

THE IDEOLOGICAL MAN: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE BY FOX NEWS OF THE OLYMPICS 2024

Dr. Sadia Siddiq

Assistant Professor,

Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Islamabad

Aiman Tasneem Syed

MS English Scholar, COMSATS University,

M. Junaid Anwar

MS English Scholar, COMSATS University

Abstract:

Media representation is crucial in the construction and dissemination of gender ideologies. Global events such as the Olympics and their coverage in the media have a significant influence, hence the need to study them. Recent studies on the Olympics have focused on economic, ecological and political impacts but no book length study is found on gender representation in Olympics media coverage. Thereby, using van Dijk's model under the broader umbrella of Feminist Theory, the current study aims to qualitatively uncover the underlying gender ideologies in news articles on the recent global event of the Olympics 2024.

Keywords: Media Representation; Feminist Theory; Discourse Analysis; Gender Ideology; Gender Representation; Olympics; Gender

Introduction:

The study of gender constructs have long been an important topic in the field of Gender Studies as they display the cultural and historical norms that society places on being masculine and feminine. Representations of these constructs in media are vital in the studies of gender as media plays a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of gender ideologies. It is important as it is not only a reflection of existing societal views, but is also involved in their construction. These include ideas about gender that are prevalent in a culture, such as the idea of masculinity and femininity, understanding of the norms associated with genders as well as the way genders are represented in discourse. Hence, global events such as the Olympics and their coverage in the media have a significant influence. This study analyses the discourse used in the media coverage of male athletes in selected news articles from Fox News for the Olympics 2024, and the comparison of that representation with ideological identities prevalent in society.

Statement of the Problem:

Gender ideologies are changed and effected by media representation, and that effect can move in the wrong direction as well. Despite that, representation of genders in the Olympics remains an understudied topic. Thereby, the current study aims to uncover the underlying gender ideologies in news articles from Fox News on the recent global event of Olympics 2024.

Research Aim:

The current study aims to uncover the underlying gender ideologies in the news articles from Fox News on the recent global event of the Olympics 2024.

Research Gap:

There is much research on gender inequality in media representation as it often reflects societal views. In the context of the Olympics, the topic remains understudied as recent researches have focused more towards the economic, ecological and political impacts of the games. Therefore, the current study aims to qualitatively uncover the underlying gender ideologies in news articles from Fox News in the recent global event of Olympics 2024.

Research Objectives:

- To examine how the male athletes were represented in the media coverage of the Olympics 2024 by Fox News
- To compare Fox News' representation of male athletes with the ideological identities prevalent in the society

Research Questions:

- How were the male athletes represented in the Fox News' coverage of the Olympics 2024?
- What is the comparison of the representation of the male athletes with the ideological identities prevalent in the society?

Significance of the Research:

By uncovering gender ideologies in media representation, the study will contribute to existing discourses in feminism and gender studies. Furthermore, the findings of the study can be used to conduct workshops, seminars, conferences etc. for increased critical media literacy and media representation, as well as awareness about journalistic ethics and gender equity.

Scope and Limitations:

Though the study looks rather extensively at language use, the generalisability of the study is not high due to the limited size of the sample. It would be difficult to conduct such an extensive and in-depth analysis on a larger sample size. However, as CADS studies have been conducted using Olympic news articles as discourses, studies similar to the current one may be helpful in filling the gap. Since CADS studies large look at corpus data and collocation, they overlook minute language use that can underpin ideologies and gender constructs, hence these studies may be more useful in conjunction.

Moreover, the study does not provide a broad, overarching perspective, but minutely focuses on language used in news articles published only during the Olympics. As the Olympics are a mega sport event, they have a very large coverage and span at least a year and a half of reporting, including reports of venue, sponsors, themes, team informs, preparations, Paralympics and coverage of issues that are resolved after the games, as well as future aspirations of outstanding athletes. By focusing only on the publications during the Olympics, the study takes a very limited view while delving very in-depth into language use via discourse analysis and its ties with gender construction.

Literature Review:

Language use can reflect and influence societal stereotypes and a more present day analysis of children's stories reveals that gender ideologies may be more prevalent than before. Eberhardt (2017) focused on the popular fiction series Harry Potter, for a corpus analysis of linguistic representation of gender through two of the main supporting characters. The results reinforce that Hermione and Ron had subtle gender nuance in verbs associated with their dialogues and they reflected gender norms and ideologies, which reflected broader societal stereotypes in the series that was seen as a progressive series for its time. The biases not only show hidden gender ideologies but also power dynamics, as women are seen as more emotional and vulnerable while men are seen as less emotional but having more social power. The depiction of these nuances in globally consumed print media not only perpetuates the stereotypes within it but also reinforces the within other cultures as well. Hence, these are relevant to the current study of gender, language and media representation.

An important and influential paper by Davis and Greenstein (2009) expands upon the components of gender ideology, its predictors on individual beliefs and its consequences on society. As other fundamental ideologies, gender ideology is embedded both at societal and individual levels and thus has far reaching consequences. At an individual level, people not only believe and orient themselves around their own gender, but also have expectations from

others according to their genders (gender constructs), which lead to impacts on social dynamics and even public policies.

In Many faces of gender inequality, Sen notes that the varieties of gender inequality cannot have one solution and also cannot be fixed at once. Not only can one society, culture or country move from one kind of gender inequality to a different kind of gender inequality, it can also affect more facets of society than just women. Moreover, inequalities do not look the same everywhere. What may be unthinkable in South Asia might be a discriminatory norm in Europe or America. Inequalities also do not exist in isolation, rather, inequalities of different kinds nourish each other and these connections need to be examined and kept aware of to get a full picture of what is going on in a particular society or culture, and how.

Moreover, gender is reinforced in society in macro and micro settings through social institutions. According to S.F. Berk (1985), gender remains enforced even at the level of the family (which is the smallest social unit in a society). Much like women's work in other occupations and the discrimination they face at those work places, the household too is a place where their work goes unacknowledged and unnamed. On a larger scale, this reflects into society and the kinds of roles women are allowed to participate in, particularly in choices of professional careers and viable jobs. A study on environments in medical schools found that discrimination in practice exists in these schools as the measure of success is tailored to male levels of "commitment". Thus, female practitioners are channeled and limited in their choices within the field of medicine (Bourne and Wikler, 1978).

The process of dividing into genders is an idea or more specifically, an ideology that is socialised into individuals from childhood. S. E. Cahill (1986) compares it to a recruitment process, wherein boys and girls are recruited into gender affirming male and female roles. Social institutions (family, peers, schools and media) take part in the process by providing role models and setting clear gender expectations towards the children, which in turn are further affirmed by social interactions and societal cues. The socialisation affects children's self-concept and identity as they build internal gender schemas according to the information they have previously received. The study provides significant insight into how gender inequality is perpetuated, as socialised gender roles force individuals into pre-existing expectations and thus reinforce unequal power dynamics.

Methodology

Research Design:

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). Consistent with qualitative research, the approach used in this study is inductive. It takes a bottom-up approach, whereby the data is observed and then conclusions are drawn about the text. Hence the research is exploratory as it does not have any underlying theories or hypothesis and any theories that emerge during the research have emerged from the data itself.

Data Collection:

For the purpose of this study, only secondary data sources were used in the form of news articles collected from the official website of Fox News. Firstly, data was delimited from web searches of the most recognised and popular channels in the world, one as selected for the purpose for this study. The channel was selected as it is watched by a significant audience from the Western hemisphere (especially USA and Europe). From this channels, further delimitation was done by purposive selection of 5 news articles. All data was collected between the duration of 26th July to 11th August 2024, the duration of which was decided by the official dates of the Paris Olympics 2024.

Analytical Framework:

The research questions in this study are addressed using ideological discourse discussed by van Dijk in his book *Ideology and discourse: A multidisciplinary Introduction*. The framework has been adapted to work as an analysis model for this study.

Theoretical Framework:

The study will use feminist theoretical perspective, and by utilizing it to examine the language used in news articles, the underlying gender constructs will be studied. Feminism aims to understand the nature of gender inequality so it will be useful in studying how society's gender ideologies influence the representation of men and women and makes it different from each other given that both are in a set of similar circumstances (i.e. the Olympics for the purpose of this study). The feminist lens will be used in conjunction with van Dijk's ideology and discourse model to analyse gender ideologies reflected within the text.

Data Analysis

Article 1: USA's Bobby Finke sets 1500M freestyle world record with second-straight Olympic gold in event

Linguistic analysis shows that the article gives a very **positive representation** to the male athlete. **Monoglossic** statement has been used to declare Finke's achievement and **literary language** has been used to elevate the impact of his competing. **Repetition** has been used to **amplify** the magnitude of his achievement as it **paraphrases** and restates Finke's win several times. For e.g. the first mention is "is now a three-time Olympic gold medalist", then it is said "It's the seventh gold medal for Americans...victory for Finke" and there are at least two more mentions of Finke's win in the short article. Moreover, there are no **disclaimers** or **contrasts** or **juxtapositions** have been made with the male athlete.

Article 2: Team USA's Anthony Edwards' Olympics experience is 'everything (he) dreamed'

Linguistic analysis shows that the male athlete has been given a very **positive representation** with support of **positive descriptors**. **Monoglossic statements** have been made to show how perfect the athlete is and no **contrast** or **disclaimers** have been used throughout the article. **Propositional structures** have been used to **foreground** his abilities while no flaws have been mentioned. His presence at the Olympics has been **framed** as a holiday and **synonymous** descriptors have been used to reinforce the **framing**, to the extent that even the regular experiences of the athletes are described in superlative degrees and holiday adjectives for Edwards.

Article 3: Olympic gold medalist takes nap on lawn after complaining about Olympic village conditions: 'Hard to sleep'

Linguistic analysis shows that the article is written in a way that seems to invalidate the point of view of the male athletes, however, upon closer inspection, the opposite seems to be true. The article still gives **significance** to the point of view of the male athletes after providing all the perspective of the organising committee by subsequently invalidating it in the same paragraph (through use of **disclaimers**). Hence, it can be said that male athlete are given **importance**, even over authoritative bodies, their opinions are **validated** and they are shown to be performing the best they can under their circumstances.

Article 4: Ethiopian track star carried off on a stretcher after terrifying fall in men's 3000m steeplechase final

Linguistic analysis reveals that **diction** has been used to **imply** that the athlete is helpless and fallen from grace. Other devices have also been used to covertly **hedge** the same meaning. **Propositional structures** have been used to **sensationalise** the news while **informal diction** has been used to create different **semantic meaning**. The use of the informal word is deliberate as it **implies** a struggle and urgency, creating a different **semantic meaning** from a

formal word like “competing” or “vying” which would imply competing in a less dismissive sense. It may be tied to the impression of the athlete’s country, as Ethiopia has been framed as helpless in western media.

Article 5: Tajikistani judoka refuses to shake hands with Israeli opponent at Paris Olympics, later withdraws over injury

In response to research question number one, linguistic analysis reveals deliberate **hedging** on part of the news channel in favour of the Israeli athlete. The **local coherence** and **cohesion** of the article is low as it seems to wander around and not follow a proper structure. For the coherence part, there is disconnect in the **semantics** both in the title and the article, as well as creating **vagueness** in the article. The news channel seems to assume that the readers will know on their own that the act of not shaking hands and yelling Allahu Akbar towards his opponent is a protest as Emomali is from a Muslim country and is protesting against Israel on a global platform. Hence, a contemporary **topoi** is mentioned yet no summary, explanation or background is given to the protest made by the Turkish athlete, as global politics take over gender construction in the article.

In response to research question number two, it can be seen that the representation of male athletes by Fox News is in accordance with ideological identities prevalent in society, particularly archetypes such as Hegemonic Masculinities (Connell, 2005). Analysis has shown that most male athletes have been represented positively, with minimal contrasts and disclaimers. Marginalised representation has only been observed for non-white athletes, while athletes from USA or athletes from countries whose interests align with USA have been represented in a flawless manner. Ideological representation is obvious as male athletes are shown to find difficult task very easy, their performances are described as dominant and their achievements are amplified. Although Jamil (2025) argued that the concept of masculinities have undergone transformations, the analysis of Fox News articles shows that media representations from mainstream media news channels have not followed the trend.

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