An Examination of Gender and Race in Newspaper Coverage of Olympian Gabby Douglas

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Analyzed the portrayal of Olympian Gabby Douglas within newspapers


Specifically examined the notions of gender and race as reflected through the use of nicknames to describe her
Significance

- Important to examine how gender and race were expressed in media as media is ever-changing

- Newspaper coverage influences how an audience understands and perceives Douglas, as well as gender and race overall
Research Questions

- Was gender and race expressed in stereotypical ways, or was the media unbiased in their descriptions?

- Did the way Douglas was described vary across the U.S.?
Method

- Cluster Criticism, which was developed by Kenneth Burke
  - Look for key terms and their significance, as well as what other words cluster around the key terms
  - Key terms are discovered either by intensity or frequency
My Analysis

- Most terms found were classified under the intensity category of the method

- Discovered 7 key terms: “golden girl,” “sweetheart,” “megawatt,” “sassy,” “African American,” “black,” and “flying squirrel”
Gendered Conclusions

- The terms “golden girl” and “sweetheart” were found to be forms of infantilism.
- The terms “megawatt” and “sassy” were used to describe her looks and personality.
Racial Conclusions

- Discovered the terms “African American” and “black”
  - Both of the key terms “African American and “black” clustered the words first and community
  - This can be viewed as spotlighting her race
Racial Conclusions Continued

- Term “flying squirrel” was coined in regard to movement but could have other implications
  - Historically, black dancers were described as wild, exotic, primitive, and animalistic
  - Douglas’s nickname could hark back to those past descriptions
Overall Conclusions

- The media turned Douglas into a media package of gender and race

- She was constrained by masculine definitions of gender such as infantilism (viewing women as younger or weaker) and a focus on her looks

- She was classified as “African American” and “black” thus spotlighting her race and confining her to a specific category


