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# Media, Sport and Male Dominance: Analysis of Sport Presentations in a Nigerian Newspaper

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## Introduction

Colonialism brought the European Judeo-Christian notions of the dominant male versus dominated female (Mengara 2001). This was done by giving education and power to men and excluding women from public, political, economic and social life, and taking away the traditional powers the women once held. As Larking (2008:24), citing Scott (1999) puts it:

> Colonialism did not 'preserve' or maintain native societies in a state of alterity; it 'disable(d) old forms of life by systematically breaking down their conditions' and 'constructing in their place new conditions so as to enable…new forms of life to come into being'.

Educational institutions established by the missionaries and later adopted after colonialism ended also aided in reflecting the image of the woman as weak and dependent. Lewis (2004) considered this in relation to the role of anthropology in making the western image of the African come to life in the minds of both the Western world and amongst the African. Scholarly research of African culture as it relates to women and gender has created conservative traditions and these traditions have affected and influenced not only African gender studies but also the societies studied. The ideology of male domination is reflected in the mass media to re-emphasise male control and socio-political power over their female counterparts (Newell 1996). Women who defied male authority are negatively depicted as against the ideal woman who tolerates maltreatment from their male counterparts, is dedicated to her family, honest and patient despite maltreatment from male members of society (Larkin 2008; Nelson 1996).

### African Women in Sports

Many pre-colonial African societies had no clear cut gender stratifications (Oyewumi 2004); and in relation to sports, a number of activities which today seem to be the preserve of men were also practised by women. Among some pre-colonial groups such as the Igbo and Nubian (Craig 2002; Basden 1966) there are accounts of female wrestlers who not only attracted public attention but also leadership positions and suitors for marriage. Older women were the coaches of younger women, thus ensuring continuity and professionalism in the culture. There are also accounts of both male and female participants in a sporting activity as was the case with Masai ox-slaughtering feast to honour retiring warriors about to marry. This activity included the active participation of warriors, women and girls who fought for pieces of meat.

Today, sport is played based on gender separation and this culture was developed not from the traditional cultures but rather from the colonial experience. A major sport that has caught the passion of many African media houses is football. Its introduction was as a result of colonialism, with the aim of constructing new definitions of ethnicity, class and gender (Akeampong 2002). Colonial powers through the introduction of various sports such as football, field hockey and rugby hoped to redefine the African perception of leisure which they believed was unorganised and barbaric. Introducing 'organization' through sports was a way in which they wanted to create the notion of organized leisure and in the process redefine space. According to Akeampong (2002), the colonial government believed that 'structured play with rules and in a time framework inculcated time consciousness, discipline, courage and endurance'. Through such organized sports, collective identities were formed as well as social networks, all of which were supervized and controlled by the colonial governments. The colonial government was more interested in developing the male members of the society who, it was believed, should be public figures while the women were to be content with being housewives who looked after their children and husbands. Akeampong (2002:11) notes that the colonial urban woman was more reserved and confined than her rural counterparts. Women who did not conform to this image were seen as morally loose and sexually available. This notion was supported by mass media (film and radio) programmes which over-emphasized the men as against the women. Men were recognized as the active public figures that needed to display certain characteristics such as strength, speed, muscles and ability to defend. The women on the other hand had to be more careful and displayed characteristics of reservations to achieve respect from the male counterpart. They had to be presented in public as beautiful, innocent, fragile and quietly sexual. Their bodies were meant to entice, imply and attract sexuality as well as compliments rather than to compete with physically exerting activities like the

organized sports introduced by the colonial powers. These traits were meant to be displayed discreetly in public in reflection of the stereotype image of the woman so depicted by the colonialists. Urban women who displayed the traits the colonial powers reserved for the male gender were often disrespected and termed 'uncivilized' by both the male and female members of the society.

## The Mass Media, Sports and Capitalism

Akeampong (2002), in his analysis of football in Africa, noted the introduction of a fee to watch a sport. Sports evolved to be a means of acquiring wealth for the few who managed the sport, the sportsmen and the crowd. This was unlike the traditional games which were usually connected to a festival, ritual or some other event which naturally attracted a crowd. The organizers and coordinators of traditional sporting events aimed at not only fulfilling cultural and social expectations, but were also expected to be a part of the preparations by contributing material or human support. This is unlike the western form of event coordination which entails specialization in various areas to ensure maximum profit by all parties concerned. Through the years, all parties realized the important role the mass media could play in this profit seeking venture.

The mass media in itself not only aids in the promotion of events but also in the promotion of the people behind the event. The government, corporate organizations as well as pressure groups all seek to make their voices heard through the mass media (McQuail 2000; Cottle 2003). They all vie and contend for media influence, representation and participation. This provokes questions as to who secures media access, why and how; who is delegated to comment or make pronouncements on public or social affairs or sports events? Cottle (2003) contends that the mass media has the power to empower a few by making them credible sources of information and, by so doing, deliberately marginalize other members in society. This is a major strategy deployed by African political elites who need their voices to be constantly heard as a way of legitimising their claims to power (Ake 2003; Nyamnjoh 2005)). Members of the society who do not conform to their ways and methods of rule are labeled as 'others'. Continuous presentations of such 'others' to the society as dangerous, deviants, or terrorists empowers the government of the day to design policies that will adequately keep such members of the society at bay without much protest from the larger society.

The process of labeling members in a society as 'others' and defining how those members should be related to have been referred to as symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, 1971). This concept seeks to understand how labels, symbols and meanings inform human interaction and understanding. It considers the concept of social power which is invested on a group or groups while those that do not fit into such social groups are defined as 'outsiders', labeled as 'others' and stig-

matized. Those who are considered powerful social groups are seen as high on the hierarchical categorization of credibility. This is especially evident in the moral panic theory which was elaborated by Cohen (1972). The moral panic theory explores how public anxieties are generated by the media through amplification involving sensationalism, exaggeration and distortion, leading to societal reaction which ultimately results in the creation of laws by the government. This seems to explain how dominant social groups through the media can control the society in which they operate. Hall (1974) maintains that the news media reproduces the voices of the powerful who become the primary definers of events. The voices of the powerful are translated into the public views through the mass media and this ultimately serves as the foundation of a set agenda for public discussion and public opinion formation (West and Turner 2004; Baran 2002; Wilson and Wilson 2001; Rogers and Dearing 1987).

Airing these voices demands an expertise which has been referred to as 'narrativity of news' by Jacob (1996). This concept is an extension of the story telling tradition formed by humans to tell and re-tell basic ideologies of the society to the living and the unborn. News therefore becomes a symbolic system in which the informational content of particular stories becomes less important than the rehearsal of mythic truths embodied within the story form itself. It is based on this that many scholars have argued that news stories like myths do not tell it like it is but rather tell it like it means. Journalists, in creating news presentations, develop mental catalogues of news themes (who the key actors will be, what the plot should be like, etc.) Thus journalists, in presenting a news item, must do so to fit into the culturally determined definitions. They must fit new situations into old definitions by placing people and events into existing categories of hero, villain, good and bad.

In relation to sports, events that can attract a crowd are the events that are over-emphasized as against sports that do not. This attraction of a crowd is not necessarily determined by the crowd but by the voices behind the sport. An over-emphasis of a sport legitimizes the actions of the voices behind the event to design policies that will encourage such a sport to continuously be in the fore-front. This strategy does not only demand that the sport be continuously featured through the mass media but also the players. Thus, an agenda is set through these 'credible voices' behind the sports with the help of the mass media. The mass media on their part feature these sporting activities not only to attract viewers but also to sustain their interest. The aim of attracting a large and diverse audience is not to solely satisfy the public and policymaker's needs but to use them as a bait to attract advertisers who will pay the media houses to ensure that their views are constantly aired and their opinions become the foundation of a predetermined set agenda (Baran 2002). The ways which these agenda are promoted in society, have significant consequence for the overall development of sports. Sporting

events or players that do not fit into the criteria developed by the media but empowered by socially powerul 'voices' are given media prominence while those that do not fit into this category are labelled as 'others' and their stories are hardly told. This labeling helps to justify policies that favour the sports approved by the prominent voices behind the sporting event.

The agenda set for the promotion of certain sporting activities as against others cannot be discussed outside the gender divisions. Modern form of many African sports has been dominated by male events and this may be a reflection of the gender divisions encouraged by westernization. The stereotyped image of a woman's body being mainly to attract and satisfy the male members of a society may make it difficult for a journalist to tell the story of a muscled sports woman because she does not conform to the theory of the fabled woman. Unfortunately, because many women were socially trained under this modified western form of gender division, being seen in such events is likened to being seen at a cinema show during the colonial era. With such limited representation by women in sports, how does the mass media ensure balance in reportage?

## Method

The focus of this study is to analyse how newspapers in Nigeria report sports events that occur in and outside the country, with special attention to gender differences. In selecting a newspaper for the study, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select *The Guardian* out of twenty-three other news-papers that are daily produced in the country. They comprise both government and privately-owned media outfit and *The Guardian* newspaper that was selected belongs to the latter category. Other news magazines and soft-selling magazines were excluded from the selection process because they do not regularly feature sports events in their reportage unlike the newspapers that devote at least the last three pages to sports and sporting events. Weekly published papers were also excluded from the selection process because the data that would be generated from such papers might not be sufficient for the purpose of the study.

The month of January in the year 2009 was selected as the timeframe for the study for two reasons: first, a review of sports news from the previous year is usually done in January and secondly an indepth analysis of the previous year's reporting may no longer reflect the true picture of gender presentations of sports men and women in the print media. Analysis of the materials was based on categorization of pictures and captions; headlines and their contents; and con-tents of the texts. This was achieved by reading through all sports pages of *The Guardian* for the month of January, 2009. After the classification, all the materials were assigned labels and were subsequently merged according to their themes in line with the objectives of the study. Simple percentages were used to present the categories after manual counting of the materials was made. In analyzing the

photographs, attention was drawn to the size of the pictures, the position of the personality taken and the captions explaining the photograph, among other considerations.

## Data Analysis and Findings

### *Pictures*

Borchers (2005) believes that images are powerful tools and often can be used to take the place of words because they suggest messages to audiences. Visual images are used today with more force than even words due to the rapid development of digital cameras, high technology of colour separation and its effect on the final product, which is capable of creating emotions among the readers. Consequently, they serve to attract the reader's attention and suggest what meaning the reader should assign to their images. It is tempting to believe that photographs are the actual representation of reality; but they are not. They are subjective interpretations of reality. Photographs as a rule cannot capture everything and so they include some details and leave out others while over-emphasizing some. Certain variables guide the mass media in deciding the photograph to attach to a story. These variables fall within the needed agenda to be set. Interestingly, the pattern that was observed in the pictures of the sports pages showed a remarkable graphic representation of Nigerian sports men and women in action but with a significant number of the pictures (71%) displaying more men than women (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Photo Presentation of Sports Men and Women

| Variables | Men | Women | Male Team | Female Team | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Action/strength/skill | 28 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 40 |
| Weakness/lack of skill | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| **Total** | **30** | **11** | **2** | **2** | **45** |

These presentations depict, in various forms, personalities as they relate to the sport in focus. The pictures were analyzed into three major categories namely: a positive representation which displays strength and mastery of the sport/victory depicted in the photo; a negative representation reflecting defeat, limitation or lack of skill/action. These are the themes represented in the table above and a total of 45 photos of such categorization were analyzed. The third category (which is not represented in the above table due to the complexity of the variables analyzed, namely policy makers or physical structures) represents neutral

photographs and these photos do not reflect the personalities in relation to a sport but rather personalities behind the sport. In all, nine of such neutral photos were identified, making 54 photographs in all.

**1. Positive Representation:** Under this category, 40 photographs were classified as a positive representation of the sports men and women. Out of this total, 28 were of men actively engaged in the sport while 2 of the photographs depicted male team-mates. Out of this 28 male dominated photo representation, 21 focused on individual male footballers, 3 athletes, 2 tennis players and 2 golfers. There were 2 group photographs of male football teams as they pose with an active field in the background, in front of a trophy won after a match. In relation to the female gender, 10 positive photographs were identified out of which 9 of them were focused on individual female athletes as they actively displayed skills or showed signs of victory while the remaining one is of the female football (the Falcon) team members as they pose in front of a trophy with a vague field in the background. From this analysis, it can be deduced that individual male footballers are the major focus of positive sport photo representation in *The Guardian*.

**2. Negative Photo Representation:** A negative representation in this analysis refers to photos reflecting defeat, limitation or lack of skill/action. Negative presentation of sports men and women was limited when compared to the more positive representations (Table 1). Under this section, 5 photo representations depicting a negative image of either the sports man/woman or the team were identified. Out of this number, two negative photographs of the male gender were identified. One of these was a male footballer who almost tripped over his opponent and the second is of a male team backing the camera while the main focus is an on-looking crowd. This photograph is so classified because the photographer attempted to reduce the players while over-emphasising the crowd. In relation to the female gender, three negative photographs were identified. Out of these three, two were of individual female players who were either tripping over their opponents or looking dejected in the field. The third photo is of the female team as they sit and stare in a football field which is active with the activities of their opponents.

**3. Neutral Photo Representation:** This category depicts not the sports man or woman but rather the officials/decision-makers or physical structures used in the sport. Under this category, 9 photographs were identified. Out of these nine, 6 are of men with their positions in the society ranging from the Vice-President of Nigeria, governors, commissioners and promoters of sports. These men are either inspecting facilities or making a statement concerning the sport under focus or receiving awards. Under the neutral category, two photos of the physical structures of a football stadium and a high school athletics field were also noted which may be a subtle reminder by the media house of the importance of not

just the players and the officials behind the game but also the need to take into account the facilities that make the game.

Borchers (2005) has noted that three factors are critical in how photographs can affect and influence people's judgment of what they watch and these are: the centering of the object or subject, thereby communicating a sense of balance while placing images in a corner creates a sense of imbalance; the angle from which the photograph is taken, whether from an upward looking camera angle which communicates power to the subject and downward looking angle con-notes weakness, while a straight-on shot indicates that the subject is trustworthy; and thirdly, when a subject is conscious that he/she is to be photographed the photographer or the mass media house can manipulate the photograph to com-municate a preconceived message. In all the pictures analyzed, these features were taken into consideration and they reflect the bias that characterizes how sports men and women are individually and collectively portrayed in the newspaper.

Selecting the photograph that will accompany a story is a major element that many journalists use in misleading readers and thus creating a preconceived mes-sage. Photographs are also taken in line with cultural norms and assumptions which are symbolic. A story that is focused on a sports star that was rejected in his club may be accompanied by a central close up of the personality about to score a goal. Men are depicted with rippling muscles, sweating and usually in active form/posture. Women, on the other hand, are depicted as feminine and are not shown with the same symbolic qualities as their male sport counterpart. The sport women are usually depicted as attempting to carry out a sporting activity, strolling on the field or smiling for a pose.

This kind of representation displays the typical stereotype that pervades sports news reportage in *The Guardian* and by extension a reflection of how the society views female sports. While individual men are most of the time identified and given prominence on the pages of the newspaper, the same cannot be said of women, partly because of society's categorization of gender divisions. The por-trayal of men as energetic, skilful and full of vitality in the pictures has positive resonance, not only on the public but it goes beyond sustaining a stereotype to creating an enabling platform for sports policies to 'naturally' favour men more than women. Although more and more women are becoming active in sports, they are still not given the necessary attention in the newspapers like their male counterparts.

Visual representation of personalities in the Nigerian sports industry is not limited to sports and women. Photos of government officials are also shown. These photographs are purely male dominated. This implies that the Nigerian sporting industry is not only dominated by positively represented sports men, but also by male sport policy makers and administrators. These personalities form the 'credible voices' behind the sporting event.

Another major way in which photographs are given meaning by journalists and, by extension, the media house is through the caption attached to them. This study considered these captions in relation to the photographs they represented. The captions were categorized into positive, negative and neutral. It was observed that the words chosen by the journalist in describing the photographs differed based on gender lines. For instance, words like 'hot cake', 'winner', 'celebrates', 'star', 'beats'/unbeaten', 'victory', 'highest', 'outwits' 'battles' (20 positive) were classified as positive captions that accompanied photographs of sportsmen. Positive captions that accompanied female centered sport stories have words such as 'led team', 'winning gold', 'Queen honours', 'doing what she knows best' and 'pose with trophy' (six captions in all). The more negative captions for male centered sports photographs include the use of words such as 'was refused', 'tries to outwit/control', 'being challenged', 'attempts', 'hopes to', 'may join' (7 in all). For the female centered sports photographs, negative words used by the journalist include 'rejected', 'crashed out', 'dejected', 'exit' (4 in all). There were some neutral words used in captions attached to male centered photographs and they include the use of words such as: 'sharing a point', 'putting heads together', 'explains rationale', 'lose to claim' (4 in all) while for the female words such as 'in her active days', 'maiden edition', 'one of those/the' (3 in all). From this analysis, it is apparent that the words chosen to describe moments of failure on the part of sports men give the reader the hope of a comeback. This is not so for the sportswoman whose hope of redeeming defeat seems hopeless.

## Headlines and News Contents: The Representation of Sports Men and Women

Here, I have attempted to classify the headlines and the contents of the news item into positive reality, which depicts a positive image of the sport personality; negative categorization, which reflects a poor presentation of the sport personality; and neutral headlines and content that do not have any value judgment in the presentation of the news item and about the sport personality being reported.

### *Positive representation*

In classifying the headlines and contents of the materials, I categorized the data into various forms and functions. Table 2 below shows the positive portrayal of sports men and women. Like the pictures, the headlines reflect the stereotype that is created in the society based on a number of factors including political, social, and economic factors. In analyzing the headlines, the following patterns were identified: professionalism, success, financial independence, hard work, and self fulfillment.

**Table 2:** Positive Reality Created through Headlines

| Variables | Men | Women | Male Team | Female Team | institution Government | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professionalism/ skills | 14 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 23 |
| Achievements/ success/pride | 11 | 0 | 14 | 2 | 14 | 41 |
| Financial independence/awards | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| **Total** | **25** | **2** | **26** | **2** | **17** | **72** |

A significant number of sports men (92%) constituted the bulk of sports persons that were positively portrayed in the newspaper. Common headlines in this category include:

1. **Obikwelu finally retires from atheletics:** Nigerian-born Portuguese sprinter Francis Obiora Obikwelu has declared that he would no longer compete in the sports that gave him fame after failing to make the finals at Beijing.

2. **Toriola remains Africa's best, as Nigerian women slump further**: This is complemented with a photo with the caption: 'African and Commonwealth champion, Segun Toriola on duty at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in China'. This is an action photo of Toriola about to hit a table tennis ball with concentration. It is a close up shot of this action. The story states that with his feat at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in China coupled with his scintillating performance at the Men's World Cup and the German Open, Segun Toriola remains Africa's number one table tennis player. He was given a standing ovation for his achievements. The story continues by stating: 'Ageing and five time Olympian, Bose Kaffo, follows Ten in Africa after slipping from 289th in December 2008 to 294th this month. Cross River born Offiong Edem and Cecilia Out are third and fourth and are also 339th and 346th respectively in the ITTF rankings. Six-time Asoju-Oba Cup champion, Ganiat Ogundele, is rated sixth in Africa'. The chapter goes on to advocate that 'for Nigeria to remain relevant, junior players should be given attention and specifically, the Ondo State player, Ojo Onaolapo based on his performance at an international competition'.

3. **We worked hard for victory, says ILCC Captain**: The captain of Ibeju Lekki, Olayemi Amusa states that the victory the team had was due to hard work. This is accompanied by an interview with the captain by the media house.

4. **Obasi rated the best young striker in Bundesliga**: This is featuring the success of Chinebu Ogbuke Obasi in the German League. This is accompanied by two major photos. The larger of the two shows Obasi as

he kneels in thankfulness after scoring a goal while his team-mates gather around him with the caption 'Chinedu Obasi celebrates with Demba Ba, Vedad Ibisevic and Andreas Beck after scoring a goal against Hamburg in Bundesliga'. The second is a personal photo of him with the caption 'Eyes on top..Obasi celebrates yet another goal' as Obasi is shown rejoicing with hand movements (Page 62)

5. **Tunisian League: Eneramo's goals catapult Esperance to comfortable lead**: former Lobi Stars' striker, Michael Eneramo, has taken the Tunisian league by storm this season with his goals, accounting for Esperance's dominion over other teams in the competition. This story is accompanied by a photo with the caption: 'Eneramo outwits two Etoile du Sahel players in one of the matches of the Tunisian league'. The photo is an action one showing the personality dribbling two players

### *Negative representation*

In grouping and analyzing the data under this sub-heading, I took into account the continued dismal performance of Nigerian sportsmen and women both on the African continent and at global events, where Nigeria has once made its mark in track and field events, long jump, boxing, and football. Although, Table 3 indicates that more men were negatively represented in the newspaper, this is not significant because of the number of cases that are associated with both genders.

**Table 3:** Negative Headlines Representation of Sportspersons

| Variables | Men | Women | Male Team | Female Team | Government institution | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of professionalism | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| Weakness and failure | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 12 |
| Financial dependence | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| **Total** | **4** | **3** | **5** | **3** | **6** | **21** |

What this means therefore, is that more women were negatively represented than their male counterpart in highlighting their shortcomings and inability to perform to expectation. One would have thought that with the interest of the media on sportsmen, the media would have been very critical of men's poor performances but this is not so, rather there seem to be ready excuses for any dismal performance by sportsmen. Some of such headlines include the following excerpts:

1.  **Gallant Pioneers bows to Dubai selected**: Howzat Pioneers Cricket Club's quest for exposure began to yield dividends yesterday when the touring Nigerian side succumbed to the technical superiority of Sharja Cricket Club in the first of their two meetings in Cricket Stadium in Sharja, the United Arab Emirates. The loss was attributed to lack of exposure to the playing conditions in the stadium.

2.  **We have lost our best boxers to US, Australia, says Nwankpa**: This story states fresh facts as to why Nigerian boxers put up a bad performance during the Beijing Olympic Games. The head coach of the Nigeria Boxing Federation (NBF), Obisia Nwankpa, stated that the country performed badly because Nigerian boxers left for other countries a few months to the games and also because of bad administration by the Nigerian sports officials. This story is accompanied by a photo of two boxers fighting in the ring with the caption: 'Nigeria's Olufemi Ajayi on duty at the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games in Australia'.

3.  **Lack of equipment, bane of Nigerian weightlifting, says Coach Bassey:** the coach of Lagos State Weight lifting team, Enofiok Bassey cited lack of equipment as a bane in the sport.

## Neutral Reportage of Sports Activities

Table 4 shows the distribution of neutral reportage in the newspaper. By its limited number, it indicates that the sports news reporting is heavily value laden as most often the media house must decide on what to report and how to report it. The neutrality of the reportage does not really hurt anyone and, in some instances, it actually consoles sports personalities who might have fallen short of expectation. Most of the news items under this classification are based on a team's failure, the uncertainty of the competition, a forthcoming event, or the conveyance of a proposed decision reached by the government through its sports ministry or agency.

**Table 4:** Neutral Reportage of Sports Activities

| Variables | Men | Women | Male Team | Female Team | Government institution | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Failure with encouragement/excuses | 1 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Uncertainty of actions/Outcome | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Proposal for action | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 9 | 13 |
| **Total** | **2** | **0** | **14** | **0** | **10** | **26** |

Some examples of neutral reporting are given below:

1. **Heartland returns to Owerri for final preparations**: speaking with the newspaper house, Heartland's Chairman, Ignatius Okeahialam, said the team was focused on ensuring that it gave Nigeria a befitting representation at the competition, adding that all stakeholders in the club were united in working for the success of the club. He stated that the club members were in high spirit and praised the Imo State Government for its unflinching support, stating that the Governor has been a solid rock behind them, ensuring that they lacked nothing.

2. **UAE Cricket Team to Visit Nigeria**: the UAE team wishes to visit Nigeria to play some exhibition matches.

3. **Flying Eagles battle Heartland in Abuja**: The National U-20 team, the Flying Eagles and the Premier League club, Heartland of Owerri, will meet in a friendly, while Eagles coach, Isah Ladan, Bosso is to name his 18 players for the championship.

## Discussion

The data presented in the preceding section is important in an attempt to understand how reality is constructed in the society using the lenses of the media, in this case, the newspaper. From these data, some fundamental points can be noted. The overwhelming positive representation of the male gender in sports in general, but football in particular, does not only display an unbalanced reportage, but a deep reflection of how gender-biased the society could be. The reportage of the male gender, whether as an individual or as a team, suggests professional skills and achievements. Words like: confident, hot cake, win, best, pleased, thumbs up, victory, unbeaten, to mention a few, have been variously employed in discussing male sporting events and about sports men. For the female, success is mentioned with failure and unreserved surprise and feeble praise is given when success is recorded. Thus, the words 'win' and 'lose' are found in the same headline describing female success while the word 'pose' is used in another caption. The use of such words in the representation of female sport participants suggests success that is either waning or underdeveloped. Failure for the male gender in sports is often associated with either excuses or encouragement with phrases such as: 'set to redeem image', 'hopes to consolidate', and 'hoping to get it right'. Female failure on the other hand is described with harsh words such as 'crash', 'defeat', 'disappointment' 'amateur' 'dejected' and with phrases such as, 'could not rescue'.

The continuous positive representation of the male gender in sports does not only aid the reader to attach success to a specific name or team, but it also facilitates and simultaneously creates a platform for financial gains both for the sport personality and the media house. The dominating male voices behind the sport continuously encourage male teams even in the face of failure. Monetary rewards

and in some cases, excuses are given by the sponsor of the action as was the case with the headline story *Eguma explains personal funding of Dolphins.* The result of this positive media coverage within an agenda designed by dominant male members of the society creates a formidable platform upon which Federal and State Governments can plan lines of actions to further improve and encourage various male teams and individuals. On the other hand, the voices of female sports professionals are hardly heard. Only once was there a feature article focusing on a female sports professional who candidly advised the government and sporting bodies to discourage 'elite' sports men and women from participating in the upcoming National Sports Festival in Kaduna. The story, which was captioned: *Ahead of 2009 National Sports Festival* presents Amata's argument and suggestion that the organizers should make the tourney a breeding ground for upcoming athletes rather than allow elite athletes to feature and dominate the event. This news item was reported on Thursday, January 8th, 2009 on page 74. By Sunday, January 18 on pages 94-95, a feature report was done with the headline: *Sports Festival: Time to rethink ban on elite athletes.*

The feature article focuses on the debate of allowing professional athletes to join in the upcoming competition or allow fresh ones to have a chance. Going into history, the story points out that in 1973 when Nigeria hosted the 2nd All Africa Games in Lagos and also introduced the National Sports Festival as a way of cushioning the effects of the civil war in areas ravaged, great athletes were discovered and they went on to hit big headlines at various continental and international events. The story goes on to add that: 'But sad enough, those good days are gone, no thanks to the rule which now bar elite athletes or those who have taken part more than three times from competing in the fiesta. The result is a situation whereby athletes stroll into national camps for rehabilitation since they are no longer eligible to compete in the sports festival which is the only viable competition in Nigeria today'. This view is contrary to those of Amata and, though her name is not mentioned neither does her photograph appear under the photo that accompanied the story, it is nevertheless evident that her position as a professional was being undermined. One of the female personalities featured in the photograph presentation was Mary Onyali who is shown in a race with two other opponents. The picture suggests an equal standing with her opponents, with Mary not at a central position, but at the left hand side of the photo with the caption: 'Mary Onyali-Omagbemi doing what she knows best in an international athletics meet. She is one of those who made the National Sports Festival thick in her active days'.

The observed gender imbalance of sports men and women in the newspaper is by no means an isolated case of gender stereotype in Nigeria; it is only a reflection of the type of social relations that characterize the society today.

## Conclusion

Communication is not just a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment, but also a process through which members in the society are acculturated (West and Turner 2004). The creation of symbols is also crucial in the communication process, which individuals use in their daily interactions. For this reason, the mass media, through various public figures, empowered by the mass media as credible voices, control the debate over public issues. By so doing they engineer how the public defines and relates to issues; thus creating an enabling platform for such powerful members of the society as well as the government to strengthen their own position and policies while undermining the positions of their opponents.

The mass media has been able to use sports reportage as a product to attract readership and thus attract funds through advertisers. This attraction of readership is not only essential for the economic development of the mass media but also for the empowerment of the personalities projected. The manipulations of the mass media to develop an agenda which ensures that sport policies and infrastructures favour male athletes, though positive in a sense, is significantly antithetical to the overall development of sports in Nigeria. By giving equal media opportunities to every member of the society, man or woman, a platform can be created to catalyze equitable sports growth and development. Thus, equal gender representation in the media must be seen as a necessity in the development of both sport and society.

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