**Print Media Prejudice in Kenya: Presentation of Sportsmen and Women in the Moscow 2013 IAAF Championship**

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**Abstract:** The mass media have an important role in informing, developing viewpoint towards an individual and their progress in the future. What people read and see in the media shapes, changes and re-enforces People’s attitudes towards certain phenomena and individuals. Just as media filter information and report issues that, in their view are important, they definitely tell the consumers what issues are important to think about and consequently influence their attitudes. The aim of this article is to determine whether there were any differences in the amount of print space allocated to Kenyan male and female athletes in the mainstream print media coverage of the August 2013 World IAAF Championship in Moscow, Russia. The study proved that there are significant differences in the sexist descriptors of male and female athletes, with female experiencing high levels of objectification with respect to gender marking, femininity, heterosexuality and non-sport related reportage. This confines woman to the traditional gender roles and reinforcing the perception that male sports are events that are more important while female are constantly relegated to the “other”.

**Keywords:** Media prejudice, Print Media & World IAAF Championship.

**INTRODUCTION**  
Although women’s participation in athletic has reached unprecedented heights, a review of existing literature shows that media coverage of female athletes still lags behind that of male athletes in Kenya. In addition, the quality or ways in which men and women sporting events are covered is inequitable. Two major themes are prevalent in research on media coverage given to female sports: exclusion and trivialisation.

However, most of the researches on media portrayal of sportsmen and sportswomen have been conducted in the developed countries and very little in the developing economies such as Kenya. In addition, there has been little research on how patterns of different coverage provided to Kenyan male and female athletes by print media differed or remained similar during major world athletics events.

The fight for the woman space in sports has been a long journey of advocacy and activism. For example, the passing of Title IX in the USA in 1972 helped girls and women take great strides in participating in sports. It provided more opportunity to break the bounds of sports as a man’s domain. Unfortunately, Title IX did receive much opposition at its inception. Even though participation has increased, media consumers, especially heavy sports followers, would not perceive this to be true. In sport media, representation of sportswomen is scarce in relation to sportsmen [7]. The media continue to give inadequate coverage to women’s sports and female athletes through commentator discourse. Sport media often attribute stereotypical masculine aspects to sportsmen and feminine aspects to sportswomen. On the one hand, the focus is on power and strength in media representation of sportsmen, whilst on the other hand, the media representation of sportswomen shows weakness and emotional vulnerability more than for sportsmen and tends to underestimate their achievements. Moreover, studies on the visual media [2] reveal that their body parts, such as breasts and thighs, are sometimes highlighted in photos and they are sexualized more than their sportsmanship is highlighted [7].

Kenya is well known for the performance of her athletes in the major athletic events both in Africa and beyond. However, the extent to which the media portray and represent the male and female athletes requires attention and examination. There is always an assumption that the prowess of male athletes is well pronounced and documented compared to their female counterparts. The prowess of Kenyan sport’s men is highly covered in the Kenyan media but the female athletes are given scarce attention and coverage. For example, there is a sports book done by the late Journalist Mohamed Amin. The book is titled Renown Kenya Athletes, which has documented the achievements of male athletes. In the recent coverage of
athletics history in Kenya, the viewers and readers are often reminded about the admirable achievements of Kipchoge Keino, Paul Tergat and the famous dance of Ezekiel Kemboi. However, not much for sport’s women like Tegla Loroupe, Catherine Ndereba and Pamela Jelimo and others who have brought glory to the country by winning a number of gold medals and participating in other community events such as charities.

Since women victory is not given ample air time and space in the sports pages of the mainstream newspapers their accomplishments does not leave ‘paws’ in people’s minds because it is not captured in a dramatic manner. For example, Tegla Loroupe is a long distance track runner. She holds the World’s records for 20, 25 and 30 kilometers. She was the first woman from Africa to win the New York City Marathon. However, compared to her male counterparts she has not received sufficient coverage to make her a household name like other male athletes whose names resonate in people’s minds. She is known more for the Peace Foundation, which she set up in 2003. The Foundation sponsors annual peace marathons in her Pokot County. The case of Pamela Jelimo is not different. She is a middle distance runner, who specialises in the 800 meters. She won the gold medal in 2008 Olympics in Beijing at the age of eighteen. She was the youngest and first Kenyan woman to win an Olympic Gold medal. Despite the feat, her coverage was and continues to be minimal and she ended up being publicised by upcountry buses, which christened their buses ‘Eldoret Express’ in her honour. Instead, the media concentrated in her family of a single mother who struggled to raise her and her five siblings. They ignored her great accomplishment and concentrated on her background. Another famous athlete is Catherine Ndereba, who is a marathon runner. She has won twice the marathon at the World IAAF championship. She broke the women’s marathon record in 2001 at Chicago Marathon. In 2008, a Chicago Tribune sports writer described Ndereba as “the greatest women’s marathoner of all times”. It is a glowing compliment to a woman whose achievements had been relegated to the background by the local media.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed descriptive research design method to gather written texts as data that was later analysed to answer the study research question. A systematic coding of text was a necessity for content analyses [11]. This process thus allowed a quantitative analysis and trends in newspaper sports coverage in the mainstream print media. The study analysed Kenyan media framing of male and female athletes and so, a collection of written texts of male and female athletes in the two newspapers during the month of August 2013 were read and analysed. The two newspapers selected Daily Nation and The Standard rank first and second newspapers in average weekday circulation in Kenya.

The independent variable of the study was gender of the athletes (male or female) covered in the newspapers, while the dependent variables were page prominence. Mentions of female and male athletes were coded with gender marking if they were marked by gender, that is, associated openly with gender-specific expressions such as men’s marathon and women’s team marathon. The extracted coded data was subjected to qualitative analysis, augmented by quantitative indicators to determine the patterns of male and female athletes’ portrayal in the mainstream media. Simple frequency distributions and percentages that depict quantitative differences in the portrayal of male and female athletes were analysed in MS Excel and presented in tables and charts to support the qualitative content analysis of the media frames. Further qualitative content analysis aimed at describing the language descriptors used to describe male and female athletes and gender stereotypes that enhance male hegemony generated results.

RESULTS

Sexism – A Qualitative Coverage of Sportsmen and Sportswomen

Mass media is especially important regarding sports because the majority of audience observe sports events through media channels such as newspapers, broadcasting systems and sports magazines. Specifically, media still portrays gender differences of athletes in a stereotypical way. Mass media is connected to how sports are presented as a socially constructed reality. The majority of representation has not only shown the different and unequal ways in which male and female athletes have been portrayed, but also how sports media deals with the traditional portrayals of femininity and masculinity [1].

Female athletes given media coverage is commonly sexualised and objectified. Commentary does not focus solely on their skill or athletic ability but their appearance and attractiveness to the male viewer. Sexualisation and objectification of female athletes is still evident in today’s sports media. Duncan [2] expanded upon previous studies from 1990 and 1994 where they examined the quantity and quality of televised coverage of female athletes and women’s sports. Overall, they found a lack of substantial change across all three studies. Even more disheartening is that the 2004 and 2009 studies showed female athletes and women’s sports receiving even less coverage less in previous years [2]. This Sexualisation and trivialisation of women in general in sports setting does not provide an optimistic outlook for women competing in sports. They already receive such little coverage that it is not benefiting female athletes by showing sexual visuals coupled with sexual commentary. This only reinforces perceptions that women’s sports are not serious sports at all, especially when fake sports are given preference over legitimate ones.
The confinement of female athletes to gender appropriate sports is not the only technique that the media use to frame women athletes into stereotypical gender roles that depict females as inferior to males. As suggested by previous literature, the media representation of female athletes underlines various techniques that subordinate women athletes and diminish them to stereotypical and sexist gender roles [3]. Wensig and Bruce [4] identified five sexist elements that frame female athletes into their culturally prescribed gender characteristics: gender marking, heterosexuality, emphasis on femininity, infantilisation, and non-sport related reports.

Maintaining femininity is important in the eyes of much of society. Commentators often focus on the feminine qualities of female athletes, especially when female athletes portray masculine qualities. Commentators will also talk about female athletes’ “dating habits, marriages, and pregnancies” [2]. Studies have also shown that commentators will talk about the nurturing side of athletes and their husbands to combat the idea of homosexual athletes [2]. By depicting athletes in the role of the traditional mother or wife, female athletes are not viewed as a threat to masculine hegemony [5]. They are not seen solely as a powerful figure in the sports world, but as a mother or a wife who is an athlete.

This portrayal of women as “other” lessens any threat men might feel toward a female athlete. Tennis champion Martina Navratilova experienced this marginalisation. Although she was very successful as a tennis star, she did not receive the amount of coverage that others did because of her sexual preference. Even her commercial endorsements were limited because of her sexuality [5]. By giving minimal coverage or no coverage at all, the media is essentially eliminating one portion of female athletes, simply because of their sexual preference, and not taking into consideration their skill as an athlete in their given sport.

Men and women’s sporting events are also commonly differentiated through gender marking. Women’s sporting events are often noted by placing “women’s” in front of the event’s title. For example, during tournament time for college basketball, the Final Four is called the Women’s Final Four. This demotes female athletes to “other” because men’s sports are usually not gender marked. In the case of college basketball, this phase of the tournament is simply called the Final Four. “Men’s” is not placed in the title. Tennis matches are often gender marked as well but research has shown that both men’s and women’s matches are roughly equitable in gender marking [6]. Matches are commonly referred to as the “men’s doubles finals” or the “women’s singles semifinals.” Female tennis players, however, were gender marked more often by commentators than male players were [6].

The researchers do suggest a reason for the gender marking among the tennis matches. In the U.S. Open, men and women’s matches are played on the same days and often at the same times. The use of gender marking may be in part to provide clarity since broadcasts often switch back and forth between the different matches. The NCAA basketball games, on the other hand, were played in different cities on different nights so it really was not necessary to gender mark the games. Even graphics used in broadcasts were gender marked. CBS’s broadcasts of women’s NCAA basketball games in 1989 used a logo, which said “NCAA Women’s National Championship” [6]. Instead of simply writing “NCAA National Championship,” the graphic was gender marked.

The marginalisation of female athletes is evident across all types of media, from television to newspapers. In the analysis of the newspaper coverage, the placement of a story in the newspaper indicates its importance; relevant articles tend to be in the front page or section front of the newspaper, while less relevant articles are usually found in inside pages [7]. A study conducted by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles found that only 3.2% of women’s articles made the front page, while 85.3% of front-page stories were about men, and 9.9% discussed both genders [7]. These data clearly suggest a subordination of female athletes, who are given less prominence in media and tend to be attributed less importance than men are.

The inequality between male and female athletes in the media also appears through their depiction in specific athletic events. Because females infrequently equal males in upper body strength and physical size, the media to feminine sports, which are historically associated with grace and beauty, have confined them. Individual sports such as golf, tennis, swimming, gymnastics, and ice-skating have been commonly considered appropriate feminine sports that emphasise the aesthetic movements of the female body rather than muscular strength. On the other hand, team sports such as football and ice hockey that require aggressiveness and physical strength are typically considered masculine sports [8]. Furthermore, Bernstein [9] pointed out that female athletes are more likely to receive media attention if they compete in appropriate feminine sports. A study showed that 61% of female sports coverage focused only on three sports: swimming, diving, and gymnastics, and the latter received more than 34% of all coverage devoted to female athletes [9].

In addition to female athletes’ depiction as sex objects, emphasis on their heterosexual role in society is common ground in media depictions of female athletes.

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As shown in a study by Sailors, [10] on women’s Olympic beach volleyball, female athletes are often confined to the stereotypical heterosexual role of mothers. The study showed how the media representation of Kerry Walsh during her interview before the 2012 London Olympics clearly maintained the centrality on motherhood by framing the woman as a mother and secondarily as an athlete [10]. Furthermore, Stevenson [11] pointed out that “media references to a sportswoman’s heterosexual credentials, such as boyfriends, husbands, and children...are common place and reassure audiences of gender priorities” (p. 212). By reinforcing, the idea that sports is the domain of men, while females are still portrayed in stereotypical heterosexual roles that do not challenge the dominance of men in the sports world. Moreover, scholars argued that mentioning women’s marital status, and whether or not they have children and discussing their husband’s occupation is a way to reinforce the traditional role of women in society [12].

In addition to feminine stereotypes, Wensing and Bruce [4] identified infantilisation as another technique that the media use to frame female athletes. The infantilisation of women athletes in the media tends to reduce them to adolescent status despite the fact that some of the athletes are in their late 20s. According to Bernstein (2002) in the media “whereas male athletes are valorised, lionised, and put on cultural pedestals’ female athletes are infantilised” (p. 420). Female athletes are often referred to as girls or young women, while male athletes are usually referred to as men [9]. Furthermore, previous studies showed that another common practice that reinforces the infantilisation of women in the media is the use of first names to refer to female athletes.

The relationship between sport and gender is a hot topic in the sociology of sports. The way the media reproduce this relationship has also drawn massive interest from scholars. There is a lot of relevant literature, which shows that the media’s representation of gender in sports coverage is one of the best-investigated themes relating to mediated sports [12][13]. The findings from this body of empirical research are similar. Through comparing newspapers page space and air time devoted to men’s and women’s sport, it has been found that under-representation of women’s sport is a worldwide phenomenon. Although significant progress has been made in women’s participation in sports during the past two decades, this progress has not been reflected in media coverage. Picking up any daily newspaper in Kenya, you will find that man’s sports in general, and men’s football in particular, has unchallenged dominance on the back pages and women’s sports are rarely reported.

A study by Huffman et al. [14] examined how college newspapers covered men and women’s athletics looking at both the quantity and quality devoted to each gender, thinking that college newspapers might approach gender differently than professional media because the student journalists grew up with Title IX. Their research found that men’s athletics composed 72.7 percent of college newspapers’ sports stories and college television dedicated 81.5 percent of its airtime for sports to men’s athletics [14]. The researchers noted that when covered, women’s athletics received the same quality of coverage as their male counterparts, but “the huge disparity in the quantity of coverage indicates that campus media mirror professional media in regard to gender equity in their coverage of sports” [14]. Since researchers started examining the coverage of both genders’ sports, there has been a visible gap in for-profit media outlets. Commercial media publications have yet to cover athletics for each gender in an equivalent fashion in terms of quantity. A content analysis of the Sports Illustrated covers from 1990 through 1999 found that the magazine’s cover did not accurately represent the increase of women participating in athletics. When female athletes were featured on the cover, more often than not it was of a female tennis player “depicted in sexually appealing ways” [15].

Within print media, Cunningham et al. [16] found an equitable amount of coverage from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). According to this study, reporters used consistent language when describing the athletic accomplishments of males and females, and there was equal space (i.e., stories, photographs) given to each sex throughout the magazine. Shifflett and Revelle [16] conducted their photo and text analysis based on a previous study, which had previously reported an unequal coverage rate of men’s and women’s sports photographic and text print media coverage. Shifflett and Revelle [16] reported women’s articles attributed to only 26.5% of the print media, and the photo coverage was reported at 34%. A decade later, Cunningham et al. [16] reported that the articles attributed to women’s athletics had increased by 15.9% and photo coverage had increased by 5.7%.

Sexism in the Presentation of Kenyan Male and Female Athletes

The table below indicates the distribution of sexism based on the five stereotypical sexist elements identified by Wensing and Bruce [4]: gender marking, heterosexuality, femininity, infantilisation, and non-sport related reports.
Table-I: Distribution of sexism based on the five stereotypical sexist elements of Kenyan Male and Female Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Gender Marking</th>
<th>Heterosexuality</th>
<th>Femininity</th>
<th>Infantilisation</th>
<th>Non-sport</th>
<th>Sexism Total</th>
<th>No sexism</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>(4%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
<td>(7%)</td>
<td>(93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
<td>(84%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in the table above indicate that in total, there were 96 sexists cases (16%) attributable to female athletes compared to 55 (7%) of such cases for male athletes. On the other hand, in 84% of the times in which one or more women appeared had no sexist attributes compared to 93% of male mentions without sexist attributions. Across all the five stereotypical sexist elements, women athletes appeared to suffer most as the percentages in the table show relatively higher rates for women except in infantilisation where they suffer equitably.

With regard to gender marking, it is worth noting that mentions of female athletes were marked by gender 8% of the time, while only 4% of mentions of male athletes were characterised by gender marking. These findings were supported by Wendy [17] findings in a study of Marginalisation and Trivialisation of Female Athletes and Women’s Sports through Commentator Discourse. The study by Wendy [17] reported that gender marking was prevalent in segment regarding women's sports in 65% of the commentator transcripts and none was present in any of the men’s segments. Giuggioli [18] established that mentions of female athletes were marked by gender 18.9% of the time, while only 8.4% of mentions of male athletes were characterised by gender marking. Denoting women’s events using the term “women’s” and not using “men’s” to describe male events shows that these are the standard (norm) and women’s events are considered to be “other” (inferior). By relinquishing women’s sports to the role of “other,” sports media emphasise that men’s sports are the most important ones to watch and read about. Although use of gender marking may be relevant in part to provide clarity when male and female athletic events occur simultaneously such as marathon, this may only be justified during live broadcasts since broadcasters often switch back and forth between the different events. Such instances are not necessary for print media which reportage is done much later after the events have occurred, more so, when the events occurred at different times.

None of the male athletes was hetero-sexualised compared to 2% of the times in which one or more women athletes were hetero-sexualised. In fact, the media constantly referred to the sportswomen’s motherhood roles as evidenced below in:

**Excerpt One**

“... Vivian Cheruiyot, who claimed the 500M and 10,000M in Daegu is away on maternity leave” (Ayodi, 2013, August 10, p. 58)

In the same beat and reference another reporter Komen writes:

**Excerpt Two**

“But Cherono, who missed a place to the world cross-country team, last March, was grateful after she settled for silver that fell short of her expectation. She wanted to win gold to make Vivian, who is expecting her first born happy” (Komen, 2013, August 18, p. 51)

In excerpts involving Edna Kiplagat, the news reporter writes

**Excerpt Three**

“But the fact that back at home in Iten, her husband Gilbert Koech was watching with her two children...” (Komen, 2013, August 12, p. 60)

In addition, the reporter writes:

**Excerpt Four**

“The world champion credits her winning prowess to sticking to her rural lifestyles unlike her competitors. Edna Ng’eringwony Kiplagat is an affable woman who enjoys cooking simple meals for her family when she is not training” (Komen, 2013, August 18, p. 51)

These instances are clear manifestations of how female athletes continue to be confined to their stereotypical heterosexual roles as wives and mothers. A study on women’s Olympic beach volleyball [10] showed how the media representation of Kerry Walsh during her interview before the 2012 London Olympics clearly maintained the centrality on motherhood by framing the woman as a mother and secondarily as an athlete [10]. Stevenson [11] pointed out that “media references to a sportswoman’s heterosexual credentials, such as boyfriends, husbands, children...are common place and reassure audiences of gender priorities” (p. 212) by reinforcing the idea that sports are the domain
Female athletes are portrayed as very emotional and fragile in success or defeat, and sports commentaries often talk about tears of pain and anger when referring to women competitors. Contrarily, male athletes are most often portrayed with expressions of concentration and challenge. Messner and Cookie [19] showed that female athletes “are more likely to be framed as failures due to some combination of nervousness, lack of confidence, lack of being comfortable, lack of aggression, and lack of stamina” (p. 125), while male athletes’ defeats are associated with the power, strength, and intelligence of their male opponents.

By depicting female athletes as very emotional, fragile, and dependent upon others, the media emphasise women athletes’ femininity, which does not challenge traditional gender roles in society. In addition to women’s fragility and emotional instability, the media often emphasise women athletes’ femininity through their dependency upon others: “Sport reports give an image of female behavior which is explained and simultaneously excused by the idea that women are in broadest sense dependent on nature” [2]. By speaking to their femininity, media are attempting to lessen women’s threat to masculine hegemony and retain the idea of male dominance in sport.

Finally, the study established that mentions of women athletes alongside non-sport related issues accounted for 2% of the mentions compared to male athletes’ only 1% of the mentions that were accompanied with non-sport related stories. These results validate Wendy [17] findings in a similar study, which reported that non-sport related comments were associated with female athletes 5.2% of the time, while only 1.1% of mentions of male athletes were characterised by non-sport related comments. Sample excerpts related to female athletes include The Standard Newspaper story about Chemos below:

**Excerpt Eight**

“Chemos, who is among a handful of runners who took up athletics after recruitment into the Kenya Police Service” (Komen, 2013, August 13, p. 51)

**Excerpt Nine**

“Jepkosgei who is the only Kenyan to have won all the medals in 800M at the World Championships, picked Sum from her rural home in Kesses near Eldoret and guided her into 800M running” (Komen, 2013, August 18, p. 50)

The Daily Nation quoted Nancy Jebet in the below excerpt

**Excerpt Ten**

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“We all have a chance because I believe championship races are different with all those in the final having an equal chance of winning gold,” “Said the Kenya Air Force Officer” (Ayodi, 2013, p. 43).

Mentions of male athlete’s names alongside non-sport related comments included:

Excerpt Eleven
“And despite having battled numerous challenges at the cattle rustling prone areas of West Pokot, Thomas Longosisiwa is also known to cut a different image in Moscow” and “Kiprop, who comes from Kaptinga village in Uasin Gishu County, was categorical that his feat in Monaco Diamond meet last year…” (Komen, 2013, August 14, p. 55)

Moreover, Ayodi wrote the following of Mutai

Excerpt Twelve
“Mutai, who dumped the flat races to embrace 400M hurdles upon joining Moi Amalo High School in Olenguruone in 2006” Ayodi, (August 2013, p. 42)

Bernstein [9] emphasises that researchers analyzing the portrayal of female athletes from different perspectives found the coverage to be often framed with stereotypes, which emphasise appearance and attractiveness rather than athletic skill. By emphasizing non-sport related issues when addressing female athletes, the media shift the focus from the performance of the athlete to other insignificant issues, which lead to objectification, which serves to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and diminish the role of women in sports. Generally, sexualisation and trivialisation of women in athletics does not provide an optimistic outlook for women competing in the sport. Sexual visuals coupled with sexual commentaries only reinforce perceptions that women’s participation in athletics and sports in general is not important at all.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was dedicated to determining whether there were any differences in the amount of print space allocated to Kenyan male and female athletes in the mainstream print media coverage of the August 2013 World IAAF Championship in Moscow, Russia. The results showed that the surface area or print space of coverage for male and female Kenyan athletes who participated in the IAAF championships in Moscow, the total written print space coverage was less than the participation for women (print space, 41%; participation, 42.2%). However, the representation of the medal winners showed that, female medalists accounted for 60% of print space but 42% of the pictorial surface area allocated to medal winners against the 58.3% of medals obtained by female athletes. Although the print space areas for individual female athletes (54% and 45% respectively) were in excess of the level of female participation (42.5%), these can only be attributed to more coverage for medal winners, yet these figures still remained below the 58.3% of the medals won by female athletes.

REFERENCES


