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# Content analysis of the Des Moines Register's coverage of women in sport through photographs since Title IX

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Content analysis of the *Des Moines Register's* coverage of women in  
sport through photographs since Title IX

by

Kimberly Jo Bell

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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Graduate College  
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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of  
Kimberly Jo Bell  
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents and written  
in honor of Abigail Kent.

Abigail, may you grow knowing that being  
a woman and the first born are true gifts from God.

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## PREFACE

Growing up on a family farm in southeast Iowa carried many privileges. One of these was being able to eat breakfast every morning with my father before he went outside to complete his many farm chores. As a young girl, my father bestowed upon me many privileges, I would later learn in life, reserved primarily for boys. Along with reading me stories of knights and their fair ladies and how my prince would someday come, every morning at the breakfast table my father read to me from the sports section of the *Des Moines Register*. The "Big Peach" sports section of the *Des Moines Register* became my connection to everything that meant anything in this world. The thought never crossed my mind that I should ask why the stories my father read to me did not include female superstar athletes. The thought never crossed my mind that I was in any way different from my brothers because I was a girl. I knew sports as my brothers did; I played sports as my brothers did; I read sports as my brothers and father did, but I was a girl. Being a "girl," I would learn later in life, did not always carry the same privileges as being a boy, at least in the sports world I first grew to love as a child.

For all of my father's heartfelt support I am eternally grateful. But just because my father believed in me as a female and an athlete did not mean the rest of the world did. Until Mary Lou Retton appeared on a Wheaties cereal box after her gold medal performance in the 1984 Olympics, I did not recall having had a female athlete to look to as a role model. Why was this the case?

In 1972, I was two years old and completely unaware of the impact Title IX would have on me and female athletes everywhere. As my athletic interests grew, however, I did become aware of certain stereotypes and perceptions society held concerning women and sport. As I took part in high school athletics and then intramural sports in college, I realized that as a woman my love of sport and the knowledge I possessed of sport were not always welcomed by those around me. My attitude concerning sport and competition was a bit too aggressive for some, and not supported by many. During my undergraduate years as a journalism and English major, I often found myself swimming against the current when trying to prove myself credible to write about sports either for the college newspaper I worked for or in classroom assignments. I believed as a journalist that one becomes a better writer by reading other examples of writing that parallel one's goals. Although it was not difficult for me to find a plethora of sports writers I enjoyed reading and found credible, I soon came to the conclusion that there weren't many female athletes being written about and even fewer female sports writers covering athletics. Why was this the case?

The chance to pursue a masters degree in journalism brought with it many challenges, but a challenge I wanted to set for myself included finding answers to some of my questions concerning women, sport and media. Thus came the idea for this thesis study: Has the *Des Moines Register* been successful in presenting men and women equally in sports coverage since 1972, the year Title IX was implemented?

My journey toward answering this question would be a frustrating one for many reasons, but in the end, the journey itself taught me more about my role as a female, an athlete and a writer than I might have ever guessed possible. This study afforded me the opportunity to contribute to the growing amount of literature concerning the portrayal of women in the media. Indeed, all may be fair in love and war, but what about the sports section?



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

All is fair in love and war, but what about the sports section? How are women in sport portrayed by the media? Are men and women portrayed in an equitable fashion? Studies concerning the general portrayal of women in the media have suggested that men and women have not been portrayed in an equal manner. More recent studies, however, which will be discussed in the literature review, suggest that the portrayals of women in the media are improving, at least in some areas. Media coverage of women in sport is one of the areas where portrayal of women has not seemed to reflect the changes seen in other forms of media.

Sport has historically been labeled a world for men, but since the inception of Title IX in 1972, women have been provided more opportunities for involvement in sport. Has the influx of women into the world of sport been reflected in the media? This study will look not only at literature concerning general portrayals of women in the media but at the body of literature related specifically to the media's portrayals of women in sport.

### Title IX And The Case For Women In Sport

In 1972, the United States government, under the presidency of Richard Nixon, enacted the Educational Amendment Act known as Title IX. Title IX was mandated for gender equity purposes. The Act in part reads: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity

receiving Federal financial assistance....” Title IX would be a significant event for females everywhere because more opportunities in sport would be provided for girls and women than had ever been seen in the history of the United States.

### Background: History Of Women In Sport

The sport realm has undergone many changes during the 20th century. Many of these changes have resulted from women becoming more involved in all aspects of sport: as athletes, coaches, athletic directors, reporters and even owners of professional sports teams. However, this was not always the case.

Historically, women were not allowed to participate in sports or strenuous activities because many believed these activities would damage women's child-bearing organs (Leonard 250). During the early part of the century, it became acceptable for females to participate in archery, bicycling, walking, horseback riding (sidesaddle only) and occasionally golf or tennis, but in moderation and rarely for competitive reasons (Leonard 251).

In 1920, the United States sent its first female athletes to compete in the Olympics. Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball and field hockey teams were also formed and, by 1943, the All-American Girls Baseball League was formed. Female athletes began to be more visible in the culture. But nothing could equal the increase in numbers of opportunities for women in sport or the number of female participants in sport catalyzed by the inception and implementation of Title IX in 1972 (Leonard 262).

As stated earlier, Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments Act was mandated for gender equity purposes. Although the term "sport" never appeared in the Title IX wording, the amendment has emerged as one of the most controversial and partisan concerns in both intercollegiate and high school athletics. This controversy stems from having to cut men's athletic programs to provide an equal number of scholarships and athletic programs for female athletes (Leonard 265). Many believe Title IX has been unjustified because of the fact that equity, in some instances, has resulted in cutting men's programs.

On paper Title IX seems simple, to provide equal opportunity for women and men. However, inequities still exist. Many of these inequities are caused by the participation and spending levels for men's football and no equivalent programs for women (265).

Although Title IX is controversial, it has increased the opportunities for participation of girls and women in sport. The year before Title IX was passed, fewer than 300,000 girls participated in interscholastic sports and there were very few women's athletic scholarships (Leonard 262). By the mid 1990s, however, there were more than 10,000 women's athletic scholarships and more than 30 National Collegiate Athletic Association-sponsored women's championships (262). In 1970, approximately 250,000 high school girls played on athletic teams. In 1980, eight years after the implementation of Title IX, the number of female athletes at the high school level soared to 2 million (262).

In 1984, Mary Lou Retton's success as the first American female to win the Olympic gold medal for all-around competition in gymnastics,

catapulted her to stardom and American glory. There had been media coverage of female athletes in the past, such as Wilma Rudolph and Nadia Komeneche. However, for many American women and girls, Retton became one of the first acclaimed women athletes of her era. In fact, Retton became the first female ever to be portrayed on the front of a Wheaties cereal box.

But even after Retton's success in the 1984 Olympic Games, women athletes didn't establish a noted presence with national media attention until the 1988 and 1992 Olympic Games. However, the media attention given to women in those games catalyzed a definite message to any girls or women watching and reading the media coverage.

"Media coverage of female athletes at the 1992 games focused on gymnasts, little pixies whose bodies were shown in graceful, aesthetic motion. Thus, after decades of denial and invisibility in our culture, the female athlete had finally arrived, or had she?" (Kane 28)

Another example of what Kane described can be found in the media portrayals of one of history's greatest track and field athletes. Who could forget the now deceased Florence Griffith Joyner, one of the greatest sprinters of all-time, regardless of gender, running down the track with her multicolored fashion outfits and longer than life brightly painted fingernails? Which image remained dominate in the minds of both women and men alike as they followed the media coverage of Flo Jo? How many remember Florence Griffith Joyner as an outstanding athlete who won three Olympic gold medals in track and field? Or are individuals more likely to remember Flo Jo the fashion model who competed in "long tresses, lavish makeup, and racy one-legged running

suits that emphasized sexual difference?" (Duncan, *Sociology of Sport*, 28)

To be objective when looking at this example, however, one must ask why Joyner felt it necessary to promote herself in such an extravagant fashion? Did she not know that the media were going to pick up on her fashion sense, unheard of in track and field until her success? Indeed, Flo Jo knew that being eccentric would help get her noticed, and perhaps improve the audience for track and field. One can say Joyner knew exactly what she needed to do to promote herself and her sport. This is not to say Flo Jo's manipulation of an existing market was wrong; this is just a point of information regarding the images the media have portrayed concerning women in sport.

A similar example occurred in professional sports when tennis pro Chris Evert announced her retirement in the late 1980s. This event was seen as so significant that Evert appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, something that historically has not happened often for women in sport. Instead of focusing on her outstanding athletic career and the ending of an era in tennis, *Sports Illustrated* framed the August 28, 1989, story surrounding her retirement with this caption: "I'm going to be a full time wife." Evert's success allowed her to retire at a young age and focus on a family. This choice was one she alluded to in the article. However, by focusing on this aspect of Evert's life in the caption, what kind of message did this headline send not only young girls and women who read *Sports Illustrated* but the majority of its readership: men?

In addition, in the summer of 1997 *Sports Illustrated* decided to test a magazine that would focus on female athleticism and sport. On the cover of the inaugural issue sent to subscribers of *Sports Illustrated* Sheryle Swoops, professional basketball player, was the focus. The cover focused on her being pregnant, not her athleticism. Swoops was decked out in a WNBA jersey which was protruding because of her pregnancy and the headline discussed her soon-to-be motherhood, not her athleticism. While these two traits: motherhood and WNBA player, were synonymous for Swoops at that time in her life, it was odd that *Sports Illustrated*, in a move to focus more on women in sport through a supplemental magazine, would choose to focus on one major difference between men and women, the biological ability to have children. Instead of focusing on the fact that Swoops had proven herself to be one of the most talented basketball players in America, regardless of gender, she was shown in a pose that focused on her being a mother, not an athlete.

After the trial issue of the magazine *Sports Illustrated for Women*, the publisher of *Sports Illustrated* decided to produce the women's edition every two months and began distribution in 1999. Although this action may be considered to be a bold and positive move on the part of *Sports Illustrated* concerning the coverage of women in sport, why is it that the magazine is published once every two months when the historical *Sports Illustrated* which focuses primarily on men in sports is published weekly?

Furthermore, in the issues that have been produced, not one of the women featured on the cover has been in an action photo. All have

been posed photographs. This is not consistent with the photographs of male athletes who appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, usually in action photographs. What is this portrayal suggesting to readers?

The media, like *Sports Illustrated*, do much to provide socially accepted messages to an audience. As can be seen with the examples of Joyner and Swoops, accommodation and resistance have occurred simultaneously when it comes to the media's coverage of women in sport. Joyner and Swoop's presence on the covers of the most recognized sport magazine in America supports the notion that social change concerning women in sport has indeed taken place; however, the specific type of portrayals offered associate both Joyner and Swoops first as "female, then as "athlete" and only in posed, not action shots.

One avenue that researchers have looked to in measuring portrayals of women in sport has been the coverage and depiction of female athletes in the United States media. However, one must look at the coverage of women in sport before theorizing what this coverage might be saying to audiences.

The studies that have been done concerning the coverage of women in sport by the media have suggested that the media have not advanced the image of societal acceptance of women in sport. Studies dealing with different types of print and broadcast media show that female athletes have been underrepresented.

How do the media in Iowa portray women in athletics? Are female athletes or would-be-athletes able to read the pages of the sports section in Iowa newspapers and see role models for female athletic success? For as long as sport has been popular in America,

women have somehow been involved. How has this involvement been portrayed in the media?

It is the hope that the results of this thesis will provide useful information which can be added to the already existing literature related to the media's portrayal of women in sport. Has the *Des Moines Register* presented men and women equally in sports coverage since 1972, the year Title IX was implemented? Does the *Des Moines Register's* coverage of women in sport parallel the real world? In relation to the studies concerning women, sport and media which have been conducted, how does the *Des Moines Register's* portrayal of women compare? To answer these questions one must first understand the way women are portrayed generally in the media and then how media specifically portray women in sport.



## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is some research available concerning female athletes and their representation in the media on an international level, this chapter will focus specifically on the coverage of women in sport by the United States media. The role of sport in American culture and the relationship between the media and sports also will be discussed.

### General Portrayals Of Women In The Media

Before analyzing how women have been portrayed in the sports media, it is important to examine the general portrayals of women in the media at large. Evidence suggests that women have historically been portrayed in a stereotypical manner in all genres of the media.

Content analysis conducted of media in the 1970s showed that portrayals of women in television “presented highly stereotyped portrayals of the sexes” (Jeffres 167). For example, a study conducted by Kenrick and Gutierrez of the 1970s program *Charlie’s Angels* yielded results which suggested that men “devalued the attractiveness of average looking women” after viewing episodes of the television show (Kenrick 131).

Research conducted in the late 1980s showed that there has been little improvement “in either the quantity or quality of news and other information about women in the world’s media” (Valdivia 109). With the coming of age of Music Television (MTV) in the 1980s, studies such as the one conducted by Vincent, Davis, and Boruszkowski (1987) showed that MTV videos often depict gender roles in a traditional and sexist fashion. In more than half of the videos analyzed, women were viewed as sex objects, while two-thirds of the characters in the videos were male.

A 1991 cross-cultural survey conducted by Mohanty found that the news still defines women and women' issues as un-newsworthy. Mohanty's study concluded that when women are included, their portrayals are of a sexual nature or are shown in domestic roles (Mohanty 1).

Studies conducted by Huston et al. (1992) found that women in television programs were "younger than men, less likely to work, and more apt to be dependent on men for help and guidance." Although studies conducted in the 1980s portray more female characters with jobs outside of the home, women are still not portrayed in positions of authority and power, managerial or professional roles (Brown 168).

As with television and music videos, studies of portrayals of women in American film have yielded many of the same kinds of results. A 1990 study by Levy found women presented in domestic type roles more than 60% of the time while men were portrayed 60% of the time in public-career roles (Levy 53).

### Critical Feminist Perspectives

Critical feminist perspectives suggest that media researchers give differential attention to topics where men are more likely to be dominant: politics, war, business and sports. Furthermore, one of the central ideas in critical feminist analysis focuses on how texts "position" women in "narratives and textual interaction and in so doing contribute to a definition of "femininity" (McQuail 261). Many feminist critics believe women can't be liberated by texts when ideas such as the patriarchal society and domestic responsibilities of women are the focus.

Since the 1960s, a major focus of gender issues by North American sport sociologists and psychologists has been to “prove” that sport competition did not “masculinize female participants either psychologically or behaviorally” (Hall 18). One might question if there is evidence that stereotypical portrayals of women by the media impact the attitudes of an audience. Can repeated exposure to a stereotypical image catalyze a certain perception by an audience, regardless of whether the portrayal parallels society as a whole?

### Cultivation Theory

George Gerbner originally proposed the theory of media cultivation in 1972. “Cultivation theory sees media images molding society by the long-term presentation of relatively uniform versions of social reality” (Jeffres, 1997, 86). Gerbner says by defining what is normal or acceptable, the media “cultivate” these definitions for the audience (Gerbner, 1990, 250).

Gerbner and his associates studied how portrayals on television might affect perceptions and attitudes in those who use television as a primary source of media influence. Could repeated exposure to television “cultivate” certain perceptions among the television audience? Gerbner noted that elements of cultivation did not happen independent of other factors (Bryant 23). Indeed, “layers of social, personal, and cultural contexts also determine the shape, scope, and degree of the contribution television is likely to make” (Bryant 23).

However, the meanings an audience associates with television portrayals are major aspects in the cultivation process. In other words, regardless of what socio-economic status one is from, television can bridge those gaps. Gerbner called this effect “mainstreaming.”

Viewing television might help, for example, to define for the audience what being an adolescent male member of a given social class entails. This interaction between television and audience does not stop with one exposure to the medium, but continues from “cradle to grave” (Bryant 23). Results of cultivation analysis studies conclude that television does not parallel the real world. However, if an individual continues to view such representation, regardless of their consistency to real world reality, repeated viewing will cultivate beliefs which mirror television portrayals.

Studies focused on how television portrays women have suggested that these portrayals cultivate gender stereotypes. A study conducted by Morgan in 1982 discovered that the viewing of television increased stereotypical attitudes among female viewers who had high IQ's and came from affluent backgrounds (Morgan 947). Results showed that before viewing these gender biased portrayals of women on television, the girls believed women could do anything in the world of work. After exposure to television portrayals of women, however, the girls moved toward a “more traditional set of beliefs” (Morgan 1980).

Results of another study conducted by Signorielli (1990) suggested that the more high school students viewed television, the more they wanted to get married and have kids. In 1992, Signorielli and Lears studied television watching among elementary school children and found that the more television the children watched, the more likely they were to believe girls should do “female-typed chores and boys should perform male-typed chores” (Signorielli, 1992, 157).

Gerbner and his associates did find that television cultivated certain perceptions among television viewers. For example, heavy

viewers perceived the world to be much more violent than FBI statistics prove. Heavy viewers also believed the elderly were a “vanishing breed” because of the lack of elderly characters on television. Certain attitudes were “cultivated, Gerbner said, from images portrayed by television (Gerbner, 1978, 46).

Keeping these studies in mind, however, it is important to understand cultivation does not simply mean that a medium such as television, by itself, creates or mirrors images, norms and societal values. Television, or the mass medium being used by the audience is only a step in the dynamic process. Societal needs and objectives influence the creation of the messages and portrayals.

In effect, then, how might repeated exposure to portrayals of women in the media affect audiences? Are portrayals of female athletes in the media consistent with the general portrayals of women in the media? Are portrayals of women in sport cultivating certain perceptions and attitudes? To answer these questions one must first understand the way women in sport are specifically portrayed by the media.

#### Background: History Of Media Portrayals Of Women In Sport

In studying sport, the history of women in sport, and sociological perspectives regarding women, sport and media, the following must be kept in mind: Sociologically, sport is an expression of the cultural system in which it occurs. Sport mirrors the rituals and values of society (Leonard 66). Sport does more than entertain. Sport influences language, clothing styles and perhaps even provides a frame of reference for heroes and heroines (Creedon 7). Individuals get gratification, support and attachment through identity with something

or someone else. A sense of belonging and identity can be gained through sport by both spectator and participant. The potential fan is generally socialized into sport at a young age (Leonard 115).

Arnold Beisser says that sport enthusiasm stems from the nature of mass society and the secondary forms of social interaction conditioned by it:

The increasing prevalence of impersonal forms of social interaction (which is due in part to family ties being attenuated and to an increase in geographical mobility); affective neutrality, in other words, emotional blandness; and social isolation of individuals force a search for more permanent roots through which a sense of belonging, social anchoring, and purpose can be nurtured. (Beisser 115)

Although not many scholars have approached sport from a feminist perspective, historians and sociologists alike underscore the belief that sport is a “microcosm of gender values in the American culture” (Creedon 4). Creedon’s studies of women, media and sport focused on “how the playing field, gymnasium, arena, court, stadium or anywhere else that sport is played serves as a metaphor for gender values in American culture” (5).

Children begin understanding sport at the most fundamental level. On the playground, gender even influences which games or activities are defined as “real” or “macho” sports. Examples of this notion are sports such as synchronized swimming having peripheral status in United States sport culture because it involves values such as grace and patience, values that are not often associated with male professional sports.

Birrell and Greendorfer produced some of the first scholarship that brought sport from the margin to the mainstream of feminist critical analysis. Greendorfer has looked at such events as the 1988 and

1992 Olympic Games where women athletes finally began appearing to achieve national media attention.

Birrell says in her studies of women in sport that the feminized and sexualized portrayals of women in sport only serve to put new variations on very old themes: "Media images as a product or tool of patriarchal oppression of women, and their bodies, through an institutionalized socially constructed system of gender roles and values" (Birrell 29).

#### Amount Of Media Coverage Of Women In Sport

The most obvious and well-documented finding in literature concerning women in sport is the underreporting, and thus under representation, of female athletes and their sporting events throughout all mass media (Kane, 1989, 58). Support for this notion comes from the following studies.

An analysis of feature articles in *Sports Illustrated* between 1954 and 1987 indicated that male athletes and their athletic accomplishments received 91% of the total coverage given to athletes (Lumpkin 13). Studies of television and newspaper sports coverage by Duncan, Messner and Williams (1990, 1991) found that the pattern of reporting of women in sports remained consistent throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. They found that 92% of television air time was given to men's sports, compared to only 5% allotted to women, and stories focusing exclusively on men's sports outnumbered exclusive coverage given to women's sports by a ratio of 23 to 1 (Duncan et al., 1990, 1991).

Similarly, Duncan found that although television sports news did include women's sporting events on a regular basis, rarely was the focus

of sports stories on individual women as athletes. Women were more likely to be reported on as a “team,” whereas men were more likely to be shown as both individual event sport leaders and members of teams. When looking at newspaper coverage, Duncan found that there were 28.8 times as many column inches devoted to men-only sport stories as there were to women-only sports stories (Duncan et al., 1990, 1991).

Further studies looking at newspaper coverage of women in sport found similar results. Luebke conducted a study of four Connecticut newspapers and their representations of men and women in photographs and found that men appeared in sports stories 14 times more often than women (Luebke 122).

A study conducted by Rintala and Birrell illustrates the “symbolic annihilation of women in sport” (Kane 36). Results from an analysis of *Young Athlete* magazine suggested that the magazine created the impression that the world of sport is dominated by males. For example, fewer than one third of all photographs that appeared in the magazine between 1975 and 1982 included female athletes (Rintala 231). In addition, the percentage of photographs depicting females decreased even further if the photograph was either the centerfold or cover (231).

All of these findings indicate that women continue to be severely underrepresented in sport media. Not only do the results of these studies suggest the idea that women are not as active in the world of sport, but they go further to create a false picture of women in sport by “denying the reality of the modern female athlete” (Kane 36).

According to statistics published by the National Sporting Goods Association in 1993, more than 7 million women participated in softball; more than 7.5 million women were involved in basketball; another 7.4



million participated in tennis, and 5.6 million participated in golf. Approximately 26 million women bicycled, 44.6 million engaged in exercise walking and close to 23 million participated in aerobic exercise (National Sporting Goods Association, 1993).

According to the same set of statistics, men engaged slightly more in activities such as softball, baseball and basketball, but when it came to bicycling, exercise walking and aerobic exercise, women's involvement tied or exceeded the numbers of male participants. These statistics support the notion that women are indeed active in sport and are underrepresented in the media as compared to the reporting of men.

The second notion suggested by the existing literature on women in sport is that even when sportswomen are depicted in the media, they are consistently trivialized and marginalized through the type of coverage they receive. Findings suggest that visual production techniques, language, terminology and commentary applied to women's sport are selectively imposed by the media to create a stereotypical feminized view of women (Creedon 36).

Kane's studies suggested that even when an article did emphasize how successful and talented these women were, another theme emerged (Kane 61). This theme supported the stereotypical belief that women were plagued by such character flaws as emotional dependency, anxiety and depression, sexual identity conflicts and role conflicts. The overriding message in these articles was quite clear: female athletes should be recognized and remembered for their stereotypical gender role, not their athletic role (61).

A Duncan et al. (1990) study that looked at coverage of women during the 1988 Olympic Games found that television treated women differently, both as spectators and as participants. The study concluded that when women were included in the broadcasts they were often times treated as comical targets of newscasters' jokes and as sexual objects. At the same time, the technical framing and production techniques of women's sporting events trivialized the seriousness of their athletic performance and achievements. A direct comparison conducted by Duncan of the coverage of men's and women's basketball coverage during the 1988 Olympics illustrated the unevenness in production techniques (Duncan 22). Men's basketball contests were framed as dramatic spectacles of historic quality, while women's basketball contests were given the feel of neighborhood pickup games.

The cultivation theory suggests the portrayals found in the above-mentioned studies could cultivate stereotypes concerning women and sport. When studying portrayals of women in sport, many researchers have focused on television, magazines and column inches in newspapers. However, there have not been many studies conducted focused on female athlete portrayals in sporting photographs. Photographs can convey powerful images in a matter of seconds as the following studies suggest.

#### The Ideology of Photographs: Conveyors of Saliency

“From the moment when, at birth, we are color coded into pink or blue, we enter into a social world in which sexual difference is continually marked by cultural signs” (Betterton 7). These cultural signs often show up in photographs in various newspapers. Images presented in newspaper photographs are catalysts as conveyors of

information. As Luebke states in his studies, “If newspapers are attempting to project ‘a representative picture of the constituent groups in the society’ (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947), news photographs as well as news stories should reflect that” (Luebke 23).

As Blackwood has stated: “Often people who either can’t read, or who don’t take the time to read many of the stories in newspapers do scan the photographs, and it is reasonable to assume that sometimes the photos are the only representation of world events to which some people are exposed” (Blackwood 711).

It is important to understand the power of photographs in portraying ideas and beliefs to an audience. Assuming a picture is indeed worth 1,000 words, it is a distinct message all on its own, regardless of the caption appearing with a newspaper photograph. “When we talk of news photographs, we are speaking of the camera and its trained observer, the photojournalist, functioning as a witness to events” (Kerns xii).

Despite the objectivity and realism one may believe he or she is seeing in a photographic image, photographs are rarely neutral images. As stated earlier, photographs are subject to the selection and editing of the photographer and editor as well as artificial processes and social uses that make them “interpretations” of daily reality. Photographs can be cropped, air brushed, reduced, enlarged and retouched. Like a painter, a photographer can catalyze a certain image by tweaking certain aspects of an event. Therefore, a photograph is the result of many kinds of influences: aesthetic, social, political, technological, personal and professional.

In discussing the power of images Zimmerman states:

The photograph is a potent source of ideology precisely because its message gets passed off as objective, natural, and unmotivated at the same time that it serves some interests more than others. Photographs purport to give us glimpses of a real world that “we have seen before and know to be true.” (Zimmerman 1975)

As Duncan stated in her study of sports photographs from the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games, “another feature of photographs that makes them ideologically powerful is their commodity form” (1988, 24). To consume many of the images of women in sport that are available, one must buy a commodity, such as a newspaper or magazine. Therefore, these photographs will be scrutinized by the individuals who have the means to buy these commodities, and who will then look at these photographs when and how they like. Duncan goes on to say that for these reasons: “Photographs offer the viewers a sense of position and control, a condition that has import in patriarchy” (24).

In addition, if these photographs of women in sport portray the women as weak or vulnerable, the consumer will perhaps feel a position of power or authority with respect to these images. One must take into account the social position of the consumer, however. Traits such as gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status all contribute to this social positioning, and therefore the consumption of the photograph by the individual audience member.

Another ideological concept mentioned in Duncan’s study, and one that is key to the formulation of this study, is the influential power of photographs as they relate to some audience members. “Photographs are ideologically potent because they offer some viewers the possibility of identifying with the subject matter or context depicted. If a

photograph shows an athlete triumphantly winning a race, viewers can identify with the person's success" (Duncan, 1984, 24). At the same time, in sport photographs, if men are dominating women or if men are found in superior positions and women in positions of inferiority, the viewers might again identify with patriarchal stereotyped beliefs.

### Summary

Since the enactment of Title IX, the numbers of girls and women in sport have skyrocketed, but an increase in the amount of coverage of women in sport and equal depiction of the athletic abilities of women in sport have not been realized. The media have been shown through the studies cited in the literature to be retaining the stereotypical historical stigmas of female athleticism through lack of coverage and, when coverage is given, it is selective and, thus, inaccurate media coverage of women in sport.

As mentioned earlier, however, Iowa has been looked at as a leader in the promotion of girls and women in sport through the Iowa High School Athletic Association and its members. If Iowa truly is a leader in terms of numbers of women participating in sport, as well as opportunities being given to women in sport, then is this realism being reflected through the inclusion and representation of women in sport by one of Iowa's major sources of news, the *Des Moines Register*?

This study will look specifically at photographic portrayals of women in sport by the *Des Moines Register* sports section. It is hoped the results of this thesis will provide a body of knowledge from which others can work to study how these photographic portrayals might cultivate certain ideas among an audience.

### Hypothesis I

*More male than female photographs will appear on the front page of the sports section of the Des Moines Register.*

The front page became the focus of the content analysis because of the generally held belief that front page news is the most important or newsworthy information. Although looking only at the numbers of photographs depicting men and women in sporting activities does not in itself answer the question of equal treatment for male and female sport figures, it does give some insight into how salience might be conveyed to the audience through numbers of photographs.

This information is important to know because cultivation theory includes a discussion of not only how a message is portrayed, but how often the audience is exposed to the message. One of Gerbner's cultivation studies (1978) analyzed what ideas were being cultivated by watching television images of women working in domestic tasks. The study concluded that lack of images, such as women being portrayed in work outside of the home, can cultivate ideas just as viewing a portrayal can. If women are not portrayed in working careers or as independent business leaders, the audience will cultivate the perception that this is the way things are in the real world. This same idea could be related to and discussed concerning the lack of photographs of women as compared to men in sports reporting.

### Hypothesis II

*More females than males will be depicted in aesthetic sport activities: figure skating, gymnastics, tennis and golf; whereas, more males than females will be depicted in both high-risk sport activities*

*and those featuring the demonstration of strength and/or overpowering one's opponent: football, hockey, boxing, basketball and soccer.*

Although those women participating in sports such as figure skating and gymnastics would argue that these sports are sports of strength and high-risk, sociological studies have shown that society often places sports such as gymnastics and figure skating into a category that is gender specific, "female." In addition, sports such as hockey, boxing and rugby are "male" sports dominated by aggressive plays and high-risk activity (Leonard 145).

Again, referring to the studies of cultivation conducted by Morgan (1982) and Signoriellia and Lears (1991), stereotypical views concerning gender roles can be cultivated by exposure to media which portrays women in stereotypical gender-specific roles. The question then becomes, does the *Des Moines Register* reflect or refract these stereotypical images by including photographs portraying gender-specific sport?

### Hypothesis III

*Women more than men will be portrayed on page one of the Des Moines Register sports section in photographs featuring non-active sport roles (mug shots, victory poses) or in moments when emotion is the focus instead of athletic ability, whereas more men than women will be portrayed in action shots showing high-risk activities featuring strength.*

Studies conducted by Duncan, Kane and Greendorfer support the notion that women are not shown in action shots as much as men. This hypothesis will seek to determine whether or not the *Des Moines*

*Register* typifies this stereotype and contributes to a portrayal that might cultivate certain beliefs.

#### Hypothesis IV

*More female than male photographs will be described using wording emphasizing the emotional status of women and not athletic action or ability, whereas more male than female photographs will be described using words focusing on physical attributes and not emotional status.*

A study conducted in 1984 by Hilliard supports the notion that portrayals of women in sport often focus on their “physical attractiveness rather than their athletic accomplishments” (Hilliard 251). Are these descriptions being seen on the front pages of the *Des Moines Register* sports section? Hilliard’s studies suggest that if an audience’s knowledge of a topic is dominated by consistent patterns, such as seeing women in non-active sports roles, or being described in emotional instead of athletic terms, these portrayals will cultivate the same perceptions to the audience (252).

#### Hypothesis V

*More female than male photographs on page one of the sports section of the Des Moines Register will show athletes in situations where they are wearing clothing not consistent with active athletic performance (warm-up attire, swimsuits that focus on physical attributes and not athletic prowess, etc.), whereas more male than female photographs will show athletes photographed in active athletic apparel consistent with the participation of the sport represented in the photograph.*



Because many cultivation studies conducted related to the image of women in television and magazine has shown women being sexualized, it is important to determine whether or not the *Des Moines Register* reflects or refracts this sex-role depiction stereotypical of women as they are photographed in other kinds of media.

#### Hypothesis VI

*More male than female photographs on page one of the Des Moines Register sports section will be accompanied by an article.*

An article on page one, by itself, conveys salience of the information contained in the article. However, a photograph along with an article on page one will raise the salience of the event being pictured even more. How does the *Des Moines Register* frame its front-page photographs of women in sport? How does this portrayal compare to men?

It is hoped the results of these hypotheses will provide some insight regarding the portrayal of women in sport by the *Des Moines Register*. Results of cultivation studies conducted by Gerbner and others suggest that what is portrayed in the media is often times considered by the audience to be true, regardless of whether or not these portrayals are consistent with reality. Therefore, knowing how the *Des Moines Register* portrays women in sport will provide the first step to understanding how these portrayals of women in sport might cultivate ideas among the audience. In turn, it is hoped these results can provide new information which can be added to the already existing body of knowledge concerning women, sport and the media.

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

#### Unit Of Observation

Since research for this study focused on the *Des Moines Register*, it is important to understand why this particular newspaper was chosen as the unit of observation for this study.

First, the *Des Moines Register* is looked upon as one of the major sources of media coverage in the state of Iowa. Second, Iowa has historically been seen as a leader in sport for women, especially basketball. The popularity of the Iowa High School Girls' State Basketball Tournament continues to gain national recognition from sport enthusiasts on a national level as has been the case with both six-on-six basketball and now five-on-five. According to Beran:

In the 1970's and 1980's Iowans could and did boast that their state led all other states in the percentage of girls participating in high school athletics. Iowa was the only state to have had official state basketball tournaments for girls since 1920. While Texas, Tennessee, and Oklahoma also had longtime state programs, none had been continuous. In most other state, girls' basketball state tournaments essentially started in the 1970's. (Beran 99)

One of the things this study will analyze is whether or not the *Des Moines Register* reflects this level of interest shown by its audience concerning certain women's sports, such as basketball.

Thirdly, the *Des Moines Register* is a medium of daily coverage. In other content analysis research, it has been found that daily newspapers serve as the best units of observation for content analysis since all days of the week can be represented in the study (Kassajian 9).

### Method Of Analysis: Content Analysis

Content analysis is a systematic way of analyzing message content in a media format. Content analysis can be explained in these words:

Content analysis, while certainly a method of analysis, is more than that. It is a method of observation. Instead of observing people's behavior directly, or asking them to respond to scales, or interviewing them, the investigator takes the communications that people have produced and asks questions of the communications. (Kerlinger 544)

Media theorists Lasswell, Lerner and Pool describe content analysis in this way:

Content analysis will not tell us whether a given work is good literature; it will tell us whether the style is varied. It will not tell us whether a paper is subversive; it will tell us if the contents change with party line. (Lasswell 45)

### Sampling

The study analyzed page one from the year 1972, when Title IX became law, to 1997, twenty-five years after Title IX. The year 1997 was chosen not only because this was the 25-year anniversary of Title IX, but when the author began the study, 1997 was the last completed calendar year. For this reason, 1997 was chosen as the last year of the study.

A content analysis of the photographs appearing on page one of the *Des Moines Register* sports section from 1972 to 1997 was carried out by using a sampling method known as constructed weeks. The goal was to sample enough issues of the *Register* so as to achieve a longitudinal study which reflected the variation in sporting seasons as

well as changes in the sporting world catalyzed by the inception of Title IX in 1972. Constructed week sampling "assumes cyclic variation of content for different days of the week and requires that all the different days of the week be represented" (Riffe 134).

Constructed week sampling of the sports section of the *Des Moines Register* was obtained by taking a stratified random sample. In other words, microfilm of the *Des Moines Register* was obtained for each of the following years or strata: 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997. The sampling was done at five-year intervals in order to include a longitudinal dimension, yet one that did not make the analysis unmanageable for the researcher.

From each of the years chosen for the study, the following months or strata were selected for analysis: January, March, May, July, September and November. The reason for choosing these specific months was to account for the change in seasonal sport variation. For example, by choosing to sample constructed weeks in January and March, sports such as basketball, wrestling and swimming would be represent. May and July would capture sports such as track and field, baseball, softball and soccer: September and November would capture such sports as football, volleyball and cross-country.

From each of the months selected by stratified random sampling for the study, the seven days of a constructed week were selected by a stratified random sample. In other words, from the year and month already selected, one Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday were selected to make a constructed week for analysis.

One constructed week was developed from each of six months (January, March, May, July, September and November) of 1972, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997. In studies using constructed weeks, "a constructed week procedure is more efficient than pure random or consecutive day sampling" (Riffe 139). The number of constructed weeks needed to provide an adequate sample for each year of the study was decided by adopting the Stempel (1952) methodology, in which 14 days, two constructed weeks, was found sufficient to represent any given year for a content analysis. Increasing sample size beyond two weeks, as stated in Stempel's results, was a poor investment of the researcher's time (Riffe 135).

### Units Of Analysis

The study was narrowed to photographic images and representations of women in the *Des Moines Register* sports section for several reasons. First, when devising this study, it became apparent that there needed to be a focus concerning the study of women, media and sport. Focusing on the *Des Moines Register's* coverage of women in sport seemed a small enough focus, but as research continued, it became evident that counting column inches and looking simply at page placement was not meeting the goal of the study. The goal of the study was to determine whether or not the *Des Moines Register* has been successful in presenting men and women equally in sports coverage since 1972, the year Title IX was implemented.

Content analysis is not a good form of analysis for study of any medium of communication unless the categories used in the analysis are specific and well defined. The categories themselves are the crux of the

research design and will do nothing to help answer the question if not well defined (Kassarjian 12).

### Coding Instrument

The coding instrument for this study was developed after reviewing the existing literature concerning women, sport and the media. The coding instrument was based on information abstracted from Duncan (1990), Rintala and Birrell (1984), Luebke (1989), Hilliard (1984).

In order to assess the value and application of Duncan's method for coding photographs of female athletes to the content analysis of the photographs of female athletes in the *Des Moines Register's* sports section, a pre-coding exercise was conducted. Several photographs from front page sections of the *Des Moines Register* sports page were coded according to the criteria provided by Duncan (1990, Photos in 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games). As a result of the pre-coding exercise, many categories were changed and many were added in order to provide an instrument specific enough for research of the topic.

To analyze the photographs necessary in studying the hypotheses, the following operational variables were used. A complete description of the variables of analysis used in coding appears in the Appendix. For each variable coded, several coding descriptors were used.

### Photograph Date And Number

Each photograph was coded by date it appeared in the sports section. Each photograph was also assigned a number in chronological order according to date the photographs appeared.

### Gender

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of gender which corresponded to the following descriptors:

- 1) Male
- 2) Female
- 3) Mixed (male and female representation)
- 4) Inanimate object
- 5) Animal
- 99) Other

### Sport

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of the sport appearing in the photograph. Because of the vast number of sport descriptions used, the coding numbers and descriptions for sport appear in the Appendix.

### Photograph Presence

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of the type of photographic shot taken.

- 1) Action shot: athletes shown in action poses. Subjects are participating in the sport during official game time.
- 2) Still shot: Subjects are not pictured participating in athletic action but are in uniform and in between playing

time or being photographed before or after the athletic event.

- 3) Mug shot: Subjects are not participating in an actual athletic event, but are pictured in a mug shot showing only the subject's head.
- 4) Reference to something concerning sport, but not showing an actual athletic event in progress. For example, this could be a group of demonstrators protesting the Olympics.
- 6) Action shot but of a fan, not an athlete during competition.

#### Placement Of Photograph On Page

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of the placement of the photographs on the page. Although this variable was coded for, the results of this variable were not used in proving any of the hypotheses.

#### Physical Portrayal Shown In Photograph

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of the physical or emotional expression being portrayed in the photograph. This variable contained 36 different coding descriptions from crying and smiling to grabbing another player. Therefore, the coding numbers and descriptions for this variable appear in the Appendix.

#### Wording Used In The Caption

Each photograph was assigned a specific number for coding of the types of adjectives used in the caption of the photograph. This variable sought to determine whether or not women were described more often using adjectives that reflected emotional or physical attributes and not



athletic or competitive attributes as is stereotypically seen in men's captions. The coding numbers and descriptions appear in the Appendix.

### Clothing

Each photograph was assigned a specific number corresponding to the type of clothing being worn in the photograph.

- 1) Shown in athletic apparel consistent with the activity
- 2) Shown in more apparel than normal athletic playing apparel  
Ex. Non-active wear: sweatsuits, warm-ups
- 3) Shown in less clothing than normal athletic apparel  
Ex. Women consistently shown in swimsuits
- 4) Shown in everyday clothes
- 5) Can't tell what clothing is being worn  
Ex. Mug shot of head only; no clothes to be seen in picture
- 6) Can't tell what clothing is being worn because of automobile covering individual
- 99) Other

### Status Of Athlete

Each photograph was assigned a specific number corresponding to the professional or amateur status of the athlete. These numbers and coding descriptions appear in the Appendix.

### Article

Each photograph was assigned a specific number corresponding to whether or not an article appeared with the photograph on page one.

- 1) Yes there is an article accompanying the photo on page one.
- 0) No, there is no article accompanying the photos on page one.

- 2) Yes, there is an article about the photo; however, the article appears on an inside page.
- 99) Other (Ex. Page one news brief, not a complete story)

After coding of the photographs was complete, each of the specific identifiers and its differentiated variables was entered into an Excel spreadsheet so frequencies for each of the identifiers could be established. Frequencies for each of the years studied were individually calculated as were total frequencies for the six years studied.

#### Coder Reliability

Once the coding instrument was established, a coder reliability test was performed. A method for coder reliability was taken from Brown et al. (1987) and used to establish coder reliability. In Brown et al. reliability was calculated as “the average (mean) percentage of agreement among all coders across all variables.” Because the researcher alone coded all photographs for the data collection, a reliability test was performed in which the researcher re-coded various photographs three times. Twenty-five previously coded photographs were chosen from the initial pre-test, using a simple random sample method. For this intracoder reliability test, the overall percentage of reliability, or agreement was 89 percent.

#### Significance Testing Of Hypotheses

After the information was gathered and formatted into table form, Chi-square tests of significance were conducted on the results of each

results table. The Chi-square test was conducted to determine whether or not the results were significant at a confidence interval of .05 (95%).

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Hypothesis I

*More male than female photographs will appear on the front page of the sports section of the Des Moines Register.*

Table 1 provides information concerning the number of photographs appearing for men and women athletes in the years analyzed for this study. Women in sport were consistently shown less often on page one of the *Des Moines Register* sports section, even 25 years after the implementation of Title IX.

Table 1. Percent of photographs by gender <sup>b</sup>

	1972	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997
<b>Male</b>	92.7%	85.6%	83.8%	78.7%	80.1%	85.2%
<b>Female</b>	4.7	13.8	13.3	19.7	19.2	13.0
<b>Other <sup>a</sup></b>	2.6	0.6	2.9	1.6	0.7	1.8
<b>Total Photos</b>	193.0	167.0	136.0	132.0	136.0	169.0

<sup>a</sup>Other = Photographs of inanimate objects or animals

<sup>b</sup>(Chi-square)  $X^2 = 24.9$ ;  $p < .05$

However, the percentage of female photographs rose between 1972 and 1992, with a small decline in 1997. These results do not support Hypothesis I.

### Hypothesis II

*More females than males will be depicted in aesthetic sport activities: figure skating, gymnastics, tennis and golf; whereas, more*

*males than females will be depicted in both high-risk sport activities and those featuring the demonstration of strength and/or overpowering one's opponent: football, hockey, boxing, basketball and soccer.*

Table 2 shows results that tested Hypothesis II. Females more than males were portrayed in aesthetic activities such as tennis and golf. However, women were shown consistently more often than men as basketball players and track and field athletes. Males more than females were portrayed in high-risk sports activities. The results tend to provide mixed support for Hypothesis II

Table 2. Results of percentage of sport representation in photographs <sup>b</sup>

Sports	Male	Female	Other <sup>a</sup>
<b>Higher Risk</b>			
Football	35.4%	0.0%	12.5%
Basketball	23.0	52.4	6.3
Baseball	14.5	1.6	12.5
Wrestling	3.2	0.0	0.0
Track & Field	4.3	20.2	18.8
<b>Aesthetic</b>			
Golf	5.8	4.0	6.3
Tennis	3.0	7.3	0.0
<b>Other Sports</b>	10.8	14.5	43.6
<b>Total Photos</b>	793.0	124.0	16.0

<sup>a</sup> Photographs of inanimate objects or animals

<sup>b</sup> Chi-square ( $x^2$ ) = 167.4;  $p < .05$

### Hypothesis III

*Women more than men will be portrayed on page one of the Des Moines Register sports section in non-active sport roles (mug shots, victory poses) or in moments when emotion is the focus instead of athletic ability, whereas more photographs of men than women will be portrayed in action shots showing high-risk activities featuring strength.*

Table 3 shows results of Hypothesis III.

Table 3. Results of photograph presence <sup>b</sup>

	Male	Female	Other <sup>a</sup>
Mug Shot	54.4%	32.3%	0.0%
Action Shot	24.3	30.6	18.8
Still Shot	13.7	21.0	31.2
Other Shots	7.6	16.1	50.0
<b>Total Photos</b>	<b>793.0</b>	<b>124.0</b>	<b>16.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Photographs of Inanimate Objects or Animals

<sup>b</sup> Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 110.28;  $p < .05$

Contrary to the hypothesis, men were shown more in mug shots than women. In addition, women were shown by a larger percentage than men in action shots. Still shots were the lowest percentage of photographs shown for both male and female subjects. Therefore, the results shown in Table 3 do not support Hypothesis III.

### Hypothesis IV

*More female than male photographs will be described using wording emphasizing the emotional status of women and not athletic action or ability, whereas more male than female photographs will be described using words focusing on physical attributes and not emotional status.*

The results of Hypothesis 4 are shown in Table 4.

The results of Table 4 are representative of the descriptors analyzed for the six years of this study. The particular days

Table 4. Results of coding for captions of photos in 1972 and 1977

Date of Photograph	Descriptors Coded for Female Photographs	Descriptors Coded for Male Photographs
January 23, 1972	chats	leaping, blocks
March 9, 1972	5 ft. 3 in. 89 lbs. Scoring star congratulated by teammates	goes up for shot
March 9, 1972	can't hold back tears	No male photos today
March 12, 1972	Hugs; screams	No male photos today
May 29, 1972	Joe's the boss (referring to husband, boxer, Joe Fraiser)	business as usual
July 23, 1972	I'm not the Berg of Old gets to basketball ahead	looks over field of yachts
January 6, 1997	of...	Aikman sacked
March, 11, 1997	blocks shot	has experience in net cutting
May 23, 1997	has won three	battles...for rebound
July 7, 1997	forty-eight and one record	races across court to return
September 3, 1997	react to match	works on kicking drill
November 14, 1997	blocks	defense

represented in Table 4 were chosen because they were representative of the wording used for 1972, the first year of the study and 1997, the last year of the study.

In 1972, women were most often subjects of photographs accompanied by captions describing emotional and physical attributes of female athletes, not specifically the athletic competition as is shown in Table 4. However, as the years progressed, stereotypical descriptions focusing on emotion and physical attributes were replaced with descriptions of athletic accomplishment consistent with the descriptions given to male subjects. Therefore, Hypothesis IV was not supported.

#### Hypothesis V

*More female than male photographs on page one of the sports section of the Des Moines Register will show athletes in situations where they are wearing clothing not consistent with active athletic performance (warm-up attire, swimsuits that focus on physical attributes and not athletic prowess, etc.), whereas more male than female photographs will show athletes photographed in active athletic apparel consistent with participation of the sport represented in the photograph.*

Results for Hypothesis V are found in Table 5. Results showed that women and men were photographed in apparel consistent with athletic competition. Women were not more likely to be shown in less clothing. Therefore, Hypothesis VI was not completely supported by these results.



Table 5. Results of coding for clothing worn in photographs <sup>b</sup>

	Male	Female	Other <sup>a</sup>
Athletic apparel	61.2%	54.8%	50.0%
More clothing	1.1	4.0	0.0
Less clothing	0.0	0.0	0.0
Everyday clothing	27.9	7.3	25.0
Can't tell clothing	9.1	33.9	6.3
Other	0.7	0.0	18.7
<b>Total Photos</b>	<b>793.0</b>	<b>124.0</b>	<b>16.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Photographs of inanimate objects or animals

<sup>b</sup> Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ )= 119.8;  $p < .05$

### Hypothesis VI

*More male than female photographs will appear on page one of the Des Moines Register sports section accompanied by an article.*

Results for the testing of Hypothesis VI are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of coding for article accompanying page one photo <sup>b</sup>

	Male	Female	Other <sup>a</sup>
Photo with article	89.3%	92.8%	75.0%
Photo & no article	6.4	3.2	12.4
Article inside	0.5	0.8	6.3
Pg. 1 brief	3.8	3.2	6.3
<b>Total Photos</b>	<b>793.0</b>	<b>124.0</b>	<b>16.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Other = Photographs of inanimate objects or animals

<sup>b</sup> Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 13.04;  $p < .05$

Results displayed in Table 6 show photographs of female athletes on page one of the *Des Moines Register* were consistently accompanied by an article. In fact, the percent of female photographs accompanied by an article was higher for female photographs than that of male photographs for the years studied. The results do not completely support or reject Hypothesis VI.

The figures included in Table 6 referring to “inside pages” and “page one brief” account for those photographs which did have articles, however, the article appeared somewhere inside the paper instead of page one.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Has the *Des Moines Register* been successful in presenting men and women equally in sports coverage since Title IX? The content analysis looked at much more than just numbers of pictures on page one of the sports section to determine “equal” coverage.

### Hypothesis I

Hypothesis I looked at the percentage of male and female photographs by year. Women in sport were consistently shown less often on page one of the *Des Moines Register* sports section, even 25 years after the implementation of Title IX, as was shown in Table 1. Taking the ideas conveyed by Gerbner’s cultivation theory, the absence of a particular group, in this case female athletes on page one of the *Des Moines Register* sports section, may cultivate perceptions among an audience. The actual number of photographs is not the only piece of information one needs to apply the cultivation theory to a set of data, but how those photographs are portraying a certain group, in this case women in sport. Could repeated exposure to the portrayals of women through sporting photographs have certain cultivation effects?

Although more male than female photographs were the consistent results of the content analysis for the sports section of the *Des Moines Register*, the sample found football as the number one sport photographed and reported on in the sports section of the *Des Moines Register*. Therefore, it must be taken into account that because very few women play football, women will not be a part of this large percentage of football photographs. This knowledge helps to account for some of the variation in photographic representation for men and

women in the sports section and may help to explain why male photographs still appear more frequently than female photographs in the 1997 pages analyzed.

While number of photographs is one indicator of the salience the *Des Moines Register* places on women in sport, other factors need to be looked to in determining whether equitable portrayals of men and women in sport are taking place.

### Hypothesis II

Results showed that males more than females were portrayed in high-risk sport activities. The exception, however, was women's portrayal in basketball photographs which may reflect the importance the state of Iowa places on women's basketball. Because women were portrayed in high percentages for both basketball and track and field, the results do not completely support Hypothesis II.

### Hypothesis III

The results showed that the largest percentage of photographs analyzed from the pages of the *Des Moines Register* sports section were mug shots. This held consistent for all photographs regardless of the gender represented in each photograph. The results of other studies referred to in this thesis have consistently found women being photographed as non-active participants in sport. The results of the content analysis of the *Des Moines Register* speak well for those female athletes participating in geographical areas covered by the *Des Moines Register's* sports staff.

#### Hypothesis IV

While newspapers and magazines studied by Duncan, Kane and Greendorfer have show women to be portrayed often times more emotional than athletic, the findings of the *Des Moines Register* content analysis do not support the same kind of stereotypical female representation. The results of coding for Hypothesis IV show the *Des Moines Register* does not consistently show women as emotional creatures incapable of athletic success. In 1972, descriptors accompanying photographs of female athletes in the *Register* were much more focused on emotional status of women than the years following Title IX. However, in he years following Title IX descriptors of all photographs analyzed were quite consistent in terms of referring to athletic ability or emotional and physical attributes regardless of gender coded in the photo.

#### Hypothesis V

Coding for clothing of athletes in photographs of the *Des Moines Register* yielded results that showed women and men being photographed in apparel consistent with athletic competition. Women were not more likely to be shown in “less” clothing as was seen in other studies referred to in this thesis.

#### Hypothesis VI

The percent of female photographs accompanied by an article on page one of the sports section was higher for female photographs than that of male photographs for the years studied. This finding then would again not be consistent with the findings of other studies mentioned in this thesis. When the *Des Moines Register* places a photograph of a

female athlete on page one of the sports section, importance is given that photograph by simply including an article along with the photo. Front page prominence as well as explanation of the event rejects the notion that the *Des Moines Register* does not place importance on females as athletes.

### Cultivation Theory Application

A researcher must first analyze how an individual or group of individuals is being portrayed before deciding whether or not any cultivating effects are being catalyzed by the portrayals. Therefore, this study focused on the portrayal of women in sport through photographs displayed on page one of the sports section of the *Des Moines Register*. From those results, further research questions concurring cultivating effects are proposed.

The results of this thesis study provided information which suggest the *Des Moines Register* is portraying women in ways that are contrary to current studies regarding women, media and sport. Studies mentioned in this thesis have shown that women have historically been shown less than men in the media, and gender specific stereotypes have been portrayed by the media. However, in the past five to ten years, studies have shown that the general portrayal of women in the media is improving. In contrast to these general portrayals however, have been women's portrayals as athletes by the media. Studies show that female athletes, even in the 1990s are still being portrayed in gender-specific sports roles and in ways that focus on emotional attributes and not athletic abilities.

One of the essences contained in Gerbner's cultivation theory is the belief that societal needs and objectives influence the creation of the messages and portrayals as seen through mass media. The implementation of Title IX as a societal objective has proved to provide many opportunities for women in sport. However, these opportunities are not generally reflected in the portrayals of female athletes in the media. In contrast, however, the results of this study would suggest that the *Des Moines Register* has worked to reflect the fact that women have achieved more opportunity and success in the 25 sports world since 1972.

Since 1972, the year Title IX was implemented, the *Des Moines Register* has increased the number of female photographs appearing on page one of the sports section. In the *Des Moines Register* women are being shown as participants in all kinds of sports, not only those labeled by society as aesthetically pleasing. Women are being photographed as much if not more than men in action shots. Women are being described using adjectives consistent with the description of men in sport. Female athletes are not shown in less clothing than male athletes, and just as many photographs of women on page one of the sports section are accompanied by an article as men's photographs.

These results conclude that the *Des Moines Register* does not parallel the general coverage of the media concerning women, media and sport. Associating these findings, then, with the cultivation theory might suggest that those reading the *Des Moines Register* will cultivate or formulate beliefs about women and sport that are contrary the ideas cultivated by audiences taking part in other forms of mass media. If

cultivation theory holds true, the ideas formulated by exposure to the *Des Moines Register* will cultivate beliefs that shed positive light on women in sport. Women will be seen as athletes comparable to men because of the *Des Moines Register's* sports section comparable portrayals of women to men.

The results of this study have shown that the *Des Moines Register*, except for frequency of photographs in its sports section, does represent male and female athletes in a consistent manner, regardless of gender. The fundamental relationship among women, gender and sport in Iowa through the portrayals of women in sport photographs by the *Des Moines Register* has been consistent with the increase of athletic opportunities for women since Title IX was instituted.

Although frequency of photographs on page one still remains low, results of the *Des Moines Register* study provide us with at least one explanation as to why this might be the case. Because football is the main sport covered by the *Des Moines Register*, the number of photographs of female athletes will suffer since most women do not participate in football. Although the *Register* still does not include a high frequency of photographs of women on page one of the sports section, when photographs of women are present, the representations are consistent to that of men.

#### Limitations Of Study

The results of this study showed an improvement in the portrayals of women in sport in the *Des Moines Register* sports section since the inception of Title IX in 1972. However, because design of the



study did not include a content analysis of photographs prior to 1972, future studies might look at the ten to 15 years previous to Title IX.

In addition, photographs only provide one way of analyzing portrayals of women in sport. Future studies might use content analysis as a way of looking at the specific texts of men and women in similar sports. Are portrayals equitable?

Furthermore, because football serves as the basis for many page one sports photographs, how would the results differ if football were excluded? Are women and men even more equitable in terms of photograph frequency if football were excluded from the study?

This study could not answer the question as to why the *Des Moines Register* has been less stereotypical in its photographic portrayals of women than other papers. This would require a study of the editors and the decision making process of the *Des Moines Register*.

#### Recommendations For Further Research

Since the results of this study have concluded that women and men are portrayed equally in most photographic representations, except for numbers of photographs, why not expand the current study by taking front page issues of the *Register* into high school classrooms throughout Iowa? One could study how attitudes concerning women and men in sport might differ when looking at representations of women and men in the *Des Moines Register*. Does the low frequency of female photographs on the front page of the sports section have an impact on the attitude of high school students concerning women and men in sport?

Currently, there is little if any research specific to the attitudes high school students may be cultivating because of photographic representations of women in sport in Iowa's newspapers. However, with continued research, findings will provide a more accurate picture of the media status of women in sport in Iowa and in society. Because the findings of this thesis are contrary to the general body of research regarding women, media and sport, one might ask why other forms of media are not following the *Des Moines Register's* example when it comes to the reporting of female athletes. Results of this study suggest the *Des Moines Register* could provide much insight in to the equitable portrayal of women to men in sports coverage.

### Conclusions

The way the *Des Moines Register* sports section portrays women in sport has been answered by results of this study. Although women appear fewer times in page one photographs of the sports section, when women are portrayed it is in an equitable fashion to men in sporting photographs. Even taking football into account, however, the low frequency of photographic representation of female athletes on the front page of the *Des Moines Register* sports section, 25 years after Title IX was implemented, still raises questions. If front-page exposure does indeed guarantee importance or at least general knowledge of an issue to an audience, then the *Des Moines Register* should look to the frequency of photographs of women in sport pictured on the front page of the sports section.

The next part of the theoretical application of cultivation theory concerns the actual cultivation process. What kind of images do these

portrayals cultivate? This thesis and its results provide a firm basis for further study into the cultivation theory as applied to not only the *Des Moines Register* but to other forms of media. )

With the tremendous fan following of the American women's Soccer Team in the Summer of 1999 World Cup series, it became apparent that there is an audience for female sports. Some might argue that this fan following and media attention came because of the team's success. Success does breed popularity, marketability, and front page prominence. In the last three years there have been other women's sports accomplishments that have provided reason for media attention: more WNBA teams being added to the league, the introduction of track and field stars such as sprinter Marion Jones and high jumper, and the resurgence of interest in women's tennis because of such athletes as Venus and Serena Williams. No longer can it be said that there is not an interest in women's sport. All is fair in love and war, but in many news organizations, the pages of the sports section do not portray male and female athletes in an equitable fashion. However, as results of this study show, the *Des Moines Register* is doing its part in addressing the success of women in sport through its portrayals of women in sporting photographs.

Do the images of women in sport as portrayed by the media cultivate certain ideas among the general population? It is hoped that the results of this study, coupled with the ideas of Gerbner's cultivation theory, provide a basis for future study of this question.

**APPENDIX**

**Coding Instructions**  
**Content Analysis of the *Des Moines Register's***  
**Coverage of Women in Sporting Photographs**  
**Unit of Observation: *Des Moines Register***  
**Units of Analysis: Photographs on Page One of Sports Section**

**Photographic Description Coding Sheet Identifiers**

- A. Photograph #** Each photograph is numbered chronologically by date of edition
- B. Date of Photograph** Date which the photograph appeared in the paper
- C. Gender**
1. Male
  2. Female
  3. Mixed (male and female representation)
  4. Inanimate object
  5. Animal
  99. Other
- D. Sport** Sport represented in each photograph
1. Football
  2. Basketball
  3. Baseball
  4. Softball
  5. Track and Field
  6. Tennis
  7. Golf
  8. Auto Racing
  9. Gymnastics
  10. Volleyball
  11. Fishing
  12. Boxing
  13. Soccer
  14. Sporting Fan
  15. Cheerleader
  16. Hockey
  17. Wrestling
  18. Horse Racing
  19. Motorcross
  20. Yachting/Boating
  21. Athletic Director
  22. Swimming
  23. Sports Information Director (SID)
  24. Rifle Shooting
  25. Bowling
  26. Hunting
  27. Diving
  28. Camping
  29. Sports Announcer
  30. Editorial in sports but not really mentioning sports world
  31. Olympics
  32. Sports Agent
  33. Downhill Skiing
  34. Bicycling
  99. Other

**Coding Instructions Continued**

**E. Photograph Presence**

1. Action shot: Athletes are shown in action photos. Subjects are participating in playing of the sport during official game time.
2. Still shot: Subjects are not participating in athletic action during the shot but are in uniform and in between playing time or being photographed before or after the athletic event.
3. Mug shot: Subjects are not participating in an actual athletic event, but are pictured in a mug shot concerning the sport in which they play or some award, etc. which they have received.
4. Reference to something to do with sport but not showing actual athletic participation (Ex. Protesting a game/Olympic protest, etc.)
5. Action shot but of fan not athlete during competition.
6. Editorial, photo in editorial that really has nothing to do with sport
7. Athletes not in action, outside of playing (Ex. Shown parenting, at a charity event)
8. Posed shot (Ex. Media day pictures)
99. Other

**F. Placement of Photograph on Page**

1. Upper left of page
2. Upper right of page
3. Middle section of page
4. Lower left
5. Lower right
6. Teaser photo on top of page (Reference to a full story inside of edition, other than page one)
7. Teaser photo on bottom of page (Reference to a full story inside of edition, other than page one)
8. Upper middle of page
9. Lower middle of page

**Coding Instructions Continued**

**G. Physical Portrayal Shown in Photograph**

1. Crying: Any character shedding tears; action suggesting intense sadness, hand over face in show of sadness
2. Smiling: Any character with smile; appearing to be amused or joyful
3. Screaming: Any character speaking with intense hysterical expressions; protesting violently; any character showing verbal aggression by shouting; could be shouting in joy also
4. Hugging: Any character(s) with arms around one another in an affectionate tone
5. Pouting: A protrusion of the lips expressive of displeasure
6. Submissive: Condition of being humble or compliant; submitting to authority or control of another
7. Submissive: Condition of being humble or compliant; submitting to authority or control of another
8. Equipment covering expression or shot too far away to notice expression
9. Wincing: to draw back with grimace on face
10. Neutral: Not smiling or frowning or making any other suggestive facial expressions.
11. Whistling: the act or sound of whistling
12. Gaping mouth: Mouth wide open in disbelief or shock
13. Tongue sticking out of mouth
14. Kissing a trophy
15. Facial contortion while competing, consistent with action of athletic event taking place
16. Clapping
17. Throwing hands in air as in celebration
18. Giving #1 sign with hand
19. Biting lip
20. Mouth open as if talking to someone
21. Displaying trophy
22. Hand raised in air-sign of a wrestling victory
23. Carried off on stretcher
24. Gritting teeth
25. High five with hands
26. Laughing (Mouth open, smiling expression, sound seems to be coming from mouth)
27. Coach yelling instructions
28. Gasping for air
29. Lifting weights
30. Throwing head back in disbelief
31. Throwing tennis racket
32. Head in hands
33. Throwing hands up in frustration, not celebration
34. Grabbing another player
35. Acknowledging crowd with wave of hat or hand
99. Other

### Coding Instructions Continued

#### H. Descriptors of Photographs, What Wording Is Contained in Caption?

\*In addition to coding the # of the type of description, coder should include in the "comment" box on the coding sheet the word(s) which are being coded.

1. Reference to physical attributes of an individual instead of athletic ability or athletic performance  
Examples: "Pretty," "Weak," "Strong," "Talkative," "Timid"
2. Reference to the sex of the individual by use of stereotypical gender terms  
Examples: "girl" instead of woman if applicable  
"boy" instead of man if applicable
3. Focus of descriptors/adjectives is on the body of the athlete and not on the competition itself
4. Descriptors/adjectives are referring to the emotions of the individuals and not the athletic competition
5. Descriptors are referring to the athletic event and competition
6. Name of person being identified are the only words under picture
7. Reference to something outside of sport or outside of competition  
Examples: Coach quits
8. Referring to victory celebration
9. Reference to warm up or pre-game activity
10. Giving background info about athlete or competition
11. Referring to crowd or lack thereof
12. Reference to award  
Examples: All-Star
13. Fan background information
14. Reference to time-out or bench activity
99. Other

#### I. Clothing

1. Shown in athletic apparel consistent with the activity
2. Shown in more apparel than normal athletic playing apparel  
Example: Non-active wear, sweatsuits, warm-ups
3. Shown in less clothing than normal athletic apparel  
Example: Women consistently shown in swimsuits or apparel not consistent with athletic event
4. Shown in everyday clothes
5. Can't tell what clothing is being worn  
Example Shot of head only
6. Can't tell what clothing is being worn because of automobile covering individual
99. Other



**Coding Instructions Continued****J. Status**

1. Professional athlete: Any athlete playing for pay
2. College athlete
3. High school athlete
4. Fan
5. Athletic director
6. Olympic athlete
7. Wife of athlete
8. Mother of athlete
9. Olympic committee member
10. Husband of athlete
11. Father of athlete
12. Club owner
13. Baseball commissioner
14. College coach
15. High school coach
16. Professional coach
17. Sports information director (SID)
18. College official
19. Amateur athlete
20. Professional official
21. Executive director of the National Football League (NFL)
22. Sports announcer
23. Sports agent
99. Other

**K. Article**

1. Yes there is an article accompanying the photo on page one of the sports
0. No there is no article accompanying the photo on page one of the sports
2. Yes there is an article about the photo, however, the article appears inside the edition
99. Other

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