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Reflection Paper: Men vs. Sports in the Media

I chose this topic because it is part of my everyday life. As a male collegiate athlete, I notice a lot of the disparity between men and women’s sports. I wanted to talk about collegiate and professional sports because although I play at the college level, I am an avid pro sports fan. While watching sports on TV and reading sports content on various media outlets regularly, I began to notice how poorly female athletes are treated compared to men. I wanted to make a compelling videographic essay that critiqued the media while also making an argument as to why female athletes deserve more coverage. This was not the topic I originally chose. I originally wanted to critique mainstream media and their coverage of social injustices through analyzing Lebron’s new show called The Shop. Although it would have made for in interesting essay, this topic just hit closer to home.

The argument of my piece is that women take a back seat to men in so many forms of sports media. In my piece, I argue that women deserve better TV audiences, better live audiences, and deserve to have the same liberties that men do during their games or matches. I also argue that our bias towards male sports is rooted in us at a young age. One of the most classic lines in The Sandlot, a classic American movie, is when Ham says to a rival in the neighborhood, “You play ball like a girl.” I wanted to add this to my argument because it exemplifies how this bias is instilled in us when we are supposed to just be watching an innocent movie.

The three keywords I chose were representation, intersectionality, and power. I chose representation because representation in the media teaches people what the norms are in society. When a kid turns on ESPN and all he sees are male athletes, he will grow up thinking women’s sports are not important. He will grow up thinking that female athletes do not deserve to earn the same wages as men because he will think that their sports are irrelevant having never watched them. Intersectionality is a keyword that I wanted to incorporate as well because of how relevant it is to this topic. In the essay, I show how gender applies to athletes and how badly they are discriminated against. For example, I showed a female tennis player who was penalized during a match for doing something male athletes are allowed to do. She realized her shirt was inside out and after she fixed it, she was given a court misconduct. This event perfectly embodies some of the regular discrimination that female athletes face. I also chose power because I wanted to show how the media can really affect what we watch and become familiar with. I included a screenshot from an article that read “in 2014, ESPN dedicated a total airtime of 2% to women’s sports.” ESPN is the biggest sports network on TV so they have the most control in determining what viewers get to see of sports content. They have chosen to virtually only show men’s sports and they can do so without repercussion because of the major power that they have in the media.

I wanted to use as many different forms of media as possible to get my point across. I wanted to start by showing videos of men and women’s basketball highlights because I knew a video would immediately grab the viewers attention. I also knew the viewer would not immediately understand my argument through these clips so it was another way to draw them in and keep them guessing as to what my piece was about. I then decided to use photographs of both a Richmond male and female basketball player. I used the Ken Burns effect to phase to the crowd after I was zoomed in on the Richmond jersey. I wanted to do this because I wanted to show how this problem also exists at Richmond. Behind the male player, you saw a filled student section while behind the female player, there wasn’t a single person in the stands. I then started audio of Michael Jackson’s song, Man in the Mirror. I chose this song because it talks about how if we want to see change, we need to look at our problem head on and begin to make a difference. I used screenshots of articles where I highlighted the stats on male vs. female viewership that I wanted the viewer to see. One of my most creative uses of media came when I put a clip from an interview in my project. In this interview, Cam Newton, a quarterback in the NFL, laughs at a female reporter after she asks him a detailed question about football. Cam Newton has a lot of young fans who watch that interview and then think it is okay to laugh at women in the media for asking legitimate questions. I close my essay with a commercial that has a powerful message. It is a boy and a girl basketball player going back and forth about what they have accomplished meanwhile the boy says he will go on to make $4 million while the girl goes on to make $40,000. I chose all these forms of media because I thought getting my point across in many different ways would make it fun to watch while still making a strong argument.

I got a better understanding of media, culture, and identity through this project by getting to apply some of the many keywords that I learned throughout this semester. Since I started taking this course, I have become much more aware of the many problems in society that I see in the media. Although I only put down three keywords, I can see how many other words like power, stereotype, and ideology as a result of taking this class. I also realized that I had some power of my own when I was making my project. After watching and reading so much content, I had an opportunity to re-write the script and bring all of these problems to light. I had never used iMovie or made any sort of videographic essay like this before and I really enjoyed this assignment and how mine turned out.