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Women in the Sports Pages: A Brief Insight into Olympic and Non-Olympic Years in Australia

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Abstract: Despite women participating in a variety of sports at an international level, the Australian sports media is dominated by male commentators, male identified sports, and male athletes. Much of the sports reporting in Australia surround high profile male team sports such as rugby league (NRL), cricket, and Australian Rules football (AFL). Women sports do not generally feature heavily in sports coverage in neither print nor broadcast mediums. However, every four years the Olympic Games change this culture somewhat. Over the period of the Olympic Games, during the lead up to the Games and in the weeks post-Games, women athletes can be found in the sports pages. During this period, Australian women athletes are celebrated and awarded space in newspaper coverage, particularly if their athletic performance brings success to the country. This ongoing longitudinal study documents the prevalence of female sports stories in two state (New South Wales) and one national newspaper in Australia, "The Sydney Morning Herald," "The Daily Telegraph," and "The Australian," between 2008 and 2012. In the broader study, newspapers were analyzed for two weeks prior to the Olympics beginning, during the Olympics, and two weeks after the Olympics were completed. However in the current paper, a small slice of this research between 2008-2012 will be analyzed in relation to gender (male, female, or a combination of male and female athletes), the articles relationship to the Olympic Games, and the general content of sports news articles. The content and language used in the newspaper articles are examined using a critical feminist perspective and such a perspective will investigate the ways that women are often 'feminized', 'gender marked', 'infantilized', and 'heterosexualized' in the sports media during both Olympic and non-Olympic years.

Keywords: Gender, Media, Olympics

Introduction

The Australian sports media are dominated by male sports commentators, male identified sports, and male athletes. Much of the sports reporting in Australia surround high profile male team sports such as rugby league (NRL), cricket, and Australian Rules football (AFL). Women sports do not generally feature heavily in sports coverage in neither print nor broadcast media. Only on rare occasions do women feature on the sports pages, most notably during major sporting events, such as the Olympics, Australian Open Tennis Championships and the Commonwealth Games. During these times, Australian women athletes are celebrated and awarded space in newspaper coverage, particularly if their athletic performance promotes patriotism and nationalism by bringing success to the country.

Women athletes and women's sports often constitute less than one quarter of the sports coverage that male athletes and male sports regularly receive. While coverage is important for the recognition and exposure of women athletes and women's sport, the content of such coverage is also pertinent. Historically, women athletes have been systematically disenfranchised and devalued in media coverage. Numerous studies have found that women athletes are often 'feminized', 'gender marked', 'infantilized' and 'heterosexualized' in coverage in both print and broadcast media (Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Litchfield, 2006; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

This ongoing longitudinal study documents the prevalence of female sports stories in two state newspapers (New South Wales) and one national newspaper in Australia between 2008 and 2012: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*.¹ In the broader study, newspapers were analysed during three time periods: two weeks prior to the Olympics beginning, during the Olympics and two weeks after the Olympics were completed. In this research paper, a small section of the broader study is presented. Specifically, the representation

¹ These specific newspapers were chosen due to their large circulation in the state of New South Wales and more broadly, Australia.

of gender (male, female or a combination of male and female athletes), the articles relationship to the Olympic Games, and the general content of sports news articles were analysed. The content and language used in the newspaper articles were examined using a critical feminist perspective. Such a perspective investigates the ways that women are often 'feminized', 'gender marked', 'infantilized' and 'heterosexualized' in the sports media during both Olympic and non-Olympic years.

Literature Review

Sport is one institution that relies heavily on the support of the media. Rowe suggests that the media and sport institutions have 'become mutually dependent in an increasingly extensive exchange of exposure and rights fees for content and audience capture' (2004, 4). Big business sport and the media feed off each other and according to Rowe, in some cases, sport and the media have been so intertwined, they have 'consumed' each other (2004, 35). This symbiotic relationship between sport and the media is certainly evident in the case of the Olympic Games.

The relationship between sport and media has resulted in media coverage of most professional male sports. However, there has been comparatively little coverage of female sports. Historically, women's sports have achieved little to no prominence in the sports pages worldwide (Messner and Cooky 2010; Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003; Duncan, Messner and Willms 2005; Boyle 2009; Harris and Clayton 2002; Lumby, Caple and Greenwood 2009; Phillips 1997; and Toohey 1997).

Over the last two decades, numerous studies have investigated the disproportionate coverage of male and female athletes through the medium of television. Much of this research has been conducted in the United States by Michael Messner, Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Cheryl Cooky (Messner and Cooky 2010; Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003; and Duncan, Messner and Willms 2005). Research by Messner et al. (2003) on women in televised sports news showed that women receive significantly less coverage than men. Across three television stations in the U.S.A., only an average of 8.33% of airtime was afforded to women athletes and women's sports (2003, 40). In another study on televised sports news between 1989 and 2004, Duncan et al. (2005) found that 6.3% of coverage was awarded to women's sport and 91.4% to men's sports (4).

In terms of print media, the story so far has been similar to that of television. Vincent, Imwold, Masemann and Johnson (2002) note that 'numerous empirical studies have found female athletes are under-represented in the print media' (320). During a non-Olympic year, Harris and Clayton's study of the English tabloid press showed that only 5.9% of the sports reporting focussed on women athletes or women's sports (2002, 397). Lenskyj's study of the magazine *Inside Sport*, found that around 88% of all feature articles focussed on male athletes and male sports (1998, 28). According to Lenskyj, of the remaining 12% of articles, 'four dealt with issues in men's and women's sport, but generally paid more attention to men, and two focussed on Chinese drug use, with the emphasis on female swimmers. Only one feature story dealt exclusively with a female athlete...' (1998, 28). Lenskyj (1998) suggested that the 'symbolic and actual marginalisation [of women athletes] was evident in every issue of *Inside Sport*' examined (30). In the UK, Harris and Clayton (2002) found that in the *Sun* and *Mirror* newspapers in 2000 only 5.9 percent of the sports reporting focused upon women's sport (397).

In Australia, various studies were conducted in the late 1990s on women in the sports pages, sports news and televised sports coverage (Mikoszka 1997; Phillips 1997; Toohey 1997). Murray Phillips' (1997) study revealed that 10.7% of the newspaper coverage of sport was devoted to women's sports and women athletes (1997 4). Kristine Toohey's (1997) research examined the Australian television coverage of the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games. Her research found that female events received around 33% of the coverage in 1980 and around 27.7% in 1984 (1997, 19). However, the statistics for women focused articles in print media in the 1980s and early

1990s are somewhat different. In Toohey's (1997) research, she outlined 'a selection of Australian studies of coverage of women's sport in the media between 1980 and 1992' (21). This selection included studies on newspaper and television coverage, and indicated that in studies during these dates, women featured on the sports pages between 1.3% and 13.2% of the time in Australia.

More recently, there continues to be research on women in the sports pages and in televised formats. In the United States, Messner and Cooky (2010) continued their long-term research on televised sports news and found that the coverage of women's sports had in fact decreased over the last two decades. Sports news programs over three television network affiliates awarded men's sports 96% of the sports news coverage, 2.1% to gender neutral topics and only 1.6% of sports coverage was dedicated to women athletes or women's sports (Messner and Cooky 2010, 8). In Australia, a report released by the Australian Sports Commission and the University of New South Wales on televised sports, found slightly more favorable results for women's sports and women athletes. They concluded that 81.1% of sports coverage was on male athletes and men's sports, 7.4% of sports coverage on 'other' (or gender neutral topics), 2.8% of sports coverage was on mixed sports (males and females combined), and 8.7% of sports coverage was on women athletes or women's sports (Lumby, Caple and Greenwood 2009).²

The small amount of articles, news reports and broadcasts devoted to women's sports and women athletes require close analysis. Many of these pieces of media are framed in such a way that women athletes are often subjugated and devalued. Duncan and Messner suggest that the media's approach to female athletes and sport demonstrates an example of 'symbolic dominance', a process that 'emphasizes the difference between men and women (in sports reporting), where men represent the standard and women represent the other' (1998, 180). Such symbolic dominance occurs via a regular set of processes. Wensing and Bruce (2003) suggest that the media have traditionally adhered to a set of unwritten 'rules' to describe women athletes, their sporting performance and their femininity (387). These rules include; 'Gender Marking', 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', 'Emphasizing Appropriate Femininity', 'Infantilization' and 'Focussing on Non-Sport-Related Aspects'.³ This manuscript explores three of these 'rules' ('Gender Marking', 'Emphasizing Appropriate Femininity' and 'Infantilization')⁴ in further detail in relation to the present study, as outlined below.

Wensing and Bruce's (2003) Unwritten 'Rules' of Media Coverage

Infantilization

The first theme ('rule') used to aid in the analysis of the current study was that of 'infantilization'. Infantilization of female athletes 'tempers the symbolic threat posed by successful adult sportswomen by representing them as "girls", "young ladies" or using only their

² While beyond the scope of the current study, it is pertinent to note that research has also been conducted around the Olympic Games and women's images in the online sports news in Australia (Jones 2010; 2006; 2004).

³ Wensing and Bruce suggest that these rules are considered the 'old rules' of media coverage, and that despite these rules still existing, there is also a 'new rule' in the sports media, which they call 'ambivalence' (2003, 388). 'Ambivalence' in contemporary sports media refers to a combination of positive images and reporting, along with the traditional undermining and negative images and reporting of female athletes, women's sporting competitions and women's sporting success. As a result, the reporter is able to point to positive images of female athletes and sport, whilst still reinforcing the gender hierarchy. Although this 'new rule' of ambivalence is considered more liberating for female athletes/sports on reports in the media, which adopt just the 'old rules', Wensing and Bruce suggest the following problems: 'Ambivalence remains problematic because it denies sportswomen appropriate recognition and prestige. In Australia, widespread ambivalence and low levels of coverage reflect international findings. Despite an overall trend towards less stereotypical coverage, many of the old rules are still employed by the Australian sports media (2003, 388). The new rule of 'ambivalence' has not been used to frame the analysis and discussion in the current paper.

⁴ Similar themes of analysis have also been used by Kane and Maxwell (2011).

first names' (Wensing and Bruce 2003, 388).⁵ A study conducted by Duncan and Messner, found that 'sports commentators referred to female tennis players by their first names 52.7% of the time and to male tennis players only 7.8% of the time' (1998, 181). According to Bernstein, this 'is a linguistic practice which reinforces the existing gender-based status differences' (2002, 420), namely, male athletes as superior and female athletes as inferior.

Emphasizing Appropriate Femininity

Several studies have found that women are presented in ways that reinforce an appropriate level of femininity (Kane and Maxwell 2011; Roedl 2007; and Wensing and Bruce 2003). Additionally, the language that many sports journalists use also reinforces this level of femininity. Such characteristics include the stereotypically feminine and emotional characteristics of a woman. The use of terms such as, 'small, weak, beautiful, graceful, emotional, dependent, self-sacrificing and concerned for others' are often used in media pieces on women's sports (Wensing and Bruce 2003, 388). Wensing and Bruce suggest that 'these related techniques situate female athletes so they are not a threat to the patriarchal order; even though they may play sport [well], they conform to the ideals of a "real woman"' (2003, 388). This process of sports reporting also suggests that 'real' women, who possess the traditional physical and emotional characteristics, could not possibly compete on an even footing with the bigger, stronger, emotionless and independent males. Duncan and Messner suggest that because this form of sports reporting 'stereotypes female athletes as attractive and feminine, it shifts the attention away from their physical prowess to their looks, and minimizes the symbolic threat sportswomen pose to male hegemony' (1998, 182). Similarly, according to Halbert and Latimer, 'one of the most popular ways commentators label female athletes is by emphasising the female athlete's more vulnerable, emotional side. In sports, emotions and vulnerabilities are devalued...' (1994, 304).

Gender Marking

The final 'rule' as outlined by Wensing and Bruce (2003) addresses the process of 'gender marking'.⁶ Gender marking in the 'sports media occurs when the media identifies a sporting competition as a 'women's' sporting competition, or an athlete as a 'woman' athlete in order to designate the event/athlete as second-class' (Litchfield 2006, 81). In contrast, men's events are often classified as 'the/an event', and male athletes are simply designated as athletes and not gender marked. An example of this is in the naming of women's sporting competitions. The women's golf tour is labelled as the Ladies Professional Golf Association Tour, and the women's basketball tour is the Women's National Basketball Association, while the men's competitions in these sports are labelled as the Professional Golf Association and the National Basketball Association respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Kane and Maxwell (2011) have recently acted on the call to expand the boundaries of sports media research and ground such research in critical social theories. Therefore, critical feminist theory is used to challenge the deeply embedded assumptions and ideologies about women and sport that are played out in the media in the current study (Kane & Maxwell 2011; Birrell 2000; and Hoerber 2007). Kane and Maxwell suggest that 'scholars who study sport from a critical

⁵ Also see Bernstein (2002).

⁶ The process of gender marking is also investigated by Daddario and Wigley (2007) on their research of the 2004 Olympic Games.

theoretical lens examine whether sport organizations and structures privilege some groups over others (e.g., women vs. men)' (2011, 203). There are a number of inequitable power relationships in wider society where women are devalued and marginalized in a systematic manner. The media, and specifically sports media, are one of the most powerful institutions in shaping cultural beliefs in society, and therefore play a large part in this marginalization and subjugation. The current study is interested in how the print articles on females are presented, in particular, if the traditional characteristics, 'rules' (as outlined above) and language (that is used by the sports media) associated with female athletes and female sports are still prevalent.

Method

Data collection occurred through the searching of three specific newspapers, which included two state (New South Wales) and one national newspaper in Australia: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*. While the data collection for the large longitudinal study continues over a longer period of time, the collection for the current study was over two specific dates (9th and 11th August) in the years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. These particular dates were chosen as they provided a cross over in dates between the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games.⁷ Most of the newspaper articles were retrieved through the media search-engine website, *Factiva*, while other articles were retrieved and collected from the hard copies of the newspapers. This examination excludes editorial pieces and opinion polls.

In total, 1011 newspaper reports were analysed for the current research paper. Due to the nature of the media, many of these newspaper reports would often contain similar stories [e.g. reports of specific athletes that were successful]; however none of these articles were identical. The format used in the 'data collection, data analysis, data display (organising) and conclusion drawing and verification' was the interactive model in qualitative research as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994, 12). An extensive analysis of the newspaper articles was undertaken and emergent themes regarding the media's treatment of female athletes were compiled. Once articles related to these themes were identified, interpretation of the data was undertaken with special consideration given to the generated research question, which was: Do the sports media still use language that infantilizes, feminizes and gender marks female athletes and female sports? These three specific dominant themes/rules of Wensing and Bruce's (2003) study served as a formula for the historical construction and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity and femininity by the sports media.

Although much of the analysis is framed in qualitative research, there is also a quantitative component to the current research project in that the specific newspaper articles were numerically counted so that percentages could be developed on their content related to a number of different categories. These categories included: female athletes and female involvement in sport; male athletes and male involvement in sport; mixed gendered reports about sport; animal sports (including horse racing and greyhound racing); sport generally (i.e., gambling in sport); and Olympic Games generally (i.e., media rights for the Olympics, medal tallies).

Results

Out of the 1011 articles over the two specified dates of analysis in 2008-2012, the following table (Table 1) represents what was found quantitatively.

⁷ The dates of the 2008 Olympic Games were the 8th – 24th August. The dates for the 2012 Olympic Games were the 27th July – 12th August. The common dates that both of these Games were held over included the 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th of August. To exclude the closing ceremony in 2008 and the closing ceremony in 2012, three specific dates were left (9th, 10th and 11th August). Therefore, the 9th and 11th of August were chosen as the dates for data collection and to provide a brief insight into prevalence of women in the sports pages for the present study.

Table 1

Dates – 9 th and 11 th August	<i>The Australian</i> newspaper	<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i> and <i>Sun Herald</i> *	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> and <i>Sunday Telegraph</i> *	Totals	Female	Male	Animal sports
2008	79	88	89	256	13.5%	55%	7.5%
2009	28	82	122	232	5%	80%	9%
2010	64	54	66	184	4%	87%	14%
2011	55	37	70	162	3%	86%	5.5%
2012	63	60	54	177	15%	56%	7%
Totals	289 ~28.5%	321 ~31.5%	401 ~40%	1011	OY# – ~14.25% NOY# – ~4%	OY – ~55.5% NOY – ~84.5%	8.6%

*Denotes the Sunday (*Sun Herald* and *Sunday Telegraph*) or weekend (*The Australian*) edition of the newspaper. Note that there wasn't a 9th August, 2009 newspaper for *The Australian*, as there is no Sunday edition.

OY refers to the years that the Olympic Games were held and NOY refer to non-Olympic years.

The table above indicates the number of newspaper articles analysed for each nominated newspaper over the specified dates. Additionally, the percentages are outlined. The results indicate that the most newspaper articles were found in *The Daily Telegraph* (and *Sunday Telegraph*) and the least amount of sports media pieces were found in *The Australian*. While a number of other categories were analysed, such as 'mixed gendered reports', 'sport generally' and the 'Olympic Games generally', only the three main findings overall are included in the table, and therefore provided the three main categories for comparison.⁸ Overall, within the 1011 articles analysed, 698 articles focused on male sports and male athletes and 84 articles focused on female sports.

The number of articles devoted to female sports or female athletes over non-Olympic years was very low. These figures averaged out to be around 4% of all articles analysed. This can be compared to animal sports (specifically horse and greyhound racing) representing over double the amount of articles (average of 9.5%) in non-Olympic years. In comparison to the low rate of female focused articles, male sports and male athletes were the focus of the sports media articles around 84.5% of the time in all articles analysed in non-Olympic years.

As Table 1 illustrates, the number of articles devoted to women athletes and women's sports increased over the two Olympic years, compared to non-Olympic years. This result is perhaps not surprising considering that Australia has many high profile and successful women Olympians, particularly swimmers, such as Stephanie Rice, Libby Trickett and Leisel Jones. Also, in the 2008 and 2012 (Olympic) years, there were a total of 60 articles devoted to women's sports or women athletes. However, 59 of these were focused on women's involvement at the Olympic Games. Therefore, if the analysis was to exclude articles focusing on the Olympic Games, only one article during the specified dates in 2008 and 2012 in all three newspapers focused on women athletes or women's sports. In fact, in some newspapers in 2012, there were more articles on Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt than there were on all female athletes. However, there were still only around one quarter of the articles devoted to women during the Olympic years compared to those that were devoted to men. So, quantitatively, very little has changed over the last couple of decades. In effect, the brief insight into these years correlates with

⁸ During the Olympic years in 2008 and 2012, the sports media articles focusing on the Olympic Games in general represented around 20% of the total articles, however, for the purposes of comparison, this finding is not relevant to the current manuscript.

Messner and Cooky's (2010) suggestion, that is, the rates of females in the sports media have actually decreased over the last two decades.

In relation to the qualitative analysis, the sports media pieces on women athletes and women's sports were analysed using the three major themes of 'infantilizing', 'gender marking' and 'feminizing' (Bernstein 2002; Duncan and Messner 1998; Halbert and Latimer 1998; Litchfield 2006; Kane and Maxwell 2011; and Wensing and Bruce 2003). There are a several ways that women can be infantilized by the sports media, but the two most prominent ways are by using first names (not surnames) and calling women 'girls' (as opposed to 'women'), unlike the way that men are often called 'men' or identified by their surname (Wensing and Bruce, 2003). Several examples of infantilization were found in the articles analysed. Some of these examples included: 'A gutsy girl may lend a winning edge' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2008); 'BMX bias has Aussie girls just a little wary' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 9 August 2012); 'Bronze is just the start for Cate, declares coach' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 2008); and 'Sam closing on first singles title' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2009). The first three articles relate to women at the Olympic Games, while the final article refers to tennis player, Samantha Stosur. However, all four specifically refer to female athletes as girls or using only a first name. In direct comparison to the above examples, several articles were found relating to 'men' and used male athlete's surnames. One such example of this includes: 'Men on a Mission join charity rush for the beach' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2008).

Wensing and Bruce (2003) and Kane and Maxwell (2011) explain that the sports media generally use a language in the media to reinforce an appropriate level of femininity of women athletes. This focus is generally on stereotypical feminine physical characteristics. Again, examples of 'emphasizing appropriate femininity' were present in the articles analysed. In these articles, the use of terms such as 'grace', 'emotions' and 'poise' were used to describe some of the female athletes, particularly Olympians in traditionally female sports such as gymnastics and diving. A few examples include: 'Mitchell goes with grace, if not a medal' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2012); 'Mixed emotions for Mitchell after missing cut' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 2012); and 'Our Great Brit's poise under pressure' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 2012). The first two articles refer to Lauren Mitchell, an Australian gymnast and the final example refers to Australian diver and Olympic silver medallist, Brittany Broben. In comparison to these examples, many of the articles featuring male athletes or male sports were associated with strength and battle metaphors. Such examples include: 'Beau fires arrow into Dragons' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2008)⁹; and 'Melbourne storm the fortress' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 2008). Both of these articles focus on the teams from the National Rugby League (NRL) competition, where such references to strength, battles and conflicts are common. The difference in this process of sports reporting indicate that women and men require different characteristics to participate in sport, and women could not compete on an even footing with the bigger, stronger, emotionless and independent males (Wensing and Bruce, 2003).

Gender marking was also prominent in the sports media articles analysed. As Wensing and Bruce (2003) explain, the process of gender marking occurs when the media identify a sporting competition as a 'women's' competition or an athlete as a 'woman' athlete. In contrast, men's events are often classified without the marking of gender. Some examples of gender marking include: 'Gender injustice - Sport struggles with a woman like Caster' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 2010); 'Two women ignore the conflict of their nations' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 August 2008); and '...Los Angeles Women's Tennis Championships' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 2009). While, all of the references to women could either be replaced by the word 'athlete' or omitted completely, Wensing and Bruce (2003) suggest this is used in order to designate events and athletes as second class to male events and athletes. Again, in contrast,

⁹ This example was specifically chosen to show that male athletes are also referred to at times by their first names, therefore infantilizing of male athletes can also occur. However, the infantilizing of female athletes is more prevalent than the infantilization of male athletes in the sports media (Wensing and Bruce, 2003).

several examples in relation to men's sports are relevant to the marking of gender. Numerous articles related to male sports focus on the Australian Football League (AFL), the National Rugby League (NRL) and the Professional Golf Association (PGA). Unlike women's events and competitions, not one of these examples need to identify that these sporting competitions are male only competitions, as it is assumed as the standard.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

These findings only represent a brief insight into women on the sports pages between 2008 and 2012. There are, of course, a number of limitations to taking a 'snapshot' approach to research, such as focusing on a very narrow time-frame or date range. There would also be factors affecting the number of newspaper articles published during these time periods, not least being the timing of the Games, i.e., in 2008 it was towards the start of the Olympic Games and in 2012 it was towards the end. Another factor to consider is that August represents the latter stages of the two major football codes (NRL and AFL) seasons in Australia, so there is an enormous focus on these two male team sports during this period. However, at other times of the year, the sports pages are filled with other male sports, such as cricket between October and February. Another consideration was that the decrease in articles from 2008 to 2012 could be attributed to the not only the timing of the Games, but also to the rise of online media over the last four years. Coined by organizers as 'the first social media Olympics' (cited in Kwek 2012), there were more sources reporting on sport at the 2012 London Games than any Olympic Games previously. How this move towards social media exposure will play out for female athletes is yet to be seen. The increase in the use of online reporting around major sporting events, combined with the increase more generally of online sports media sites and online newspapers will be another factor that will need further investigation over the coming months and years.

While many (including many of the authors' sports journalism students) may pass these findings off as male journalists writing these articles and using this language, this is not entirely the case. Although males do write most of the sports journalism pieces and all of the newspapers analysed employ male sports editors, female sports journalists also use the language that incorporates infantilizing, feminizing, and gender marking of female athletes and female sports. This is also not to say that all male sports journalists write in a way that devalues women athletes. However, many sports journalists appear to carry 'traditional' baggage, in which the language used by sports journalists seems to be replicated time and time again. This is also prevalent with students studying sports journalism, where often their language is modeled on current sports journalists, so the 'traditions' continue over time.¹⁰

Although there are increases in print media coverage during the Olympic Games for women, these increases are still a long way behind the coverage that men (and in some cases, animal sports) are afforded. Also, such an increase is generally more of an exception than the rule. That is, these small increases are only seen during the coverage of a major sporting event, in which women make up nearly half of the participants. During non-Olympic years, the prevalence of women in the sports pages aligns with previous research, and in some cases, actually shows a decrease in coverage of women athletes and women's sports.

It may be suggested that looking at the same newspapers at a different date of the year once a wider analysis has been covered might provide a different story. However, based on previous research and the current culture of the sports media, this is highly unlikely. Therefore, although Wensing and Bruce (2003) explained these themes as the 'old' rules of media coverage nearly 10 years ago, it seems this many of these ways to subjugate and devalue women's sports and athletes are still prevalent in the sports pages today. This is evidenced in the present study by

¹⁰ Both of the authors teach into a 'sports journalism' course in Australia.

both the low percentage of articles that are written about women's sports and women athletes and by the use of language in many of these articles.¹¹

The problem with constantly using and reinforcing this type of language through infantilizing, feminizing and gender marking women athletes and women's sport is that power remains in the traditional places in sport, which in this case is male athletes and male sports (and predominately male journalists and male editors). Due to this, it is often difficult for women to be seen in any other way than infantilized, feminized and gender marked. Also, it may be pertinent to revisit Toohey's (1997) suggestion, some fifteen years ago, that ignoring female sport sends the message out to the wider community that women's sport is unimportant and unworthy of attention. This serves to reinforce and legitimize the patriarchal male sport model as hegemonic. Evidently, changes to these practices, while not impossible, remain a challenge.

¹¹ However, the increase in sports media articles does not necessarily equate to gender equality of sports reporting. This has been explored further by Toohey (1997, 27).

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