Sportswomen at the Olympics

A Global Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage

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Do the global sports media continue to ignore and downplay female sporting success – or is this invisibility changing? Does the world’s largest media event, the Olympic Games, which places sport at the centre of world attention, also represent a media showcase for the achievements of female athletes?

This is the main focus of this book. It explores women’s printed media coverage during the 2004 Olympic Games and brings together the largest quantitative collection of content analyses of media coverage of a single event using the same methodology. Expanding beyond research centred on the English-speaking world, it includes analyses of newspapers published in 14 languages and research teams from 18 countries, including Norway, Denmark, Sweden, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Canada, the United States of America, Turkey, China, Japan, South Korea, South Africa and New Zealand.

Based on comparative analyses the book provides a current picture of the place of sportswomen in global media. The comparative approach further informs and demonstrates how the methodology of content analysis can be used on printed media texts and its strengths and limitations when used across borders of language, culture and nation.

With contributions from across Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and Oceania, Sportswomen at the Olympics: A Global Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage provides evidence of the ongoing gendered difference in sports media coverage and shows how media may play a global role in the transformation and reproduction of gender structures in sports.
Sportswomen at the Olympics: A Global Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In part, this book is a tribute to the value of academic sabbaticals which allow researchers to exchange ideas with international colleagues. The idea for an international collaboration came when Jorid Hovden (then at Finnmark University College, Norway) spent time with Toni Bruce while visiting the University of Waikato (New Zealand) and was enhanced when Toni later visited Norway and Europe on sabbatical as part of developing the project. Through our discussions, we not only realised we had a shared interest in issues of gender but became aware that, despite being at opposite ends of the globe, there were strong similarities in the ways that Norwegians and New Zealanders thought about the world. From this position of mutual interest, we embarked upon a comparison of Olympic media coverage during the 2004 Olympic Games. After deciding to see if any of our international colleagues would like to join us, our potential countries of collaboration grew from two to 24, the majority of which were not English-speaking nations. At this point, Pirkko Markula agreed to join the editorial team. As in most collaborations of such size, not all interested researchers were able to see the project through: some had to withdraw as a result of illness, others because of more pressing responsibilities, and some because their institutions failed to see the value of joining the largest international comparison of its type. By the time we went to press, we had gained one country, Turkey, and lost others, including Iran, Tanzania, North Korea, Ireland, Israel, Greece and Australia, which would have broadened the scope of comparison even further.

An international collaboration such as this could not be successful without the commitment and passion of many different people, not least the researchers and authors of the chapters which comprise this book. We would like to thank all of them for their enthusiasm, patience and willingness to contribute to broadening our understanding of how a global event like the Olympics plays out in the sports media in a range of national contexts. We also acknowledge the hard work done by the individuals and teams in 14 countries who analysed data in their own (non-English) language newspapers and then translated their work into English for a broad audience. Susan Chapman, a PhD student in the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies at the University of Waikato, helped a number of researchers with their analysis of data using Excel. Her commitment and expertise in this area is much appreciated. Jane Burnett brought a meticulous approach to formatting the chapters and Stephanie Chia helped ensure consistency across them. The French language expertise provided by Nick Grey and Fabrice Desmarais was important in making sure nothing was ‘lost in translation’.

Finally, we would like to thank our institutions, particularly the University of Waikato, Finnmark University College and The Norwegian University of Science and Technology, for their support of this project, which included the provision of grants for research and editorial support as well as sabbatical and conference leave.
The Olympic Games today represent the world’s largest sport and media event. During the Olympics, sport is momentarily placed at the centre of the world’s attention as large audiences avidly follow broadcast and news media coverage (Puijk, 2000). The Games that are the focus of this book, the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens, were characterised as ‘the biggest show ever’. More than 35,000 hours of live events were beamed to 220 countries and territories and it is estimated that almost 4 billion people had access to coverage of the Games (International Olympic Committee [IOC], 2004; IOC, 2008).

With such an expansive scope, the Olympic Games offer a powerful public platform to showcase the achievements of women athletes. And it is evident that there are many achievements available for showcasing. In Athens, women competed in a record number of sports (27) and events (135) and were eligible for more than 400 medals (IOC, 2004; “Women in”, 2004). The proportion of women competing in the Games offers a clear indication of how far women have come in their fight for access to sports fields, pools, courts and arenas. Although females made up less than 15% of all Olympic participants until the 1970s, by the 2004 Games in Athens, the overall proportion of female competitors exceeded 40% for the first time. Today, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) actively promotes women’s increased participation in the Olympic movement through a range of strategic developments.

Just as the numbers show a major increase in female involvement in elite sport so, too, have attitudes changed significantly. We have clearly come a long way from the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, when founder Baron de Coubertin felt “women should not soil the Olympic Games with their sweat” (Pfister, Habermann & Ottesen, 2004, p. 5), and just as far from the 1970s when a United States judge in a court case about equal sports access for girls was reputed to have said, “Athletic competition builds character in our boys. We do not need that kind of character in our girls, the women of tomorrow” (Dyer, 1982, p. 109). However, although the societal attitudes embedded in these comments have been firmly rejected as females have successfully taken to the field of play, the struggle for sporting equality is far from over, especially in the area of media coverage.

Despite exponential growth in female sports participation, research over more than three decades consistently shows the invisibility of sportswomen in the global sports media. Although this invisibility appears to be moderated during global media events such as the Olympics in which both males and females compete, media coverage clearly has not kept up with the rapid growth in female participation.

Researchers remain concerned about the generally low levels of coverage which, they argue, constitute an ongoing marginalisation and trivialisation of female athleticism. Although studies across many nations show this broad trend, the research has been critiqued for inconsistencies in methods and times of analysis, and types of media analysed. Thus, comparisons between countries, and even within countries, have been difficult to make, due to the variability in how the research has been conducted.
PREFACE

This book brings together, in one place, the largest quantitative collection of content analyses of media coverage focused on a single event and using the same methodology. It presents the results of the Global Women in Sports Media Project which was designed to broaden the scope of quantitative sport media analyses beyond research that centred on the English-speaking world by including research from across Europe, Africa and Asia. With contributions from all major world regions except Latin America, and analysing newspapers published in 14 languages, this book will allow for substantial international and cross-cultural comparison of the current status of female athletes in the global sports media. It includes chapters from countries such as Turkey, South Korea, China, the Czech Republic, Hungary and South Africa which have only infrequently been included in international comparisons of this type. It draws upon the work of both established and emerging scholars to assess the progress – or lack of it – made by the global media in providing equitable coverage that recognises the involvement and success of female athletes.

ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

To prevent repetition, Chapter 1 contextualises the existing international research on media coverage of sportswomen and identifies the key themes that inform the broader project. Chapter 2 aims to enable comparisons over time by providing enough detail that others can replicate the study. As a result, it includes a practical guide to the method of content analysis for the use of the many novice undergraduate and postgraduate students embarking in this type of research, while also addressing the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of this type of research.

The findings are divided into five major sections, each of which represents a United Nations-defined world region. We begin with Europe. The first part introduces the findings from Northern Europe, including the United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The focus then shifts to Western and Southern Europe with chapters from Belgium, France, Germany and Spain. Eastern Europe is represented by the Czech Republic and Hungary. The second section focuses on North America and includes Canada and the US. In the third section, we highlight chapters from Asia, beginning with Turkey from West Asia and concluding with China, Japan and South Korea from East Asia. Finally, the regions of Africa and Oceania are represented by chapters from South Africa and New Zealand. The authors of each country chapter locate their findings in the broader context of gender relations and the status of sportswomen in that country. They also provide in-depth reviews of research conducted in their own countries to complement the overview provided in Chapter 1. As a result, the reviews of research from each country bring together a wealth of material, much of which may not have been accessible or previously published in English. We conclude the book by summarising the major trends across the different nations and look at the implications for future research regarding women in the Olympic media.
REFERENCES


1. KEY THEMES IN THE RESEARCH ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF WOMEN’S SPORT

INTRODUCTION

In order to set the scene for the rest of the book, in this chapter we review the major trends in more than 50 published quantitative studies on media coverage of sporting women. A large portion of the substantive body of research published in English focuses on the United States and, to a lesser extent, Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and a range of European countries. The trends identified in this review are further developed throughout the book as each country chapter reviews research in its own national context, much of which may not be published in English.

We first briefly discuss the media-sport relationship, before examining the relative invisibility of women athletes in routine sport media coverage; a trend which contributes to the ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women in sport. We then examine how women athletes are represented in the Olympics, with particular focus on newspaper representations. Throughout, we indicate how the major trends identified in the literature inform the research project that frames this book.

SPORT MEDIA AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

In the first decade of the 21st century there can be little doubt that life is significantly mediated. Indeed, researchers argue that “no place in the world can escape entirely the power of contemporary media, although different places (and populations) experience that power in different ways and to different degrees” (Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise, 2006, pp. xvii–xviii). The power of contemporary media is particularly evident in major international sport festivals such as the Olympic Games, in which the symbiotic relationship between the most powerful multinational media corporations and Olympic sport has turned them into global spectacles (Coakley, 2001). The Games represent powerful global and secular rituals that engage more people in shared experience than any other institutions or cultural activities (Burstyn, 1999). At the same time, they are presented as bodily dramas, where the athletes reflect and act as national symbols of dominant cultural values and ideologies (e.g., MacAloon, 1987; Messner 1988; Rudie, 1994). Thus, media coverage of the Games is both global and local: showing patterns that extend across countries while also being represented differently to different national audiences (Bernstein, 2000).
As the media preserve, transmit and create important cultural information, they powerfully shape how and what we know about sport in general and women’s sport in particular (Pedersen, Whisenant & Schneider, 2003). Phillips argues that “regardless of what is actually happening, it is the media’s interpretation of that event that shapes our attitudes, values and perceptions about the world and about our culture” (1997, p. 20). In this sense, the media has significant symbolic power that influences public perceptions of women’s sport.

Yet, the symbiotic relationship of sport and media benefits some groups and excludes others (Pedersen et al., 2003). Indeed, as discussed in the next section, routine media coverage of women’s sport symbolically reinforces dominant ideological beliefs in the superiority of men and makes the dominant gender order in sport appear as ‘natural’ and fair (e.g., Birrell, 2000).

SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION – INEQUALITY IN ROUTINE COVERAGE

In this section, we focus on the substantial research into what has been called routine, normal, general or everyday coverage. This type of coverage makes up the bulk of sports media content and excludes major events such as the Olympic Games. While the results differ depending on cultural context, one of the long-standing criticisms of sport media is its routine exclusion of women (Theberge & Birrell, 1994). Although female coverage ranges from zero to almost 23% in the research reviewed here, most studies find that women receive less than 10% of routine newspaper or TV sport coverage. Further, when compared to the average across all newspapers in a single study, closer analysis of the raw data consistently demonstrates a much wider range of results for individual newspapers. This trend is found in studies in Australia, New Zealand and the US where, for example, an average of 12% might be made up of a range from 4% to 22% (Sage & Furst, 1994; see also Eastman & Billings, 2000; Fountaine & McGregor, 1999; Phillips, 1997; Stoddart, 1994).

The Australian finding that sportswomen “have struggled to get consistent, long-term and supportive attention” (Phillips, 1997, p. 19) rings true for many Western nations (see Table 1). In addition, rather than a steady upward trend as women’s participation in sport has increased, the studies reveal consistently low levels of coverage, with women’s sport receiving less than 5% of all sports coverage as recently as the mid-1990s (e.g., Matheson & Flatten, 1996; McGregor & Fountaine, 1997; Szabo, 2001). “Women are invisible” was the summary of a recent study involving 37 newspapers in 10 countries which found an average of only 6% of coverage going to women (Jorgensen, 2005, p. 3). Even when mixed coverage was included, females appeared in only 12% of all sports coverage.

Media throughout the English-speaking world follows the same pattern of male-dominated sports reporting. For example, Canadian newspapers allocated just over 6% of sports coverage to women (Crossman, Hyslop & Guthrie, 1994). In US newspapers, women’s sport coverage has ranged from less than 1% to 14% (Bryant, 1980; Duncan, Messner & Williams, 1991; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Sage & Furst, 1994; Szabo, 2001). The United Kingdom findings range from zero to 12% (Bernstein, 2002; Donohoe, 2003, 2004; Matheson & Flatten, 1996; Valgeirsson & Snyder, 1986).
Table 1. Female sports coverage\(^1\) in selected countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Range of routine newspaper coverage %</th>
<th>Range of Olympic newspaper coverage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0 – 23</td>
<td>9 – 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11 – &gt; 40(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4 – 7</td>
<td>15 – 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>&lt; 1 – 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>2 – 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>4 – 14</td>
<td>16 – 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>5 – 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>9(^3)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>&lt; 1 – 12</td>
<td>22 – 32(^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>&lt; 1 – 14</td>
<td>14 – 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Coverage relates to female-only coverage and does not include mixed coverage.

\(^2\) This range highlights coverage since the mid 1960s (Lee, 1992; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999).

\(^3\) This percentage excludes Olympic and Paralympic results from Serra’s (2005) data.

\(^4\) These studies looked only at Olympic athletics or track and field coverage (Alexander, 1994; King, 2007).

In Australia and New Zealand, the results are similar but slightly higher. Across numerous studies, women’s coverage has varied within a very small range, generally between 5% and 15%. In New Zealand, coverage of women’s sport has averaged 10% since research began and, rather than a trend of gradual improvement, some of the higher levels of routine newspaper coverage were found in the 1980s (Bruce, 2008; Ferkins, 1992; Fountaine & McGregor, 1999; McGregor & Fountaine, 1997). Although Australian coverage did not exceed 2% in the 1980s (Menzies, 1989), a longitudinal study found that women received a steady increase in regional newspaper coverage from just over 1% in 1890 to just over 17% in 1990 (Brown, 1995). Regional or non-commercial newspapers and television stations have tended to give more coverage to women’s sport than major metropolitan newspapers or commercial broadcasters (Alston, 1996; Brown, 1995; Bruce, Mikosza, Hayles & Whittington, 1999; Mikosza, 1997; Phillips, 1997; Stoddart, 1994).

A recent six-month South African study found an average of almost 14% coverage for females, but this percentage also included coverage of the 2004 Olympic Games (Serra, 2005). Excluding the Olympic and Paralympic results, the routine percentage was approximately 9%.
While there is less information about sport media coverage in non-English-speaking countries, the findings again reflect the trend of extremely low coverage for female athletes. In published studies since the 1970s, routine coverage has not passed 10% in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway or Sweden (Fasting & Tangen, 1983; Jorgensen, 2002; Klein, 1988; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Valgeirsson & Snyder, 1986). Jorgensen’s (2002) cross-cultural analysis of Scandinavian countries concluded that “if not for female handballers and Norwegian female skiers, women would be almost absent from the sports pages” (p. 4). In Italy, one study found that “outside the Olympic Games women’s sports took less than 1 percent of newspaper coverage” (Aversa & Cence, 1992, cited in Capranica & Aversa, 2002, p. 338). Similarly, research in Israel reports very low levels (below 1% in some cases) of women’s sport coverage (Bernstein & Galily, 2008).

The electronic media appears to marginalise women’s sport to an even greater extent than the print media. For example, while newspaper coverage may reach 14%, television news and highlight shows seldom give women’s sport more than 5% and are sometimes well below this level (Duncan, Messner & Willms, 2005; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Tuggle, 1997). In Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, researchers found that women’s sport never exceeded 10% on national television stations (Bernstein, 2002; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Koivula, 1999; Szabo, 2001); a finding that is also true for New Zealand coverage since 1985 (Bruce, 2008). In one case, a three-month study of a popular UK channel found that female athletes received no coverage at all (Szabo, 2001). The majority of Australian studies reported that female coverage on major television stations languished between 1% and 2%.

While studies of newspaper photographs tend to show similar low levels of coverage for female athletes, some researchers discovered that women athletes received a higher percentage of images than of text (e.g., Duncan et al., 1991; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Matheson & Flatten, 1984; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994; Wann et al., 1998). The percentage of female photographs was sometimes close to double the percentage given to text. For example, a UK study found that female athletes received 12% of text and 22% of images in one newspaper, and 10% of text and 20% of images in another (Matheson & Flatten, 1984). Studies in the US found that women’s sport coverage comprised almost 4% of text and 7% of images in California newspapers (Duncan et al., 1991) and 14% of text and 19% of images in USA Today (Eastman & Billings, 2000). Eastman and Billings concluded, however, that women’s relatively larger photographic coverage showed “a lingering tendency to use women athletes for their glamour or sex appeal without serious treatment of their activities” (2000, p. 204). Therefore, photographs, while more numerous than textual coverage, may be used to trivialise sportswomen.

Because women’s sport in the mainstream media is almost invisible, the audience necessarily gets a false impression that women’s sport does not exist (e.g., Alexander, 1994; Bernstein, 2002). Gerbner (1978) characterised women’s under-representation in the media as ‘symbolic annihilation’ because, as he argued, such exclusion convincingly demonstrates that women do not matter in
our culture (Theberge & Birrell, 1994). Therefore, based on the extensive evidence of women’s marginalisation in routine sport media coverage, we hypothesised that in the non-Olympic coverage during the Athens Olympic Games, female athletes would receive unequal and lesser newspaper coverage compared to male athletes.

INCREASED VISIBILITY: WOMEN’S COVERAGE DURING MAJOR EVENTS

While the majority of routine sport reporting focuses on men’s sport, women’s sport is more visible during major international events. For example, Alexander (1994) showed evidence of more parity between men’s and women’s sport in UK coverage of the World Athletic Championships. During the Commonwealth Games, women’s coverage increases to around 30% in both Australia (Pringle & Gordon, 1995) and the UK (Donohoe, 2003) and has exceeded that of males in New Zealand (Wensing, 2003). One might assume, as Bernstein (2002) points out, that during an international sport event, any successful athlete “will get extensive media attention in his or her home country regardless of their sex” (p. 418). Therefore, in the next section we consider media coverage of the Olympic Games, which has received extensive attention.

THE OLYMPIC GAMES: BETTER BUT BY NO MEANS EQUAL

Across a wide range of countries, there is a general trend of increased media coverage of women’s sport during the Olympic Games both in newspapers (see Table 1) and on television. Capranica et al. (2005) even identify the Olympic Games as “a path-breaking event” for newspaper coverage of women’s sport (p. 214). Although the amount of reported increase varies, based on the newspapers selected for analysis, cultural context, and the exact measures used by the researchers, it appears that some time in the 1980s we begin to see a shift to higher levels of coverage. With a few exceptions, women’s Olympic coverage was generally below 20% into the 1980s in many countries but has increased to around 30% since then. Longitudinal comparisons demonstrate a gradual increase over the past three decades. For example, an extensive longitudinal study of Canadian winter Olympic coverage in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper found that women received more space in the later years (from 1964 to 1992) than during the earlier period (1924 to 1960) (Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). Similar findings emerged from German research, where a comparison of reports of female Olympians between 1952 and 1980 found that the percentage of women’s Olympic coverage rose from almost 15% to just over 29% (Pfister, 1987).

Up until the early 1990s, the North American increase above routine coverage was relatively small, with women receiving between 13% and 17% of Olympics coverage and men receiving between 54% and 57% in Canadian newspapers (Lee, 1992; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). However, from the 1990s onwards, US research has reported women receiving a much higher proportion of coverage. A content analysis that included the 1996 and 2000 summer Games coverage in *USA*
P. MARKULA ET AL

Today found that women received 25% of articles; a percentage that rose to 43% when mixed coverage was included (Pemberton, Shields, Gilbert, Shen & Said, 2004). Similarly, a review of coverage in five major US newspapers during the 1996 Atlanta Games reported that women received 38% of the coverage (Kinnick, 1998). Equivalent findings emerged from another analysis of the Atlanta Games, in which women athletes featured in 36% of articles with photographs and 31% of articles without a photograph in newspapers from the US, Canada and Great Britain (Vincent, Imwold, Masemann & Johnson, 2002).

Recent research in Europe and Oceania also suggests that women receive about one third of Olympic coverage. The results of European research conducted 20 years apart are remarkably consistent. A study of the 1980 Olympics (in Germany) and the 2000 Olympics (in Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy) both found that females averaged 29% of coverage (Pfister, 1987; Capranica et al., 2005). However, the recent study reported a range of results, with Denmark achieving the highest percentage of coverage at 37% (Capranica et al., 2005). In Australia, the media has dedicated slightly in excess of 30% of coverage to female athletes since the mid-1990s. Coverage of women’s sport in seven major newspapers during the 1996 Olympics averaged 33%, rising to 41% when the female proportion of mixed coverage was included (Mikosza, 1996). Coverage in individual newspapers ranged from just over 29% to almost 40% in 1996; and from 32% to 40% in 2000 (Mikosza, 1996; Payne, 2004). Australian coverage has clearly increased from below 20% in the 1980s (Hindson, 1989). The only New Zealand research found low levels of coverage of between 22% and 24% in the 1988 and 1992 Olympics (see Bruce, 2008). These levels appear similar to Israeli 1992 coverage in which men received three times more coverage than female athletes (Bernstein & Galily, 2008). According this research, women’s coverage in Australian and European newspapers has tended to be slightly higher than the North American Olympic coverage, although Vincent et al. (2002) recently found few significant differences between European and North American newspapers.

The trend of increased coverage is also seen in analyses of photographs and, just as with routine coverage, some studies found the female athletes received more photographic coverage than text. Australian research reported that the percentage of female photographs was more than double the percentage of articles during the 1984 and 1988 Olympics (Hindson, 1989) and was higher in two out of three newspapers in 1992 (Embrey, Hall & Gunter, 1993). In Canadian winter Olympic coverage between 1924 and 1992, newspapers devoted only 14% of text but 25% of photographs to females (Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). In the UK, females received 15% of all coverage but 25% of the photographic coverage of Olympics athletics events during the late 1980s in British newspapers (Lee, 1992). In other studies, the overall percentage for female photographic coverage has ranged from 33% in a study of four European countries (Capranica et al., 2005) to 48% in five US newspapers (Hardin, Chance, Dodd & Hardin, 2002). In both cases, there were a range of results; from 39% to 55% in US newspapers (Hardin et al., 2002), and from 24% to 49% in different European countries (Capranica et al., 2005). Another cross-cultural
study reported high levels of photographic coverage, averaging 43% when results from Canada, the UK and US were combined (Vincent et al., 2002). Based on these findings, women athletes receive a lower percentage of photographs than men yet this coverage, like the overall coverage, increases during the Olympic Games.

It may be, as Pemberton et al. (2004) concluded, that at the international elite level, “we may be closing in on the day when an athlete is an athlete, and sport media coverage truly reflective of those who compete” (p. 95). Consequently, we hypothesised that during the Olympic Games in Athens 2004, female athletes would receive relatively equal newspaper coverage compared to male athletes.

COVERAGE RELATIVE TO PARTICIPATION IN THE GAMES

During the Olympics, while women’s overall coverage remains lower than men’s, women have tended to be represented relative to their proportions on national Olympic teams. Longitudinal studies in Europe and North America, for example, have found that women’s sport receives equivalent and sometimes proportionally more coverage than men’s sport in relation to the proportion of female participation (Capranica et al., 2005; Pemberton et al., 2004; Pfister, 1987; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). For example, in USA Today coverage of recent Olympiads, women athletes represented 34% (Atlanta) and 38% (Sydney) of participants but received 41% (Atlanta) and almost 46% (Sydney) of all articles when mixed coverage was included (Pemberton et al., 2004). Capranica et al. (2005) concluded that in several European countries “female athletes receive an equitable amount of coverage during the Olympic Games, especially when their national participation rate is considered” (p. 220). This is also true for photographs, where coverage is relative to or even higher than the female proportion on Olympic teams (Capranica et al., 2005; Pemberton et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, several studies have found exceptions to this pattern. For example, during the 1992 summer Games, Australian women were 37% of the team and won 38% of the medals but their overall coverage ranged between 24% and 30% (Embrey et al., 1993). An analysis of British newspaper coverage of the 1992 Olympics athletics events identified a ratio of 3:1 in favour of men; a finding that could not be explained by the higher proportion of male athletes on the British team or the men’s greater success (Alexander, 1994). In Canada, despite an overall trend towards proportional coverage, and a higher proportion of photographs from 1964–1992, Urquhart and Crossman (1999) identified five Olympiads “when women received extremely poor coverage in relation to the number of female competitors” (p. 198). They noted, however, that Canadian women won few medals in those five Olympiads and, as we discuss in our next theme, argued that medal success may influence coverage of females. Overall, these studies provide an optimistic picture of gender equality in Olympic sport reporting. Mirroring the more recent optimism, we hypothesised that female and male athletes would receive coverage relative to their proportions on the Olympic team during the Athens Games.
There is some evidence that factors other than gender might create increased media visibility for females in international competitions. In this section, we discuss two key intersecting factors – medal success and nationalism.

Successful athletes, regardless of their gender, become the focus of media attention, especially during major international sporting events. Indeed, the media focus on those who win gold medals (Darnell & Sparks, 2005; Pemberton et al., 2004; Wensing, 2003). MacAlloon (1987) argues that “female achievements…are of equal status with those of men in the context of a national medal struggle which is ‘gender-blind’” (p. 118). Thus, it should not be surprising that several studies have demonstrated that women who win or are expected to win medals receive more attention in the media. For example, throughout the twentieth century, Canadian newspaper coverage of female Winter Olympians ebbed and flowed with their medal success, leading the researchers to conclude that “media coverage may have been performance biased” (Urquhart & Crossman, 1999, p. 198). During the 2000 Games, the five women who were among the top 10 most-mentioned athletes on US prime time television coverage were all gold medallists, as were four of the men (Billings & Eastman, 2002). The growth in women’s events in the Games means that increased opportunities for Olympic success should result in increased media coverage. As a result, we hypothesised that female and male athletes would receive coverage relative to the proportion of Olympic medals they won.

Nationalism is another key factor that may result in increased coverage for female athletes. While women have not historically been seen as carriers of national identity, all athletes and teams who represent the nation “have a potential for constructing symbols of national identity” (see von der Lippe, 2003, p. 379). Indeed, Wensing and Bruce (2003) reflect a growing belief among sport media researchers when they argue that “coverage during international sports events … may be less likely to be marked by gendered … discourses or narratives than reporting on everyday sports, at least for sportswomen whose success is closely tied to a nation’s sense of self” (p. 393). In many countries, the media focus on athletes who represent the nation, whether in routine stories, Olympic reports or coverage of other international events. For example, in three Scandinavian countries, more than 60% of routine coverage focused on ‘domestic’ athletes and “40 per cent of international articles spotlight a national athlete who is partaking” (Jorgensen, 2002, p. 4). In New Zealand, 70% of articles and 73% of images in Commonwealth Games reports focused on New Zealanders (Wensing, 2003). During the 1992 Olympic Games, two separate studies also found a large ‘national’ emphasis. In the UK, the 10 most photographed athletes in athletics events were all British (Alexander, 1994) and 88% of front page Olympic stories featured British athletes (Bernstein, 2000). In Israel, 100% of front page Olympic stories were about Israeli athletes (Bernstein, 2000). The author concluded that:

There is a clear trend that shows that Olympic stories deemed most newsworthy and considered by newspaper editors to be of interest to the general public and not only to the devoted sports fans (who read the sports pages) were the stories related to the nation’s own performance. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 361)
It is possible that nationalism may be even more important for female coverage than for males. In contrast to men’s coverage during the 1991 World Athletics Championships, British coverage of women was “to a great extent limited to coverage of British women alone” (Alexander, 1994, p. 652). This finding led Alexander to conclude that “the situation seems to be that male athletics is interpreted on a world-wide scale, but women’s athletics is only seen of importance if there is a British contestant” (1994, p. 652).

However, despite the overarching nationalism that generally marks media coverage some sports have stronger links to national identity than others. As MacAloon (1987) argues, “whole nations may be distinguished by their appreciation for or domination of certain sports and by their weakness, disinterest, or even shock at others” (p. 115). This claim is supported by research which found that sports routinely covered by the media outside of the Olympics received more coverage during the Olympics, even if the home nation was not competing (Bernstein, 2000). It was also evident in two cross-national studies which found that different countries highlighted different female Olympic sports; such as judo and tennis (Belgium), handball, badminton and sailing (Denmark), fencing and basketball (Italy), and field hockey (UK) (Capranica et al., 2005; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson & Massey, 2003). Similarly, European research discovered that attention to women’s handball during the 1998 European championships varied by country. In contrast to only about 5% in German newspapers, women’s handball received about 30% in Norway (von der Lippe, 2002), where the sport has a long tradition of media interest (Jorgensen, 2002).

These findings resulted in the hypothesis that female athletes who won medals in sports that were historically linked to national identity would receive more coverage than female medal winners in other sports.

SPOTLIGHT ON FEMININITY

While several of the themes discussed above appear to demonstrate a shift towards more equitable coverage, some researchers caution that a focus on the ‘raw’ numbers might provide an overly optimistic picture of the equality of women’s Olympic representation in newspapers. Therefore, in addition to investigating the amount of coverage sportswomen receive, it is valuable to analyse the content more closely. One way of providing further insight into the content is to examine the types of sport to larger issues of gender inequality, many researchers classify women’s sports into sex appropriate and sex inappropriate sports, following Matteo (1986), or into acceptable/feminine or non-acceptable/masculine sports, following Metheny (1965). Acceptable/feminine sports include individual sports that focus on aesthetics instead of the power, strength and/or contact required by many team sports. For example, ice-skating, diving, swimming, badminton or volleyball (which, while a team sport, does not require contact with the opponents) were considered female appropriate sports in Metheny’s original classification. Media
scholars argue further that if women athletes are only depicted in feminine or female-appropriate sports it limits women’s equal access to sport. For example, Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) conclude that “as a result of beliefs concerning the sex appropriateness of particular sports, women who participate in male-appropriate sports must challenge traditional sex role stereotypes by combating the belief that their participation is less valuable than men’s involvement” (p. 184). Furthermore, limiting women’s media representation to feminine or acceptable sports trivialises women’s achievements, because their physical prowess in other sports is not fully appreciated. Therefore, a stereotypical focus on feminine sports in the media portrayal of women athletes generates and supports “sexist ideologies and beliefs about gender” (Jones et al., 1999, p. 184). We should point out, however, that beliefs about the gender-appropriateness of particular sports are not universally shared, and need to be defined on a nation-by-nation basis. For example, handball is seen as women’s sport in Norway, as a gender-neutral sport in Denmark and as a male sport in Germany (von der Lippe, 2002).

North American newspapers have tended to focus on sports that are traditionally stereotyped as feminine in both Olympic and routine coverage (e.g., Duncan et al., 2005). In Canadian and US Olympic coverage, Lee (1992) found that female athletes were highly represented in individual sports, particularly in swimming and gymnastics, which she argued “emphasize aesthetic characteristics – appearance, beauty, form, and grace – and are seen as culturally acceptable sports for women” (p. 206). In the US, Pemberton et al. (2004) argued that Olympic “coverage for women remained largely focused on sports/events traditionally stereotyped as ‘appropriate’ for women and girls” (p. 94). This trend was moderated only in relation to gold medals: “Unless a ‘gold medal’ was at stake, the coverage of less ‘feminine’ sports/events was at best thin” (Pemberton et al., 2004, p. 94). Therefore, while women did receive coverage proportional to their participation, the coverage tended to focus on sports or events traditionally seen as appropriate for females.

Vincent et al. (2003) found that more than half the articles and photographs in Canadian, UK and US Olympic coverage were of gymnastics and swimming, and more than three-quarters of the most prominent photographs focused on these historically gender-appropriate sports, as well as diving and tennis. Another study found that photographic coverage in USA Today suggested “a lingering tendency to use women athletes for their glamour or sex appeal without serious treatment of their activities” (Eastman & Billings, 2000, p. 204). Certainly, research throughout the 1980s on both Olympic and routine coverage found evidence of imagery that highlighted gender difference. For example German media in the 1980s represented the female body “as barely covered nakedness in skin-tight sports clothes, graceful positions, fully stretched bodies, legs wide apart...sportswomen have been degraded to mere sex objects” (Klein, 1986, p. 145; see also Duncan, 1990). Although more recent research on routine US news broadcasts found “less frequent trivialization and humorous sexualisation” of women (Duncan et al., 2005, p. 5), an analysis of beach volleyball during the 2004 Games concluded that sexuality and sexual difference were “highly evident” in US broadcast images (Bissell & Duke, 2007, p. 35).
To further explore trivialisation of women athletes in newspaper coverage during the 2004 Olympic Games, we hypothesized that female athletes competing in sports more strongly linked to femininity or dressed in ways that highlight gender difference would receive more coverage than those competing in sports more strongly linked to masculinity or dressed in ways that did not highlight gender difference.

WOMEN AND MEN IN ACTION: SIMILARITIES IN PHOTOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

A key issue in the research has been the way in which females are represented in images. Research suggests that when female Olympic athletes are photographed, they tend to be shown in similar kinds of photographs to men (e.g., Alexander, 1994; Lee, 1992; Hardin et al., 2002; Pemberton et al., 2004; Vincent et al., 2002). For both genders, the most common photographs show athletes in action or in competitive settings; a finding which is also true for some studies of non-Olympic coverage (e.g., Klein, 1988; Pedersen, 2002). Studies of Canadian, South African, UK and US newspapers report that men and women are most often shown in action or sport settings, and that the percentages differ very little by gender (e.g., Lee, 1992). A number of studies of the 2000 Games demonstrate that the trends in distribution by photo type (such as action, in a sport setting, not competing or posed) are remarkably similar by gender, although there may be minor percentage differences. More than 40% of images of men and women athletes showed them in action in *USA Today* coverage of the Sydney and Atlanta Games (Pemberton et al., 2004). Hardin et al. (2002) found that 78% of women and 81% of male athletes were represented in active rather than passive images in US newspapers. Comparing UK, US and Canadian coverage, Vincent et al. (2002) reported that both women and men were most commonly represented in competitive situations (female, 51%; male, 52%). Women were slightly more often depicted not competing but males were found more often in ‘posed’ photographs. Furthermore, an approximately equal number of photographs showed female athletes competing in so-called gender appropriate (22%) and gender inappropriate (21%) sports. The researchers concluded, positively, that national newspapers in all three countries gave generally equitable coverage to both genders (Vincent et al., 2002). From the 2004 Olympics, South African research reported that both males (65%) and females (60%) were most often represented in action (Serra, 2005).

As a result of this research, we hypothesised that female and male athletes would be portrayed similarly in photographs.

CONCLUSION

The extensive literature on the amount of women’s coverage in the sport media demonstrates clearly that outside of major sporting events female athletes receive very little coverage. However, during the Olympic Games there is a significant increase and, in many cases, even though women receive less overall coverage than men, the Olympic coverage tends to be proportionate to the number of women athletes in national teams. This development, some researchers conclude, is a positive result of several factors.
First, women’s increased media visibility demonstrates that some of the gender equality policies initiated by the IOC have taken effect. For example, Capranica et al. (2005) argue that these initiatives have increased both women’s participation and women’s events in the Games and, thus, enabled growing acceptance of women’s sport in general.

Second, the increased visibility of women’s sport in the Olympic movement has created a better market for women’s mediated sport. Women’s sport is now more popular and also attracts greater audiences, especially during the Olympic Games (e.g., Capranica et al., 2005; MacAlloon, 1987; Vincent et al., 2002). Vincent et al. (2002) also argue that the media might currently perceive physically active women as a lucrative niche market and, therefore, the increased media coverage “may be reflecting the increased commercial potential of women’s sport and physical activity and the marketing requirements of their advertisers” (p. 333). Third, as discussed earlier, some researchers point out that nationalism and success are factors that create media visibility during international level competitions. Therefore, women who are expected to win medals or who are successful will receive more attention in the media of the country they represent. In this sense, national identity overrides the athlete’s gender identity (e.g., Bernstein, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

While these are positive developments, most researchers are only cautiously optimistic about gender equality in Olympic media representation. Several studies found that while the amount of coverage for women’s sport might have increased, the media still tended to focus only on few women’s events. This was particularly evident in the US media, where women’s gymnastics was the major focus. Currently, gymnastics is classified as a feminine/appropriate sport as it promotes such traditionally feminine qualities as smallness and flexibility. Some researchers also pointed out that female individual sports received more coverage than team sports because the former are considered feminine sports and are, thus, more acceptable in terms of female participation. Consequently, the media may promote an acceptance of sportswomen as long as they participate in appropriately feminine sports that do not require obvious strength, power or physical contact. Capranica et al. (2005), however, maintain that factors other than gender appropriateness dictate the content for Olympic sport coverage in the European media:

the lack of any “gender-appropriate sports” effect on coverage and the differences among countries in the amount of articles and photos dedicated to sports reflecting high national medal expectancies, achievements, and sport participation, confirm that gender may not be the most relevant issue for media coverage in a global multisport event. In this regard, the Olympic Games contribute to the general promotion of women in sports, giving visibility to female athletes who compete in traditionally male-appropriate sports. (p. 221)

Several studies also pointed out that while the IOC or the media at the executive level may engage in positive action to promote gender equality, this sentiment does not necessarily reach the grassroots level of sport reporting. Male reporters greatly outnumber female reporters in most countries and they tend know, write and talk
about men’s sport (Bruce, 2008; Capranica et al., 2005; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Garrison & Salwen, 1989; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Lowes, 1999; Strong, 2007; Theberge & Cronk, 1986). They also believe that audiences are primarily interested in men’s sports; a claim that is challenged during Olympic broadcasts which not only attract large numbers of female viewers but have also indicated “no audience preference for men’s sport” (Capranica & Aversa, 2002, p. 347). This finding led the authors to argue that the supposedly ‘market-driven’ media argument that audiences want to read about men’s sport is merely an “ideological justification for what is in fact a socially constructed ‘audience preference’ for men’s sport” (Capranica & Aversa, 2002, p. 347, emphasis added). Their claim is further supported by the finding that noticeable gender imbalances remain even in print media where no commercial imperative drives journalists’ choices (Shifflett & Revelle, 1994; Wann, Schrader, Allison & McGeorge, 1998). The overwhelming male domination of sports journalism has led some researchers to argue that until there is more occupational equality we will not witness a significant change in the content of sport reporting.

Finally, we should not forget that Olympic Games media coverage does not represent the routine level of women’s sport coverage. Outside of the Olympics, women’s representation in the sport media remains dismally low. Researchers continue to be concerned about the level of routine media coverage which, they argue, constitutes an ongoing marginalisation and trivialisation of female athleticism. Tuggle and Owen (1999) suggest that viewers express less interest in women’s sport because they have very little exposure to it between Olympics. Despite exponential growth in female sports participation, research over more than a quarter of a century consistently shows the invisibility of sportswomen in the global sports media and demonstrates that media coverage has not kept pace with changes in the gender makeup of sport.

The existing research demonstrates that although women are winning on the podium, they are still mostly missing in action in terms of media coverage, especially outside of major events. If women’s sports are ignored, the patriarchal, male sport model is further legitimised as the hegemonic structure for sport. With the sports media acting as the primary source through which most people gain their ideas about what is important and valuable, the absence of sportswomen in the sports media appears to reinforce historical but still widespread cultural assumptions that sport is a male domain. However, because Olympic media coverage moderates women’s usual invisibility, it clearly has the potential to challenge these cultural assumptions. As Vincent et al. argue:

The unique format of international sporting events such as the Olympic Games is ideal to provide the print and electronic media with an opportunity to balance social responsibility with economic rationales and provide an equitable amount and type of coverage of female athletes competing in all sports. (2003, p. 18)

NOTES

1 Throughout the review, we have rounded all percentages to whole numbers. See original research for the exact figures.
2 Because our project analyses newspaper coverage during the Olympic Games, we focus our review on this type of media coverage. There is also considerable research on televised coverage of women’s Olympic sport (e.g., Billings & Eastman, 2002; Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Higgs & Weiller, 1994; Higgs, Weiller & Martin, 2003; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Toohey, 1997; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). This research suggests that airtime for women’s sport has steadily risen and females receive almost as much coverage as men in a number of countries, (e.g., Billings & Eastman, 2002; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). Research on Australian online media also found that women received almost half the coverage (Jones, 2004). The research also indicates that females receive more television coverage than newspaper coverage (e.g., Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Toohey, 1997); a finding which contrasts with the research on routine coverage. In addition, while televised coverage in the US tends to focus on ‘feminine’ sports such as gymnastics, swimming and diving (e.g., Eastman & Billings, 2000; Higgs, Weiller & Martin, 2003; Tuggle & Owen, 1999), this trend is not necessarily found in Europe (Capranica & Aversa, 2002) or Australia (Toohey, 1997).

3 The methodological tool of dividing sport events into ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ for women is based on Metheny’s (1965) study of perceptions of gender appropriateness of different sports among US college women in the 1960s. Sports that the college women found inappropriate included wrestling, judo, boxing, weight-lifting, hammer throw, pole vault, the longer foot races, high hurdles, and all forms of team games except volleyball. In 1964, women were excluded from these events in the Olympic Games. Currently, only wrestling is not offered as a women’s Olympic event. Sports that they felt appropriate for women of lower socio-economic status included shot put, discus, javelin, shorter foot races, long jump, gymnastic events, and free exercise. Metheny reasoned that in the United States, ‘Negro’ women were disproportionately represented in the track and field events (shot put, discus, javelin and sprint events) and this might influence college women’s perceptions of their suitability for certain, but not all, women. Moreover, Metheny pointed out that women of Germanic and Slavic ancestry in the United States tended to engage in gymnastics at club level in their ethnic communities rather than colleges which probably made the college women classify gymnastics as an unsuitable for themselves. Sports that were identified as wholly appropriate for college women in the US included swimming, diving, skating, figure skating, golf, archery, bowling, fencing, squash, badminton, tennis and volleyball. Metheny noted that some of these sports required considerable amounts of time and money. More recent research by Reimer and Visio (2003) suggests that some team sports, such as soccer and basketball, are now seen as appropriate for both genders: Indeed, they argue that “perceptions of best sports for girls seem to be expanding to include more masculine sports” (p. 203).

4 The idea of classifying photographs based on their content derives from Rintala and Birrell’s (1984) study. Lee (1992), Pringle and Gordon (1995) and Vincent et al. (2002), among others, have used this study to devise their content analysis for the photographic coverage.

REFERENCES


RESEARCH ON MEDIA COVERAGE


RESEARCH ON MEDIA COVERAGE


2. CONTENT ANALYSIS, LIBERAL FEMINISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MAPPING THE MEDIA TERRAIN

Content analysis is a popular and widely used method for the study of gender differences in media coverage; a tradition to which this book contributes. Briefly, its goal is “the accurate representation of a body of messages” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 141). Content analysis aims to understand what the media produces by systematically quantifying media content, using pre-determined categories, and analysing the results statistically (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdoch, 1999; Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

In sport, gender has attracted by far the most attention, although researchers have used content analysis to consider other areas of sociological interest such as coverage of race (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Bruce, 2004; Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada, 1996; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Rainville & McCormick, 1977) or disability (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Duncan, 1999). For well over quarter of a century, researchers have steadily counted and measured their way through newspaper, magazine and television coverage, en route to demonstrating how the sports media has ignored, trivialised, devalued and often sexualised female athletes. More recently, content analysis has been used to assess how these patterns are replicated or disrupted in the online environment (Cipywnyk, 2006; Jones, 2004, 2006).

There are those who suggest there is no further need for content analyses of gender difference and that we should now turn our attention to more important questions or different methods. Such critics suggest that there is little need to conduct or publish these kinds of studies when they so often tell us the same thing, particularly in Western countries with a history of content analysis research (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States).

In contrast, we suggest that the very fact that these studies demonstrate such limited change, during a period of unprecedented growth and development in women’s sport in many countries, is exactly what makes this kind of work important. It is precisely the documented lack of change that challenges us to continue the fight for the public recognition and respect that sportswomen around the world deserve for their dedication, skill and performance. We agree with Turner (1997) that content analyses of the sports media “are themselves a damming indictment of the institutionalised sexism of sports reporting” (p. 298). Ongoing systematic documentation allows us to explore the historical reproduction of gender and

T. Bruce, J. Hovden and P. Markula (eds.), Sportswomen at the Olympics: A Global Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage, 19–30. © 2010 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.
contributes to theorising about why some forms of representation and stereotypes persist and others do not. In addition, policy makers “notoriously prefer ‘hard data’” (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 73) and, thus, quantitative analyses of content can be used effectively in legislating and arguing for change. As van Zoonen (1994) argues, the method of content analysis produces results that are grounded in traditional scientific expectations of objectivity and, as a result, are generally accepted as reliable and true.

In this chapter, we describe and assess the quantitative methods used in the Global Women in Sports Media Project. We begin by considering the theoretical framework that underpins much of the quantitative research on media coverage of sportswomen. Next, we discuss the value of content analysis as a method. Finally, we outline the ways in which it has been used by the researchers in this book and consider some of the issues that arose in attempting to follow one methodology across a range of countries.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GENDER: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Many of the previous content analyses of sports media have been conducted from an explicit or implicit liberal feminist position that focuses on ensuring that female athletes achieve equality with male athletes in terms of amount and type of coverage. This position reflects the broader liberal feminist focus on “the removal of barriers to the achievement of equality with men” (Curthoys, 2005, p. 129; hooks, 1984; Jaggar & Rothenberg Struhl, 1978; Jones & Jones, 1999; van Zoonen, 1994). Thus, while seldom acknowledged by researchers, we argue that the fundamental assumptions of liberal feminism are a driving force behind the conduct of this kind of analysis. This approach draws heavily on a transmission model of communication which assumes “a rather straightforward relation between media and society, accusing the mass media of conveying a distorted picture of women’s lives and experiences and demanding a more accurate reflection instead” (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 68; Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney & Wise, 2006).

Following liberal feminist thinking, researchers argue that women athletes deserve what male athletes have in terms of media acknowledgement and visibility. Thus, unlike radical feminists for example, researchers who conduct content analyses of sport have seldom argued for a significant revolution in how the sports media and sport are organised. Rather, their work has come from a liberal position seeking equality within the existing structures of sport and sports media. This theoretical approach implicitly believes that once discrimination has been highlighted then it is logical for steps to be taken to end that discrimination. It focuses on legal and government intervention, believing that affirmative action programmes and equal opportunity policies are the way to bring about gender relations that are more equal (Jones & Jones, 1999). Current sports media coverage appears to reflect what Jones and Jones (1999) call a cultural lag in which the significant social changes in women’s lives “are only partially reflected and represented by the media” (p. 66). The liberal feminist position holds that media representations of women should eventually “catch up with their actual social position” and provide “a more accurate view” of women’s lives and experiences (Jones & Jones, 1999, p. 66).
Liberal feminism has, however, endured extensive critique. The limits of liberal feminism have been highlighted by critics who argue that it primarily reflects the beliefs and experiences of white, middle class women (see hooks, 1984; van Zoonen, 1994). Some have argued that feminism must go beyond focusing on gaining “social equality with men” (hooks, 1984, p. 31), and recognize that because “patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression…there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact” (hooks, 1984, p. 22). At the same time, however, liberal feminism’s focus on reform has been successful in instigating legal and political changes in many countries (see Curthoys, 2005; hooks, 1984; Jagger & Rothenberg Stuhl, 1978, Skjeie & Teigen, 2003), and hooks acknowledges that “such reforms have helped many women make significant strides towards social equality with men in a number of areas” (1984, p. 157). As discussed in the individual country chapters, nations such as Norway and the United States have enacted laws which have led to large increases in female participation in sport and sport administration. Yet these increases have rarely been represented in increased media interest in or coverage of women’s sport. Nor has bringing inequality to the attention of the sports media resulted in substantive change (Fountaine & McGregor, 1999), except perhaps in the case of major events such as the Olympic Games, when nationalism rather than gender appears to become a stronger determinant of coverage. Almost 30 years of content analysis on sports media coverage of women in a variety of predominantly Western countries appears to have done little to challenge the persistent ideology that sees female sport as inferior and second-rate. While increasing numbers of women successfully compete in sport, the male-dominated sports media shows virtually no change in the amount of coverage of everyday or within-nation women’s sport.

Despite our awareness of the critiques of liberal feminism, we have chosen to engage in content analysis in this project because we firmly believe that Winston (1990) is correct when he argues that “the objective, systematic and quantitative description of communication … is a thing to be sought after. If we cannot have such a description of [the media’s] content, then how, in any real sense, can we know what it is?” (p. 62). For sport researchers analysing the ways in which female athletes are represented, accurate summaries or ‘maps’ of what the media actually produces are central to any argument for change. As Winston argues, “without the ‘map’, no case can be sustained as to any kind of cultural skewedness except on the basis of one-off examples of misrepresentation … and if no case can be made, then there is none to answer” (1990, p. 62). Further, for researchers wanting to consider questions about what media practices produce the content or what effects the content might have on those who consume it, knowledge of the content must come first. Indeed, some suggest that without knowledge of media content such questions “are meaningless” (Riffe et al., 1998, p. 32). Therefore, while acknowledging that much content analysis research is underpinned by a liberal feminist position, we chose this method because it provided the most appropriate way to gather and compare results across a large international sample. It also was the most appropriate way to begin, in some countries, the ground-breaking work of determining ‘what the content is’.
THE VALUE OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Like all methods of media analysis, content analysis is a tool that researchers can use to gain a more rigorous and reflective understanding of particular media texts (Grossberg et al., 2006). It aims to understand the nature of what the media produces by systematically quantifying media content, using pre-determined categories, and analysing the results statistically (Deacon et al., 1999; Riffe et al., 1999; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

One of the key advantages of content analysis is its ability to consider the big picture; “delineating trends, patterns and absences over large aggregates of texts” (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 117). This means that researchers can summarize large amounts of information and present their results succinctly. As a result, it is particularly appropriate for research such as ours which explores questions about patterns of media representation across a wide range of countries. In addition, Deacon et al. argue that:

The great advantage of content analysis is that it is methodical. It stipulates that all material within a chosen sample must be submitted to the same set of categories, which have been explicitly identified. To this extent it ensures a reasonable degree of reliability in the establishment of a pattern of media representation. (1999, p. 133)

Equally importantly, they point out that:

It also provides a guard against temptations inherent in less rigorous approaches, of selecting items that seem to fit the case you may want to prove, or allowing your impression of a developing pattern of representation to be guided by your pre-existing prejudices and assumptions. (Deacon et al., 1999, p. 133)

Even critics of content analysis (e.g., McKee, 2001; Turner, 1997; van Zoonen, 1994; Winston, 1990) recognise its value in producing descriptions or ‘maps’ of media content. Certainly, content analysis of gender in the sports media has a long and well-established history; and the ‘maps’ of content identified across time, countries and continents have been widely used by organisations, Governments, teachers and researchers as part of a broader discussion of sexism in sport.

THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING CONTENT ANALYSIS

The methods followed in the Global Women in Sports Media Project were developed so that researchers in each country could collect, input and analyse the same data in a similar fashion. Of course, it is never as simple as this and, as you will see throughout the book, researchers from each country made their own decisions about what data was of most relevance. Their choices reflect a number of factors including the relationship of this study to previous research in their countries, the questions or hypotheses that were most relevant to their own interests, stylistic differences in newspapers, expectations for research quality in their institutions and, in some cases, the availability of graduate students or research
assistants to do the “often laborious and tedious” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 145) work of measurement. Our aim was to produce a body of work that was systematic, objective and rigorous, while also being accessible to a wide range of readers including undergraduate students, policy makers, sports organisations and interested members of the public. To enable such readers to make sense of the results and compare them across different nations, we recommended that each country limit the analysis to descriptive statistics.

Although we attempted to maintain the same methodology across all studies, some countries undertook their data collection across slightly different time frames, decided to focus only on coverage of the Olympics (excluding any stories unrelated to the Olympics from their collection and analysis), or measured either space or the number of articles and photographs. As a result, although this chapter outlines the key elements of the project methodology, each country chapter outlines methodological issues specific to the data gathering undertaken in that country.

A typical content analysis project follows the following steps: developing hypotheses, ‘defining the universe’, sampling, developing the instrument and statistical analysis (Deacon et al., 1999; Riffe et al., 1998; Wimmer & Dominick, 2003; Winston, 1990). In the following section we discuss how we structured our project based on these steps.

**Developing the Guiding Hypotheses**

The first step in content analysis is formulating research questions or hypotheses. These can come from existing theory, prior research, industry definitions or practical/grounded problems. In our case, the seven guiding hypotheses derived primarily from the substantial body of existing international research (see Chapter 1), and we attempted to assess whether the 2004 Olympic coverage supported or challenged the results of previous studies. We noted that not all hypotheses would be relevant to each country and that hypotheses 5 and 7 would need to be defined on a country-by-country basis.

Hypothesis 1: In coverage of the Olympics, female athletes will receive relatively equal newspaper coverage compared to male athletes.

Hypothesis 2: In non-Olympic coverage, female athletes will receive unequal and lesser newspaper coverage compared to male athletes.

Hypothesis 3: Female and male athletes will receive coverage relative to their proportions on the Olympic team.

Hypothesis 4: Female and male athletes will receive coverage relative to the proportion of Olympic medals they win.

Hypothesis 5: Female athletes competing in sports more strongly linked to femininity or dressed in ways that highlight gender difference will receive more coverage than those competing in sports more strongly linked to masculinity or dressed in ways that do not highlight gender difference.
Hypothesis 6: Female and male athletes will be portrayed similarly in photographs.

Hypothesis 7: Female athletes who win medals in sports that are historically linked to national identity will receive more coverage than female medal winners in other sports.

As will be apparent in the various chapters, although all countries gathered data relevant to the guiding hypotheses, the authors of each chapter decided which results were the most relevant to their own contexts.

Defining the Universe

Another key decision is specifying the boundaries of the body of content to be analysed, a process that Wimmer and Dominick call “defining the universe” (2003, p. 145). To ensure comparisons could be made across the countries, the sample was limited to newspaper coverage (rather than including television news, live broadcasts, radio or internet coverage, for example) and, in most countries, to the largest circulation or most prominent newspaper. This definition of ‘the universe’ recognised that media environments differ significantly across countries and relied upon the researchers’ local knowledge to identify the most appropriate newspaper outlet. Where possible, authors selected a newspaper with national circulation, such as in the Czech Republic, Japan, South Korea, Spain and USA. Others, such as Canada, Hungary, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, selected the largest circulation daily newspaper, even if it did not have ‘national’ distribution. Some countries, such as Belgium, China and South Africa, focused on popular or large circulation regional newspapers, especially in cases where there were distinct regions within the nation. In still others, such as Denmark, the UK and Germany, the cultural importance of both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers led the researchers to analyse one example of each type. In France, the researchers compared a general newspaper and sports-only newspaper, and the Turkish researchers examined three mass circulation newspapers which appeal to different audiences. Although each country was initially asked to analyse only coverage in the sports section and on the front page of the newspaper, once the study began it became apparent that there were substantial variations in how newspapers in different countries presented the Olympics. For example, some placed all or most Olympics coverage into special Olympic supplements while others provided specific Olympic pages in the general news section. As a result, researchers in each country gathered the most appropriate sample in their case and described this in their methods section.

Sampling

Because our questions related to media coverage during the Olympic Games, the sample time frame selected in this study was relatively straightforward. We chose a purposive sample, defined by the time frame of the 2004 Olympics. We offered
two options for the period of analysis: the longer period included a week either side of the Games to permit collection of preview and review stories and the shorter period began with the opening ceremony and concluded with the closing ceremony; thus focusing only the days during which competition was taking place.

The unit of analysis was the ‘story’ or ‘article’, which included any material written under a headline and included any attached photographs, graphics or illustrations and their accompanying captions. One area of difference related to the analysis of results data. Some studies counted each result report as a separate story and analysed by gender; others categorized it as mixed even if only one set of results included female sport; others excluded the results from analysis (deciding that results would accurately reflect Olympic performances by gender and, thus, would not reflect media choices grounded in gender difference).

Instrumentation

The instrument for gathering data was an Excel spreadsheet containing 15 different elements, which were chosen to allow researchers a wide range of possible avenues for analysis, and to gather data related to the guiding hypotheses. In regard to the newspaper articles, the elements included the name of the newspaper, the day and date, the sport, whether the article was an Olympics story or not, gender of the article, identification of key individuals or teams discussed in the article, position or location of the article (e.g., front page, main sports page, inside sports page, etc.), the article focus or topic (e.g., sports event, athlete or team, facilities, sport organisation), the type of story (e.g., profile or feature story, event report, results, editorial) and the size of the article. In relation to images (which often have a different focus from the written text), the elements included image size, gender, type of image (e.g., sport action, sport-related, with medals, headshot or mugshot, logo, graphic), who was featured, and whether the image was in black and white or colour.

Validity and Reliability

The heart of any content analysis is the categories developed to classify the media content. In most sports media content analyses, the focus is on face validity which means that categories actually measure what they propose to measure. All categories should be mutually exclusive, exhaustive and reliable. In our study, this meant that each story could fit into only one category and that different coders would agree on the categories in most instances. In this project, the key categories were those related to gender. In line with previous research, we identified four ‘gender’ categories: male, female, mixed and neutral. The male category included articles that focused only on male athletes or, in longer feature stories (also called personality profiles or human interest stories) on male coaches or sports personnel. The female category included all articles focused only on female athletes (or on female coaches or sports personnel in feature stories). The mixed category included any stories that featured both males and females. In major events like the Olympic Games
there are often high numbers of mixed stories, particularly in daily summaries of results or when multiple individuals or teams win medals on the same day. What this form of data gathering did not make possible was an analysis of the relative weight of male or female content within such stories, although some previous research has investigated this aspect. The neutral category (also called ‘other’ in some research) included all stories that did not focus on individuals or teams associated with the Games, such as stories about security plans for the Games, descriptions of various stadia, explanations of drug testing processes and features on the city of Athens. While the four ‘gender’ categories appear, in principle, to be relatively straightforward, valid coding is one of the most difficult elements of this kind of content analysis. In all cases, we emphasized that coders should be consistent with their choices and explain in their methods if and where they deviated from the project recommendations. For example, some countries such as Germany adapted the template to allow comparisons with existing German research, which meant dividing mixed stories and counting them twice (once as male, and once as female).

Reliability is another key issue for content analyses. This concept means that repeated measurement of the same material would result in similar decisions or conclusions. In studies such as this, where different people code material using the same template, it is recommended that training sessions and pilot studies be conducted to achieve intercoder reliability. However, given the difficulty of such an approach because of the geographical spread of researchers, wide range of native languages, different structures of national newspapers and levels of researcher experience, we concluded that this approach was not feasible. Instead, we provided a description and English-language newspaper example of how to measure and categorize stories, and set up a web-based discussion forum through which researchers could pose questions to the project leaders. The project leaders also visited a number of research teams and met with coders to discuss specific issues related to allocating stories to appropriate categories. The different layout of newspapers and the range of native languages (Chinese, Czech, Danish, English, Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Swedish, Spanish and Turkish) resulted in much discussion of the terms used in the template. For example, while the terms “feature story” and “headshot” or “mugshot” are commonly used by sports journalists in English-speaking countries, they were unfamiliar to a number of researchers. Much of the discussion on the web forum and via email revolved around explaining what kinds of material would appear in each category of story or photograph. Thus, issues of reliability and how to ‘translate’ categories became an important and ongoing aspect of the research project discussion.

Statistical Analysis

A common form of analysis used in quantitative studies involves descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, medians and modes, which allow readers to easily grasp the importance of the findings, even without an extensive background in statistical analysis (Riffe et al., 1998). Given our explicit intention of making the
results accessible to a wide range of readers, we asked researchers to limit their analysis and discussion to descriptive statistics. We note that of the more advanced statistical tests, the chi-square test is the most commonly used because content analysis data tends to nominal in form, although previous studies have also used t-tests, anovas and Newman Kreuls tests (e.g., Billings & Eastman, 2002; Pedersen, 2002; Vincent, Imwold, Masemann & Johnson, 2002).

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: A STATISTICAL COMPARISON OF MEASURING SPACE OR COUNTING NUMBERS

Much of the quantitative research on media coverage of women’s sport has measured space in squared centimetres or inches. This method of assessing the quantity of coverage involves a considerable investment of time and, in some ways, limits the number of researchers who can be involved in large, collaborative studies of this kind. The emphasis on measuring space is also apparent in the bulk of research at the Masters and PhD level where we suspect that ‘merely’ counting the number of articles might be considered too ‘easy’. However, to our knowledge, previous researchers have not attempted to measure the association between measuring space or measuring numbers. As a result, we decided to use the results of this project to consider whether it was necessary to measure space as well as counting the number of articles and photographs in Olympic analyses (see BOX, Tom Cavanagh). As Tom Cavanagh’s analysis demonstrates, admittedly based on a small sample of 10 countries, although there are small percentage differences between the results for space and for number of Olympic articles, the two measurement methods are significantly correlated. We want to suggest that this finding opens up exciting possibilities for future international collaborations which, by counting the number of articles and photographs, could be done in an efficient fashion and allow comparisons across a wide range of media types, time frames and countries, at least in terms of assessing Olympic coverage. It also opens up opportunities for fulfilling Winston’s (1990) recommendation for more robust content analyses which must be based “on a sufficiently large body of output...so that the true regularities of ideological production can be described without the distortion of particular news incidents...skewing the results” (p. 61; see also Fountaine & McGregor, 1999). If counting numbers of Olympic articles provides results that are significantly associated with those measuring space, then the possibilities for time-strapped academic researchers and graduate students to expand their research time frames are much greater.

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst acknowledging that content analysis has theoretical and analytical limitations, it is a powerful method that provides the kind of hard data that governments and sports organisations value. It is also the most appropriate in studies such as this where researchers wish to compare results across a large international sample such as ours, which comprised 18 countries and newspapers published in 14 different languages. Large content analyses of this type are rare yet, precisely because they follow the same methodology and present results
statistically, they permit us to explore global trends and differences that might be more difficult to investigate using other methods. The results of the analyses included in this volume suggest that it is important to continue to track and record the mass media’s failure to adequately acknowledge women’s sport and, at the same time, to explore the conditions, such as during the Olympic Games, under which female athletes may more closely approach equality with males.

### Means and Standard Deviations Comparing Measurement of Percentage of Space with Percentage of Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37.90</td>
<td>39.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25.46</td>
<td>26.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>17.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>16.06</td>
<td>17.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n = The number of participants (countries) in the sample; M = The mean is simply the average of all the items in a sample; SD = The standard deviation is a measure of how spread out your data are. * Alpha set at p ≤ .05.

### Results

To investigate if there was a statistically significant association between measuring space and counting numbers of Olympic articles, a Pearson product moment correlation was computed for each variable, with these results: male – r(8) = .88, p = .001; female – r(8) = .88, p = .001; mixed – r(8) = .91, p = .000; and neutral – r(8) = .85, p = .002. The results are interpreted as meaning the correlations are strong to very strong. Correlation analysis is a statistical test conducted to determine the degree of relationship between two sets of data. In this type of analysis results below .60 are not acceptable, between .60 and .69 are minimally acceptable, between .70 and .79 are adequate, between .80 and .89 are good, and between .90 and .99 are very good. Thus, results over .80 are interpreted in this case as meaning that a researcher can substitute counting the number of Olympic articles for measuring space.

The 10 countries contained in this analysis are a representative sample of the total 18 countries taking part in the study and, therefore, these results can be generalized to the whole project.
Content analyses provide important ‘hard data’ to convince policy and programme decision-makers about the need for change and to promote public awareness and debate. Yet, as we discuss in the final chapter of the book, even policies and programmes designed to raise awareness and encourage change appear to have had only limited impact on how the sports news media generally represent female athletes. Unfortunately, demonstrating discrimination does not directly translate into stopping discrimination.

REFERENCES


