

Competent Athletes or Family Portraits: Content Analysis of Images on NCAA Division I Softball and Baseball Sport Marketing Posters

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Over the past three decades, sport media scholars have consistently uncovered two patterns of representation throughout mainstream media: 1) female athletes, compared to their male counterparts, are significantly underrepresented with respect to amount of coverage (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Kane & Buysse, 2005); and 2) sportswomen are routinely presented in ways that emphasize their femininity and heterosexuality versus their athletic competence (Kane, 1998; Parker, 2002). These trends have been remarkably resilient: They have been discovered in print and broadcast journalism, at different levels of athletic involvement (e.g., Olympic, college, and professional sports), and regardless of time period with respect to Title IX (Maxwell, 2006; Duncan & Messner, 2005; Duncan, 1990; Kane, 1988).

In spite of the contributions made by sport media scholars, a significant gap exists in our understanding of what images are presented through intercollegiate marketing and promotional materials. Given that, sport consumers typically receive information in the form of images from two primary domains: 1) mainstream sport media coverage (e.g., television, print media, the Internet); and 2) marketing and promotional materials, the purpose of this study is to expand the boundaries of sport media research by exploring the images of female and male athletes presented on NCAA Division I softball and baseball sport marketing posters.

This study will focus on the marketing and promotions domain, comparing NCAA Division I softball and baseball sport marketing posters in the Big 10, Big East, PAC-10, Big 12 and the SEC conferences. These conferences were selected because they are Bowl Championship Series eligible conferences and each conference represents varying geographical regions in the United States. Building on the work of Kane and Buysse's (2005) longitudinal media guide study, content analysis will be employed using four poster-content variable criteria: 1) in uniform v. out of uniform, 2) on the court v. off the court, 3) in active poses v. passive poses (e.g., pictures from a game versus a staged photograph), and 4) contemporary marketing themes represented within the posters.

Emergent trends suggest softball and baseball athletes are typically shown in uniform and on the field. Athletic department portrayals of softball and baseball players differ when examining athlete pose (active vs. passive) and marketing themes within the sport marketing posters. Results will be discussed using a critical feminist framework, by specifically addressing issues of gender equity and how dominant gender ideology is promoted, reproduced or resisted, or both.