

**RESEARCH PAPER**

‘He Cries’ and ‘She Battles’: A Qualitative Study of Masculinity and Femininity Redefined in Sports Discourse of Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The study attempts to investigate how and in what ways the selected newspapers have represented masculinity and femininity in their sports sections. The media has a major role in shaping our perception of the world and in assisting us in determining what is and is not significant. It is critical to take into account how the media portrays the sports stars, and for this purpose the current study has analyzed twenty news items taken from two Pakistani and two foreign newspapers for a span of three years. The study based on Hall's theory of representation concludes that sports persons have been depicted in unconventional ways; and traditional notions of gender have been challenged and redefined in the data analyzed. The study indicates the necessity for further investigation into additional linguistic and semiotic dimensions of newspapers to attain a more thorough comprehension of the phenomenon.

KEYWORDS Sports Rhetoric, Gender Stereotypes, Subversion, Masculinity, Femininity

Introduction

Both masculinity and femininity are cultural constructions that are socially constructed and defined by social members who decide what behaviors, traits, and practices are appropriate for each gender. The degree to which men and women embrace and embody these masculine and feminine traits determines whether they are classified as more or less masculine or feminine. The desirable form of maleness and femaleness is celebrated and embraced by society to encourage conformity to these conventional ideas. The process of socialization, which imprints and promotes these convictions and views in early life, helps boys and girls become conscious of their unique gender identities. Manhood and womanhood are constantly defined in relation to one other. Males should be rugged, strong, and logical, according to conventional conceptions of masculinity. The ideal of masculinity is present in every culture, however it differs slightly amongst nations. Across civilizations, the majority of traits that are linked with masculinity are universal. Men are socialized to repress all emotions except rage, whereas women are encouraged to express their sentiments and emotions freely. Men are under social pressure to exhibit manly qualities, especially the desire to be domineering in order to appear more macho. They are expected to remain emotionless and to repress their feelings in order to prove their manliness by rejecting all things feminine. In this context, any violation of the highly valued and respected behaviors and practices that are considered masculine or feminine is undesirable. Adhering to conventional ideals of manhood and womanhood causes internal conflicts for both men and women, and rejecting societal norms has far-reaching effects on them.

All domains of life are subject to these stereotypical expectations and sports are not an exception. The sports media also serves to promote conventional gender ideology by highlighting the conventional gender attributes of sports stars and not focusing on their sports skills only. Even though women's sports circumstances have improved recently, they still face a number of barriers to achieving their athletic ambitions, the majority of which are caused by long-standing gender stereotypes. Female athletes face a challenging situation that causes them to defy gender conventions as they have to balance their feminine identity

and athletic identity. If sportswomen are still seen and treated as beauty icons, what challenges might women in other professions be facing? Despite facing many challenges, they have reached an exceptional level of success, which makes them role models for others. Misrepresenting their experiences has lasting effects on both them and future female athletes. Because traditional media often shows athletes in a certain way, this study aims to find out if the newspapers in question treat athletes like stereotypes or if they show how society is changing by showing athletes of all genders competing and doing well in sports.

Literature Review

Throughout their history, women in sports have encountered prejudice and struggle. Women were perceived as being too frail to participate in athletics, particularly endurance sports. It was commonly argued that athletics had a detrimental effect on women's health, particularly their reproductive health (Mohapatra, 2021). Boys' and girls' development of sports interests and behavioral patterns is greatly impacted by gender socialization, which is largely influenced by sexual orientation. Particularly in the context of sports, gender socialization sets the guidelines and standards for what is considered appropriate for boys and girls. In an environment where hyper-masculinity is prevalent, women in sports often challenge perceptions of femininity as weak and dependent while also reaffirming their identities (Khan, 2017). The attractiveness of female athletes is more important to people than their skill or potential. Usually, people assess them based on their appearance. Women are expected by society to be kind, non-violent, and to refrain from physically demanding activities. Gender bias is prevalent in media as well as other spheres of society. The norms and priorities of media have historically been largely set by men. Print media still portrays women poorly, despite the fact that women have immense participation in business, politics, and journalism (Mansoor, 2013). Our perceptions, identities, and social roles are greatly influenced by the media, and media's role in shaping perception cannot be overlooked, and even gender equality can be promoted by using media platforms efficiently and sensibly (Zia, 2007). With an emphasis on spoken, written and visual modes of communication, media discourse has been extensively researched for its representation of gender. The media frequently presents female athletes negatively by downplaying their achievements, employing sarcasm and lighthearted humor, and concentrating on non-athletic topics. Men are typically held to higher standards by society, and their work is frequently regarded as superior to that of women. Many people, regardless of gender, think that women can't compete on the same level as men, even though there is proof that they do very well (Jarratt, 1990). Spender (1985) asserts that the world is perceived through a male lens, indicating that our reality is influenced by male constructs owing to the prevalence of male-centered language. The intelligence and intellectual capabilities of women are infrequently acknowledged, with predominant emphasis placed on their domestic roles (Zia, 2007). In order to further capitalist goals, women are objectified, which diminishes their respect and dignity. By portraying women only as objects of beauty and prioritizing aesthetics over intelligence, gender stereotypes are maintained. Ali and Batool (2015) also looked at the depiction of women in the English-language Pakistani newspaper and have found male dominance in all sections of newspaper including politics and sports. The study came to the conclusion that the public's ability to advance socially and economically is hampered by the media's promotion of incorrect ideas about femininity. Disparities in the representation of both genders were also discovered in a corpus-based analysis (Yasmin, Bukhari, & Abubakar, 2019) of Pakistani newspapers in the form of asymmetrical address terms, less visibility of women, misrepresentation of women by showing them in stereotypical ways.

An examination of the aforementioned studies substantiates the notion that media presents a distorted and partial representation of women across various sectors of society. Their accomplishments are often dismissed and inadequately represented or distorted by stakeholders, highlighting the pervasive patriarchal ideology that exists within various institutions of our society. In the backdrop of all these works reviewed here, the current

study has been designed to examine whether the selected newspapers also adhere to and promote patriarchal ideology or they endorse the societal transformation of contemporary by depicting sports persons in realistic ways.

Material and Methods

This study presents a qualitative examination of the sports discourse found in two Pakistani and two international newspapers, aiming to explore the representations of masculinity and femininity concerning male and female sports figures. The data has been meticulously collected over a three-year span, specifically encompassing the years 2017, 2018, and 2019, and is exclusively comprised of lexical data of Pakistani newspapers (*The Nation, Dawn*) and International newspapers (*The New York Times, Daily Mail*). The analysis has been conducted on a total of twenty news items, initially focusing on the representation of sportsmen, followed by an examination of the representation of sportswomen. The present work is based on Theory of Representation propounded by Halls (1997) to examine how the notions of masculinity and femininity have been dealt with in the selected newspapers' sports sections. According to Hall language is inherently imbued with significance and conveys messages through the utilization of words, images, and signs. The symbols and expressions serve as vessels of significance and can never exist in a state of neutrality or devoid of meaning. Language serves as a medium for the representation of ideas, thoughts, and emotions regarding various subjects. In this case, language includes all kinds of signs, like words, pictures, sounds, and other symbols, that work together to communicate and express meanings. It is crucial to realize that meanings are created and established through a process of signification rather than being innate to objects. It can be said that meanings are attributed by the social actors to create particular versions of reality. Since meaning making is not an innocent process and language is always loaded with implied meanings, the present work has used Hall's theory to examine the linguistic choices of reporters with regard to male and female sports stars.

Results and Discussion

The analysis has been done in two categories namely subverted masculinity in sports news and subverted femininity in sports news. The examples of subverted masculinity are coded as M1, M2, M3; and examples of subverted femininity are coded as F1, F2, and F3 etc. The current analysis shows that both sportsmen and sportswomen are depicted in non-conventional manner, and challenging the traditionally held notions about men and women.

Subverted Masculinity in Sports News

This part focuses on representation of sportsmen in the selected newspapers. The portrayal of women in news media often aligns with traditional stereotypes, depicting them as emotionally weak, susceptible to feelings such as sorrow, happiness, and anger. However, the present study reveals that similar attributes are also emphasized in the depiction of male athletes, who are represented in unconventional manners in the selected newspapers. The examples are given below:

Table 1
Masculinity Redefined in Sports News

M1	"Peter Wright left in tears after beating Gerwyn Price in UK Open final to win the first televised title of his career" Daily Mail, March 6, 2017.
M2	"Yannick Noah could not hold back tears" Daily Mail, November 24, 2018.
M3	"He sobbed in the locker room after the defeat, and he was crying again an hour later, with a group of his friends" The New York Times, September 9, 2018.
M4	"Federer cried after beating Baghdatis in the final and receiving the trophy from Laver. He choked up again after being beaten by Nadal in the 2009 final, saying, "God, it's killing me." He eventually

	backed away from the microphone and was consoled by Nadal" The New York Times, January 28, 2018.
M5	"He cried during the awards ceremony, which he has done before here. But these tears came as he held the trophy and received an extended ovation from the crowd that felt more like an extended recognition of his staying power" The New York Times. June 10, 2018.
M6	"Moments after winning one of the most grueling tennis matches of his life, Rafael Nadal sat in his chair, a few tears streaming down his face...Nadal dropped his head into his hands. The trickle of tears turned into weeping" The New York Times, September 8, 2019.
M7	"Karius was in tears, his face puffy, his eyes red. He approached the Liverpool fans, a mass of red at the other end of the stadium from where his ignominy had descended, gingerly, nervously, palms outstretched, pleading for forgiveness" The New York Times, May 26, 2018.
M8	"Tears as Muller grabs first title with Sydney win" The Nation, November 13, 2014
M9	"Former Test vice-captain David Warner... tearfully apologised Saturday over a ball-tampering scandal...The usually pugnacious batsman, 31, repeatedly struggled to talk and tears ran down his face as he apologised to fans, team-mates, his family and the Australian public." The Nation, April 1, 2018.
M10	"A wave of sympathy for Smith, in particular, has been gathering pace since a heart-wrenching public apology on Thursday, in which he broke down in tears" The Nation, April 3, 2018.

The literature review indicates that male athletes are predominantly portrayed in traditional manners as resilient, unemotional, composed, ferocious, and highly talented. Nonetheless, the current study indicates that representations are not consistently stereotypical, as stereotypes have been challenged and shattered in the data analyzed where sportsmen are portrayed as losing self-control, often exhibiting emotions such as crying in response to victories or defeats on the field. Peter Wright, a dart player, is depicted in M1 as crying after getting defeated. Similar to this, the tennis star Cilic is depicted in M3 sobbing in exasperation about blisters on his feet that prevented him from giving his finest performance. He sobs in despair because he feels powerless to stop his suffering. When Yannick Noah, the French football player, learned that he would be retiring and would not be listening to the national anthem in this manner again, he too became overcome with emotion in M2. He began to sob in the playground as this thought overcame him. In M4 tennis player Federer reportedly started crying after accepting the award, according to reports. Furthermore, he had acted in a similar manner in 2009 after losing to Rafael Nadal; he was "*choked up*" and unable to speak for a while. Additionally, he exclaimed, "*Oh God! It's killing me,*" he said, unable to continue, and Nadal reassured him. It is unusual to see him crying over his wins and losses being the oldest tennis player. In M7, Karius, a Liverpool football player who was defeated by Real Madrid, was also seen sobbing with "*puffy face*" and "*red eyes*". The loss caused his eyes to get irritated and his cheeks to swell. With his arms extended, he apologized to the audience for his poor performance, saying, "*gingerly and nervously*". The following instances further subvert stereotypical masculinity: tennis player Rafael Nadal is shown crying after winning the title for the eleventh time in M6. The text claims that this is not the first time it has happened because he has done this at award ceremonies before. These tears were shed in appreciation of the supporters who gave him a standing ovation during his triumph, which appeared to be a lasting testament to his tenacity. Nadal has been shown thus in M6 since he broke down in tears following the triumph of a significant tournament. Tears were streaming down his face as he sat in a chair, then he covered his face with his hands and began to cry. Tennis player del Potro has been crying in the M3 at his loss. After an hour, he and his pals continued to weep and wail in the locker room. Murray, another tennis star, was shown in M5 as being overcome with emotion and "*with tears in his eyes*" when the audience stood up to applaud him and say goodbye. Lowry, a golfer, was likewise unable to control his feelings and sobbed excessively in the parking lot of his car after his loss. Similarly, Muller is depicted in illustration M8 sobbing over his triumph. Cricket players are shown in examples M9 and M10 sobbing during the press conference after being found guilty of match-fixing.

The aforementioned analysis demonstrates that the chosen newspapers do not strictly adhere to stereotypical ideas of masculinity because every example cited here demonstrates how male sports stars have been portrayed in an unconventional way as being sensitive, emotional, expressive, crying, or having teary eyes. Contrary to our conventional notions, they are depicted as being overcome with emotion and crying in

public. Such a display of emotion in public is associated with women who are deemed as over emotional and fragile, while the selected newspapers have challenged these stereotypes.

Subverted Femininity in Sports News

This part focuses on the projection of femininity. Femininity emerges as a cultural construct, shaped and delineated through social consensus among members of society who determine the acceptable behaviors, characteristics, actions, and practices associated with it. Women are socialized to accept that power and moral authority reside with men, leading to a lack of resistance or objection on their part. Society venerates and endorses the appropriate or preferred expressions of masculinity and femininity, fostering adherence to these conventional frameworks. The concepts and convictions are ingrained and cultivated during early childhood through socialization, during which boys and girls become attuned to their distinct gender identities. This is how the patriarchal dominance is sustained and perpetuated through invisible means. It has been observed that media generally propagates conventional gender ideology but the current study has found that traditional notion of femininity has been challenged and distorted in the selected newspapers. The examples are given below:

Table 2
Femininity Redefined in Sports News

F1	"she was an irresistible force, breaking Konta four times and producing crisp winners, sharp angles and consistent intensity" The New York Times, January 24, 2017.
F2	"Mahoor crowned Int'l Series Badminton champion...she was playing like a tigress and never looked in any sort of trouble or pressure while playing her first major final in front of huge crowd" The Nation, November 13, 2017.
F3	"But the fiercely competitive American was full of confidence after ending the campaign of Canadian comeback queen Eugenie Bouchard in round three" The Nation, January 22, 2017.
F4	"Karolina Pliskova put on a ruthless display of big hitting to swat aside crowd favourite Venus Williams 6-2, 6-2 as the WTA Finals opened with a pair of power-packed slug-fests at the Singapore Indoor Stadium" Dawn, October 23, 2017.
F5	"Brave-heart Fatima, despite being badly injured, won silver medal for Pakistan in the El-Hassan Taekwondo Championship" The Nation, July 30, 2019.
F6	"A thunderous hitter of the ball, she played an aggressive baseline game to overpower the Romanian" The Nation, January 22, 2017.
F7	"Second seed Ushna was at her deadly best when she outclassed her rival and top seed Sara Mansoor 6-1, 6-4 in the women's final" Dawn, November 19, 2017.
F8	"Garcia overpowers Barty, storms to Wuhan title...Ranked 20 in the world, Garcia battled her way through two tight sets against Barty before breezing the third to claim the biggest title of her career" Dawn, October 1, 2017.
F9	"She performed like vintage Sharapova: aggressive, agile, and fearless, earning a berth in the second round, where she will face Timea Babos of Hungary" The New York Times, August 29, 2017.
F10	'Parkha, through impressive application of golfing skills and a nerve free temperament she compiled a score of par 72 and appeared in full command' Dawn, March 22, 2018.

In contrast to the traditional representation of sportswomen and the marginalization of their achievements, the researcher has found multiple instances in the collected data where the achievements and successes of sportswomen are emphasized. Serena Williams, a tennis player, is rated as "*an irresistible force*" in F1, having defeated her opponent four times in that match. It has been emphasized that she utilized merely 45 percent of her serves; nevertheless, her 'sharp angles' and the fervor with which she struck the ball distinguished her remarkably. Her movements have been portrayed in a favorable light. The analysis has carefully looked at every part of her performance and has made smart comments about how she acted during the match. F2 also shows badminton player Mahnoor as a strong opponent who has won the championship. The example emphasizes the confidence of Mahnoor and the fierce manner with which she has played as she has been compared with the tigress in the given example. It has been emphasized that it was her first major competition but she felt no pressure and stayed calm and cool. Moreover, the presence of a huge crowd could also not deter her from pursuing her target. The next

example F3 also portrays another player Kerber in a similar manner as confident and “*fiercely competitive*”. The example F4 highlights the exceptional tennis skill of tennis player Pliskova who has defeated experienced player like Venus Williams. Their match has been labeled as ‘*slugfest*’ which implies that both are strong competitors and it was a tough match between them. It has been mentioned that Pliskova has used ‘*power packed slug fests*’ which hints at her strength and energy during the match. Moreover, Venus Williams is ‘*crowd’s favorite*’ which implies her fame and popularity but she has been defeated by Pliskova. Sportswomen are generally shown to be weak both emotionally and physically, but the example F5 depicts Taekwondo athlete Fatima as having a ‘*brave-heart*’ as she continued fighting even after getting injured. She has won a silver medal despite brutal injuries which is a reflection of her strong fighting spirit. She did not cry over her injury and has tolerated the pain to win the medal. Again the traditional masculine qualities of aggression and dominance have been attributed to a female player in F6 who has been depicted as ‘*a thunderous hitter of the ball*’. This phrase emphasizes the power and energy invested by the player in her game which has been played aggressively. The example F7 also endorses the sporting skills of tennis player Ushna who has been depicted in her ‘*deadly best*’ during the match. The specific use of adjective phrase ‘*deadly best*’, and verb ‘*outclassed*’ highlight the athletic prowess of Ushna. The example F8 also intensifies the athletic competence of tennis player Garcia who has been depicted as ‘*overpowered*’, ‘*battled*’, and ‘*storms*’ to win the title. The purpose of using such lexicon is to project the athleticism of the female player in the best light. The example F9 also challenges the conventional gender ideology by presenting tennis star Shrapova as ‘*aggressive, agile, fearless*’; the qualities stereo typically associated with men only, but the given example has created a new image of sportswoman who are equally competent and tough like male athletes. The same perspective has been adopted in F10 where another athlete has been depicted as having exceptional golfing skills along with a ‘*nerve free temperament*’.

The analysis of all these examples shows that masculinity and femininity have been contested and redefined in the selected newspapers in accordance with the changing societal trends as women now extensively participate in all domains of life including sports; and long standing conservative notions that receive women to be weak and men to be strong do not hold sway in the contemporary world. Additionally the boundary line that ascribes superior and inferior status to men and women according to conservative ideals seems to dissolve as women like men are transgressing every walk of life and also asserting their existence and dominance by all means.

Conclusion

Athletics is one way to question and change gender norms and stereotypes of traditional femininity. For example, female athletes work to break the stereotype that women are passive objects who are only valued for their looks. The analysis indicates that conventional perceptions of gender are transforming, fostering equality and promoting women’s participation in the male-dominated realm of sports. At the same time the societal expectations for men have been defied in the data analyzed in this study as sportsmen are shown as overtly emotional, sensitive, expressive, fragile who display their feelings publicly by crying over their wins or losses. On the other hand, sportswomen are shown to be combative, exceptionally talented and skillful, powerful and dominating, fierce and competitive, which is also contrary to traditional expectations. The discourse practices employed in the selected newspapers for depicting sportsmen and sportswomen align with societal transformation as gender dichotomies leading to discrimination and marginalization have been questioned and challenged in contemporary world. The selected newspapers have also contested the conservative notions by depicting athletes in true light, and not to be guided by biased perspective. This change of perspective in media with reference to gender portrayal will definitely affect the future female athlete’s goals and dreams of joining the sports as positive portrayal of sportswomen has far reaching impact on shaping people’s perception about women’s sport.

Recommendations

The current study has adhered to projection of sports persons in headlines and leads; and the rest of the sections including articles, reviews, editorials and interviews are not part of the analysis. It is therefore recommended to delve deeper into the genre of sports discourse by exploring the aforementioned sections of newspapers. Moreover, the pictorial data of newspapers is a valuable source for understanding the journalistic practices and their implicit agendas.

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