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Women Wheelchair Athletes: Competing Against Media Stereotypes

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Abstract

This study explored the attitudes and perceptions of 10 women wheelchair athletes about sports media by soliciting their opinions

...and concerns using both mainstream and disability print and web-based sport media. Using the "auto drive" technique for qualitative data collections, the analysis revealed three themes: (a) the participants were consumers of both mainstream and disability print media; (b) they were tired of the media stereotypes; (c) they believed that the media is partially responsible for the lack of coverage of women and individuals with disabilities in sports media as a whole. Within each of these three themes, several sub-themes emerged. Although this study was limited to female wheelchair athletes analyzing web-based and print media, the themes can provide a basis for the analysis and future study in the rising area of sports media research as it relates to females and individuals with disabilities.

Introduction

The United States thrives on sports media. You can watch a wide variety of sporting events on television, attend events in person or even stay up to date on your favorite athletes and teams through the Internet. This may seem like an abundance of media opportunities for sport in the United States; however, there are still two groups that have historically been marginalized or ignored because they are not seen as physically "ideal" for American sports by society's normative standards of femininity and ability. These two groups include women and athletes with disabilities (Hardin & Hardin, 2005).

The exclusion of women and athletes with disabilities in sports media can be seen in a number of arenas. These include, but are not limited to, both mainstream and disability print and web-based media, such as books and magazines, as well as, television shows that emphasize sports.

Currently, the mainstream media continues to ignore disability sports; however, the disability press finds ways to advocate for disability sports by publishing websites, newsletters and magazines. These publications tend to originate within the disability community (Hardin & Hardin, 2005) and include publications such as *Ragged Edge Online*, *Paraplegia News* and *Sports n' Spokes*.

Just as the media tends to see people with disabilities as not having the ideal body, it also tends to frame female athletes as "sexually different" (Hall, 1996). With this being said, it is also likely that female athletes who also have a disability face a double bind by being caught in two

also have a disability face a double bind by being caught in two minorities (Blinde & McCallister, 1999; DePauw & Gavron, 1995). Not only are they excluded because they are female, they are excluded on another level for their disability (Blinde & McCallister, 1999; Hardin & Hardin, 2005).

Several researchers have taken a strong focus on disability sports research; however, these studies are heavily centered on male athletes with disabilities. Hardin and Hardin, examined athletes with disabilities attitudes and perceptions on sports media. Their study attempted to re-narrate the voices of ten male wheelchair basketball players. In order to re-narrate the participant's voices they conducted in-depth interviews and were able to distinguish themes on how the male athletes with disabilities felt about sports media (Hardin & Hardin, 2003).

Using Hardin and Hardin's 2003 study as a guide, the purpose of this study was to re-narrate the opinions of women athletes with disabilities in order to understand the interlaced meanings embedded in disability, gender and sexuality (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000) in sports media, and to allow women's attitude and perceptions toward women athletes with disabilities to be heard. In order to acknowledge these perceptions, a cultural feminist approach was considered most useful.

Cultural feminism emphasizes essential differences between men and women and acknowledges structures that may be oppressive to women (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Hargreaves & McDonald, 2000; Tuttle, 1986). Cultural feminism often points out women's most distinctive and superior virtues (Tuttle, 1986). This approach works well with disability studies because it tackles the political aspect of the body, normalcy, multiculturalism and the social construction of one's identity (Garland-Thomson, 2002). The focus of this research was limited to female wheelchair athletes with regard to print and web-based sports media (Hardin & Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2005).

Components in Sports Media

In order to understand this study, it is first important to look at some components to sports media and to understand the stereotypes that are often associated with these specific components.

Disability In Sports Media

According to Auslander and Gold (1999), the media is the key reason for the negative images and ideas with regard to people with disabilities. Disability has not been an area that the media has felt

obligated to cover because media representatives and their audience often do not know that disability sports exists or even consider it authentic. In fact, some people seem to think that disability sports are not legitimate sports, but instead something less (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). According to DePauw (1997), people with disabilities continue to be excluded from sports because they fail to meet the societal "norm" of physicality. Athletes with disabilities feel the only time they are mentioned in the mainstream media is when the media wants to perceive them in a stereotypical way (Day, 2000; Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Nelson, 1996).

One of the main stereotypes athletes with disabilities face is the "supercrip" model (Hardin & Hardin, 2004; Harris, 1999). In this model, the athlete is seen as a "hero" for "overcoming" their disability and accomplishing something incredible. Most of the time, when the media recognizes athletes with disabilities, a "supercrip" stereotype is involved. It is no wonder that many people with disabilities, who are just trying to lead a "normal" everyday life, resent this stereotype (Haller, 2000).

Hardin & Hardin (2003 & 2004) conducted several studies using male wheelchair basketball players. In these studies, the researchers concluded that the majority of the athletes are desensitized to the way that the media ignores athletes with disabilities. According to these studies, the athletes all enjoy mainstream media as well as disability media. They use the mainstream media to gain socialization with others, learn more about able-bodied sports and to find able-bodied sports role models (Hardin & Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2004). They also like the disability media such as *Sportss n' Spokes*, because it allows them to see other athletes with disabilities participating in a wide variety of sports and sometimes they even see pictures of people they know or former teammates (Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2004). Throughout the last decade, web-based media has become popular as well. It has a low production cost and is easy to access. Going online has made it simple to stay up to date with sports.

Many athletes with disabilities would like to see media coverage focus on the influential elements of their sport, but they do not blame this entirely on the media (Hardin & Hardin, 2003). They just hope one day their athletic accomplishments will "be accepted as legitimate by the wider culture" (Hardin, 2003, p.115).

Women In Sports Media

Female athletes have been the most examined subordinate group in

relation to the body and sports (Hardin, Lynn & Walsdorf, 2006). Research continues to indicate that women in sports have been marginalized (Messner, 2002; Schell, 1999). The main reason cited for the marginalization of women in sports media is that women are seen as "sexually different" (Hall, 1996). Sexual difference is a term that "describes the presentation of girls and women as naturally less suited for sports than men" (Hardin & Hardin, 2005). Women are actually deemed "disabled" in relation to sports because their body does not match the "ideal body" type of an able-bodied male (Garland-Thomson, 2002).

The use of photos is a very powerful tool in media. Photos have also been the "most powerful mediated conveyor of sexual difference" (Duncan, 1990; Rowe, 1999). To reinforce the idea of women as being sexually different, the use of fewer photos of women has been seen. Also, when the media does use photos of women, they are often taken with a downward camera angle. By doing this it allows the photos of the men to remain dominate while the females remain non-dominant or passive. The shots of the women tend to be more passive or they are sexualized and objectified (Cuneen & Sidewell, 1998; Duncan & Sayaovong, 1990; Hardin, 2003) because it allows the media to portray the women in other ways besides athletic.

Although female athletes in recent years have gained entrance into the sporting world, it has still not been "as full and equal members" (Hardin & Hardin, 2003 pp 151). Women have become more popular in sports media and have earned numerous endorsements, but they are still way behind the men. The media sometimes presents them as self-centered and egotistical (Schell, 1999), which does not help the advocacy for women in sports media.

However, it seems, after all these years, women in sports media are finally progressing and moving away from stereotypical coverage. A study done by Hardin, Chance, Dodd & Hardin (2002), found this to be the case by saying that more females are participating in sports and so there should be more opportunities for them to be in media.

Women With Disabilities In Sports Media

The history of sports has always been represented largely through the male athlete's eyes. Disability sport is no different; it is mainly seen through the eyes of the male athlete with disabilities (DePauw, 1997; DePauw & Gavron, 1995). This being said, the research also finds that being a female athlete with a disability is placing a person in a double minority (Blinde & McCallister, 1999). According to research, women with disabilities face double discrimination based on gender

and on disability (Sherrill 1986; DePauw & Gavron, 1995). There has been little research done on women with disabilities in sports media.

Even *Sports n' Spokes*, a magazine devoted to athletes with disabilities, allows male athletes to dominate the coverage and are more likely to show the males in dominant photos. According to a study done by Hardin & Hardin (2005), *Sports n' Spokes* used images of athletes with disabilities where 79% of the images included males and 19% included females.

Besides dealing with discrimination from others, women with disabilities also have to deal with their invisibility in the media's cultural messages (Haller, 2000; Hardin, 2003; Iwakuma, 1997; Smart, 2001) as well as dealing with the negative stereotypes chosen to represent them (Haller, 2000; Iwakuma, 1997). Keeping this discrimination in mind is a great starting point for research with female athletes on the perceptions and "values communicated about disability sport" in the media (Hardin & Hardin, 2005, p.115).

Because there is a paucity of research published on disability sports media and none on female athletes in disability sports, this study attempted to establish an interest and create future studies through the analysis of in-depth interviews (Hardin & Hardin, 2003) done with ten female wheelchair athletes. This study is important because it focuses on women and women have been marginalized throughout time in both mainstream sports media and in disability sports media. This must change so barriers faced by women with disabilities can be overcome to increase women's opportunities in sports and beyond (DePauw & Gavron, 1995). In order to change this, we must first understand the perceptions of the women who play disability sports on both mainstream and disability sports media.

Method

Since this study uses Hardin & Hardin's research on male wheelchair athletes as a guide, the research questions used by the researcher are similar to the ones in which guided that study (Hardin & Hardin, 2003). The research questions included the following: (1) What are the female wheelchair athletes' attitudes and perceptions toward current mainstream print and web based sports media; (2) What are the female wheelchair athletes' attitudes and perceptions toward current disability print and web based sports media; and (3) What mainstream and disability print and web based media do the participants consume and why? Using these questions, the researcher hopes to gain insight and give voice to women's attitudes and perceptions toward women athletes with disabilities in sports media.

Participants

The participants for this study were ten female wheelchair athletes ranging in age from 19 to 38. The participants came from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Nine of the participants were American citizens and one was a Canadian citizen. The participants' were selected because they were all members of the same collegiate women's wheelchair basketball team in the southeastern United States and the researcher was familiar with the team. The participants' wheelchair basketball experience ranged from two to twenty years. Some of the participants have also played several other disability sports such as tennis, volleyball, skiing, hand cycling and swimming. The education levels of the participants also varied. All the participants were currently enrolled as full-time college students. Their levels of education included three sophomores, two juniors, one senior, three master's and one doctoral student. In order to participate in this study, the participants had to be willing to participate and had to sign a written consent form agreeing to participate. The researcher then created pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of all the participants.

Data Collection

Role Of The Researcher

This study is an interpretive study so the researcher used qualitative methods to collect the data. Since the researcher is a key component in any qualitative study, it is important to take note that the researcher is an able-bodied female who has played able-bodied sports since she was three years old. The researcher also currently participates as an athlete in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) and is very involved with disability sports. Therefore the researcher acknowledges preconceived attitudes and perceptions on women and disability in sports media. During this study, the researcher attempted to not let her opinions and perceptions interfere with the data collection and analysis. The researcher tried to capture and describe the attitudes and perceptions of each individual participant as told by the participant.

Interviews

The researcher conducted ten in-depth interviews (one with each participant) using the "auto drive" technique established by McCracken (1988) to document the perceptions of the wheelchair

athletes concerning sports media (Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2003). This technique puts the participant in the "driver's seat," allowing the participant to talk freely about what they think and feel about sports media (Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2003; McCracken, 1998). The researcher had a list of guiding questions in case there were times when the participant got confused at the point they were trying to make. All of the interviews took place in a room with a computer and lasted approximately one hour. All the interviews were tape recorded and then later transcribed.

Artifacts

In order to help provoke participant's thoughts during the interview, the researcher used two forms of print sports media as well as two web-based media sites. The researcher gave the participants ten dollars to purchase their favorite print sports media (Hardin, 2003; Hardin & Hardin, 2003) and asked them to bring it with them to the interview. The meaning behind this, was that participants' may talk more open and freely about their thoughts if they were given the chance to talk about their favorite sports media.

Second, the researcher provided the participants with a recent issue of *Sports n' Spokes*; a magazine designed for wheelchair athletes. The participants' were given the opportunity to flip through the magazine and talk freely about their attitudes and perceptions of what they saw in this magazine.

Third, the researcher had the athlete identify their favorite web-based sports media site on the computer. The researcher then showed the athlete two other web-based sports media sites. These included ESPN's homepage as well as *Ragged Edge Online*, an online site dedicated to disability sports. These web-based sports media sites were all used to again allow the participants' the chance to talk openly about their attitudes and perceptions on sports media.

Data Analysis

Although it allowed for limited generalization (Stacks & Hocking, 1999), for this study, the researcher used standard interpretive methods to search for patterns and themes throughout the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). After all the interviews were transcribed and member checked, the researcher took all ten transcribed interviews and, using a cultural feminist approach, broke them down into themes by color-coding them. The researcher completed the member checks by returning the interview transcripts and tapes back to the participants to have them check for

accuracy. The participants were allowed to confirm or dispute any information that they felt had been transcribed correctly or incorrectly.

Once the initial themes and categories were established the researcher continued to break them down into sub-themes and sub-categories using a form of the constant comparison method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Just like with the transcripts, the researcher used member checks to allow the participants to confirm or dispute any themes the researcher felt emerged from the data.

Data Trustworthiness

In a qualitative study there are a few different ways you can establish data trustworthiness or reliability (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). In order to establish data trustworthiness in this study, the researcher used data triangulation. The researcher achieved data triangulation by using member checks and by attempting to connect the independent themes noted in the interview transcripts to the entire group of interviews" (Hardin & Hardin, 2003, para. 31).

Findings

The findings of this study, only specific to "this group of wheelchair athletes" (Hardin & Hardin, 2003, para. 34) have been summarized into three themes (a) the participants were consumers of both mainstream and disability print media; (b) the participants were tired of the media stereotypes; and (c) the participants believed that the media is partly responsible for the lack of women and individuals with disabilities covered in sports media as a whole. Also, within each different theme, several key points emerged.

Consumers Of Both Mainstream And Disability Sports Media

The wheelchair athletes discussed their consumption of both mainstream and disability sports media (Hardin & Hardin, 2003); however, the reasons for their consumption of both were different. The athletes tend to consume mainstream print sports media because they: liked sports in general; liked to know about the latest events occurring in able-bodied sports; had subscriptions to the magazines; needed to find information on able-bodied sports; or enjoyed what mainstream sports media had to offer.

For example, Izzie, a 19-year-old athlete, brought *Sports Illustrated* because she liked "to keep updated on not only basketball" but

because she liked to keep updated on not only basketball, but football, hockey and everything else that I enjoy" (Izzie, March 1, 2007). Another participant consumed mainstream media because she was "into sports so I like to know what is going on in the different angles and views of different reporters inside sports media. I think it's needed for those that are interested in sports" (Ginger, March 3, 2007).

Several participants brought in mainstream print sports media they have subscriptions for, due to their interest in able-bodied sports. One of these participants is Meredith, a 26-year-old, who has a subscription to *ESPN* the magazine because:

I like reading it, so I read all the issues when they come in. I like reading about sports and if you're a sports nut and you want to get your information on sports it's good. It's also good for the pictures. That's one of the main reasons I like this one is for the pictures. (March 2, 2007)

Two of the athletes talked about consuming mainstream sports media in order to benefit them socially. One of these participants was Sally, a 32-year-old doctoral student, who brought in the magazine *Runner's World* because she "used it for my jogging class. I use it as a resource for me and them" (Sally, March 2, 2007). Kimmy, a 38-year-old Canadian participant, also used mainstream print sports media as a resource on an issue often found oppressive by women: "I brought *Shape Magazine* and it has a whole bunch of stuff in terms of the perfect body. I think it's all trash, but I like to read it this because I can talk about it in my aerobics class with my students" (March 4, 2007).

Although the athletes found that disability sports media is less accessible than mainstream sports media, they still avidly consume it. They were often frustrated by the fact that disability print sports media was hard to come by. For example, Jennifer, a 31-year-old participant, stated "you can't just walk up to the next street vendor and buy it there" (February 28, 2007). Kimmy, went even further by saying, "if you didn't know that magazine existed you wouldn't even know where to find print sports media on disabilities" (March 4, 2007).

Although there are some frustrations, they liked to consume disability sports media because it is their area of interest and they enjoy getting to see other athletes with disabilities, often friends of theirs, participating in their same sports. Anne, a 20-year-old

athletes, participating in their same sports. Anne, a 20-year-old, brought *Sports n Spokes* to the interview because:

It has both basketball and all the other sports in it. Basketball is the thing I keep up with the most. I think it's a cool thing to see people I know. One of the cool things about being involved in disabled sports is that it is such a small world that.... this is our only known disability sports magazine so all of us participate in it.... so we see each other. (February 28, 2007)

Another athlete who had a subscription to *Sports n Spokes*, but did not bring it into the interview, was Debra. While flipping through the *Sports n Spokes* I provided, Debra mentioned, "I personally like *Sports n Spokes* because personally, I see people I know. I really go through there and look for the people I know before I do anything" (March 4, 2007).

The last key point to emerge from the consumption of mainstream and disability sports media was the usage of print versus web-based media. Only two participants brought *Sports n Spokes* as their print sports media; the other eight came with mainstream print sports media. When allowing my participants to choose their web-based site in which they would refer to as their online sports media source, six participants choose disability websites, three chose ESPN, which is a mainstream website and one participant stated that she did not use the Internet for sports media at all.

Of the participants that chose disability web-based sites, their reasons for doing so included staying up to date with what is going on in the disability community, knowing what is going on with their specific team and/or using it as an outlet to find other information they need regarding disability. For example, Izzie uses her team's website "to see the schedule of our games, see what's going on with our men's team and it has updates, usually on the front page, of what's going on, on our team and what we're all doing" (March 1, 2007). Ally, a 23 year old master's student, went to sitski.com, a website for disabled skiing. She enjoys this website because, "it's one of the first websites that I have ever seen of monoski cross. It's a new sport in the X Games that I am excited about" (Ally, March 2, 2007). All three of the participants that chose mainstream web-based sports media choose espn.com. The main reason the participants use ESPN's website is to "stay up to date with teams and scores of different sports" (Meredith, March 3, 2007).

It can be seen the participants consumed both mainstream and disability sports media, but they were more likely to bring in mainstream print sports media than disability print sports media. Whereas, with the web-based sites, the participants choose to go to more disability web-based sites than mainstream for sports media.

Tired Of Media Stereotypes

Throughout the interviews I conducted it became very clear my participants were tired of media stereotypes that affect the way disability and women with disabilities are seen in sports media. Three different sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) they were tired of seeing women as sex symbols and/or as "tomboys;" (b) they got frustrated with the "inspiration" and "supercrip" terms; and (c) they believed that because of these stereotypes women with disabilities face double discrimination.

Women were often seen in the media as sex symbols. Several different times throughout my interviews participants made comments about this type of stereotype. Brandy, a 20-year-old undergraduate, was talking about how in sports media it seems like "they always portray women in a sexual way. They don't look at women in a sports way; they show them in a sexual way" (March 1, 2007). Ginger also agreed by saying, "women are photographed for magazines to look more sexual than athletic" (March 3, 2007). Kimmy talked about how *Sports Illustrated* has the swimsuit edition and wonders, "Why can't those people that are in those swim suits be muscular people that actually look healthy and like athletes?" (March 4, 2007).

According to my interviews, another common stereotype for women in sports media is that they are seen as tomboys. Jennifer thought that mainstream and disability media portray women differently. She stated:

In *Sports Illustrated* they have the title Gritty Women talking about soccer players. I think it's tomboyish. They are mainly perceived as rough and tough. In disability sports media they are not perceived so much as being tomboys or boy wannabe's they are perceived more as an athlete. (February 28, 2007)

Izzie thought that disability media didn't show too many

stereotypes, but in mainstream media, "some of the women basketball players are seen as kind of macho or tomboys" (March 1, 2007).

Throughout the interviews numerous comments were made about the inspiration story and the supercrip term. Not a single participant I interviewed was fond of the inspiration story. For example, Kimmy said,

You're an athlete with a disability. I think a lot of times people see people with a disability and they still see the story as opposed to the person. As the what happened and why and what have people overcome what hurdles did you overcome you know they're glorified along the way as opposed to you know this is who I am, this is where I am and you know and this is what I am accomplishing. (March 4, 2007)

Within the interviews the participants talked about how when the media was not using their accomplishments to tell an inspirational story they were using them to come up with a "supercrip" story. The participants were frustrated with this because "our athletic accomplishments are just as good athletically as able bodied people are and it's not because I have super human powers that I go out and play a sports everyday" (Meredith, March 3, 2007). According to Anne,

Disabled athletes are just put in this stereotypical way, like disabled people always need help with stuff and they always need certain stuff done for them and so obviously, they don't do as much as able bodied people. So when we do something like play basketball instead of seeing it as an accomplishment it's seen as some super human thing." (February 28, 2007)

Also, within these interviews, the comments about the inspiration story and supercrip story started formulating opinions within the participants that women with disabilities face double discrimination. For example, Meredith talks about how in sports media there is

... a double standard, you're a female or you have a disability you are not really seen in sports media. So if

you're a female with a disability it's even worse. Even within our own culture of disability sports, there's still that stigmatism of women are not as athletic as the guys (March 3, 2007).

Ally also talked about how "women have progressed farther in able-bodied sports. Like they are finally validating a woman as an athlete. But, if she has a disability it's, not only is she disabled, she is a woman too" (March 2, 2007).

Media Responsibility

Throughout my interviews it was clear the participants believed the media is partly responsible for the lack of women and individuals with disabilities in sports media as a whole. Three sub-themes emerged under this theme: (a) they blame the media for the lack of image; (b) they blame the media for showing women as passive participants; and (c) they wish for the inclusion of disability sports in mainstream sports media.

Several of the participants made reference to lack of women in sports media as a whole. According to Sally,

The media reflects society, but media also shapes society. When you see someone in a chair and you are like "Oh that's great" the media puts that out there so when consumers are reading something they're like "wow that is, that is great!" So then the next time they see someone out in a chair whose active, it's like "you're so fantastic" and that's the message they got from the media all along. (March 2, 2007)

All the participants thought both mainstream and disability sports media needed to have more focus on women and acknowledge their superior achievements. Brandy thought women should be in the media more "because they are doing the exact same stuff that the men do" (Brandy, March 1, 2007). While flipping through the *Sports n Spokes* magazine I provided, Ally mentioned, "WOW. This magazine is completely male dominated" (March 2, 2007).

The women agreed that it would be nice to see more women's sports. Jennifer stated, "It's interesting to read about all the stuff the men are doing, but I would like to see more women's sports. Both mainstream and disability sports media are geared more toward the men's sports" (February 28, 2007). Even in disability sports media

men's sports" (February 28, 2007). Even in disability sports media, "they cover Women's Wheelchair Basketball Nationals using only one page and will use about three or four pages to talk about a small men's tournament" (Meredith, March 3, 2007).

Second, the interviews illustrated that the participants believe that women are shown more as passive participants rather than as dominant athletes like the men. These illustrations can be seen in examples of women being more passive in pictures, not sweating, or not even being in the pictures at all. Ally pointed specifically at two images in the *Sports n Spokes* magazine saying "in these two pictures, he is definitely more hard-core than she is" (March 2, 2007).

When talking about mainstream sports media, Brandy thought that the media tried to make women seem "lower ranking and that they shouldn't be playing sports" (Brandy, March 1, 2007). Sally added to this, while she was looking at ESPN's website, by saying "I hate them. I think they're annoying and they only cover men and mainstream sports. It's like a male soap opera" (March 2, 2007). Kimmy thought that within both mainstream and disability sports media, the women "need to show that they can be athletic and that it is good to be athletic and strong and all that" (March 4, 2007). The interviews suggested that in order for more women to get involved, the media needs to show them as dominant athletes. Debra adds to this by saying:

I mean, as much as men are in these things and that fine, you need to have women as well. I want to see something I can strive to be. I can't strive to be in the NBA. It's just not going to happen. But, I can see people, if I was completely able-bodied, I could see people in the WNBA that I could emulate. And the same goes for disability sports. (March 4, 2007)

Another sub-theme that emerged was that disabilities are not shown in mainstream sports media at all. The participants all believed, since there was such a sparse amount of disability sports media, they should be included within the mainstream sports media somewhat in order to get their sports recognized. Debra thought if mainstream sports media were more balanced and included people with disabilities they would make more money. She said, "there's different types of people out there and magazines need to be a little more diverse. If they would only just make it a little more balanced I think mainstream sports media could be sold a lot better" (March 4, 2007). Ginger would also like to see mainstream media include

disability sports just a little: "I mean not like obvious. I don't want it to be an obvious change to where like there is a ruling that says they have to have so many pages of disability sport. But, to kind of just sneak a little bit in to introduce disability sports to the mainstream world" (March 3, 2007). Sally's magazine was the only mainstream magazine that included any type of disability sport. She said, "that's why I like *Runner's World*, because in every issue I've seen they always have at least one person with a disability in it" (March 2, 2007). Ally wanted to see mainstream media "become more open minded. I think they would be surprised by what people are interested in if they weren't feeding them the same thing all the time" (March 2, 2007).

Although some participants "would like to see disability sport out there a bit more" (Izzie, March 1, 2007) some think it is still a ways away from happening. Anne demonstrated this by saying, "I think disability sports should get more coverage, but it's not going to happen" (February 28, 2007).

Discussion and Conclusion

The theoretical framework that guided this study was a cultural feminist approach. Because cultural feminism's agenda was to emphasize the essential differences between men and women (Tuttle, 1986), this was a good approach because it went well with a study on women athletes with disabilities. The researcher was able to find out how the participants felt about women not being included in the media as well as the disability culture not being included. The participants gave numerous examples of their experiences within the disability culture and how they feel about sports media in general.

The researcher found that the participants were consumers of both mainstream and disability sports media. They consumed mainstream sports media because they have a general interest in sports whereas with disability media they like it because it is about their sports and their friends. They were more likely to look at disability web-based sports media and mainstream print sports media.

Second, the researcher also found that the participants get tired and frustrated with media stereotypes. They did not enjoy being seen as sex symbols or tomboys. They wished to be seen as the athletes they are without anything else attached. The use of the supercrip term and inspiration stories was often found in relation to disability sports media. The participants' do not like this and they believed it often leads women to face double discrimination in sports media.

And finally the researcher found that the participants believed the media is partly responsible for the lack of women and individuals with disabilities in sports media as a whole. They believe both mainstream and disability sports media should include more women. Both medias should also show women as dominant athletes and disabilities should be shown more in general.

Although this study compares to several other studies done on disability in sports media, there is one key difference: until now, there have not been any studies done on women with disabilities and their attitudes and perceptions on sports media.

Future Research

After completing this study, the researcher recommends that more research should be done examining sports media as a whole. The researcher suggests, for example, that more research should be done to actually compare the numbers of pictures in disability and mainstream sports media, using both print and web-based media. More research also needs to be done on why women with disabilities face double discrimination. Finally, the researcher would also suggest a study about whether the able-bodied culture would consume less sports media if there were more inclusion of women or individuals with disabilities in sports media.

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