

A Content Analysis of Media Coverage of Collegiate Level Sport-Related Violence and the Construction of Gender: The Cases of Blount, Spikes, and Lambert.

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Sport-related violence is present throughout all levels of competition, with only the most deplorable instances finding their way into the national media spotlight (Fields, Collins, & Comstock, 2007). The current study focused on three separate instances of such violence that occurred at the collegiate level in the fall of 2009. More specifically, three instances of brawling and foul play that each received considerable national-media attention and scrutiny. The three cases of sport-related violence analyzed in the present study were: Oregon's LeGarette Blount's postgame punching incident, Florida's Brandon Spikes' in-game eye-gouging incident, and New Mexico's Elizabeth Lambert's in-game repeated violent behavior. Coverage of the three instances by national online, television and print media outlets (ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN.com, and Sports Illustrated), August through November 2009, were examined to determine the extent to which socially constructed ideas regarding gender, and more specifically hegemonic masculinity (Connelly, 1995; 2005), were presented and reinforced through such media presentations. The mass media, as a social institution, plays a central role in the distribution of information; as such the media acts as an outlet for the construction, dissemination, and maintenance of cultural values, including those with respect to gender. This is true particularly within the domain of sport, as sport is consumed predominantly in its re-presented form via online, television, radio and print media.

A content analysis was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the media coverage through the use of common themes, or categories of discursive discourse, frequently used in media portrayals sport (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Thus the content and text of the mediated messages were systematically analyzed and coded based on predetermined criteria (Milne and Adler, 1999; Neuendorf, 2002; Weber, 1990). Wensing and Bruce's six categories that are present in the media's coverage of sport were used to frame the current analysis: gender marking, gender stereotyping, establishing heterosexuality, infantilizing, mentioning non-sport-related characteristics, and ambivalence. Descriptive quantitative analysis of media coverage was used to give a general depiction of the amount, type, placement and quality of coverage given to each of the three incidents. In addition, the presence of, and extent to which, gendered discursive discourse was used in the media's presentation of the three disparate sport-related incidents of violence was also analyzed.