

C I N E M A

Reel Women:
Depictions of Females in the Sports Film Genre

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Introduction

- Hollywood typically presents women in predictable roles that often depict women as second class citizens.
- A wide range of stereotypical depictions of females in Hollywood films exist.
- At present, athletes are becoming subjects of made for television movies and documentaries, while typical events of an athletes' life act as plots and storylines for feature films.
- Sports and media are interconnected parts of life with sports programming, evolving into an important segment of media content (Coakley, 1994).

Background Information

- Women have made strong contributions in commercial movies as actors, writers and designers, however 96 percent of films are directed by men (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2004).
- Hooks (1996) contends that sex, race, gender and class have an impact on character representations and depictions in the film industry.
- Women have typically been portrayed in superficial roles.

Statement of the Problem

- There has been a surge in sports being covered in the media, shifting from scores and athletic performance to lifestyles and entertainment.
- However, women do not receive equitable coverage.
- The sports film dates back to the 1940s, with an influx of sports films being seen in the last decade. This has spurred new opportunities for female characters.
- In spite of their celebrity stature, their film characters are often generalized and based on a stereotype.

Goal of Study

By analyzing the roles of women in fictional sports films, this study is significant to determining how film producers perpetuate images of women by constructing characters that embody and depict gender stereotypes.

1. It seeks to investigate what female character images prevail in film.
2. It seeks to shed light on the media's practices of typecasting women in film.
3. It seeks to analyze how women are framed in sports films.

Theoretical Framework

Framing

- Refers to the way media gatekeepers organize and present information to the public and the way audiences interpret the information.
- Within the context of film, framing is a process in which producers and directors emphasize some aspects of reality while downplaying others (Gitlin, 1980).
- Scheufele (2000) states that framing influences how audiences think about issues, by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation

- Television is responsible for shaping or cultivating viewers' conception of reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986).
- The repeated viewing of certain portrayals contribute to the development of particular beliefs about the world and reinforce these established beliefs.
- Jhally's (1990) concept of the image based culture supports Gerbner's claim, in that, the portrayals about gender in the visual media are distorted and confuse the public.

Methodology

Textual Analysis

- Most commonly used method to interpret the storyteller's use of characters and events as symbols of interpretations of the evolution of social behavior (Potter, 1996).
- Used to describe the content, structure and functions of the messages contained in visual or recorded texts (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000).

Genre Analysis

- Gives the breakdown and meaning of camera shots and angles as a guide to understanding the producer's intent in delivering a message.
- Observations about the technical and symbolic elements of music, camera shots, lighting, location, sound and costuming were evaluated.

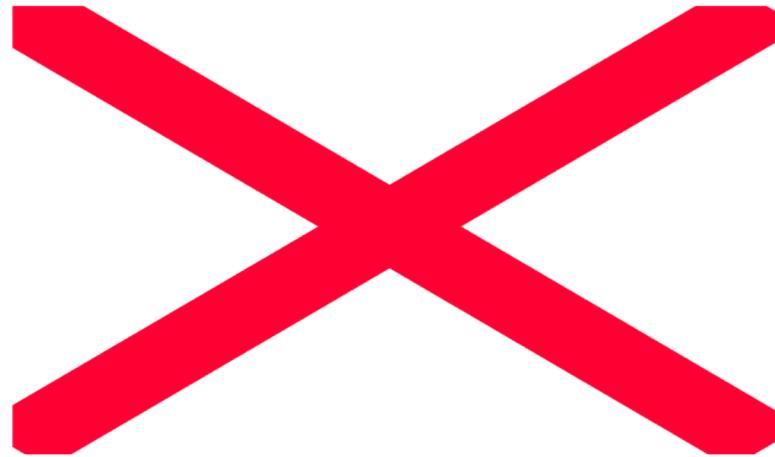
Sample

- A purposive viewing sample was selected from the top 50 sports movies through the Internet Movie Database.
- Open, axial and selective coding were completed in the analysis of eight films:
 - Jerry Maguire (1996)
 - He Got Game (1998)
 - Any Given Sunday (1999)
 - Love and Basketball (2000)
 - Remember the Titans (2000)
 - Friday Night Lights (2004)
 - Coach Carter (2005)
 - Glory Road (2006)

Findings

- A total of 34 females were in lead or co-starring roles.
- All eight films had at least one female that was typecast and framed in a stereotypical manner.
- There are certain “types” of characteristics required for shaping the female image for the role of the companion of a sportsman.
- Through typecasting, archetypes are created. They become oversimplified through repetition and ultimately translate into stereotypical roles for females in sports films.

RQ 1: Are females typecast in sports films, if so what archetypes are reflected?

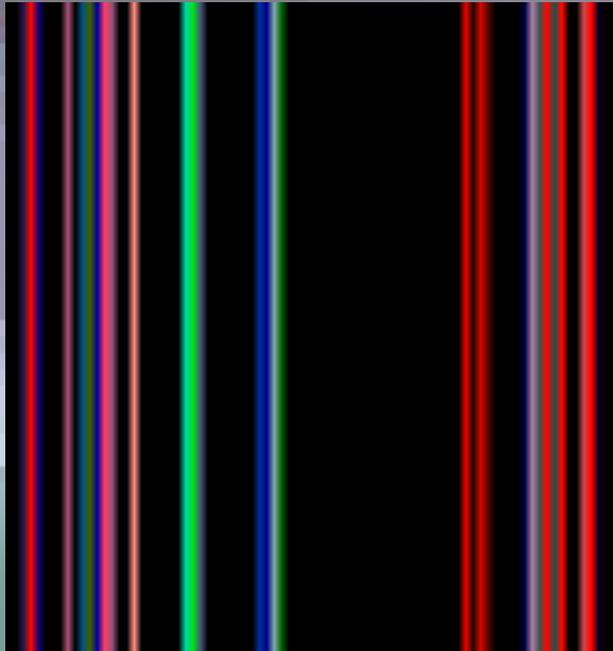


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RQ 2: How do sports films specifically frame women?

- Through the use of camera shots and angles, women were framed as small or weak, with their importance downplayed.
- Camera techniques of sex scenes were used to create intimacy and excitement.
- The combination of dialogue, clothing, lighting and camera angles undeniably framed women in a one dimensional, superficial, promiscuous or subservient manner.

Film Conventions



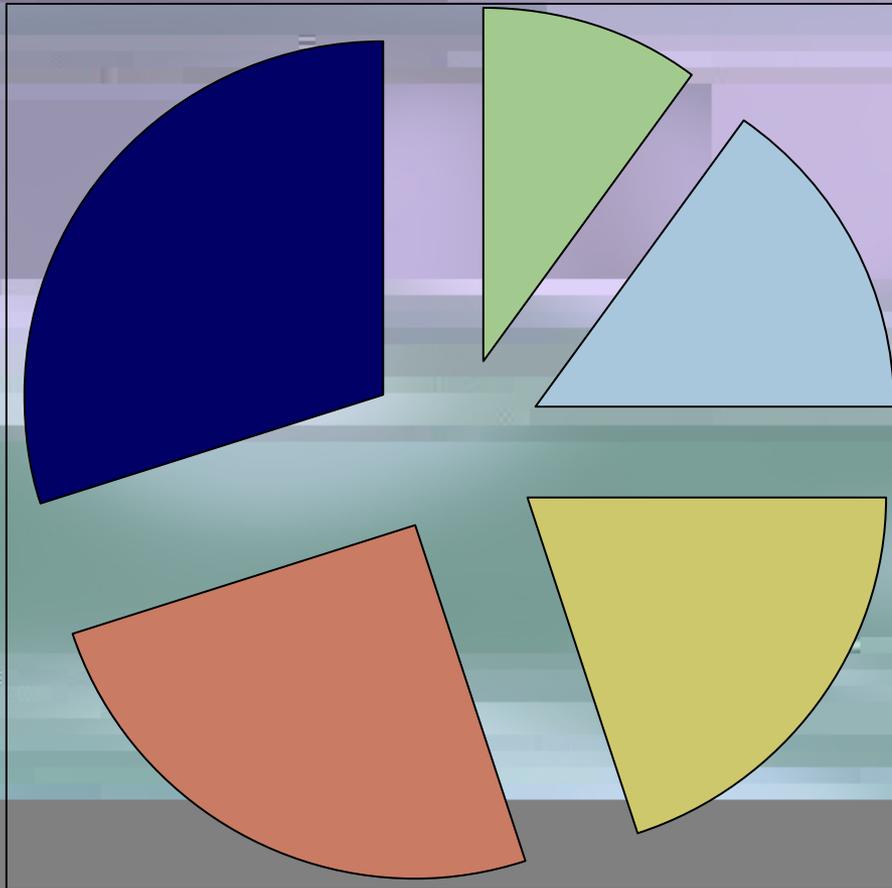
LS Of Avery In *Jerry Maguire*

MS of Christina in *Any Given Sunday*

Images from <http://www.google.com/images>

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RQ 3: What, if any, stereotypical female roles exist in sports films?



■ **Gold-diggers**

■ **Trophy Wives, Supportive Wife, Prostitute**

■ **Lesbian, Mother Figure, Cheerleader, Girlfriend/Baby Mama**

■ **Random Blonde, Aggressive Woman, Traditionalist/Muted Woman**

■ **Groupie**

Stereotypical Roles



“Groupies”

Any Given Sunday

“Traditionalist”

Glory Road

Girlfriend/Baby Mama

Coach Carter

Images from <http://www.google.com/images>

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Conclusions

- There is a certain “type” of woman who is cast in a sports film.
 - Creation of the love interest and mother figure archetype.
- Through the use of camera angles, clothing and verbiage, images are calculatedly framed.
 - Other elements of a female’s persona are excluded in order to shape a stereotypical image of a woman in the sports film genre.
 - Groupie, lesbian, random blonde, traditionalist/muted woman, aggressive woman, cheerleader, girlfriend/baby mama emerge.

Conclusions

- Archetypes are created then oversimplified, which translate into stereotypical roles of women.
- The film industry has capitalized on the creation of “cookie cutter” female roles.
- The typecasting of women in sports films pigeon hole actresses, subsequently only recognizing them if in subservient roles.
- The female images created for these films act as reflections of the male perspective and ultimately help shape social values.

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