulfilling a demand. In contrast, scholars are claiming this is the workings of a dominant ideology, more specifically a dominant male ideology, shaping the public opinion through the use of essentialism and utilizing the cultivation effect theory.

After reviewing the secondary research as well as analyzing the primary research gathered throughout this study; the research question has been answered. The majority of Spring Hill College students who participated in the focus groups believe that women’s sports are not in the same echelon as men’s sports. Men’s sports were perceived to be more physical, competitive and overall more thrilling to watch than women’s sports. The lack of coverage time was justified by participants because they believed that women’s sports were overall boring, anti-climactic and too slow to keep their attention. This data directly correlates with both theoretical underpinnings. Since participants mostly correlated sports with traditional masculine attributes such as physicality, aggression and competition it is no surprise that men’s sports were more favored to watch than women’s sports. Essentialism places men and women in two different and unequal spheres. Essentialism played an intricate part of participants’ responses. If men are perceived to be physical, aggressive and competitive just the same as sports are then women’s sports would be considered the opposite: weak, too slow and anti-climactic. This directly translates to the other theoretical underpinning utilized: cultivation effect theory. The cultivation effect theory claims that the media are able to construct a false sense of reality through constant televised coverage of a specific thing or idea. If the televised medium is constantly showing men’s sports on network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter*, the public will perceive men’s sports as the premier type of sport to watch over women’s sports. The televised medium has cultivated a false reality in the sports world where male sports are the highest of sports quality while women’s sports falls extremely short of this expectation. This ideology is cultivated largely by the higher ranking individuals in the sports media, most of which are male.

Additionally, the constant depiction of female athletes in hyper-feminized and overly sexualized roles correlates with the essentialism theoretical underpinning as well. If male athletes are regarded as icons to their respected sports then female athletes must fall into a sphere unequal to this. Participants believed the images of female athletes shown in the focus groups were degrading and unrelated to their respective sports. Most participants saw these images depicting a sexual nature first and an athlete second while in contrast male athletes are depicted as being athletes rather than utilizing their sexuality first. Although participants collectively agreed that men’s sports are more favored to watch over women’s sports; participants also collectively agreed that the sexualization of female athletes is a misrepresentation of female athletics and simply seeks to unsuccessfully gain followers.

This study is important to understanding the nature of women’s sports coverage and the depiction of female athletes by the media. Is this the way the public wants to see women’s sports and female athletes? Or is it a dominant male ideology shaping and cultivating public opinion and perceptions? After reviewing the secondary research and primary data the researcher has determined that it is the predominantly male gendered media utilizing their power to construct ideologies that the public perceives as their own opinion.

For future research on this topic the researcher has a few suggestions to ensure further strong data is uncovered. First, the researcher suggests that more time is dedicated to gathering information on this topic. Although a great deal of information was gain during this time frame, even more essential data could be gather with a longer time frame. Additionally the researcher suggests future researchers to utilize other avenues to gather data. In-depth interviews of media professionals could yield pertinent information that could either support or not support the theoretical underpinnings utilized in this study or bring other theoretical underpinnings into the study. Lastly, the researcher would suggest a quantitative study be conducted to obtain strictly opinionated data. A quantitative study utilizing cross tabs could also provide data that isn’t accessible by obtaining qualitative data.

**References**

Adams, W. L. (2011, July). Game, sex and match: The perils of female sports advertising*. Time Magazine.* Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,2081209,00.html>

Abrams, L. (2012, August, 3). Sex Doesn't Always Sell: Why Female Olympians Fail in Advertisements. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/08/sex-doesnt-always-sell-why-female-olympians-fail-in-advertisements/260658/>

Bandy, S. J. (2005). From women in sport to cultural critique: A review of books about women in sport and physical culture. *Women’s Studies Quarterly, 33,* 246-261.Retrieved from <http://www.feministpress.org/books/carol-j-pierman/women-and-sports>

Berkowitz, D., Manohar, N. N., & Tinkler, J. E. (2010). Walk like a man, talk like a woman: Teaching the social construction of gender. *Teaching Sociology, 38*(2), 132-143. doi: 10.1177/0092055X10364015

Boyatzis, R.E. (1998). *Thematic Analysis.* Retrieved from <http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=qualitative&pageid=icb.page340897>

Cunningham, G. B., Fink, J. S., & Kenix, L. J. (2008). Choosing an endorser for a women's sporting event: The interaction of attractiveness and expertise. *Sex Roles, 58*(5-6), 371-378. doi: 10.1007/s11199-007-9340-z

Fink, J.S. (1998). Female athletes and the media. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 69,* 37-41. Retrieved from <http://www.shapeamerica.org/publications/journals/joperd/>

Goodman, J.R., Duke, L.L., & Sutherland, J. (2002). Olympic athletes and heroism in advertising: Gendered concepts of valor? *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 79,* 374-393. doi: 10.1177/107769900207900208

Gray, E. (2012, August, 1). Female Athletes' Endorsement Opportunities Hindered By Sexualization And Lack Of Visibility, Say Researchers. *The Huffington Post.* Retrieved from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/31/female-athletes-endorsements-sexualization-lack-of-visibility-research_n_1725786.html>

Kane, M.J. (2011, July) Sex sells sex, not women’s sports. *The Nation.* Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/162390/sex-sells-sex-not-womens-sports>

Klos, D.M. (2013). *The status of women in the U.S. media 2013.* Retrieved from <http://wmc.3cdn.net/51113ed5df3e0d0b79_zzzm6go0b.pdf>

Knight, J.L., & Giuliano, T.A. (2001, August). He's a Laker; she's a "looker": The consequences of gender-stereotypical portrayals of male and female athletes by the print media. *Sex Roles, 45,* 217-229. Retrieved from <http://www.springer.com/psychology/personality+%26+social+psychology/journal/11199>

Messner, M. (n.d.). *Playing Fields: Power, passion and practice in sport*. Retrieved from <http://www.michaelmessner.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/GenderRelations13.pdf>

Messner, M. A., & Cooky, C. (2010, June). *Gender in televised sports.* Retrieved from <http://dornsife.usc.edu/cfr/gender-in-televised-sports>

Messner, M.A. & Dunbar, M. (1999, September). *Boys to men: sports media messages about masculinity.* Retrieved from <http://library.la84.org/9arr/ResearchReports/boystomen.pdf>

Messner, M. (2010, June). Dropping the ball on covering women’s sports. *The Huffington Post.* Retrieved from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-messner/dropping-the-ball-on-cove_b_599912.html>

*The next generation of Title IX: Athletics.* (2012, June). Retrieved from <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/next-generation-title-ix-athletics>

Schroeder, L. M. (2005). Cultivation and the elaboration likelihood model: A test of the learning and construction and availability heuristic models. *Communication Studies, 56*(3), 227-242. doi: 10.1080/10510970500181215

Steinfeldt, J.A., Zakrajsek, R., Carter, H., & Steinfeldt, M.C. (2011, October). Conformity to gender norms among female student-athletes: Implications for body image. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 12,* 401-416. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2011-11057-001>

*Title IX of the education amendments of 1972.* (2014, December). Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titleix.php>

*Women play sports but not on TV*. (2010, June)*.* Retrieved from <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/home/research/articles-and-reports/media-issues/women-play-sports-but-not-on-tv>

**Appendices List**

Focus Group Transcriptions………………………………………………………...…Appendix A

Sample E-mail…………………………………………………………………….…...Appendix B

Consent Form………………………………………………………………………….Appendix C

Focus Group Questions & Images…………………………………...…………….….Appendix D

IRB Approval…………………………………………………………………………..Appendix E

Thematic Analysis Table: Opinion…………………………….………..……………..Appendix F

Thematic Analysis Table: Reaction…………………….………………..……………Appendix G

Scoring Sheet: Opinion…………………………...…………..……………………….Appendix H

Scoring Sheet: Reaction…..…………………………….………………………………Appendix I

Signed Consent Forms………………………………………...……..…………………Appendix J

**Appendix A: Focus Group Transcriptions**

**Focus Group 1**

Facilitator: Thank you all for coming today! I will be facilitating this focus group. As a general reminder I just want to inform all of you that your identities will remain confidential and I will now collect your signed consent forms. The purpose of this focus group is to gain primary data on Spring Hill College students’ opinion towards women’s sports and female athletes’ depiction in the sports media. Okay so… just first question, did you guys play a sport as a child?

Group response: Yes.

Facilitator: Okay, since you all played a sport. Think of the phrase “You play like a girl.” How’s that make you feel?

Participant 1: It’s not very nice.

Participant 5: I agree.

Participant 8: Yeah.

Facilitator: Can I ask why? Like why does it make you feel that way? Just as opposed to you say it makes you feel you not great, makes you feel bad. Why? Can you elaborate on that? Like what does that phrase mean to you to make you feel those things?

Participant 2: Well as a boy playing a sport you don’t want to be compared to a girl. Because guys are always, well at least around us, we have to be better.

Participant 1: It kind of feel like it means that “you suck.” When you’re a little kid and say that to a little kid, it means that you’re bad at it. So it’s not very good connotation.

Participant 8: Especially if you are playing like soccer, I remember it mean that you were being too dainty. And not like being strong or aggressive enough.

Participant 7: I mean I was always bad at sports, so it always made sense.

<Laughter>

Facilitator: Um so, what are three adjectives that you associate with sports?

Participant 4: Strength, competition, intense.

Participant 1: Strength.

Participant 6: Competitiveness.

Participant 3: Physical.

Participant 8: Determination and commitment.

Facilitator: Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s?

Participant 5: I think they have a tendency to be a lot more physical, which people like. And, um a lot of times I think they have a tendency to be more fast-paced. Especially in our culture, I think that’s something we like and value. And like to see.

Facilitator: Do any of you watch women’s sports?

Participant 2: No.

Participant 8: Gymnastics.

Participant 5: Certain ones

Participant 7: Maybe Olympics.

Facilitator: If women sports got more coverage, would you even care to watch?

Participant 3: No, probably not.

Participant 4: Just for certain sports though- like volleyball or gymnastics.

Facilitator: You wouldn’t watch a women’s soccer game?

Participant 4: I’d watch that

Participant 6: Team USA.

Participant 4: I’d watch that. But maybe not like basketball or football.

Facilitator: Women’s football? I’d watch that, that sounds fun. Um, okay. The women’s sports foundation found that only 2 % of network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* covered female athletic events. Does that make you feel anyway? Or does that just make sense?

Participant 3: I mean that’s insane. Only 2%? I mean honestly…I don’t know, that’s just an insane number. When ESPN, Sports Center open its all guys. The intro is all men playing sports you never see women coverage.

Facilitator: That’s true. Ladies?

Participant 5: Well, I had a couple thoughts right away. One: With like ESPN and stuff. Recently I feel like, and by recently I mean I haven’t watched in a while but when I’m home and it’s on. I feel like they have a lot more women anchors now. So you would think, well I remember a long time ago I felt like it was all guys and like Erin Andrews. And now it’s a lot more equal on a man to woman ratio of people who are covering sports. But it’s definitely all men’s sports. I don’t know that’s it.

Participant 3: And to go with that, all the women are attractive.

Participant 8: I was going to say, I feel like, the 2 % like, I sometimes do watch women’s soccer at home, with my family. But like every single girl that’s playing has makeup and hair done for them, like so nicely. I feel like the focus is not even on her abilities it’s more on her appearance.

Facilitator: So you’re referring, when you’re say that you’re referring to the players that are girls?

Participant 8: Yes.

Facilitator: So just to go back to back to what Pete said about the coverage for a second, do you guys think that men need to be equally attractive as the women covering sports? Or does that not matter? Is all that matter is their intellect and knowledge as opposed to their looks and their knowledge?

Participant 1: I don’t think it matters just because like statistically speaking more men watch more sports than women watch sports.

Participant 5: I think though. Like, I don’t think it would matter what men look like on there. It’s kind of what, it’s almost like, every time a man comes up there too to talk about something, I don’t know, like when they talk about hockey. They like kind of show their resume to be like this are why this person is qualified to talk about hockey. And it’s not based on their appearance.

Participant 1: Yeah, they’re always like former players. And then there’s like a woman anchor.

<Laughter>

Facilitator: Do they ever like show why women anchors qualify? Just wondering.

Participant 1: I personally don’t know why they’re qualified.

Participant 5: Well, sometimes.

Participant 1: I mean they’re good, they’re good anchors. I’m not saying they’re bad. But I don’t know their history.

Participant 5: I mean if you watch like women’s soccer or women’s basketball, or something. At that point they have a lot more women announcers and those people are usually past players. An at that point they are more qualified, or at least show their qualifications, I would say. But, um, just like regular anchors? No, they don’t really tell them why they’re qualified. They’re just like you’re good at being in front of the camera.

Facilitator: How do think the public would react if news networks and ESPN Sports Center covered women’s sports as much as they do men’s?  There was equal coverage on both gender sides?

Participant 2: I don’t think there would be a problem with it. They would just watch both.

Participant 3: I think they’re would be a problem with it. I mean in my opinion, I think men’s sports are just more exhilarating. Like, I mean prefer watching men’s sports because they get into the game more. They’re more physical. Um, how do I say it? They make a lot more money too.

Yeah. (Multiple group members)

Participant 3: Comparative to women’s sports.

Facilitator: Ok. You brought up the money. Do you think that if they got equal coverage the amount of money would be equal? Because money comes from ads and such. How do you think of that, in perspective?

Participant 2: I don’t think they would make as much money as the men do. Just because, even if they are, doesn’t mean people are going to watch them. So they could have equal coverage, but that doesn’t mean people are going to go watch them.

Participant 5: But I think that is also playing a factor in two separate ways too. Because I feel like a lot of times, women, like I have a couple friends playing college basketball. And they are like there’s no point in me giving my all to this right now because what am I going to do, go to the WMBA where I don’t make that much money? And like, and one of the reason they don’t make money is because there’s not that much coverage so they don’t get those kinds of sponsorships and ads and all that stuff. So I mean if there was increase coverage and I don’t know if they were showing more highlights. I guess, I guess, I mean if there are more highlights, I don’t really know. But then, I think you’d have more girls who would be inclined to play at higher levels. Because I know so many people who just quit because they just feel like what’s the point. Like if I was ever that good, I wouldn’t be making that much money. Is that a good way to support myself? Not really, compared to men who can make a living and like become a huge name.

Facilitator: You three have anything to say? Just to give a female perspective, in addition to Victoria’s.

Participant 8: I feel like the public would be outraged if we were to, or more coverage was used. Just because of like from my own experiences with my brother, like hearing the jokes that female sports teams are. Like the way that I hear people joke about the female basketball teams or soccer teams, or anything like that. I feel like people would be really pissed off if men’s teams weren’t shown as often as they are currently.

Participant 6: I think there’s like higher demand from society wants to see more physical activity. And men’s sports show a lot more aggression, and people are so drawn to that. And so women are obviously not as physical and aggressive during their sport play but… well, I think that’s why they are more drawn to it.

Participant 7: Yeah, I also think it’s almost tradition. Like, I know for football games and stuff like that there’s tailgating. It’s such a huge thing. And nobody would do that for a volleyball game.

Facilitator: Ok. So, we all agreed that it’s not on TV. But what would make you guys want to watch it? What would make you want to be active in it?

Participant 2: If they were more physical, if they hit as hard as the guys do.

Participant 5: I think if it was faster paced. Sometimes you watch it and it’s just so slow.

Participant 6: It’s like anti-climactic.

Participant 2: Yeah, just more aggressive.

Facilitator: So if more women were taught about sports and taught about how to participate in sports, more women would want to watch sports. So there would be more women’s sports on TV?

Participant 8: I think so.

Facilitator: That’s interesting. Ok. What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a women’s basketball game?

Participant 6: I think it’s pretty obvious.

<Laughter>

Participant 1: The way they are dressed. They’re wearing short, tight shorts. And like when I think about Olympics, like what are the big women Olympic Games? I think about Gymnastics and then beach volleyball. I mean because they are in bikinis and then gymnastics girls are in the … what is it… leotard? Leotard. And then they have makeup and everything.

Participant 6: They are just built differently. They are different sports so they are built differently. And most people are attracted to the way they are built.

Participant 8: It seems more feminine. So it feels more comfortable for us to watch because its women doing something feminine.

Participant 6: Exactly.

Participant 8: Instead of masculine.

Facilitator: Victoria? Do you, you play basketball. I wanted to ask you specifically.

Participant 5: Yeah, I think women’s basketball.  I played women’s basketball for a really long time. But I think it’s really boring to watch. I don’t know how my parents went to so many games for so long.  I think it just is, especially when you watch women’s basketball compared to men’s basketball. Men’s basketball is so much more fast-paced; it’s so much more physical. I mean how many times in a men’s basketball game do you see jump balls? Like never, rarely. But in a women’s game you’ll see it 10 times, in a half. And it’s like that’s boring, it’s just more stopping time. And I think, I don’t know, for volleyball rallies go longer anyways so like it just is a lot more interesting to me than watching women’s basketball anyways.

Facilitator: Very interesting. Alright, I’m going to pass around some pictures. Um, you guys are going to each take a minute to look at them. I’m going to ask specific questions about the pictures so make sure that you get a good look. And, I’m going to leave it with you two.

<Laughing>

Participant 3: Wow.

Participant 1: That’s actually kind of funny.

Participant 5: Would you be comfortable taking a pic? I would scream.

Facilitator: What picture are you guys laughing at?

Participant 1: The one where it says “only the ball should bounce.”

<Laughter>

Participant 5: I mean this girl is a swimmer so she’s in a swim suit. But golf and soccer?

<Laughter>

Participant 8: I’m imagining like a guy’s team in the exact same lineup.

Facilitator: So what image would you guys say stands out the most for you?

Participant 3: Probably the top left.

Facilitator: What number is that one?

Participant 3: Number 1.

Facilitator: Number 1?

Participant 3: Yes, um, she just looks like she is in a sexual position.

<Laughter>

Participant 1: I was looking at it upside down.

Participant 5: Yeah, number 2 or 3.

Participant 8: I mean it is the body issue. But I would like to see them try to pull that over with the men’s. Nobody would be okay with that.

Facilitator: Ok, so what about the most prominent images, the ones that stood out the most. What made them stick out the most? What is the thing that gets to you the most?

Participant 5: It doesn’t have anything to do with the sport that they are trying to portray.

Participant 6: Yeah, it’s just really sexualized. It is damaging to their bodies.

Participant 1: And like Number 2 she’s not even holding a basketball.

Participant 8: Yeah, you wouldn’t even know she is playing a sport.

Participant 6: It just looks like lingerie to me.

Participant 7: And that quote, just ridiculous.

Facilitator: So what is that image, those images, what is that telling the public? What is the underlining meaning of that ad?

Participant 7: That you have to beautiful to play a sport.

Participant 1: I mean at least to be successful in a women’s sport.

Participant 5: To be successful, it’s not about how good you are. It’s about how attractive you are. But then you should also be good.

Participant 3: To be successful and liked, you have to be attractive.

Facilitator: What does it say about women’s athleticism?

Participant 7: It’s only about their bodies. It seems like the only reason they are playing the sport is to look good in a swim suit, which is not true, I would think, for the most part.

Facilitator: What an interesting perspective.

Participant 8: I think it’s showing like that your athleticism is number two to your femininity and your attractiveness.

Facilitator: Total ad-lib question. Um, guys. What does, do those ads make you think of those women, when you look at those ads do you ever see those women as an athlete?

Participant 4: No.

Facilitator: Girls? You obviously have different views of body image when you saw the pictures of women.

Participant 8: I mean if you told me, I mean if I looked at this I wouldn’t think she’s an athlete. But if you then told me she was an athlete, it wouldn’t seem so weird to me.

Participant 5: I mean… what was the question again? Do you think of them as athletes based on this?

Participant 5: Well, only, honestly, they only one I would think of like that would be Alex Morgan because I know what she did from like World Cup situations. So when I think of her and I see her face I think soccer. So that’s the first thing that would come to my mind, but other than that, no.

Participant 7: I wouldn’t think any of these are athletes except for Sports Illustrated; uh the first picture. because she is in a speedo.

Participant 8: You could also cut out her face and it would be like a hair model. Like you just like totally use that in a different, not for sports because she just looks so perfect in it.

Facilitator: Does anybody else have any comments about sports and women and advertisements and men?

Participant 7: I think its degrading that they have to portray themselves like this in order to get attention.

Facilitator: Do you think that, why do you think that only women have to do that and not men? Why are male athletes not sexualized?

Participant 6: It’s just unheard of. Like, for men the main focus for them is their aggression and like how athletic they are. When they’re on the cover like they are showing how big their muscles. They’re not in these kinds of positions. I mean, it’s just unheard of. For women, yes you can see that she is athletic in this but like this isn’t demonstrating her athletic ability; this is showing what her sport has done to her body. People are attracted to that.

Participant 3: It’s just like the social norm. Men have always been portrayed has these big, aggressive men.  You know, and women when they are portrayed in sports, especially in the media, it’s just very sexual. Um, yeah. Think of these advertisements but with men instead.

Participant 5: I do think though, that sometimes, not to this extent, but I think a lot of times when advertisements are trying to reach out, geared towards women, then they do sexualize the athletes too, like male athletes. I think it is very common to like take pictures of them with their shirts off to advertise for women clearly. These magazines, Sports Illustrated, is primarily for men; ESPN, primarily for men. I mean you know- there they have the women but you know in a magazine geared towards women, I think there would be a lot more sexualized images, I guess, of male athletes. But if you are seeing a man in Sports Illustrated, it definitely wouldn’t be sexualized because a man would find it weird to be reading that. Um, so I guess not in these situations. And I don’t think it is to this extreme level.

Participant 8: That’s funny because when you mention how Sports Illustrated in geared towards men, and then you were like something about women’s magazine I thought about People. You know, like Sports Illustrated and People are totally different things.

Participant 5: That’s exactly what I was thinking too.

Participant 5: Because like if there was a male athlete in People it is like David Beckham. Or like some, I don’t know, I can’t think of somebody else, and then it’s in a totally different way than this, I guess. Kind of the same though.

Participant 3: Going with what Vic said, Sports Illustrated and ESPN, their target markets are mostly male and showing that kind of stuff that’s how they are going to make money because men appeal to that.

Facilitator: So I’m going to re-ask the question. So based on everything you just said, what do those images say about women athletes?

Participant 8: That their purpose is to please men.

Participant 5: That because they are athletic they have attractive bodies.

Facilitator: Boys?

Participant 2: I agree with what she said.

Participant 1: Yeah if you’re a woman athlete it’s not so much about your talent but it’s more about your looks.

Participant 2: In order to be successful.

Participant 8: Going off of what Vic said, like men athletes they might, well women might look at them sexually. But men use them as inspiration or entertainment. But men use women athletes for looking at them sexually, I guess, or looking at them like that. But women don’t look at women athletes as inspiration or entertainment often.

Participant 5: It’s like very few exceptions, towards like women who you look at as an inspiration. Like Mia Hamm, she was somebody a lot of girls looked up, but since then not very many.

Facilitator: Does anybody have any last final comments they want to add, or thoughts?

<Laughter>

Participant 4: Well, I couldn’t agree more with Andy when you said we focus more on female athletes that it’s not about the sport at all, like it’s good that they can play their sport and like they’re in their own kind of world. But it’s not what the media chooses to focus on, like they won’t, they’ll find someone good at the sport but someone who is really attractive. I’m sure there is someone who is equally as good as, who is the goalie- Hope Solo- I’m sure there is someone who is equally as good as her but maybe not as attractive. And that’s what they choose to focus on.

Facilitator: Alright guys, thanks so much for participating!

**Focus Group 2**

Facilitator: Well first off thank you all for coming out today! I will be facilitating this focus group. As a general reminder I just want to inform all of you that your identities will remain confidential and I will now collect your signed consent forms. The purpose of this focus group is to gain primary data on Spring Hill College students’ opinion towards women’s sports and female athletes’ depiction in the sports media. Let’s get started everyone, did you all play a sport as a child?

All: Yes.

Facilitator: Ok, you care to elaborate on that? Explain what sports you played?

Participant 1: Like one by one or are we just shouting them out?

Facilitator: I mean that, I don’t have organization rules, so whatever you think is best. It’s an open conversation.

Participant 6: Soccer.

Participant 8: Soccer, basketball, volleyball.

Participant 7: Soccer, basketball, volleyball, softball.

Facilitator: I’m sorry what?

Participant 4: Baseball.

Participant 1: Soccer, hockey, baseball, basketball, cross country, track and field.

Facilitator: Oh, interesting.

Participant 4: Not at the same time though. We traded.

Participant 2: Baseball, basketball, gymnastics, and…football. What else…yeah.

Participant 3: Soccer.

Participant 5: Soccer.

Facilitator: Okay, um…

Participant 8: I was a cheerleader once.

Facilitator: I think cheerleading counts Astrid.

Participant 1: Can we have pictures of that?

Facilitator: When you guys think of the phrase “play like a girl” what comes to mind?

Participant 2: That commercial they had in the super bowl.

Participant 1: My ass got kicked by some female athletes so [laughs]. I actually think of well-played, or well-rounded, or well…what’s the correct word. Or people well-trained. Yeah…well-trained individuals.

Participant 2: But less aggressive in my head. I mean I automatically think less aggressive.

Participant 3: Soft.

Participant 2: Yeah.

Facilitator: Girls?

Participant 6: I’d rather not comment on this subject.

Participant 7: I don’t see it as a compliment.

Facilitator: Why…explain why you don’t want to talk about it.

Participant 6: Because when people talk about it…it’s an insult basically because they don’t think playing like a girl means anything.

Participant 8: Because you’re not playing as an athlete they say you’re playing like a girl.

Facilitator: And how does that make you feel?

Participant 6: Not happy.

Participant 5: It’s put on a different playing field. It’s a double standard.

Participant 3: Very judgmental.

Facilitator: Guys do you think you would feel differently when if someone told you you played like a girl how would that make you feel?

Participant 2: Emasculated.

Participant 3: Yeah.

Participant 4: Insulted.

Facilitator: Okay, so what are three adjectives you associate with sports? Just each of you give me 3 adjectives. You don’t have to repeat it if someone took the same as yours.

Participant 2: Competitive, aggressive, umm…I don’t know…fun.

Participant 8: Hm, I’d have to say physical, aggressive, loyal. Those are the first ones that come to my mind.

Participant 3: Tough.

Participant 6: Physical.

Participant 7: I forgot the question.

Facilitator: That is no problem. What’re some adjectives that you associate with sports?

Participant 7: Sportsmanship.

Participant 5: Leadership, character building. That’s all I’ve got…sorry.

Facilitator: Okay so just transitioning here…why do you think that there’s more coverage of men’s sports on TV than women’s sports?

Participant 4: Supply and demand.

Participant 2: Yeah.

Participant 1: Society dictates.

Facilitator: So society dictates supply and demand…

Participant 2: The basic stereotypes in our society in how it sees guys sports as like more fun to watch but more of what you want to see like hard hitting or when you go to a hockey game you want to see a fight.

Participant 7: They think they’ll be more intense and more entertaining.

Participant 3: There are not as many girls as guys that play sports. Usually in the Olympics it’s more even so that you see as many girls’ sports as guys’ sports but then you watch soccer and you see guys playing all over the world and then girls is mostly in the U.S. and you know stuff like that like basketball. They have the women basketball league but they’ll don’t show it as much importance as the NBA.

Facilitator: You make a really great point because according to the women’s sports foundation only 2% of network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* cover female athletic events.

Participant 4: Wow

Facilitator: 2%...so how does that make you guys feel based off and you think they don’t show it? Take that into consideration.

Participant 2: Well it makes me like kind of I mean not I guess like I knew it was unequal but I didn’t know it was like that bad. I thought it was 60/40.

Participant 3: I think its cause of the viewers.

Participant 4: Yeah but what percentage…you know if it were and that goes back to a capitalist society…should there be a demand for a woman’s sport like there will be a response by the providers to increase the coverage of such events.

Participant 7: Also, I think like more men watch sports and men aren’t going to want to watch girls they’re going to watch men. So if more girls watch sports then there probably will be more girl sports being played.

Participant 3: Unless it’s like beach volleyball or something.

All: <Laughs>

Participant 1: We were all thinking it.

Facilitator: So the other ladies in the room…how does that make you feel as women that have played sports?

Participant 7: I don’t think it’s fair because we (sprint) a lot and…

Participant 6: I mean we work hard but no one really cares but us.

Participant 3: And something I’ve noticed regarding that is a lot of girls that play sports don’t watch sports but the guys that do play sports watch the sports.

Facilitator: Interesting. Okay so we’ve established they’re only getting 2% of coverage but how do you think the public would react if they made if 50/50? If they made it equal the amount of coverage men and women get in sports on *Sportscenter* and network news?

Participant 2: Well we brought up the point not as many girls watch sports not as many guys want to watch women’s sports so I think viewer’s ratings would just be dramatic in how the difference between the guys sports viewings and the girls’ sports viewings

Participant 1: Also, if you’re going to look at it from a business standpoint if you’re going to put all this money making it even 50/50 and you don’t get the viewership you don’t get a lot of money for ads then it’s just not financially feasible to go with that type of 50/50 split.

Participant 4: To play devil’s advocate though…perhaps if by increasing the coverage they can increase the exposure of such sports; therefore increasing the viewership. Again, it could go either way.

Participant 1: Yeah, no if definitely if you did it the recognition goes to those women who deserve it and then maybe it will create that market for them.

Facilitator: Do you think that’s feasible? Do you think that’s something that would happen?

Participant 4: No.

Participant 4: Not in the U.S.

Facilitator: Why? Why do you think that’s not something that would happen?

Participant 4: Capitalistic system. You can’t you can’t well… development might just be frowned upon.

Participant 5: Sometimes I feel like something should work but nothing’s guaranteed to work and that’s the hardest thing to accept.

Facilitator: So what would make you watch a woman’s sporting event? If you’re saying it needs viewers…what’s going to make you watch? What’s going to make you want to watch them play?

Participant 8: I mean if a team’s doing really well like if the Chicago women’s basketball team was doing really well then I think people would notice but…

Participant 3: Yeah like I would think the women’s national soccer team they win Olympics they win world cups.

Participant 6: It’s usually when they get to competitions that people start watching.

Participant 8: Yeah it’s like a bandwagon fan.

Participant 2: It’s like when they represent the nation like the Olympics and any time in the World Cup.

Participant 4: When the stakes are high, when there’s a rivalry if the stakes are high.

Participant 3: If the stakes are high and the teams are good.

Participant 5: Yeah.

Participant 3: The U.S. fans will follow the team if the team is good.

Facilitator: Okay…um….what is more appealing over a woman’s volleyball game than a woman’s basketball game?

Participant 8: Spandex…probably.

<Laughs>

Participant 4: Probably, allegedly.

Participant 8: Well otherwise it’s like big baggy shorts and like yeah…

Participant 1: Well yeah you have the sex appeal with volleyball and sex sells so if you’re looking at a marketing standpoint you put it on primetime and NBC you’re going to get more viewership for volleyball than you would if you put a basketball game on.

Participant 5: Is that why you watch football?

<Laughs>

Participant 1: I don’t watch football.

Facilitator: That was a good point. So just to ask a question…if you put your woman basketball players spandex and sports bras and your volleyball players in spandex and sports bras would you still watch volleyball games over basketball games when it comes to women?

Participant 4: Probably not.

Participant 2: Just because...eh...like Patrick said sex sells when you’re watching basketball you think like elbows to the face and like stuff like that like some guys don’t want to see the aggressiveness of it like want to feel emasculated when watching sports.

Participant 4: No and I agree it’s…I would feel uncomfortable if there was a woman being hit in front of me…even if it’s just a sport. It’s just something that wouldn’t be comfortable watching.

Participant 4: I didn’t even think about that.

Participant 4: Yeah, like just a woman getting hurt in some way in front of me that’s just like…

Participant 2: Although like and I just said that but there’s the laundry football league which was like something you try…

Participant 8: They like enjoy saying that.

Participant 2: But like I still don’t like … even watching that.

Participant 1: It’s not right to have that and also if you were to do that with basketball it ruins the integrity of the game cause you’re switching what the game is all about just to get that market base and that’s just not right.

Participant 7: Okay I think the whole not wanting to see woman get hit that’s a male vs. female thing. I mean we choose to play the sport. We know it’s going to happen.

Participant 4: No, absolutely this is personal. I completely agree it’s probably incorrect. Definitely double standards.

Facilitator: Just before we move away from it…I just want to ask a question…so you’re saying that if women were to dress like women in basketball like if they dressed... is the clothes that female athletes wear when they play basketball…does that help you take away from the fact that they’re women and makes the sport easier to watch? I just want a clarification on that.

Participant 2: No, I don’t think, no.

Participant 4: No.

Facilitator: No? Okay.

Participant 6: I think overall basketball’s just a manly sport.

Participant 8: Compared to volleyball.

Participant 6: Yeah.

Participant 7: Mhm.

Facilitator: Okay.

Participant 8: When guys play volleyball it’s kind of like…weird. Like rugby or something.

<Laughs>

Facilitator: So I’m going to go and pass around some pictures and give you guys an opportunity to look at them and look at them for as long as you need and then I’m going to ask some questions about it. So…just let me know what you think.

Participant 2: Can I just make a side comment?

Facilitator: Yeah you can keep talking while this goes on if you want to go back to anything.

Participant 2: I was thinking when we are kind of playing catch up in the sports realm just because like in the past 50 years it’s been women have had the ability to play sports. Like I always talk to my mom about when she was in high school she won state in track, won state in volleyball at Dominican but there was no forward. She could never go anywhere.

Facilitator: Dominican has fantastic athletics.

Participant 2: Right, but she couldn’t go anywhere after that. It’s not like she could think “I’m going to play college volleyball because that’s not going to get me a job after that.” Like no professional. Like basketball, yes, volleyball at some states but like you think softball there’s no professional women’s softball league.

Facilitator: There’s no upward mobility.

Participant 1: Right and my neighbor she played basketball at Bucknell and she’s really good but she teaches kindergarten now because you didn’t have that upward mobility and if you did another neighbor, her niece played for university of Arizona as a softball player but if you wanted to stay in it then you have to stay coaching. I mean that you’re going to stay in it once you graduate from college.

Participant 4: And also I think it might be it might be part of a lack of adjustment. There is a catch-up that’s been going on. As far as least developed that it might seem here…it’s the most developed here than other places in the world. Like the U.S. leads in women development in terms of opportunities afforded to women.

Participant 1: But that’s still only recently.

Participant 4: Exactly!

Participant 4: It’s still developing.

Participant 4: It’s part of a lack, it’s developing. And I definitely think that sports is getting better. It’s opening up to women everyday here so I feel like it’s part of a growing trend.

Facilitator: So if you’re saying that it’s growing and is becoming something do you think realistically you’ll ever reach a place where coverage will be greater or do you think that it’ll stay at that 2%?

Participant 4: Yeah, women are now the majority, they’re growing in numbers which means by plain numbers there will be a greater demand for viewing these events, which in turn will get more exposure and then it’ll inspire people to get involved and it will grow on its own.

Facilitator: Ladies, do you agree?

Participant 6: I mean you could hope that it grows but I don’t know that it will.

Facilitator: Okay.

Participant 3: It’s already growing in marketing cause Nike has pictures of women all over the place wearing Nike stuff and…

Facilitator: I think you just hit our perfect transition we are talking about. So let’s go ahead and move into some of the pictures we have here and so what image here if you remember the numbers stood out for you the most?

Participant 1: I think 3 is a little ridiculous (all: yeah) they all have to strip down and take a cover photo to get acknowledged. I mean the only one, really out of anyone, there’s really nothing, no sex appeal is number one and that’s the most honest of the pictures. If I looked at one correctly then yeah but even then she’s bending over. So it creates…

Participant 4: I didn’t notice that.

<Laughs>

Facilitator: I see a lot of sex in that.

Participant 1: I’m just saying she’s got all her clothes on but she’s still bending over.

Participant 8: Like what sport is she playing? Like the bottom left is a soccer player so why is she in a bikini?

Participant 2: Yeah.

Participant 8: Also…a swimmer you don’t wear that either…like I don’t know.

Participant 4: I found two like weirdly funny…so inappropriate like only the ball should bounce.

Facilitator: Do any of you recognize that woman in the photo?

Participant 4: In number 2?

Facilitator: Mhm.

Participant 4: Is that the tennis player? Yes! I’ve always liked tennis.

<Laughs>

Facilitator: So the images that did stick with you…what makes them stick out? What is it about those pictures?

Participant 2: Sex appeal.

Participant 7: I think some of it’s sex appeal but I also think they do it just to remind the public that they are feminine and they’re not like dikes.

Participant 5: Yeah.

Participant 4: Oh.

Facilitator: So you think it’s more of the athlete doesn’t mind doing it from that perspective?

Participant 7: Well I mean it’s not like they’re forced to do it. I get there is some sexual appeal to get views but I also think it’s so they feel like women.

Participant 5: That went 0 to 100 real quick.

Facilitator: Elaborate.

Participant 5: Like….the marketing angle they go through with women just doesn’t make sense with me because where are the dudes in speedos then? Like you know what I mean? I feel like…most of the ads I’ve seen they portray men as looking tough not looking like desirable. It undermines their merit.

Facilitator: Okay I’m going to ask the two genders a different question here…when you guys look ads of men how do they make you feel?

Participant 3: Damn, I wish I looked like that…Christian Renaldo.

Facilitator: Girls when you look at pictures like that how does that make you feel?

Participant 8: I mean I want to look like that too…

Participant 7: So it’s the same…I mean this one is a little degrading but this one…I want to look like that in a swimsuit.

Facilitator: So overall, and we will move away specifically from images of men what do those images of women send to the public?

Participant 8: I think it’s sad that these people like athletes or even like famous actress or whatever does something so great or has all these great achievements but you still see them naked on a magazine cover and like you just did all this great like..idk it just seems like degrading. We are so inspired you worked really hard and then the correlation.

Participant 5: You have to overcompensate for.

Participant 3: But it’s not something that only happens to women athletes. Its supermodels…all of them sort of show their whole body.

Participant 4:I feel like supermodels might be THE exception.

Participant 8: Right.

Participant 4: If there is one that might be the one but it’s responding to a need…not to a need but to a preference.

Facilitator: But doesn’t that preference say something?

Participant 4: Absolutely, but I just think it might…

Participant 1: What do you mean by preference?

Participant 4: I didn’t want to…

Facilitator: No do it! Definitely open that and have a real conversation.

Participant 4: Ok, I’ll try. Biologically speaking I know men and women have different preferences and are attracted to different things. You know like if you want to sell a magazine to a man you have to follow a marketing strategy different than if you want to sell a magazine to a woman. So depending on what market you’re trying to appeal to and it’s just responding to a reality that might be more than a social construct and it might something that’s biologically engrained in us or our parts of our nurture. So I don’t see it as something deliberately degrading I just feel like it’s a money making scheme that it’s responding to a reality whether it be genetic or acquired through environment.

Participant 8: That’s why I feel like why would they ever change? They earn so much money…like SeaWorld…will it ever really close? It’s all about money at the end of the day. It’s wrong but it’s money making.

Participant 3: The women let themselves do it. It’s not like they’re forcing them.

Participant 4: I agree. There’s more members of the soccer team that are not…I don’t know who they are but there’s a wide array of the team that chose not to do this photo shoot.

Facilitator: To the women in the room who are athletes…if the difference between a contract came down you taking off your clothes for an ad…would you?

Participant 7: Mm, no.

Facilitator: Does anyone have any final comments or say or follow back up on?

Participant 2: I just want to say…maybe not on number 3 the less sex appealing of the photos in my mind I just thought of it maybe like younger people, younger females look at this magazine and will see how they have these great bodies and I know it’s not supposed to be like that like they’re athletes and they play sports but like if there was more or a split of sex appeal and the sport they play…it would encourage younger females to want to play sports and want to look athletic.

Participant 1: And to elaborate these are so…when you get young girls that are still impressionable. Like I have to look like that and those are so damn wrong in society you don’t need to look like that. You can be whoever you want to be and so I think that the continual use of doing that is really going to mess up younger generations of females and just as much guys because then you’re going to have it in their mind that this is what women need to look like but they don’t and you just need to be yourself and have a good personality. It doesn’t really matter any of the shit at the end of the day.

Participant 3: Yeah but that’s not their target audience. Their target audience is men. But when’s a girl going to be looking at that?

Participant 1: But when a little girl sees that though and for the next 15 years of her life she’s thinking this is what I have to look like so she doesn’t eat and she does that and then you have people with eating disorders.

Participant 3: I understand that.

Participant 1: I mean I know it’s their point to target men or to target older women but if you get a little girl who sees that and for the next god knows how long she’s thinking I have to look like this to go somewhere in life. That’s pretty messed up.

Participant 7: I get that point and I know there are probably some girls that freak out about that stuff but honestly I don’t even remember if I looked at a magazine yesterday. Like honest to God.

Participant 2: I was just trying to point out the benefit of being an athlete. Like having a fit body.

Facilitator: They are a direct correlation but when you look at those pictures do you think from looking at them, not from knowing anything else do you think these are athletes?

Participant 8: I would say Victoria Secret models; they don’t look like athletes at all.

Participant 2: Very true.

Participant 8: Because they probably don’t even really look like that. They’re not even muscular like they’re…like they’re hot but they’re not like I don’t know…

Participant 5: They’re skinny though.

Participant 8: Yeah she looks like she just got her boobs done.

<Laughs>

Facilitator: So just as a closing question what does that say about the way our public or our society views female athletes?

Participant 7: In order to get attention they need to show their body.

Participant 6: And it’s kind of like they’re not really athletes, they’re just pictures.

Participant 8: Right.

Participant 4: The only reason I know they’re athletes is because of this cover…honestly.

Facilitator: Does anyone have anything they’d like to say or add? Alright thank you guys so much!

**Focus Group 3**

Facilitator: Thank you all for coming to the focus group! I will be facilitating this focus group. As a general reminder I just want to inform all of you that your identities will remain confidential and I will now collect your signed consent forms. The purpose of this focus group is to gain primary data on Spring Hill College students’ opinion towards women’s sports and female athletes’ depiction in the sports media. All right guys so let’s start off with our first question. Did you guys play sports as children?

Yes (group)

Facilitator: What sports?

Participant 2: What sports did I not play?

Participant 5: Soccer.

Participant 7: Basketball, baseball, lacrosse.

Participant 1: Swimming, gymnastics.

Participant 8: Wrestling.

Participant 2: Softball.

<Laughter>

Facilitator: So basically only whiffle ball was not played?

Participant 4: Right.

<Laughter>

Facilitator: Since you guys all have a background in sports, when you hear the phrase “you play like a girl,” like what thoughts does that bring to your mind?

Participant 6: Mhm.

Participant 7: Negative connotations.

Participant 2: Yeah, very negative.

Participant 8: Sandlot.

Participant 2: Makes me mad.

<Laughter>

Facilitator: Elaborate on that, both the Sandlot and the negative connotations.

Participant 6: I feel like the negative connotations, like I couldn’t actually tell you if I thought of a woman athlete I would say she plays like a girl. Like I feel like that is its own phrase. I don’t think of women’s sports when I hear that.

Participant 3: Yeah, and I feel like it’s just like a wimpy. Like I weak player.

Participant 2: It’s more of a saying. Like you play like a girl doesn’t necessarily mean or refer to a girl.

Participant 8: Yeah, like what girl?

Participant 6: I can think of a woman athlete that I’d be like she can beat him.

Facilitator: So, well girls does that make you feel in any way…what was the exact wording? I want to make sure…that like of the phrase that you used to say weaker playing how does that make you feel that it’s recognized as a girl, as women?

Participant 4. I mean it; I think it made me mad more when I was younger.

Participant 1: Yeah, and now it’s just kind of like you know the people who actually say it don’t mean it and aren’t offending you. Or aren’t purposely offending me when they say it. It’s just because its been said for so long.

Participant 2: I guess it also depends on whose mouth it is coming out of also.

Participant 1: Yeah.

Participant 3: If it was someone who wasn’t joking then I would be like, “no, screw you…you are wrong. I’ll prove you wrong.” But usually I feel like people are joking about it.

Facilitator: Okay, can you guys give me three adjectives you would associate with sports or athletics?

Participant 7: Probably physical, aggression and being stronger than the average person or non-athlete.

Participant 4: Yeah, like physical and hard working.

Participant 5: Pretty much any synonym for strong or physical

Yeah (Majority)

Facilitator: Why do you guys think that there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s sports?

Participant 5: I think that the male fan base tends to be a little large. Maybe that’s another stereotype but I feel that those are the people who are usually going to be on the television and they want to see men’s sports.

Participant 7: I think it also depends on what sport.

Participant 6: Right.

Participant 7: If you are talking about like baseball or basketball it’s more predominant and just because it is more of a male background, or not background but fan base. But then when it’s like soccer and stuff it’s still the same and volleyball I mean…

Participant 2: Well, um for a guy athletes specifically professional guy athletes I feel like they have been given a God complex and I feel like when you know as woman we don’t have that. That is not even an option for us, not that we want to be portrayed like that. But I think that people don’t even realize how much they praise these people so they just have that going off. They didn’t have to be a good team and like if its guys playing people are going to be more interested just because their men.

Participant 6: It’s less about the sport; they create a drama surrounding it.

Participant 2: Right.

Facilitator: Do you guys at the end of the table agree?

Participant 1: Mhm.

Participant 3: I see what she’s saying.

Participant 8: I see what you’re saying but like if there were two really good women teams I’d rather watch them play then two terrible men’s teams, you know?

Participant 1: There also just isn’t even a lot of professional women’s sports like for softball there only the USA team which isn’t even in the Olympics anymore so it’s like why do they even have a team? And there are only two professional teams, there’s the MLB but there isn’t anything like that for women for softball.

Participant 2: I mean I also think a lot of it has to do with media like the Superbowl is talked snout for months before it happens. It’s almost like the first one is over and then it’s like oh the next one. They already have a location for it, like you have people raising money, people bidding on commercials and it’s all for this guy sport.

Participant 7: It’s very similar for FIFA though.

Participant 2: Mhm, you’re right. The World Cup. The World Cup is the exact same way, but I mean like there’s never any women’s sports that that much goes into.

Participant 7: Right.

Participant 5: It’s just not the same funding, or money.

Facilitator: That is actually a perfect segway to the next question. The Women’s Sports Foundation found that only 2% of network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* cover female athletic events. Why do you think that is and how does that make you feel?

Participant 4: I think that they focus a lot on more collegiate sports for women more so than professional. Except for, the only thing I hear much about is soccer for women. But other than that it’s mainly like collegiate softball or collegiate volleyball.

Facilitator: Do you need me to repeat it Matt?

Participant 6: Yeah.

Facilitator: Basically only 2% coverage on shows of sports is of women.

Participant 6: Okay.

Participant 2: Yeah but I just don’t think they have the same number of sports. I think that is one big thing.

Participant 2: That’s a very good point, but also I think right now it’s just a stereotype like men are the ones who are supposed to play at that level, professionally. That’s where the money is so that’s obviously where the media is going to be.

Participant 5: I agree.

Participant 6: I mean trying to get to the highest possible level in soccer you probably still would not be making mean the salary that a men’s play would. That’s probably largely due to the coverage disparity. You know if you are not getting the same coverage then they don’t have the money to pay women’s players.

Participant 7: As soon as coverage goes up that’s when money will start to go up.

Participant 6: Yeah.

Participant 7: At least, little by little.

Facilitator: Do you think coverage will go up?

Participant 2: Well, also you have to think of…so you guys are saying that, and it’s very true, that the highest covered women’s sport at my level is soccer. But soccer isn’t really popular here in America. So you have to think of that too…the most popular is baseball or football. Is there anything for softball?

Participant 1: I think the only thing is the College World Series which is like a week in the entire year that women’s sports is like actually on TV.

Participant 2: Right.

Participant 1: That’s like the only thing.

Participant 7: But I definitely think it is rising over the last few years I mean soccer has completely changed over eight years.

Participant 2: I mean so maybe we are transitioning but again that’s just soccer. There is no other sport.

Participant 8: I’d rather watch women’s gymnastics than men’s.

Participant 6: I was going to say Olympic coverage; it’s all about the women’s sports.

Participant 4: Yeah, that is true. But I mean doesn’t that have a lot to do with the other countries?

Participant 1: Yeah because there isn’t really football in other countries and that’s our big thing.

Participant 6: Football and baseball like you said are the two biggest things and those were started largely just for the male population.

Participant 1: And I don’t think baseball is in the Olympics anymore. Because I think since softball got taken out baseball did too.

Facilitator: Sami you’re kind of quiet but you look very thoughtful.

Participant 3: I know I’m just like it doesn’t really offend me like the 2% I don’t know like…I guess just because it’s the way it is and it’s always been. I don’t know, like if people wanted to really get into women’s sports then they could watch college like volleyball games on or whatever. I don’t know.

Participant 7: I think that when it’s at a college level it’s much more competitive and a fun sport to watch. Like I mean I prefer to watch college basketball more so than NBA.

Facilitator: Okay, well how do you think the public would react if um, sports channels and news channels started covering equal amount of women’s sports and men’s sports on any level such as college or national?

Participant 2: I mean I think at first there would be a problem but I also think if they can continue to do it…

Participant 3: It would become like a normal thing.

Participant 1: Over time they would get used to it.

Participant 7: Because they are starting to integrate women into a lot more sports coverage just with news bases, you know? So it is slowly changing to be not as stereotypical of just a guy’s thing.

Facilitator: Patrick, do you agree?

Participant 8: Oh I missed that is said.

Participant 7: I was just saying that it is changing to be not just a male dominant type of industry. I mean there are a lot more female reporters, media coverage.

Facilitator: So what would make you guys want to watch a women’s sporting event? What would be the drive to do that?

Participant 6: Good athletics.

Yeah (majority)

Participant 6: Competition.

Participant 2: Well obviously that has to be a big part. I wasn’t even considering that but um now like a lot of it has to do with the game obviously but a lot of it has to do with like half time shows and the venue and you know if there is good catering and stuff like that or good coverage like who will be videoing the game. Honestly it comes down to funding again.

Participant 7: Like you’ve never heard of a WNBA game at Madison Square Garden or anything like that.

Participant 5: Also your allegiances, like no one has allegiances to women’s WNBA. No one really has those allegiances like team pride or die hard, like Steelers fans or Colts fans like there’s just not that level, because those are the people who are going to be rallying, having the tailgates, inviting friends over to watch.

Participant 7: For soccer, I mean it’s much more at a national level more so than anything else I mean you don’t hear anybody going around being like a Galaxy fan, you hear let’s go U.S.!

Participant 4: That’s true.

Facilitator: Okay, segwaying again here a little bit. What is more appealing over a volleyball game for women over a basketball game for women?

Participant 3: All the girls in spandex.

Yeah. (majority)

<Laughter>

Participant 1: That’s basically it, girls wear spandex.

Participant 8: Like which one would you rather go to?

Facilitator: I mean you can answer that too. But yeah, what would you rather go to?

Participant 3: What do you mean? Like Spring Hill or in general?

Facilitator: In terms of in general.

Participant 6: For me, we both played volleyball, so volleyball.

Volleyball. (Majority)

Participant 1: Yeah I agree like I’d rather a volleyball game like when I played in high school the football guys would just because of the spandex. Not because they actually wanted to watch the game, because they wanted to watch the girls playing the game.

Participant 7: But that just comes to a maturity thing.

Participant 4: But it definitely depends on the person; it’s from two different ways.

Participant 3: Would you pick volleyball?

Participant 8: Yeah, definitely.

Facilitator: Okay, I’m going to show you guys some images and give you guys some time to look at them and then I’m going to ask questions specifically about the images.

Participant 6: Wow.

Facilitator: You can talk about the pictures now that you’ve seen the pictures.

Participant 6: I want everyone to see them first.

Participant 4: Okay.

Facilitator: We’ve all seen?

Yes. (majority)

Facilitator: Okay so, Matt before I asked my question you had some pretty strong feelings…

Participant 6: Okay let me see, this right here is not a volleyball team. That’s *Sports Illustrated.* What? The body issue.

Participant 7: Well they also have body issue for men but at the same time I mean that’s just when you make it a sex symbol and it’s just not about the sport.

Participant 6: Yeah, exactly.

Participant 7: That’s the problem; it’s not about the sport.

Participant 6: If you’ve ever gotten a subscription to like a women’s lacrosse magazine which comes to my house a lot because both of my sisters play. Like you don’t see that crap, you see a woman on the front…

Participant 7: You would never guess that this is actually a tennis player based off of that.

Facilitator: So what image stands out the most? If you could speak in terms of the pictures that are in front of you.

I mean definitely number three. (Majority)

Participant 7: Number two just because the words “only the ball should bounce,’ like that’s just what…

Facilitator: So what is it about those two images that specifically like, give me in detail what it is about those?

Participant 8: Its marketing.

Participant 7: They are trying to get more of a male base by showing a bunch of hot women, half-dressed or not even dressed.

Participant 1: And it’s not making them want to watch the game because they are a good athlete; it is because they look like that.

Participant 6: It’s just sex sells.

Participant 7: That’s the problem with women’s sports, they are selling them like that and not as athletes who are playing the game or are good at it.

Participant 6: You know like they should, if they start doing equal coverage like having ESPN highlights and you saw her with a racket in her hand you wouldn’t think well she’s got nice breasts.

Participant 1: You can’t even take them seriously.

Participant 5: Yeah like you would have a Nadal picture where he is taking like a serve or something and not half naked covering up his body with his own hands. It makes no sense.

Facilitator: As females how does that make you feel?

Participant 3: Like degrading, it’s just so unnecessary it has no relevance to the sport like I don’t know.

Participant 1: Just the fact that they have to show them like that to make people want to watch women’s sports.

Participant 6: And I don’t even think, again, that this doesn’t even get people to watch the sport.

Participant 7: It’s not even like she’s skiing.

Participant 4: That looks so posed.

Participant 3: At least she’s fully clothed.

Participant 3: This is the only one that looks like a normal ad because she’s fully clothed.

Participant 5: I mean this is part of larger issue too just the bombardment of like sex symbols and icons.

Facilitator: So speaking of that, what overall do those images send to the public? What is the message that those images are sending?

Participant 7: It’s saying come see these sex symbols.

Participant 8: I feel like “Sports Illustrated”is just trying to get guys to buy the magazine, you know?

Participant 6: Is “Sports Illustrated”supposed to be about sports?

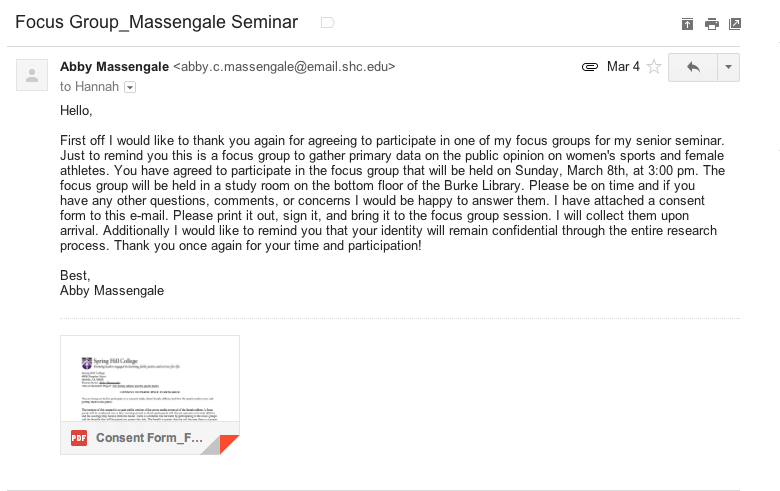
Participant 7: What did you say?

Participant 6: Is *Sports Illustrated* supposed to have anything about sports?

Participant 7: Yeah, it does but I mean then they also have stupid stuff like that to make you think more male based.

Does anybody have any follow-up statements? Or things that they would like to say about anything we’ve talked about or an added comment? Alright, great thank you guys!

**Appendix B: Sample E-mail**

****

**Anonymous**

**Appendix C: Consent Form**



Spring Hill College

4000 Dauphin Street

Mobile, AL 36608

Researcher(s): Abby Massengale

Title of Research Project: Playing Like a Girl: Women's Sports and the Media

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being invited to participate in a research study about female athletes and how the sports media cover and portray them to the public.

The purpose of this research is to gain public opinion of the sports media portrayal of the female athlete. A focus group will be conducted over a three meeting period in which participants will discuss opinions on female athletes and the coverage they receive from the media. There is a minimal risk for harm by participating in this focus groups and the benefits that will be gained are greater the risks. The benefit is greater than the risk because there is a greater need to understand why there is such shortage of female athletes in the media and if this portrayal the media is giving female athletes is fair. The participants identities will remain confidential to the public and I will be the only know who knows the identities of the focus group participants. The statements given by the participants will in no way be linked to their identities. The primary data will be in my custody and shared with no one. If you agree to participate, you must be given a signed copy of this form and a written summary of the research.

You may contact Abby Massengale at [abby.c.massengale@email.shc.edu](mailto:abby.c.massengale@email.shc.edu) any time you have questions about the research. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Institutional Review Board Chair at [hdorton@shc.edu](mailto:hdorton@shc.edu)

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized or lose benefits if you refuse to participate or decide to withdraw.

Your signature on this document means that this research study has been explained to you, that the explanation includes the above information, and that you agree voluntarily to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Typed/printed Name Typed/printed name

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date Date

**Appendix D: Focus Group Questions & Images**

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP

Did you play a sport as a child?

Think of the phrase “you play like a girl,” how does that make you feel?

State three adjectives that you would associate with sports.

Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s?

The Women’s Sports Foundation found that only 2% of network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* covered female athletic events, how does that make you feel?

How do you think the public would react if network news and ESPN’s *Sportscenter* covered women’s sports as much as they did men’s?

What would make you want to watch a woman’s sporting event?

What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a women’s basketball game?

(Show images of female athletes)

Which image stood out the most for you?

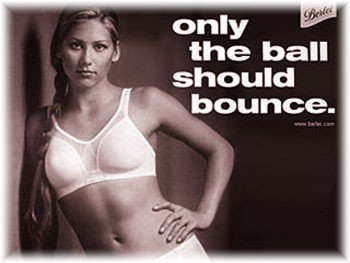
What was it about this image that made it stick out in your mind?

What message do these images send to the public?

IMAGES FOR FOCUS GROUP



1.



2.



3.

4.



5.

**Appendix E: IRB Approval**

Abby Massengale, Communication Arts

Dear Abby,

The Institutional Review Board at Spring Hill College has granted you approval to conduct your research. Our review has determined that you expose your participants to minimal or no risks.

This approval is valid for one year. Any extension of approval requires the principal investigator to request and extension in writing.

In addition, the IRB requires a progress report, which is likely to include a notification of either completion or termination, and reports of any harm to participants.

This approval may be terminated or suspended if research does not follow IRB requirements or becomes associated with unexpected serious harm to participants.

Your application has been coded 201415-17

Best of luck in your research,

Harold Dorton, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Chair of Sociology

Chair of the Institutional Review Board

**Appendix F: Thematic Analysis Table: Opinion**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *State three adjectives you would associate with sports* |  |  |
|  | Position Opinion (PO) | Competitive, physical, tough |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) |  |
|  | Other (O) | Leadership, commitment |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s sports?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Opinion (PO) |  |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) | More physical, more fast-paced, society’s preference |
|  | Other (O) | Male fan base |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *How do you think the public would react if network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered women’s sports as much as they do men’s?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Opinion (PO) | Good improvement |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) | Backlash, frowned upon, negative reaction |
|  | Other (O) | Viewer ratings |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question ask by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *What would make you want to watch a women’s sporting event over a men’s sporting event?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Opinion (PO) | Good teams, high stakes, good competition |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) | Nothing, anti-climactic, boring, lack of fan base |
|  | Other (O) |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a men’s basketball game?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Opinion (PO) |  |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) | Clothing, sex appeal |
|  | Other (O) |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *What messages do these images send to the public?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Opinion (PO) |  |
|  | Negative Opinion (NO) | Sex symbols, degrading, athleticism isn’t important, upsetting |
|  | Other (O) |  |

**Appendix G: Thematic Analysis Table: Reaction**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *Think of the phrase “you play like a girl,” how does that make you feel?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Reaction (PR) |  |
|  | Negative Reaction (NR) | Negative connotations, not aggressive enough, not a compliment, upsetting |
|  | Other (O) |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *The Women’s Sports Foundation found that only 2% of network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered female athletic events, how does that make you feel?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Reaction (PR) |  |
|  | Negative Reaction (NR) | Shocked, surprised, upset |
|  | Other (O) | Women’s collegiate sports |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question asked by facilitator** | **Themes/abbrev.** | **Keywords** |
| *What is it about this image that made it stick out in your mind?* |  |  |
|  | Positive Reaction (PR) |  |
|  | Negative Reaction (NR) | Hyper feminized, inappropriate wording on image, degrading |
|  | Other (O) |  |

**Appendix H: Scoring Sheet: Opinion**

**Thematic Analysis Scoring Sheet: Opinion**

Questions

*State three adjectives you would associate with sports.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: Strength, competition, intense. | **X** |  |  |
| Focus Group 2: Hm, I’d have to say physical, aggressive, loyal. Those are the first ones that come to my mind. | **X** |  |  |
| Focus Group 3: Probably physical, aggression and being stronger than the average person or non-athlete. | **X** |  |  |
| TOTAL: | **3** | **0** | **0** |

*Why do you think there is more coverage of men’s sports than women’s sports?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: I think they have a tendency to be a lot more physical, which people like. And um, a lot of times I think they have a tendency to be more fast paced. Especially in our culture, I think that’s something we like and value. And like to see |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: The basic stereotypes in our society in how it sees guys sports as like more fun to watch but more of what you want to see like hard hitting or when you go to a hockey game and you want to see a fight. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: I think the male fan base tends to be a little large. Maybe that’s another stereotype but I feel those are the people who are usually going to be on the television and they want to see men’s sports. | **X** |  |  |
| TOTAL: | **1** | **2** | **0** |

*How do you think the public would react if network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered women’s sports as much as they do men’s?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: I think there would be a problem with it. I mean in my opinion, I think men’s sports are just more exhilarating. Like, I mean I prefer watching men’s sports because they get into the game more. They’re more physical. Um, how do I say it? They make a lot more money too. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: Well we brought up the point not as many girls watch sports, not as many guys want to watch women’s sports so I think viewer’s ratings would just dramatic in how the difference between the guys sports viewings and the girls’ sports viewings. |  |  | **X** |
| Focus Group 3: Because they are starting to integrate women into a lot more sports coverage with just news bases you know? So it is slowly changing to be not as stereotypical of just a guy’s thing. | **X** |  |  |
| TOTAL: | **1** | **1** | **1** |

*What would make you want to watch a women’s sporting event over a men’s sporting event?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: I think if it was faster paced. Sometimes you watch it and it’s just so slow. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: It’s like when they represent the nation like the Olympics and anytime in the World Cup. | **X** |  |  |
| Focus Group 3: Also your allegiances, like no one has allegiances to women’s WNBA. No one really has those allegiances like team pride or die hard, like Steelers or Colts fans like there’s just not that level, because those are the people who are going to be rallying, having the tailgates, inviting friends over to watch. |  | **X** |  |
| TOTAL: | **1** | **2** | **0** |

*What is more appealing about a women’s volleyball game over a women’s volleyball game?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: It seems more feminine. So it feels more comfortable for us to watch because its women doing something feminine. |  |  | **X** |
| Focus Group 2: Well yeah you have the sex sells appeal with volleyball and sex sells so if you’re looking at a marketing standpoint you put it on primetime and NBC you’re going to get more viewership for volleyball than you would if you put a basketball game on. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: Yeah I agree like I’d rather watch a volleyball game like when I played in high school the football guys would just because of the spandex. Not because they actually wanted to watch the game, because they wanted to watch the girls playing the game. |  | **X** |  |
| TOTAL: | **0** | **2** | **1** |

*What messages do these images send to the public?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PO | NO | O |
| Focus Group 1: I think it’s showing like that your athleticism is number two to your femininity and your attractiveness. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: I think it’s sad that these people like athletes or even like famous actress or whatever does something so great or has all these great achievements but you still see them naked on a magazine cover and like you just did all this great like…I don’t know it just seems like degrading. We are so inspired, you worked really hard and then the correlation. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: It’s saying come see these sex symbols. |  | **X** |  |
| TOTAL: | **0** | **3** | **0** |

**Appendix I: Scoring Sheet: Reaction**

**Thematic Scoring Sheet: Reaction**

Questions

*Think of the phrase “you play like a girl,” how does that make you feel?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PR | NR | O |
| Focus Group 1: Well as a boy playing a sport you don’t want to be compared to a girl. Because guys are always, well at least around us, we have to be better. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: Because when people talk about it… it’s an insult basically because they don’t think playing like a girl means anything. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: I feel like the negative connotations, like I couldn’t tell you if I thought of a woman athlete I would say she plays like a girl. Like I feel like it is its own phrase. I don’t think of women’s sports when I hear that. |  |  | **X** |
| TOTAL: | **0** | **2** | **1** |

*The Women’s Sports Foundation found that only 2% of network news and ESPN’s Sportscenter covered female athletic events, how does that make you feel?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PR | NR | O |
| Focus Group 1: I mean that’s insane. Only 2%? I mean honestly…I don’t know that’s just an insane number. When ESPN, *Sportscenter* opens its all guys. The intro is all men playing sports you never see women coverage. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: Well it makes me like kind of, I mean I guess like I knew it was unequal but I didn’t know it was that bad. I thought it was 60/40. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: I think that they focus a lot on more collegiate sports for women more so than professional. Except for, the only thing I hear much about is soccer for women. But other than that it’s mainly like collegiate softball or collegiate volleyball. |  |  | **X** |
| TOTAL: | **0** | **2** | **1** |

*What is it about this image that made it stick out in your mind?*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Responses: | PR | NR | O |
| Focus Group 1: It doesn’t have anything to do with the sport that they are trying to portray. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 2: I think some of its sex appeal but I also think they do it just to remind the public that they are feminine and they’re not like dikes. |  | **X** |  |
| Focus Group 3: Number two just because the words “only the ball should bounce,” like that’s just what… |  | **X** |  |
| TOTAL: | **0** | **3** | **0** |

**Appendix J: Signed Consent Forms**