

He Shot, She Shot: Sports Photojournalism, News Outlet Size, and Gender

I. Project Summary:

Sports images are gripping invitations for viewers, offering front-row seats for seeing game action, revisiting key plays and defining moments. In addition, sports photojournalism offers fans a behind-the-scenes look, allowing them intimate and candid views of athletes they feel an association with, but are likely never to meet.

Photographs attract attention (Garcia & Stark, 1991; Zillmann, Knobloch, & Yu, 2001) and influence perception (Gibson & Zillmann, 2000), allowing viewers access to a newsworthy event. Previous research has focused on gender stereotyping of sports images by photojournalists and sports editors (Hardin, Chance, Dodd, & Hardin, 2002; Hardin, Dodd, Chance, & Walsdorf, 2004; Wanta & Leggett, 1988) but little attention has been paid to the impact of gender on those who create the images. Few, if any, studies have focused on the way photojournalists, both male and female, interact with and visually represent athletes and coaches. This is important on an interpersonal level as well as having ramifications on the images that result.

In light of the recent sexual harassment controversies surrounding the New York Jets and sports reporter Inez Sainz (Bishop, 2010), and sports columnist Tara Sullivan barred from the Masters locker room (CBS/AP, 2011), gaining insight into the relationship between gender and sports coverage is of great importance, as journalists and athletes must interact in a mutually beneficial manner. Photojournalism has historically been a male dominated field, however the number of female photojournalists is growing (Ricchiardi, 1998), as are efforts by news organizations to recruit female journalists (Weaver, Beam, Brownee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). As a result, the way in which female photojournalists work while covering sports is of mounting significance. Photographs are understood to be constructed versions of reality (K. Bissell, 2000; K. L. Bissell, 2000; Lowrey, 1999; Newton, 2001) and gender plays a role in the way images are conceived and framed (Ricchiardi, 1998). Joe Elbert, former assistant managing editor of photography at the Washington Post and judge of the prestigious Pictures of the Year award, is among those who understand the influence gender has on photojournalistic images. "Until the 1970s, [photojournalism] was a man's world," said Elbert, "We're starting to get more and different ... interpretations of subject matter as more women come into the profession. There is a different approach because of gender." (Ricchiardi, 1998).

Other factors besides gender also come into play. The size and scope of a news organization will also mediate the way in which photojournalists operate as theorized in the Hierarchy of Influences Model. According to the model news, including sports coverage, is a product created by journalists who are influenced by outside factors. Five levels of forces – the individual, media routines, organizational, extramedia and ideological – limit and help shape the way news is made (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Gender is an important factor of the individual level, which focuses on journalists' background and experience. Journalists' norms and routines – the way they go about their jobs – define the second tier of influence. The third level encompasses organizational constraints, including size and scope of the news outlet. According to the Hierarchy of Influences approach higher-level forces influence lower level forces (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). However, lower-tier levels are seen as more influential from journalists' perspective (Johnson & Fahmy, 2010). This research focuses on the first three tiers, in particular, how gender, routines, and organizational size and scope affect the way in which sports images are created. Therefore, this research seeks to explore

the question, “*What roles do gender and scale of news outlet play in the creation of sports images?*”

Both sports journalism and photojournalism are understudied areas of academic research. These often-overlooked areas are rich in providing information about the way in which athletes are portrayed visually. This study is relevant as streamlined news outlets and sports organizations must decide how to allocate resources to maintain the best possible sports coverage. Understanding how photojournalists and their organizations create and use sports images will help both to accommodate the work of journalists and help reduce stereotyping that may occur.

In light of recent controversies surrounding female sports journalists, this study is also important because it provides insight into how women and men photojournalists work and interact with athletes and coaches. This will provide the sports industry, journalism schools, and news organizations information helpful in preparing both journalists and athletes for successful communication.

Because this is an exploratory study, it could launch into future research involving the influence journalists’ race and gender have on sports coverage, and extend to other types of journalists (reporters, columnists, broadcast, etc.) Additionally, the sports journalism that results from these different groups can then be analyzed to better understand the effects on audience members and society.

II. Proposed Research:

As faculty sponsor, I will supervise Carolyn Yaschur, a Ph.D. student and former sports photojournalist (who has covered: the 2004 Olympics, NFL, MLB, NBA, the 2008 Iditarod, local and university athletics), as she conducts this qualitative study. It will consist of in-depth interviews to be conducted with both a male and female photojournalist from a small and large newspaper, as well as the Associated Press bureau in the Seattle area. The researcher is limited to interviewing one male and one female from each outlet because the Seattle AP bureau and the small newspaper employ only two staff photojournalists each.

The intent is to determine the similarities and differences that exist in the way sports events are covered based on size of news outlet and gender. All three news organizations cover many of the same local, university and professional sports. Questions regarding use of technology, access, experiences, and routines in coverage will be asked as a way to identify how gender and size of news organization play into sports coverage.

Following all interviews, the discourse will be transcribed and analyzed using discourse analysis, an interpretive method based on Michael Foucault’s interpretation of the individual nature of creation and deconstruction of meaning (Hall, 2001). Through multiple readings, dominant themes and discrepancies will be determined based on repetition of answers in light of existing literature and Carolyn’s photojournalism experience to provide a richer context for understanding the impact gender and scale of a news organization have on photojournalistic coverage of sports. Additionally, a content analysis of the photojournalist’s work will be conducted to determine how differences in gender and news organization size influence the images.

III. Additional Funding Opportunities:

As a result of this study, future funding may be gained and partnerships built with organizations dedicated to photojournalism and gender studies. The Harry Ransom Center, which offers grants for research conducted in their archives, and The Briscoe Center both

have sports photojournalism in their collections. The National Press Photographer's Association and Sportshooter are both large, international organizations that support sports photojournalism, and may offer funding. The Association of Women in Sports Media provides fellowships and internship opportunities for female university students pursuing careers in sports journalism. The Women's Sports Foundation and the American Association of University Women also offers fellowships and grants for gender-related research. The Chambers Family Fund provides grants for women's economic self-sufficiency, highlighting job stability and professional opportunities for women. Relationships may be built with and funding may be provided by these organizations as a result of this study.

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