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CHAPTER TWO

Sport Media Research: Examining the Benefits for Sport Injury Psychology and Beyond

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Abstract

Within the present chapter, the benefits of studying the media as a cultural site to expand sport injury psychology research are explored by bringing together research in sport sociology, sport communication and sport psychology. To accomplish this purpose, what constitutes ‘sport media research’ is outlined, followed by research in sport sociology concerning risk culture to contextualize sport media work on injury. Media research focusing on sport injury is then presented to show the value of studying the media as a socio-cultural site of analysis and to learn more about sport injury meanings, athlete identities and the implications. We conclude with future research avenues and centralize three critical discussion questions to spark interest on media work in sport injury psychology.

Introduction

“Those of you posting and tagging me in the video of my injury, I am asking you to please stop,” Cerio reportedly Tweeted Wednesday, before taking her account private on Thursday. “Going through the pain and seeing my knees bent unnaturally in real life was horrible enough, but to continue to see it from videos/pictures because some people feel entitled to repost it is not okay. My pain is not your entertainment”, she added (Bieler, 2019)

The above quote comes from a news media story about US Collegiate gymnast Samantha Cerio, who suffered a horrific injury (i.e., broke both legs and dislocated both knees) while performing a difficult skill in her floor routine, on April 5, 2019. In the hours, days, weeks and months that followed, this ‘media incident’ and impact of the injury on Cerio’s life publicly unfolded in various media forms. The quote above refers to a video of the injury posted on YouTube and circulated across digital media platforms, in which Cerio was ‘tagged’ through her account and hashtags. Each time this occurred, she relived the incident, all the while facing an uncertain future. An updated search for this video reveals circulation of the incident in other storied video forms in the past four months, totalling over 3.5 million views and comments. Several days following the initial posting of the video, Cerio took to her social media accounts (i.e., Twitter, Instagram) to ‘clap back’, noting the trauma that re-viewing the injury caused her. She has continued to post her experiences on Instagram in conjunction with mainstream media stories. To date, over 10,000 news stories have been produced on Cerio’s injury, recovery and experiences. A google search of Cerio’s injury garners over 89,000 matches, showing continued public interest in the story.

Stories about athletic injury–recreational, youth, collegiate, elite—are ubiquitous in the media landscape, generating personal, public and commercial interest (Young, 2019). Cerio’s story alludes to different forms of ‘intertextual significance’ (i.e., multiple and different

meanings are generated in relation to surrounding media texts; Millington & Wilson, 2016) concerning media generated injury meanings, sport values, and the life world of an athlete. Related to the point of intertextuality, Cerio's story also shows the blurring of boundaries of media production, consumption and representation, as athletes and social agents (e.g., coaches, teammates, spectators) interacted with mainstream media stories, to (re)produce, reconfigure, or resist them in digital spaces. What value and benefit does studying media representations about athletes and sport injury hold for sport injury psychology and beyond in this regard?

Within the present chapter, this complex question is explored by bringing together research in the sociology of sport, sport communication and sport psychology, to outline some benefits of studying the media for sport injury psychology. The goal is to answer calls within the sport injury psychology literature to explore the socio-cultural context to further understand injury meanings, response, and recovery of injured athletes more holistically (Wadey, Day, Cavallerio & Martinelli, 2019; WieseBjornstal, 2010; Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer, & Morrey, 1998). To accomplish this purpose, an overview of what constitutes sport media research and why it is of value is first outlined, followed by research in sport sociology concerning risk culture to contextualize sport media work on injury. Media research focusing on sport injury is then presented to show the value of studying the media as a socio-cultural site of analysis. We conclude with future research avenues and critical discussion questions to pique conversations and interest on media work in sport injury psychology and beyond.

Critical Review of Literature

Sport Media Research: Clearing Some Ground

What is 'sport media research'? Given the dynamic media landscape and way(s) in which media-related sources and technologies afford, and limit, sport-related values and identities (e.g., fans, athletes, coaches), answering this question is not straightforward

(Millington & Wilson, 2016; Wenner, 2015). While some media sources were alluded to in our opening, within the present chapter, ‘media research’ refers to the systematic study of ‘media’ focusing on at least one of three interconnected elements: production, representation and consumption (Millington & Wilson, 2016, p. 153). Sources of media data might include textual and visual/images found in news media (print, digital), television and film (documentary, narrative fiction), sport magazines, photographs, advertisements, drawings and artwork. Sport media researchers may explore digital/social media such as blogs, websites, chat rooms, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (Bundon, 2016). Sport media using verbal and auditory communication such as podcasts and radio, are also sources of media production, representation and consumption research topics. Although it is not possible to explore the advantages of studying all of these media sources, they are noted so that readers gain a sense of the vast, and as yet, untapped area of media research in sport injury psychology. Although sport media injury research examples will be shown, given that such research is limited, some of these media data sources will be revisited when making future research suggestions.

Sport media research is extensive within sociology of sport and sport communication scholarship. This work can be found in handbooks (Billings, & Hardin, 2014; Pederson, 2013), edited books (Bundon, 2017), and chapters in edited books (Bundon, 2016; Millington & Wilson, 2016; Wenner, 2015). While sport psychology researchers have engaged less with media data, McGannon and McMahon (2016) outlined the benefits of studying the media in relation to identity formation and representation issues in sport psychology. Drawing on cultural studies of sport research, they argued that exploring the media’s role in the social construction of athlete identities was important to expand taken for granted understanding of identity meanings and implications, in cultural sport psychology research (McGannon & Smith, 2015). Broadly grounded in social constructionist forms of theorizing, the media is

viewed as a powerful source of cultural representation and circulation of ideologies (i.e., expected behaviours based on cultural values and norms) concerning sport and athletic identities (Andrews & Jackson, 2001), which influences how athletes are perceived by society and how they may perceive themselves (McMahon & Barker-Ruchiti, 2016; McMahon, McGannon & Zehntner, 2017). Examples of media research in sport psychology can be found in a growing body of work on a range of topics, including, but not limited to, career retirement (Cosh, Crabb, & Tully, 2015), career trajectory and performance of professional athletes (Bonhomme et al., 2018), elite athlete mother identities (McGannon, Gonsalves, Schinke, & Busanich, 2015), and leadership and elite athletic performance (Slater, Barker, Coffee, & Jones, 2015).

Contextualizing Sport Injury Media Research: Culture of Pain and Risk

Research from sport sociology provides compelling evidence that psychosocial issues concerning sport injury can be further understood within the context of socio-cultural influences, which has been less examined within sport injury psychology (Wadey et al., 2019). In order to contextualize sport injury media research as a socio-cultural influence, some additional discussion of sport sociology research on the culture of pain and risk is warranted. Unlike sport psychology which formed an interest in sport injury research in the 1970s (Wadey et al., 2019), prior to the 1990s sport sociologists considered sport injury research the domain of sports medicine (Roderick, 2006). The early 1990s ushered in research on a culture of risk in sport to explore injury and pain related issues, which continued into the early 2000s and beyond (Atkinson, 2019; Young, 2019). Such work is relevant toward expanding sport psychology injury research, as it has problematized taken for granted aspects of sport culture that may compromise athlete health, well-being and performance. Risk culture has been shown to encourage and/or reward pain and injury so that athletes will gain respect and/or put athletic performance ahead of health and safety (Nixon, 1992, 1993; Safai, 2003; Young, 1993, 2004). Within a culture of risk, pain and/or injury tolerance have socially constructed

meanings linked with desirable athlete-attributes of toughness, strength and commitment, which create the parameters of the 'sport ethic' (Hughes & Coakley, 1991; Young, 2004). When athletes demonstrate hard work, mental toughness and winning at all costs, through physical training and performance practices, they conform to the sport ethic (Hughes & Coakley; Sabo, 2009).

Risk culture and the tolerance of pain and injury in sport is further normalized through a network of social relationships—termed 'sportsnets' by Nixon (1992)—that pressures athletes to play with, and through, pain, reinforcing conforming to the 'sport ethic' (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). While both male and female athletes' identities, experiences and behaviors are impacted by a culture of risk (Nixon, 1992; Safai, 2003) male athletes who give in to their pain and/or resist playing injured have their masculinity and athleticism questioned, while those who do not give into their pain are lauded and rewarded (Nixon, 1992, 1993; Young, 2004; Young, McTeer & White, 1994). Athletes learn from a young age that if they want to succeed in sport, playing and accepting injury and pain are 'meritocratic acts' that afford access to sporting rewards and success (Sabo, 2009; Young, 2004). Pain and risk culture in sport is so ingrained, that some athletes will over conform to the sport ethic, even when social agents (e.g., family, coaches, medical staff, teammates) express concern, and suggest modification, rest or treatment (Howe, 2004; Sabo, 2009; Safai, 2003). Chapter 5 (physiotherapists and injury), Chapter 6 (coaches and injury), and Chapter 7 (parents and injury) provide additional perspectives on social influences and sport injury.

Young et al.'s (1994) sociological study on male athletes' injury related 'body talk' further showed that athletes used strategies (e.g., ignoring pain, adopting an irreverent attitude), to suppress emotions and rationalize pain and injury to themselves and others. Research on women's experiences shows that they also normalize playing with pain and injury, and hide pain and injury from others (e.g., coaches, medical staff) so that they do not appear too 'feminine' or 'weak' (Young et al., 1994). As a consequence of risk culture and the associated pain, injury meanings, and practices,

athlete health and well-being may be compromised, and at times health and sport science professionals are complicit in the process (Howe, 2004; Roderick, 2006; Young, 2004; Safai, 2003).

Sport Media and Injury: Research Examples

When Young (2004) took stock of the research on pain, risk and injury 15 years ago, he noted that while people may experience the tactile, lived and emotional sides of sports-related pain and injury, “it is nevertheless the case that sports injury reaches most people indirectly as a set of images transmitted by the mass media” (p. 16). The media serves in this case, not simply as a conveyer of risk culture meanings in sport, but as another normalizing force that reinforces taken for granted cultural meanings about what an ‘athlete’ is (e.g., tough, committed strong, can withstand pain and injury) and what it means to be ‘injured’ (e.g., broken, needed to be fixed, less of an athlete, less strong or weak, less masculine) (Anderson & Kian, 2012; Nixon, 1993; Sabo & Jones, 1998). Conversely, as noted in our opening media incident example, cultural meanings concerning risk, pain, injury and athletic identity can be contested or resisted, in and through, the media. Despite the potential of studying media texts and images concerning pain, injury and risk culture to learn more, relatively few sport sociologists had systematically studied the mediated pain and injury when Young (2004) called for more work in this regard. Our updated search yielded a surprisingly limited number of articles in the sociology of sport and sport psychology literature. Before outlining some of this work, it should be noted that there is related media research under the umbrella of ‘sport, violence and society’. Reviewing this work is outside our scope, but interested readers are referred to Young’s (2019) overview on sport, violence and the media in contact sports.

Sport sociologist Nixon (1993) provided one of the first media studies on sport injury and the media. Cultural meanings of risk, pain, injury and coming back to play in American sport, were explored through a broad content analysis of ‘Sports Illustrated’ magazine articles from 1969-1991. Nixon sought to connect the broader meanings produced within the texts to athlete’s willingness to risk their bodies and health to play in professional sports. Media items

and/or stories primarily came from journalists, coaches, retired athletes, doctors and trainers, providing the opportunity to explore the social (re)production of meanings. The results of the content analysis identified six overarching themes, which showed that male athletes are exposed to a set of mediated beliefs that coalesce the message that they must accept risks of pain and injury in sport as normal and necessary. These themes related to structural influences (e.g., constraints about what it means to be an athlete), structural inducements (e.g., prospects, rewards and encouragements for athletes), cultural values of sport (e.g., good character, pain tolerance), and athletic socialization (e.g., multiple others in the sport context reinforcing pain and injury tolerance), that collectively conveyed the message that athletes should accept the risks, pain, and injuries of sport. Of particular interest to sport injury psychology was that Nixon linked findings concerning risk culture and the sport ethic to athlete health and well-being, which was compromised due to athletes 'suffering in silence'. Issues identified included guilt, shame, job insecurity, and depression among those with disabling injuries. Although this study is over 25 years old, it shows the value of systematically studying the media to learn more about sport culture, pain and injury meanings, and a prevalent issue still shown to compromise injured athlete's health: returning to play after injuries (McGannon, Cunningham, & Schinke, 2013).

Nixon's study is one in which media representation was the focus, rather than on the interrelated aspects of production and/or consumption, although the consumption of the mediated messages and meanings were implied given Nixon's (1993) findings were connected to athlete's identities, performances and lives. The majority of media research on sport injury has followed a similar track, exploring media representations and the health, injury and safety implications for athletes and other social agents. A recent example of this work explored mainstream print news media's framing of two injury incidents involving two prominent National Football League (NFL) quarterbacks—Jay Cutler and Robert Griffin II—

1 who became injured during games (Sanderson, Weathers, Grevious, Tehan, & Warren, 2016).
2 Cutler incurred a serious knee injury during the second quarter and tried to return but ceased
3 playing and remained on the side-lines to watch his team, while Griffin sustained an injury
4 with only 6 minutes remaining and left the field. Analysis of 177 print news representations
5 of these two incidents showed contradictory portrayals of the athletes and injury meanings.
6 Cutler's masculinity and toughness was questioned in some portrayals by downplaying the
7 severity of injury, while other portrayals supported him for taking care of his health. Griffin
8 was given heroic status in portrayals for sacrificing his body for his team by incurring the
9 injury due to the severity of the injury. This media analysis also showed that some news
10 media portrayals of the injuries that both athletes incurred shifted blame to social agents (e.g.,
11 coaches, the organization) with some noting aspects of risk culture (e.g., inherent pressures to
12 play injured to demonstrate masculinity). This study shows the advantages of centralizing a
13 particular media incident and high profile athletes, to learn more about the narratives that
14 reinforce the sport ethic, but also beginning to question it, shifting some blame and
15 responsibility off the athlete to others' role in the socio-cultural sport context.

16 Additional media work on sport injury has primarily focused on concussion and/or the
17 progressive degenerative disease of the brain, chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), in
18 sport media forms. An example of this work comes from Anderson and Kian's (2012)
19 exploration of the news media's characterization of NFL player Aaron Rodger's self-
20 withdrawal after hitting his head. An analysis of 10 news media outlets from print media and
21 internet sources also showed that news media were beginning to draw attention to athlete
22 health and CTE, questioning a pain and risk narrative, and noting a 'softening of
23 masculinity'. This study is of value and interest to sport injury psychology because it
24 highlights how media narratives surrounding the portrayal athlete's injuries can resist
25 dominant narratives surrounding risk and the sport ethic, allowing for a male athletes to take

care of their bodies and health.

The media has undoubtedly played a role in raising awareness concerning concussion and CTE, pain and risk culture in sport, as further shown in Furness' (2016) analysis of the television documentary 'League of Denial' which exposed the NFL and pro-football's complicity in concussion and CTE injury. This analysis showed that concussion was framed as a 'crisis' through resistance of the sport ethic and risk culture that position injury and violence as necessary parts of the game. Importantly, this analysis also drew attention to the film's critiques of the media's role—and use as a cultural site—in constructing football, pain and injury as a spectacle that has contributed to the cultural context in which the 'concussion crisis' has emerged. Ventresca's (2019) recent analysis is a rare exploration of how multiple media sources (news stories, documentary films, popular books) and scientific studies further coalesce dominant understandings of CTE as an 'urgent public health problem' but remains characterized by scientific uncertainty, and downplaying athlete's voices and experiences.

Finally, McGannon et al. (2013) explored news media portrayals of National Hockey League (NHL) star Sidney Crosby's incurrence of a concussion (see Chapter 4) from controversial hits in back-to-back games that side-lined him for 10 months. This study was the only one positioned in sport psychology. Analysis of 150 articles showed that injury meanings were constructed within an overarching narrative: *a culture of risk and its impact on athletes*. Multiple meanings of concussion within the risk narrative were linked to three sub-narratives: (a) *Crosby's concussion as a cautionary tale*, (b) *Crosby's concussion as a political platform*, and (c) *concussion as an ambiguous injury*. These findings drew attention to previous media portrayals of concussion being based solely on physical risks and symptomology, with little, if any, discussion of psychosocial issues and concussion. This is problematic given that sport psychology research on athlete concussion has repeatedly identified psychological and social consequences, which can result in anxiety depression and

isolation for athletes.

Future Research Implications

The foregoing media research examples provide a glimpse of what sport injury and media investigations might focus on. These studies show that the media is a valuable data resource to explore narratives and representations of sport injury and some of the implications (e.g., social, psychological, health, awareness of injury issues in sport). While this work is of benefit for researchers interested in socio-cultural and psychological aspects of sport injury, much of this work is limited in scope. Our critical literature review shows that researchers have focused on media representations (termed first generation media research, see Millington and Wilson, 2016) and less on the intertwining of production, representation and consumption side of media work. Given that the dynamic media environment includes a range of media forms within which journalists, fans, sport organizations, coaches, sport psychologist, sports medicine staff, and athletes can participate to produce and change narratives and representations within them, an exploration of these blurred lines from different social agent vantage points between production, representation and consumption is warranted. Millington and Wilson (2016) termed this media research stream ‘pro-sumption’, whereby investigations focus on sport injury meanings, values and/or athlete identities, in both mainstream media forms (e.g., news media, television, film) and new media forms (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube).

Related to the above point regarding ‘pro-sumption’ of media is that no investigations of have systematically explored how social agents (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, sports medicine staff, sport psychology consultants) engage with and/or react to media stories about injury and athletes. Analysis of athlete injury media stories across a range of sports and contexts are absent within the literature, with the focus on contact sports as ‘risky spaces’, primarily for concussion and CTE. Female athletes and younger athletes have also been under researched

with respect to the media and sport injury. Media representations of acute/traumatic injury or overuse injuries in relation to athlete's identities and lives across the injury experience (e.g., incurring injury, rehabilitation, recovery, retirement) could be explored to expand media research and sport injury psychology research. The findings could then be used to make suggestions toward building on second and third generation media research, whereby applied recommendations are made (second generation) alongside how these might contribute toward social change (third generation) (Millington & Wilson, 2016). In this regard, the media can be used as a concrete entry point for educating practitioners and athletes through showing them forms of 'identity and sport injury talk' and/or images within various media forms (e.g., narrative or documentary film, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter). Through one-on-one or focus group discussions (see Chapter 14), various meanings can be highlighted, and data collected and analysed concerning whether or not these align with athlete experiences, and the implications for mental health, rehabilitation and performance. In turn, awareness can be raised as to how concrete forms of talk (rather than mental states within the person) as shown within various media forms, offer entry points of social action for researchers, consultants and athletes, expanding narrative resources at individual and social levels.

Social media forms can also be studied in their own right as 'naturalistic data' resources to learn more about how athletes view themselves, unsolicited, through online forums, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook posts, or blog postings concerning sport injury-related topics (e.g., injury meaning, rehabilitation, retirement, reactions to injury stories in the media). Finally, social media data—as shown in our opening example—could also be explored intertextually in terms of how athletes mobilize the media to resist or reconfigure narratives that are less, or more, productive for psychological well-being, sport participation and performance. The research in sport sociology concerning pain and risk culture has primarily focused on what is inherently bad and/or threatening for athlete health (Atkinson, 2019). Sport

injury psychology work has shown that injuries can be repositioned by athletes for growth (Wadey et al., 2019; See Chapter 12). Studying the production, representation and consumption aspects of sport injury in relation to growth and positivity in media forms, would also expand understanding.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the value and benefits of studying the media as a cultural site to expand sport injury psychology research was outlined. Despite the potential to expand sport injury understanding in socio-cultural context, the media has been minimally ‘tapped’ as a data resource to learn more about the sport injury meanings, athlete experiences and identities. Given that media research on sport injury has developed at a slow pace, the exploration of the media in its many ubiquitous forms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs, television, film) to study sport injury psychology topics is wide open. Qualitative research methods might be particularly advantageous to use to learn more about the socio-cultural construction of sport injury regarding first, second and third wave media research.

Critical Discussion Questions

We leave readers with three critical discussion questions, which are modest in scope, but that we hope may spark additional conversations and interest in media research.

1. How might forms of media research be utilized to fill contentious issues or gaps in sport injury psychology research?
2. What new, or different, research questions can be generated by studying the intertwining of media production, representation and consumption?
3. In what ways can social media forms be used by practitioners, social agents, and athletes, as forms of activism or sport injury reform?

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