

An Olympic Mosaic

Multidisciplinary Research and Dissemination of Olympic Studies
CEO-UAB: 20 Years

Editors

Emilio Fernández Peña
Berta Cerezuela
Miquel Gómez Benosa
Chris Kennett
Miquel de Moragas Spà



Centre d'Estudis Olímpics
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona



Ajuntament de Barcelona

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Olympism and Gender Studies

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Media-related gender studies are traditional areas of research for the main universities and centres in the Western world. While the influential power of the media at every level of society makes them the perfect vehicle for perpetuating gender stereotypes, the media are also an excellent way of bringing about social change. In today's context of globalisation, there is an even greater need to understand the dynamics of the various cultural industries connected with gender studies and women's studies.

Research of this kind began to gain momentum from the 1970s onwards, encompassing several disciplines: anthropology, sociology, psychology and also the field of communications. Gender, as an object of analysis, refers to an idea of relationships: of women in relation to their surroundings, and also in comparison to men. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the role of women from a position of union, rather than of isolation in the world, disconnected from the outside. It is impossible to understand the role that women now have in the new social setting if they are disassociated from the world of men. Men and women are integral parts of the same system, of the same reality. It is a reality in which the media have become transmitters of the values and thinking that are present in society, but they also generate new kinds of relationships. For this reason, studies linking the gender perspective with the media have grown in importance.

In the particular case of CEO-UAB, the tendency towards studies that combine aspects of gender and the media has been consolidated in the last decade. Thus, CEO-UAB has embarked on a new area of study based on the subject of gender and the media in the sports sector, and specifically in the Olympic Games. In this respect, it is only reasonable to think that, in a society where the term 'equality' has become a regulatory tool for minimising the differences (in our case with specific regard to the treatment and presence of female athletes in the media), institutions such as CEO-UAB should embrace this concern at the beginning of this decade and find ways to respond to it through various studies.

In a cross-national context, at the end of the 1980s, the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) began work to identify the main needs arising in female sports. The work carried out by this working group gathered pace following the Brighton Declaration³⁷ in 1994, when the IWG set the foundations for future actions with the ultimate goal of eradicating any existing inequality between male and female sports events.

37. The first International Conference on Women and Sport was held from 5-8 May 1994 in Brighton, United Kingdom. It was organised by the British Sports Council and was supported by the IOC. The Declaration was endorsed by 280 delegates from 82 countries, made up of representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations, Olympic Committees, national and international sports federations, and also education and research institutes. The Brighton Declaration set out measures designed to increase the involvement of women in sport at all levels and in all functions and roles.

Today, the IWG continues its work of promoting female sport and of achieving gender equality in sport. In this respect, it is worthy of note that five international conferences have been held since 1994 (the fifth was held in May 2010 in Sydney, Australia). A particular example of its work is that of Anita Defrantz from the United States, who was vice president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) from 1997 to 2001, and is one of the founders of the International Working Group on Women and Sport. This athlete is currently the chairperson of the IOC's Women and Sport Commission, where she has established guidelines for the different National Olympic Committees to follow, setting the minimum level of representation by women in all the structures at 25%.

In recent decades, moreover, a surge in the number of media-related gender studies has coincided with the highest coverage of sport in the media ecosystem. It could be said that sport has undergone a change of venue, from the sports field to the media, and has become a major media spectacle. Over that same period, the media have undergone a deep-rooted transformation, with the advent of private television broadcasters, the emergence of new channels and an increase in broadcast rights. Following this, technological, economic and cultural globalisation has directly resulted in the emergence of a major audiovisual sports industry. International studies along these lines of research have been carried out by Real 1985, Kang, MacAloon and DaMata 1988, Whannel 1992 and, more recently, Wenner 2000, Boyle and Haynes 2004 and Rowe 2004. On a national level, noteworthy contributions have been made by Moragas 1992, 1994 and 2001 and Moragas et al. 1996, who is one of the pioneers in research on the relationship between the Olympic Games and sport in general with culture and the media.

With regard to the specific imbrications between gender and sport, at the end of the 1970s, feminist theories began to severely criticise the fact that, in sport, the biological and physical differences between the genders mirrored the social and cultural interpretations of the male and female roles (Bernstein 2002). Sport is viewed as a sexist institution with a clear masculine orientation which gives men priority over women (Sabo and Jansen 1992). A duality exists, which at the same time sets up a comparison between 'male sport' and 'female sport' (Kane 1995). From this perspective, 'female sports' take place within a male-dominated sports world, in which they only play a part (Theberge 1997). This means that sport, on a global scale, in terms of a social institution, can be considered to be the greatest perpetrator of male superiority over women (Duncan and Hasbrooh 1988).

From a realistic point of view, it is true that women develop the same interest in doing sport as men. The difference lies in the fact that female athletes tend to seek to gain mastery of the sport and personal improvement, whereas men need to compete and their personal goal is to do well against an opponent (Antúnez 2001). Historically, it is also true to say that sport has been less important in women's lives than in men's, but it is also the case that the growth of women's involvement in sport in recent years has brought about the most significant and notable change of the 20th century in the sports structure (Coakley 2003). When modern sport began, women only played a few sports that were widely considered to be gender appropriate, such as swimming or tennis. With the passage of time and as incipient feminism began to effect changes, particularly after World War II, women were inspired to take part in other sports that were not considered to be female sports.

This widespread involvement of women in sporting life has yet to be reflected in the world of media. The media display a tendency to minimise the participation of women in sport. Some data reveal extremely surprising facts. For example, 1992 was the first year when television sports broadcasts involving women outnumbered those of sports involving animals (Lopiano 2002). There are many studies that quantify the participation of women compared with men in sport, but the resulting data coincide in that it barely reaches 5% (Lumpkin and Williams 1991; Tuggle 1997 and 2004; Bernstein 2002; Duncan et al. 2000 and 2005; Billings, Angelini and Eastman 2005; Markula 2009).

The Olympic Games, however, is a world apart, where in recent times, the presence of female athletes has been normalised at an equal level to that of male athletes. However, in the first modern Olympic Games held in Athens in 1896, the participation of women was completely vetoed. Three decades later, at the Amsterdam 1928 Games, the female contingent reached 10% of the total and, finally, in the latest Olympic Games of the modern era, Beijing 2008, this figure reached 42% (IOC 2008).

In this respect, Billings (2008) carried out a study on the coverage of female presence in six different editions of the Olympic Games and found that 48.1% of all broadcasts were of women participating in them, and the percentage was even higher in the Atlanta 1996 Games (promoted by the American NBC television network as the 'Women's Games'). However, this author goes on to clarify certain aspects, such as the fact that coverage during the Olympic Games is always influenced by a number of issues, which go beyond strict matters of sport, whether it be following national athletes, the athletes' media profile, or the popularity of each sporting event. This could go a long way to explaining why there is such a difference between the coverage of female sports in the Olympic Games and in sports events outside the Games. In addition to Billings' results, Markula (2009) also indicates the effectiveness that the gender equality policies introduced by the IOC seem to have had, since not only has the number of female athletes participating in the Games increased, but so has the number of sports in which they participate, giving the female athlete greater visibility.

Another approach to studies on gender, sport and the media is a qualitative analysis of broadcasts, to verify the patterns used in images and texts by narrators and commentators. Thus, voluntarily or involuntarily, certain stereotypes can be reinforced, such as men's physical and emotional dominance over women (Kinnick 1998). Another example of this is presented in the work by Eastman and Billings (1999), in which, after analysing three editions of the Olympic Games (the Winter Games of Lillehammer 1994 and Nagano 1998 and the Summer Games of Atlanta 1996), they reached the conclusion that commentators were more likely discuss the physical attractiveness of female athletes on the one hand, and the strength and stamina of male athletes on the other. It was also reported that women could receive more media attention if they participated in sports that put their charm, charisma or beauty on show (Banet-Weiser 2002; Koivula 2001; Parsons and Betz 2001). This is a clear reference to the fact that female beauty, as an attribute, receives a lot of attention in sport, since it is perceived as a value by the public through the media's influence over the public (Bisell 2010). Continuing along these lines, another study by Billings (2003) on the 1999 U.S. Tennis Open showed that although women received 59% of total television coverage, the amount of praise and criticism directed at them was lower than that for men. Furthermore, female tennis players received three times as many comments related to their physical attractiveness as men.

As already mentioned, common patterns can be observed in the coverage of female sports in the media. One example of this is gender marking. In these cases, a female sports event becomes a kind of version of the male event, where women are subject to accepting the rules created for the 'official' version, that is to say the men's (Theberge 1997). Another of the most common patterns is the infantilization of female athletes, when they are repeatedly referred to as 'girls' or variants of the same (Messner et al. 1993). The last of the patterns referred to is sexualisation. In the media, when female athletes are referred to as sexual objects or are attributed roles that have no bearing on the sport (mother or wife); this contributes to sexism in society. An example of this last pattern is demonstrated in two studies carried out in the United States (Daddario 1992; Fink and Kensicki 2002), where the magazines *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Kids* were analysed. In both cases, it was shown that most of the photographs of female athletes looked like models posing and, paradoxically, they were not shown playing any sport.

Studies on gender and the media instigated by CEO-UAB

At the beginning of this chapter, we indicated that a noteworthy aspect of the line of research described in this article is that it combines three aspects, each of which has generated, and no doubt will continue to generate, a large amount of scientific investigation: namely, studies on sport, media and gender. CEO-UAB has instigated a series of research projects as a result of merging these three subject areas, which are co-funded by various Catalan public organisations.

In this respect, we would like to highlight two studies. The first of these is *Identificación de las deportistas de élite con los estereotipos sociales que transmiten los medios de comunicación (Elite female athletes' identification with the social stereotypes portrayed in the media)* (Lallana and Kennett 2007). The Sant Cugat High Performance Centre collaborated in the re-

search and acted as a test laboratory, as the majority of the subjects in the survey attended the facility. This project was carried out using the research by Antúnez (2001) as a point of reference. According to Antúnez, women's relationship with female body image and with sport is determined by pre-established stereotypes. Despite the advancement of women in society, these stereotypes are still prevalent in the 21st century. This means that female identity and women's roles are dependent on how they 'see themselves' as women. According to this author, women develop the same interest in sport as men. The difference lies in the fact that female athletes tend to seek mastery of the sport and personal improvement, whereas men need to compete and their personal goal is to do well against an opponent. It is, however, a mistake to make broad generalisations about men and women. Every individual should be considered unique, with their own ambitions and particular values.

This research was divided into two phases, the first of which was a quantitative analysis, consisting of a survey of 150 elite athletes at the Sant Cugat High Performance Centre (CAR Sant Cugat), which was designed to establish some basic profiles. The second part of the project was based on the results obtained from the surveys and, together with in-depth personal interviews conducted with male and female athletes from different sports, the results obtained were compared with each individual's perception of themselves. The most noteworthy result was regarding the general idea of how athletes, both men and women, saw themselves reflected in society. In this respect, athletes, regardless of their gender and their sport, considered that being labelled as an elite athlete was a kind of differentiating status that set them apart from the rest of society.

The second of the studies instigated by CEO-UAB that we would like to highlight is *La presencia del deporte femenino en la televisión pública catalana: TV3 y C33 como caso de estudio en el año 2008 (The presence of female sport on Catalan public television: TV3 and C33 as a case study in 2008)* (Ramajo et al. 2009). This study seeks to answer a series of questions about how female sport is treated (quantitative and qualitative aspects) by the Catalan public television stations. To this end, a comparative analysis of television coverage of female and male sport on TV3 and C33 was carried out. The results were very disheartening: female sport accounted for only 2.6% of sports coverage on Catalan public television. A total of 2.3 hours of female sport were broadcast out of a total of 672 hours analysed. A further corroborating factor in the invisibility of female sport is the time of the broadcasts. In the case of TV3, female sport barely received any coverage at prime time, accounting for only 0.4%. The majority of female sports was broadcast very late at night (19.8%), and then in the morning and at midday. Finally, news programmes devoted hardly any coverage to female sports (0.5% of the total analysed). It is, therefore, necessary not only to quantify the presence of sports on television, but also to evaluate their presence, such as the time of day of the broadcasts and how they are dealt with in the news.

It is certainly true that, in light of these results, there could be a link between a greater presence of male sports on Catalan public television (and, by extrapolation, in the media as a whole) and the fact that those sports are of greater interest to the public and receive greater media coverage. Our aim is not to start a debate about the greater or lesser presence of minority sports in the media. The issue is to find out how these two visions of sport on television can coexist: on the one hand, major sports with high audience figures (male participation), and on the other hand, the space that female sports in the media should occupy. An example of this is provided by TV3 where, in the three sports receiving most coverage (football, motor racing and basketball), which accounted for 85% of all sports coverage, the presence of women is as low as 0.11%. This fact corroborates the dynamic that female sports face an uphill battle to gain pre-eminence, both in quantity and quality, in the television channel's programming.

Throughout this chapter, we have introduced the value of qualitative analysis in order to understand the relationship between female sport and television. Along these lines, in the study on the presence of female sport on Catalan public television, it can be observed that those female athletes featured on the news represent minority sports. This implies that a female athlete is placed at a lower level than a male athlete. It gives the impression that in the world of sport, men participate in the 'top league' whereas women belong in a 'lower league'. Reality demonstrates that men's and women's roles are still very different.

Conclusions

The difficult relationship that exists between gender, sport and the media is a situation that, as researchers, we cannot ignore. In spite of advances in the search for equality, and the efforts of academic establishments to highlight these inequalities, with the exception of a few particular occasions (the Olympic Games has already been named as an atypical event), the media continue to fail in treating male and female athletes equally. These differences, which are both quantitative and qualitative, perpetuate the invisibility of female athletes in the public eye, when in reality, at grassroots level, women are as involved in sport as men.

The aim of this chapter is not to provide any hard and fast rules for minimising these differences, but rather to reflect on their significance. For this purpose, the tradition of gender, sports and media studies has become a useful tool. Through observation, it has been found that the situation of female athletes in the media has been overlooked in recent years. Everything would suggest that, in the short term, this situation will not change.

Despite the quotas set by international organisations and institutions, and the promotion of female sport, male-dominated sporting events continue to be the media's bread and butter.

History has shown that this is a difficult barrier to break through. However, perpetuating this situation would go against the dynamics of today's society. The issue rests on deciding what limits can be set. In other words, in relation to the media's treatment of female sport in terms of both quality and quantity of coverage, we need to decide at what point it is considered satisfactory and at what point it is not.

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