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GENDER BIAS IN INDIA'S NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE ATHLETES AT THE 2014 INCHEON ASIAN GAMES

by

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Abstract: *Gender bias in sports news coverage is not a new phenomenon. Recent studies in the United States and European context have found continued evidence of such bias and the framing of women athletes as second-class citizens. However, globally, mass communication scholars have largely ignored studying how news media in India, the world's largest democracy that also boasts of one of the largest news media industries in the world, covers sporting events and how such coverage speaks to media ethics. This study conducts a content analysis of two leading English language newspapers in India and their coverage of the 2014 Incheon Asian Games. Consistent with findings in studies conducted in USA and Europe, findings indicate that women are framed as second class citizens, as less deserving of coverage than male counterparts and when they are covered, such coverage often highlights them in feminine, glamorous and off-the-field avatars rather than as hardened athletes. Implications and scope for future studies are discussed.*

Keywords: *Newspapers, Gender bias, framing, reporting ethics, India, sports journalism, media effects*

Introduction

Even if they fight shoulder to shoulder with the men and do their country proud, the exploits of female athletes have traditionally been ignored or given second class treatment by the mainstream media (Eastman & Billings, 2002; Lumpkin, 2009; Schmidt, 2016). Analysis of sporting event reports in USA, UK and European media where both male and female athletes played a prominent role, such as the Olympics or Grand Slam tennis tournaments, have found repeated presence of gender bias in sports coverage. Relatively fewer studies have looked at this

supposed gender bias in sports reportage in Asian cultures. This is especially true in the Indian context with only a handful of mass communication scholars paying attention to sports reporting in the country. With 243 million internet users, over 12,000 newspaper titles, a growing print market, close to 400 million TV viewers and 237 radio stations that reach over a billion people, India boasts of the world's largest media industry(bbc.com, 2015). How the mainstream news media treats sporting successes of half of its population in the world's largest democracy is a subject that definitely needs more thorough scholarly interrogation, especially for scholars who study media policy and media effects on society.

The 2014 Asian Games were held at Incheon in South Korea from September 19 to October 4, 2014. According to the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), this was the largest-ever sporting event in Asia governed by the OCA (Korean Ministry of Culture, 2014). Over 13,000 athletes and officials as well as 7,000 media professionals from 45 nations were part of the Games. India, always a strong contender in these Games and a traditional top-ten finisher, sent a 679-member contingent to the Games, including 516 athletes and 163 support staff. Participating in 28 disciplines (TOI, 2014), India won 57 medals (11 gold, 10 silver and 36 bronze medals) and stood 8th in overall standings. Male athletes won 6 gold, 6 silver and 18 bronze medals, a total of 30. The women won 4 gold, 4 silver and 18 bronze medals, a total of 26. An 11th gold medal was shared by the mixed doubles tennis team. Male and female athletes therefore won almost an equal number of medals at the event.

Did the Indian mainstream news media's coverage of the Games reflect this reality? How did newspaper reports for instance frame the successes of male and female athletes in terms of allotted space and positioning of news stories, as well as through headlines, and images? What lessons can journalists, media managers as well as media scholars learn from the findings?

The coverage of most major sporting events and sports in general has grown in popularity in the 21st century(Schmidt, 2013)with more news pages,TV slots and space on websites being dedicated to sports news.In financial terms it has grown exponentially and globally media rights are expected to touch \$17.1 billion by 2017, a 7.7 rise year-on-year (Van Riper, 2013). The audience for sports news has grown over 200 per cent too in the past decade (Nielsen, 2014). But not all sports and definitely not all athletes have benefitted equally. This disproportionate coverage is most apparent in the coverage of women's sports (Schmidt, 2016).

Despite its thriving and growing news media industry with print, television and internet all showing a consistent rise in readership/viewership in the news segment over the past decade (IRS, 2013), research on India's news media in general and how they frame gender issues in particular, has been historically limited (Rao, 2014). Research on coverage of sports and gender bias has been even more limited since sports news is sometimes considered not-so-serious news. Therefore, while studies on how India's news media frames crimes against women or reports rapes (**Belair-Gagnon, Mishra, & Agur, 2014**)(**Rao, 2014**)(**Durham, 2015**)have been more

frequent in recent years, similar research on marginalization of female athletes in sports news coverage, has been almost nonexistent.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: News Framing and Effects

Newspapers act as a critical source of information, framing news items for audiences about issues that are considered important for mass consumption (McCombs, 2005). Members of the public form opinions and visions of a distant world that they connect to their family, work and life – based on the information they receive from media sources (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2010).

Framing refers to the cognitive process through which news producers make sense of a subject and present it to their audiences, and the way consumers in turn understand these reports (Reese, 2001; Guzman, 2016). To frame is to ‘select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, evaluation and treatment recommendation,’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52). News frames create linkages between very familiar issues and existing beliefs, values and attitudes (de Vreese, 2004). At their most powerful, frames invite people to think about an issue in particular ways. Indeed, news frames function to suggest how audiences can interpret an issue or event. They can exert a relatively substantial influence on citizens’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). For instance, media frames in foreign news can affect news consumers’ opinions of foreign nations (Brewer, 2006). Mainstream, elite media use well-established gatekeeping norms to package news stories in a specific frame to convey information about a topic. This they do through arguments, information, symbolism metaphors, and images (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). In India, the world’s second largest speaker of the English language, all English media is targeted at the large middle and upper middle class elite since only the privileged receive English education in schools. The English media mainly addresses these members of society, since they form the overwhelming majority of its audience. Framing literature suggests that audiences of news frames are often not aware of the presence of frames and the influences they can wield (Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000). However, frame builders—journalists and the news organizations they belong to—are more likely to be aware or conscious of how reports about sporting events are being framed. How the achievements of male and female Indian athletes were framed and reported for such a huge international event therefore, is critical to understanding the relative presence of absence of gender bias in sports coverage.

Gender Bias in Framing News

In both the global north and the global south female participation in any sporting activity has historically been opposed by those in power, including in the media. Previous studies have found

repeated evidence of media coverage ignoring women's sport in comparison to how men's events are covered (Sanderson & Gramlich, 2016; Billings, Angelini, & Duke, 2010) even though the advent of new media may have offset such bias in news coverage to some extent (Geurin-Eagleman, Burch, & Vooris, 2014). Lumpkin (2009) identified three ways in which media framing is biased against female athletes and women's sports. First, they get limited quantity of coverage compared to male athletes. Further, they are often portrayed as athletes with second-class standing. Finally media frames emphasize femininity over sporting abilities. For instance in the U.S., as one study found, less than one-third of newspaper coverage of high school sports were focused on female athletes (Pedersen, 2002). Similarly women continue to get significantly less coverage than men in media reports of Olympic Games (Eastman & Billings, 1999) even though female participation in the Games has significantly increased during the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Davis & Tuggle, 2012).

Female athletes are also often accorded second-class treatment. For example media reports attach gender markings to women's sports such as 'best women tennis players' but not to men's sports (Schmidt, 2016), or refer to female athletes as *girls* but seldom mention men as *boys* (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993). Women are also portrayed in sexist manner through the use of language (Lumpkin, 2009) or by focusing on their physical attractiveness or other physical attributes instead of competence. In visuals too, women are often portrayed in non-sports related poses while male athletes are portrayed within the context of their sports (Fink & Kensicki, 2002).

Several recent studies in the United States, Europe and other nations of the global north have found gendered frames in coverage of sports news. An empirical study of the Australian Open tennis tournament in 2002, for instance, discovered how women tennis players' achievements and news about their matches were packaged in a sexist overtones, with female tennis players being visually portrayed in glamorous poses and reportage centering around the players' love lives, fashion sense and looks—often at the cost of highlighting their playing skills (Stevenson, 2002).

Eastman and Billings' (2002) study of U.S. print and visual media similarly found that both media had a high degree of gender bias and gave greater coverage to men's events even when major women's sporting events were peaking in newsworthiness. Other studies have used qualitative tools to explore the same phenomena, with similar results. In his study of the Spanish media's coverage of the 2004 Olympic Games Teso (2007) found that the gender bias was not merely limited to number of articles, photographs or lines dedicated to male and female athletes but even in context of the language used in headlines. The study concluded that while gender gap was narrowing in sports coverage in the European media, subtle subtexts continued to affect how the media framed news about women's sports. Similar findings were reported by George, Hartley and Paris (2001) who carried out an empirical analysis of the British media and its coverage of women's sports to conclude that the media gave: "preference in their coverage to male athletes, often ignoring female athletic achievements."

Some scholars have argued that such bias in sports reporting creeps in not just because of patriarchal domination of newspaper managements and editorial leadership but also because fewer women become sports reporters. Schmidt (2013), in his research on student-led newspapers, argued that female sports reporters are not just uncommon in campus newsrooms but that they participate in sports reporting much less frequently than they participate in other related activities including journalism in general, playing sports, or watching sports.

Boasting of the fastest growing as well as probably the largest media industry in the world, India has seen a surprising lack of scholarly work focusing on this powerful sector. Some scholars have looked at the issue of gender equality in terms of actual representation, financial benefits and infrastructural backing. Cricket, India's most popular sport, has been the predictable subject of study that has looked at how women cricketers are marginalized, not provided similar infrastructure, funds or encouragement by either the government, sports bodies or private corporations that sponsor sporting events (Gupta, 2013). However, relatively few studies have explored how the Indian news media, especially the elite English newspapers with their power to influence the agenda of opinion makers, the political elite and, critically, the vernacular media, frame news about sporting events and athletes.

Since the primary aim of the study was to understand how English newspaper reports framed male and female athletes from India in their coverage of the Asian Games and what they imply about the state of the Indian newspaper industry, the following Research Questions were posed:

RQ1: How were Indian female athletes framed in news coverage of the Asian Games?

RQ2: How were Indian male athletes framed in news coverage of the Asian Games?

RQ3: Which attributes of Indian female athletes were framed as more prominent in news items?

Further, in view of the findings of many previous studies, the following hypotheses were also proposed:

H1: Newspaper reports are likely to show a clear gender bias in its coverage by publishing fewer number of items about female athletes during the Asian Games

H2: Newspaper reports are likely to show gender bias by dedicating fewer numbers of lines to and carrying fewer photographs of female Indian athletes during the Games.

Method

A content analysis was considered to be the most suitable research tool to answer the questions and hypotheses posed in the study. Content analysis is an unobtrusive technique that allows researchers to 'analyze relatively unstructured data in view of the meanings, symbolic qualities,

and expressive contents they have and of the communicative roles they play in the lives of data sources' (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 49).

Text or content can be analyzed both numerically as also qualitatively. Quantification is not a defining criterion for content analysis, Text is always qualitative to begin with and content analysis may well result in 'verbal answers to a research question' (Krippendorff, p. 88). While one provides the explicit objectivity of scientific data, the other provides the appropriateness of the procedures used relative to a chosen context. For the analysis of text, both are indispensable.

All content analyses should be guided by research questions or hypotheses. When researchers analyze a sample of texts in place of a larger population of texts, however, they need a sampling plan to ensure that the textual units sampled do not bias the answers to the research questions.

For the purpose of this study, a relevance sample was found to be the most suited. This type of sampling aims at selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions. Because the resulting sample is defined by the analytical problem at hand, relevance sampling is also called purposive sampling (Krippendorff, 2013).

The resulting units of text are not meant to be representative of a population of texts – rather they are the population of relevant texts, excluding the textual units that do not possess relevant information. For purposes of analyses, a clustering of data was carried out. Clustering operationalizes what humans do most naturally: forming perceptual wholes from things that are connected, belong together or have common meanings while separating them from things whose relationships seem accidental.

Two prominent English newspapers from two of India's largest cities were chosen for the study, *The Telegraph* from Kolkata and *Mid-Day* from Mumbai. All news items about the Asian Games that appeared in the two newspapers between September 19th and October 7th, 2014 (the duration of the event) were analyzed. The unit of analysis was every news item about the Games. A *news item* was defined as a written report, or a visual report or a combination of both. Text and images were manually counted separately for analysis. A *report* was defined as any written item about the Games. An item was categorized as a *joint report*, if it covered news about male and female athletes or events concerning both genders, under the same headline. However, in such cases, a further comparative analysis was done to see how many lines were devoted to each gender in the particular report. A *photograph* was defined as any image concerning the Games in context of Indian athletes. In case of photo-collages where two or more photographs were packaged under one central photo box, each photograph was counted separately instead of being categorized as *mixed*. Only those photographs where male and female athletes were in the same frame, were categorized as *mixed*.

Since a relatively small sample size was used to understand how India's mainstream (elite) English newspapers framed male and female athletes in their coverage of the Games, a manual content analysis was conducted on the data instead of running the data through the the

mechanical SPSS software. A total of 121 news reports and 183 images were analyzed for the study.

Findings

Second Class Citizens: Framing of Female Athletes

Case study 1: Track & field winners. The track and field team was the largest component of the Indian contingent. Of the 56 track team members, 30 were female and 26 male. They won a record 15 medals including two gold, four silver and seven bronze medals. The women took the major share – winning both golds, three of the four silver medals and four of the seven bronze medals. Yet, just one of the women who won a gold made it to the front page of Mid-Day’s sports section (it was also to be one of the only two days during the entire Games that a female athlete’s accomplishments made it to the front page). Men in comparison were on the front page on nine days while on three days, the front page story and photographs were “mixed”. Asian Games did not get front page presence on five of the 19 days. Overall too, the accomplishments of the male athletes were framed as more important. For instance, the silver medal-winning effort of male discus thrower Vikas Gowda was the front page lead story as was squash player Sourav Ghoshal’s silver winning effort. However, when the women’s 4 x 400 meter relay team won gold for the fourth consecutive Asian Games – a record – it merited just 39 lines and a photograph on page 3 of the sports pages

[Insert image 1 about here].

Case study 2: Retiring icons. Three of India’s biggest stars announced this was to be their last Asian Games – Former Olympic gold medalist Abhinav Bindra, former world champion boxer Mary Kom and Grand Slam-winning tennis player Sania Mirza. All three are winners of India’s highest civilian award – the Padma awards – as well as Olympic medal winners.

When Bindra announced his decision after winning a bronze in the 10m rifle event, he got front page coverage for the next two days (September 23 and 24). Three articles were written about him including a two-page cover spread and a total of 294 lines were solely dedicated to this athlete. In comparison, Kom won the gold medal in boxing, to cap off a career that had seen her win three world championships, a Commonwealth Games gold and an Olympic medal. Yet she received a total of three articles and 284 lines. Mirza, who won a gold and a silver – capping a superb Asian Games record of eight medals across four Asian Games – was mentioned in a front page news item on two occasions and received just 202 lines in total.

Case study 3: Hockey winners. On October 2, when the Indian women’s hockey team won bronze, a mere 18 lines were dedicated to this medal-winning effort along with a photograph of the team members. When the men’s hockey team won gold the following day, they received a front page coverage as well as a story on an inside page. Overall, the men’s hockey team

received 1048 lines of coverage spread across 9 articles over seven days. Further, 10 photographs of the players and staff were carried during the course of the period analyzed. There was no second story about the women's hockey team.

Case study 4: Kabaddi golden men and women. Kabaddi is an ancient Asian sport where rival teams use various wrestling techniques to ensure an opponent who steps into rival territory is pinned to the ground before they can return to their own side. On October 4, both the men's and women's Kabaddi teams created history, successfully defending their gold medals at the Games. The men came from behind to win gold while the women cruised to victory. The double gold did get place on Mid-Day's front page as the cover or lead story. But the headline was heavily gendered and read: 'True Kings of the Sport', with the introductory strap reading: 'men win, women not far behind' (Mid-Day, 2014, p.1). The framing of this report clearly focused on the kings (men) and was not very subtle when they referred to the women's team's gold-winning effort as 'not far behind'. Further, in the article itself, of the 126 lines dedicated to these twin efforts, the men received a *king's share*(emphasis added) of coverage.

[Insert image 2 about here].

The women's gold-winning effort was merited just three lines. The lead photograph was of the men's team in action. The women's team's photograph was taken in a single column, towards the bottom of the article.

Case study 5: Headlines. On September 21, the lead story on Telegraph's page 3 of the sports section carried 121 lines of news on the Asian Games, with sub-headings about women's boxing, women's archery, men's shooting and wrestling for both sexes. But the umbrella headline read: 'Jitu Rai hogs limelight' (Telegraph, 2014, p.3) referring to the gold medal Rai had won in wrestling. The lead photo was also his.

On September 22, the page 3 lead headline in Telegraph was: 'Marksmen win bronze' even though the article covered news of multiple sports events (with sub-headings) such as women's tennis, men's and women's badminton, squash etc. The accompanying photograph too was of the male shooters. On September 23, the front page story in Telegraph was not even of a medal winner but of a series of tweets Abhinav Bindra had sent out, indicating his possible retirement. Deepika Pallikal, who had a bronze in women's squash the same day, was relegated to a sub-heading on page 3. The lead headline on that page read: 'Saurav Ghoshal scripts history, ensures silver,' referring to the squash player's entry into the final round. Two of the 6 columns of the story (176 lines in total) was on him, with Pallikal sharing the rest of the space with men's track & field event news, tennis players and boxers.

The following day, on September 24, while Bindra got half of the front page for his bronze medal and the Indian men's hockey team was given front page positioning, the lead article on page 3 (91 lines) said: 'Saurav settles for silver' referring to the silver medal-winning

performance of the squash player, even though the article dealt once again with exploits of both male and female athletes.

Of the five remaining days, the men's hockey team's exploits made it to the front page on three occasions. On September 30, women's events made an appearance on the headline, stating: 'Sania, Seema win Gold for India', bundling the gold-winning performances of discus thrower Seema Punia and tennis player Sania Mirza into a single headline and thereby indicating that they were probably half as important as a gold won by a man.

[Insert image 3 about here]

In contrast, all gold medal-winning performances by male athletes (the hockey team gold, the kabaddi gold, YogeshwarDutt's wrestling gold) made it as single-event or individual-focused stories. The other *mixed* story on page 3 on this day, mentioned multiple event news but the headline once again was focused on a male athlete: 'Bajrang settles for silver'.

Finally, on October 1, on a day when world champion Mary Kom made the final of her category in boxing and the women's kabaddi team marched into the semi-finals on their way to a gold medal, they merely made it to the introductory strap that said: 'Kom storms into final, women's kabaddi team in semis'. Again, bundling two completely separate sporting events into one simply because women were part of both, indicated the second class citizen status reserved for women athletes. The main headline was on a male discus thrower winning silver: 'Vikas bags silver' when, by reaching the boxing finals, Kom had already assured the country of at least a silver (she went on to win Gold). The women's 4 x400 meter relay team winning gold for a record fourth consecutive time too, only managed a lead photograph on the inside pages (page 3), and worse, the news report itself was part of a *mixed* item where the headline was not about them at all. Similarly women's middle distance runner Tintu Luka winning silver did not merit either a photograph or a headline. Nor did the two medals Indian women won in the 3000 meter steeplechase, amidst high drama.

[Insert Image 4 about here]

In stark contrast, the Indian men's hockey team's victorious march deservedly received maximum coverage, considering the popularity of the sport in India and that the win in the final came against arch-rivals Pakistan. The total of 761 lines dedicated to men's hockey was more than the total combined lines written on Mary Kom's progress and subsequent gold medal (147 lines + mention in two other articles) in boxing and the women's track & field team's nine-medal winning record-breaking effort (including 2 gold medals and 3 silver medals) across six disciplines (261 lines).

Underreporting achievements

Case study 1: Mid-Day. Over the 19 day study period, *Mid-Day* had 102 pages of sports in total, of which 57 were dedicated to the Asian Games. The other pages were dedicated to regular

sports news from the world of cricket, soccer, motorsports, tennis and other sports that are most popular in India.

A total of 95 news reports were carried on the Asian Games in these 19 days. The front page of the newspaper featured a news story about the Asian Games on as many as 14 days. Photographs and stories on male athletes made it to the front page on 9 out of these 14 occasions. Women made 2 covers while 3 covers had both men and women. Of the 95 news reports, 19 were on the achievements of individual male athletes, while 17 articles were written on multiple male athletes or on a team event. A total of 15 articles focused on the achievements of individual female athletes while just 8 focused on multiple female athletes or women's team events. A total of 20 articles were focused on reports that covered both male and female athletes in the same story and were categorized as mixed. A further 16 articles were related to the Asian Games but unconnected to India.

For the purpose of answering the specific questions, items not connected to Indian athletes were removed from the final analysis. Of the 79 articles on Indian athletes, 36 were on male athletes, 23 on female athletes and 20 covered both sexes in one report (e.g. Indian men's and women's Gold in Kabaddi).

Separately, the total number of photographs carried throughout the Games was also analyzed. All photographs connected to India at the Asian Games were counted for this purpose. The difference between coverage given to men and women was stark here. Of the total 126 photographs of Indian athletes carried over 18 days, there were 78 photographs of male athletes, but there were only 44 of women. Four photographs had both male and female athletes in the same frame (mixed). Photographs of non-Indian athletes were not counted.

The newspaper gave significant space to the Asian Games (more than half of its total sports pages in this period) and carried a total of 5901 lines on India at the Asian Games. Comparing the total lines dedicated to men and women, it was found that while sporting events and accomplishments of male athletes received 2681 lines of coverage, women received 2011 lines – over 600 lines less. Joint stories accounted for 1208 lines.

[Insert table 1 about here]

Case study 2: Telegraph. The Telegraph is a broadsheet and usually broadsheets are designed to carry larger stories and, therefore, less number of stories. Also The Telegraph traditionally has pages dedicated to cricket and continued with this tradition through the Asian Games (when an equally popular event was taking place in India – the World 20:20 cricket club championship). Over the 19-day period, The Telegraph carried a total of 56 news reports. Of these, 42 were on Indians in the Asian Games and 14 were general reports about the Games. Of the 42 items included in the analysis, 18 covered male athletes, 17 covered both genders under the same headline (mixed) and just 7 articles focused solely on female athletes. Of the 57 photographs of various dimensions that were carried during this period, there were 31 photographs of male

athletes, 24 of women while two photographs had both genders in the same frame. Photographs that were not of Indian athletes, were not counted. A total of 4515 lines were allotted to Indians at the Games. Of these 2425 lines were spread across 17 articles that were mixed, 1474 lines were spent on male athletes and just 616 lines on women athletes.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

However, the high proportion of lines in the mixedcategory, forced me to look deeper at this category for a more qualitative analysis of the gender balance (or imbalance) that the newspaper injected in such stories.

The cover page featured news on the Asian Games on 7 days. Photographs and stories on male athletes made it to the cover on 5 out of these 7 occasions. Women made 2 covers. Of the 76 pages dedicated to sports during the period of the study, 19 full pages (one page each day) were dedicated to the Asian Games apart from stories spread across some other pages on some days. Therefore H1 was supported.

Highlighting apparent feminine traits

The only woman athlete to get continued coverage during the Asian Games was boxer Sarita Devi – not because she won multiple gold medals but because her bronze medal-winning effort in women’s boxing made news for the wrong reasons. She felt she was unfairly denied a crack at the final and refused to accept her bronze. Photographs of her crying on the podium made global news and her subsequent allegations and suspension by the Indian Olympic Association (for showing dissent) meant she was covered in 6 articles across 5 days with a total of 544 lines being dedicated to her exploits. Photographs of Sarita showed her crying on her husband’s shoulder while news items related to her also privileged information about how she was planning to take matters to the court.

When Sania Mirza won the mixed doubles gold in Tennis (and a medal in the ladies singles), none of the photographs in either newspaper showed her in action on court. Mid-Day carried one photograph of her posing with the trophy and another where she was off court, attending a fashion show. Telegraph carried one photograph of her hugging her doubles partner after the win and another where she was smiling for the camera.

When triple world champion boxer Mary Kom won gold, one news item in Telegraph prominently mentioned that a Bollywood movie had been made on her life and carried an image of actress Priyanka Chopra (a former Miss World) who had portrayed Kom’s role in the movie. Mid-Day carried visuals that included one of Kom with her husband and children.

Overall, there were 109 photographs of male athletes and 68 of female athletes between the two papers combined. The total lines dedicated to male athletes between the two papers (4155 lines) were nearly 60 per cent higher than the lines allotted to female athletes (2627 lines). Of the 3633

lines allocated to mixed or joint stories featuring news about athletes from both genders, over 2000 lines were on the achievements of male athletes. Therefore H2 was also supported.

Discussion

Two broad themes emerged from the qualitative textual analysis of the data. In answer to the first two research questions, it was evident that news about the successes and failures of India's women athletes were not only covered fewer times in the two newspapers, but when covered, they were also given second-class citizen status (Lumpkin, 2009). This was further substantiated by the quantitative data that supported H1 and H2. The number of news items about male athletes far exceeded those accorded to female athletes as did the number of lines dedicated to men the number of photographs featuring male athletes.

The second theme that emerged was of female athletes being framed in a non-sporting manner. Many articles that covered the exploits of female athletes, mentioned movies being made about their lives, their exploits off the court in fashion shows or glamorous ads, and when images were carried, many of them showed them off the court – dressed in casual wear, in comparison to male athletes who were almost without exception shown in images that were on-field and in action. When stories about boxer Sarita Devi were carried, most photographs showed her crying or with her husband and the reports spoke mostly about her complaining about unfair rules, instead of focusing on her bronze medal-winning performance. Sarita was framed as a victim, as complaining, as feminine and in need of constant male support—despite the fact that she is a boxer, physically very capable and a medal winning athlete.

A deeper qualitative analysis of the headlines carried in the newspapers was revealing. Of the 12 headlines about India's medal-winning feats at the Olympics that were carried in *The Telegraph*, as many as eight referred to male athletes winning medals and led with news of male athletes, even though within the report, there was mention of women athletes winning medals. These reports about female athletes were well hidden, not featuring in either headline or shoulder straps (the line just below the headline)—not even featuring as a photograph accompanying the article. Only on three occasions did women make it to the headline – when three female athletes won gold.

The two newspapers analyzed for this study are from two different metros –two of India's largest and most populated cities. While *The Telegraph* is the highest-selling English daily in the entire Eastern part of India for over two decades, *Mid-Day* is a leading newspaper in Mumbai. Both newspapers are known especially for their sports coverage, one reason why they were selected for this study.

The findings of this study indicate that a definite media bias exists in the way in which English language newspapers in at these two large Indian cities cover sports news. The study of the

Asian Games and media coverage provided a good example of an international sporting extravaganza where Indian male and female athletes won almost an equal number of medals and yet, the men received significantly higher coverage than the women, in some cases up to 40 per cent more. Not only were the total articles on male athletes in the two newspapers combined (54) almost double the articles on female athletes (29), even in the number of photographs, the bias was clear (109 photographs of male athletes and 68 of female athletes between the two papers combined). The total lines dedicated to male athletes between the two papers (4155 lines) was nearly 60 per cent higher than the lines allotted to female athletes (2627 lines). Of the 3633 lines allocated to “mixed” or “joint” stories featuring news about athletes from both genders, a majority of the lines were on the achievements of male athletes.

A clear case of gendered reportage and a bias against female athletes in both the selection of news for publication as well as in the framing of the published news is evident from his study. The framing puts female athletes as weaker to the male athletes and their achievements as secondary to their male counterparts’. Further when news about female athletes were carried, they focused more on non-sporting, feminine and glamorous attributes instead of solely focusing on sporting attributes.

This study therefore by and large supports the findings of similar studies conducted in other parts of the world. While scholars have differing opinions on whether to term this phenomenon attribute agenda-setting or framing, the findings of this study further strengthen the argument that the media not only tells people what to think about but also *how to* think about it (McCombs, 2005).

Implications

The findings of this study speaks strongly to media ethics and calls for possible introspection by media managers as well as on-the-ground sports journalists about how women athletes are presented in news coverage. Objectivity in reporting or reporting facts as they happen are at the very core of journalistic ethics. Sports journalists in India’s English language newspapers at least may want to re-examine current news selection or gatekeeping processes to analyze causes for underreporting news about female athletes and women’s sports in general. How news about female athletes are framed – both textually and visually, also needs to be re-examined and analyzed in light of journalistic ethics. Journalists are the eyes and ears of a nation and they have the power not just to tell people what to think about but how to think about it (Stacks & Salwen, 2011). By framing achievements of female athletes as secondary to achievements of male colleagues, what message are they giving their readers or consumers? By visually portraying female athletes as ‘glamorous’ and ‘feminine’ instead of as athletes first, what messages are they passing on to the public? Sports journalists, media managers and media scholars alike, have to

conduct more research through surveys, experiments or qualitative interviews, to find answers to these questions.

The author acknowledges that this is a cross-sectional study where newspaper coverage of a large, specific event has been analyzed. More longitudinal studies can measure if the English language newspapers show similar bias when covering other events such as the Commonwealth Games where both male and female Indian athletes compete. Further, a content analysis of overall sports coverage instead of focusing on one specific event may be able to gauge more accurately if gender bias and stereotyping exists only in coverage of specific sporting events or across all sports – similar to the presence of hegemonic masculinity that have been found in studies conducted in the United States for instance Pederson (2003).

More young people now consume news on the internet and not through newspapers. Geurin-Eagleman, Burch, & Vooris found evidence of US-based web-based news platforms' coverage of sporting events to show less gender bias. India boasts of the world's largest news media industry (Rao, 2014), Indians are the second largest users of Facebook, Twitter and internet in general and the country's online news industry is one of the fastest growing globally (Kemp, 2014). Does online news coverage of sporting events provide a more balanced perspective both quantitatively and qualitatively? Further, future studies need to explore not just India's elite English media but the much larger vernacular media that is consumed by over 70 percent of the nation's 1.3 billion population. English media is consumed by India's elite, English-educated middle class of a little over 200 million people. Nearly a billion others consume vernacular media. How are sporting events reported in such media, is a subject that needs to be explored if communication scholarship is to gain a better understanding of this multi-cultural, multi-lingual democracy that is home to the largest media industry in the world.

Another issue that many previous studies raise and one that was beyond the scope of this essay, is to study the actual participation of women in the field of sports journalism. In the United States for instance, there has been an effort to integrate female sports journalists into the field (Hardin & Shain, 2005; Hardin & Whiteside, 2006). Calls have also been raised to make it imperative for communication programs across the US to encourage women to take up sports journalism (Schmidt, 2013). This study agrees with the assertion that media leaders must take measures to “disavow male athletes and journalists of the notion that sport (and, by extension, sports journalism) is a males-only domain” (Hardin & Shain, p.32). How many women take up sports journalism in India and what type of job roles are they given – are issues that scholars need to probe deeper in to.

Most importantly however, as mentioned before, India's sports journalists may want to re-examine the current framing of female athletes and women's sports in their news reports from an ethical concern point of view. What they write sets the agenda for the public, inviting them to think of a particular topic in a particular manner (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). If sports journalists in India want to truly become members of a fourth estate that act as champions of

social justice and provide accurate, equitable and credible news—then they need to introspect about the framing of female athletes as second-class citizens, as feminine more than athletic and as less deserving of coverage than their male counterparts—and the possible effect of such coverage on their audiences.

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Table 1: Frequency - Gender bias in *Mid-Day's* coverage of the Asian Games

Date	Total items	On male athletes	On female athletes	Mixed items	Male image	Female image	Mixed image	Lines on males	Lines on females	Lines mixed
9-19	3	1	-	2	10	2	-	170	-	87
9-20	2	1	-	1	2	-	4	18	-	75
9-21	3	1	1	1	3	3	-	177	149	41
9-22	3	1	1	1	3	2	-	54	169	15
9-23	6	2	2	2	4	3	-	187	145	107
9-24	3	2	-	1	7	2	-	265	-	26
9-25	5	4	1	-	7	3	-	277	37	-
9-26	4	3	1	-	4	3	-	198	44	143
9-27	6	4	-	2	5	2	-	202	-	200
9-28	8	2	1	5	5	6	1	61	53	303
9-29	5	1	2	2	7	4	-	116	229	91
9-30	6	4	2	-	3	3	1	345	259	-
10-1	5	2	3	-	2	2	-	285	163	-
10-2	5	1	4	-	2	5	-	137	302	-
10-3	5	3	1	1	5	2	-	245	118	53
10-4	5	1	2	2	3	4	-	54	210	126
10-5	2	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	65	36
10-6	3	2	1	-	4	1	-	110	73	-
Total	79	35	23	21	76	48	6	2891	2016	1303

Table 2: Frequency: Gender bias in *The Telegraph*'s coverage of the Asian Games

Date	Total items	On male athletes	On female athletes	Mixed items	Male image	Female image	Mixed image	Lines on males	Lines on females	Lines mixed
9-19	5	3	-	2	8	7	-	168	-	621
9-20	2	1	-	1	2	1	-	122	-	124
9-21	3	1	1	1	2	1	-	78	140	121
9-22	2	1	-	1	1	2	-	49	-	99
9-23	3	1	1	1	2	2	-	53	37	176
9-24	3	2	-	1	2	1	-	138	-	91
9-25	2	1	-	1	2	-	-	62	-	133
9-26	3	1	-	2	1	2	-	120	-	182
9-27	1	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	115
9-28	3	2	-	1	3	1	-	199	-	93
9-29	3	1	1	1	1	1	-	91	56	106
9-30	3	1	-	2	1	1	1	89	-	318
10-1	4	2	1	1	1	1	-	208	102	127
10-2	N	O		P	A	P	E	R		
10-3	N	O		P	A	P	E	R		
10-4	N	O		P	A	P	E	R		
10-5	2	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	40	95
10-6	4	1	2	1	3	3	1	97	281	119
Total	43	18	7	18	31	24	3	1476	656	2521

■ Figures/Images 1, 2, 3, 4 attached