Newspaper Coverage of Women’s Sports During the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games: Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy

Laura Capranica, Carlo Minganti, Veronique Billat, Signe Hanghøj, Maria Francesca Piacentini, Elke Cumps, and Romain Meeusen

In general, women are well represented among sport participants and sport audiences but not in the media. Data show that women’s sport is greatly underreported and trivialized in newspapers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to measure press coverage during the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in the largest circulating Belgian, Danish, French, and Italian daily newspapers by: (a) number of articles, (b) size, (c) page placement, (d) accompanying photographs, and (e) photograph size. For each sport covered, the athletes’ nationality and the gender were recorded. Compared to the 1996 Atlanta Games, there was an increase of 326 female athletes (+4%), and women competed in 25 sports and 132 events (+4%) of the total 300 events. Although only 29.3% of the articles and 38% of photos were on women’s sports, the newspaper coverage was similar to the distribution of participating athletes and events. No significant gender differences were found with respect to article size, page placement, accompanying photographs, or photograph size. The most covered sport was track and field, independent of national achievement. Other sports received different coverage in relation to national expectations, achievement, and participation. In conclusion, there was a trend to overcome gender inequalities in media coverage during the Olympic Games, which may be due to the International Olympic Committee’s actions to promote increased participation of women in sport activities and to publicize their achievements. Moreover, during the Olympic Games, a nationalistic fervor might affect the equality of gender coverage.

Keywords: gender sport coverage, Olympics

Because sport has been at the forefront of communication technologies, considerable attention has been paid to the relationship of sport, media, and gender in contemporary culture (Tomlinson, 2002). While the sport-media complex is a “globalized” and “globalizing” phenomenon, Law, Harvey, and Kemp (2002) showed that its structure is quite uneven and reasonably decentralized. Thus, to grasp important features of the gender mainstreaming in the global-local sport-media complex, it is necessary to analyze cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparisons.

The overwhelming media coverage of men’s sport creates, reflects, and refracts the hegemonic masculinity, especially in everyday sport reporting (Daddario, 1994; Donaldson, 1993; Pedersen, 2002). Usually, media tend to undermine and trivialize women’s accomplishments and reinforce the idea that sports pertain to men. In fact, data show that women’s sport is greatly underreported in newspapers (Bishop, 2003; Crossman, Hyslop, & Gutrie, 1994; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1991; Jefferson Lensky, 1998; Kane & Parks, 1992; Lee, 1992; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003; Pedersen, 2002; Pirinen, 1995; Vincent, 1995; van der Putten, 2002; Wann, 1996).

Submitted: October 31, 2002
Accepted: September 19, 2004

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Inmold, Masemann, & Johnson, 2002) and television (Alexander, 1994a, 1994b; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1990; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1994; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993). The ideology of hegemonic masculinity powerfully influenced the “invisibility” of female athletes so that they rarely enter the national or global marketplaces as role models in sport. Analyzing women’s sport in coverage Sport Illustrated over 16 years (1980–96), Bishop (2003) showed that the mass media do not reflect the growing popularity of women’s sport, and they tend to “symbolically annihilate” the female athletes. The amount of media coverage is crucial for visibility of the female athlete, but it doesn’t necessarily represent women’s achievement in sports equally, especially when nontask relevant commentaries are made (Bernstein, 2002). When women’s sports are covered, textual analyses of the commentaries show that the media use several techniques to subordinate the female athletes. Wensing & Bruce (2003) identified five “rules” that frame female athletes into the culturally prescribed gender characteristics: (a) gender marking, when an event is referred as a woman’s event (i.e., inferior to the men’s sport); (b) compulsory heterosexuality, when a female athlete is represented in her heterosexual role (i.e., sexual symbol, mother, wife, girlfriend, daughter); (c) emphasis on appropriate femininity, when the focus is on stereotyped femininity (i.e., fragility, emotional instability, dependency, passivity); (d) infantilization, when a female athlete is represented with diminishing adjectives (i.e., girl, baby); and (e) non-sport related reports (i.e., when the focus is on the athlete’s personal life as opposed to her athletic abilities). Thus, a linguistic practice reinforces the existing gender-based stereotypes consonant to the ideology of patriarchy.

In the literature (Bishop, 2003; Duncan et al., 1994; MacNeill, 1994; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Stevenson, 2002; Theberge & Cronk, 1994), the limited and biased coverage of women’s sport has been also attributed to the scarce interest of the male audience. However, data reported an impressive 40% share of female in-arena audience (Andrews, 1998) and female television audience during the 1996 and 2000 Summer Olympic Games (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Lopian, 2000). Furthermore, the male television audience showed a significant interest in women’s sporting events (Capranica & Aversa, 2002). Besides television, newspapers not only play a relevant role in promoting and delivering different sports to local consumers, but they can also represent local resistance to heavily gendered sports (Stevenson, 2002). Unfortunately, male journalists dominate sport commentaries (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Messner et al., 2003), and they strongly support the hegemonic masculinity contributing to the idea that sports are a man’s world.

In the past decade, several national and international actions have fostered gender mainstreaming in society. This is also mirrored in sport (Title IX, 1972; European Parliament, 2003; European Women and Sport, 2000, 2004; International Olympic Committee, 2000, 2004a; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2000) where gender-equal democracy has been developed to recognize women’s sport, reduce existing economic, social, and cultural inequities between male and female athletes, and change attitudes of those who decide what others should see, hear, and read in the media. Although transnational forces contribute to the development of good practice in women’s sport through “recommendations,” “calls upon actions,” “encouragements,” and “targets,” gender discrimination persists at the local level. Nations maintain their autonomous and distinct control of sport and negotiate the global-local tradeoff with international political bodies. Furthermore, in response to the number of women participating in organized and competitive sport, recent locally biased commentaries have opposed gender mainstreaming, claiming that the shifting landscape in gender politics reversed patriarchy so that girl’s inclusion in sport discriminates against boys (Cole, 2005).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), which organizes the Olympic Games, has implemented measures to improve overall participation of women in sport (IOC, 2004a). It promoted modification of the Olympic Charter of equal opportunities for men and women, created the IOC Women and Sport Working Group, organized the IOC world conferences on women and sports (Lausanne, 1996, Paris, 2000, Marrakech, 2004), established the Women and Sport Trophy and the Women and Sport Program of Olympic Solidarity. IOC also established targets for the National Olympic Committees to increase the participation of female athletes and the number of women serving on their executive boards (Year 2000 = 10%; Year 2005 = 20%) and promoted higher international recognition of women (a woman became IOC vice president for the first time in 1997). The final report of the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy of the Loughborough University study (2004b) pointed out the clear and positive impact of IOC strategies on the portion of women in the National Olympic Executive Committees. In fact, both the quantitative and qualitative analysis showed a rapid increase of women in such positions immediately after the announcement of the IOC targets (National Olympic Committees with women by year: 1998, N = 98; 2000, N = 130 representing a 33% increase from 1998; 2002, N = 143, representing a 48% increase from 1998). Finally, the IOC strongly recommends that sport communities and media organizations work together to ensure a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of women in sport (IOC, 2000, 2004a). At present, the Olympic Games are im-
important in publicizing women’s sport achievements. In fact, the spatial distribution of women’s participation and success in the Olympic Games is generally noncoincidental. According to gender mainstreaming, the Olympic women’s program was subject to consistent development, with an increase in the number of women’s events (Atlanta 1996 = 40%; Sydney 2000 = 44%), the number of female athletes in the Games (female participation: Atlanta 1996 = 34%; Sydney 2000 = 38%), and a better positioning of female events within the Olympic program.

The Olympic Games also function as a path-breaking event for newspaper coverage of women’s sport (Capranica, Aversa, & Franzen, 2001; Vincent et al., 2002) when compared to the massive underrepresentation of non-Olympic events (Duncan et al., 1990, 1994; Pedersen, 2002). However, greater coverage of women’s sport during the Olympic Games might be due both to strategies to promote gender equity in sport coverage (IOC, 2000) and the strong nationalistic fervor ignited by the Olympics (Vincent et al., 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Although the Olympic Games are a global multi-sport event and largely contribute to the internationalization of the sport culture, the participation of athletes in national teams and the phenomenon of boycott affirm the defensive-cultural nationalism. In sports, the “Nation” is represented through ceremonials (i.e., national flags, national anthems, national uniforms for athletes, and involvement of national politicians). Thus, female and male Olympic athletes are central to communicating a national image and identity, representing nations rather than themselves (Lippe, 2002; Stevenson, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Analyzing Australian written commentaries on track star Cathy Freeman during the 2004 Olympic Games, Wensing and Bruce (2003) claimed that much of the reporting deviated from the conventional gendered “rules,” because her positioning as a symbol of national unity appeared incompatible with any “classical” construction of a female athlete. The authors also pointed out a need to analyze sport, media, and nationalism that include the gender aspect.

The unique format of the quadrennial Olympic Games can represent a tremendous opportunity to investigate the largely unexplored relationship of gender in regional sport cultures (Lippe, 2002; Vincent et al., 2002). Both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the coverage have been studied in several countries. However, it is difficult to compare the qualitative aspects of women’s sport coverage, because an attribute considered positive in one cultural environment may be negative in another. The lack of valid qualitative indicators in cross-cultural studies require of content analyses of print media content to draw inferences about the communication system (Vincent et al., 2002).

Studying European countries, relative to cross-cultural gender studies, could be of some interest. In fact, the European Union, established in 1957, is made up of 25 member states, with distinct national identities, different languages, cultures, economies, currencies, and sport habits. In some countries, distinct communities coexist (e.g., French and Flemish communities in Belgium), with separated social and cultural lives (e.g., Belgian French and Belgian Flemish economies, administration, and education). On the other hand, several countries share regional structures (e.g., Northern, Central, and Mediterranean countries) with a common history, culture, geography, climate, social structure (e.g., Eastern, Western countries), and religion (e.g., Catholic, Protestant countries). In particular, a dominant patriarchal society is present in the Mediterranean countries where a small percentage of women hold socioeconomical and decision-making positions (e.g., female members of the national parliaments: Spain = 28%, Portugal = 19%, France = 11%, Italy = 10%, Greece = 9%) with respect to Central European countries (e.g., female members of the national parliaments: The Netherlands = 36%, Germany = 31%, Austria = 27%, Belgium = 23%, United Kingdom = 18%, Ireland = 12%) and Northern countries (e.g., female members of the national parliaments: Sweden = 42%, Denmark = 38%, Finland = 37%). As expected, the patriarchal Mediterranean countries also show smaller percentages of women participating in sports (COMPASS, 1999; Lanfranchi, 2002).

Based on previous research on media coverage of gender in sport, the aim of the present study was to examine the print media coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy and do a cross-cultural analysis of women’s sport coverage. Five general research questions guided this study: (a) Do female athletes receive disproportionately less written coverage (number and size of articles) than their male counterparts? (b) Do female athletes receive disproportionately less image coverage (number and size of photographs) than their male counterparts? (c) Do female athletes receive disproportionately less prominent written and image coverage than their male counterparts, also in relation to their sport achievement? (d) Does national identification influence gender sport coverage? (e) Does the readers’ gender influence the amount of women’s sport coverage?

Method

Because newspapers might have different social and regional reader targets (Audipress, 2000), daily newspapers with high circulation from four European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy) were considered (Audipress, 2000; World Association of Newspapers, 2004). The following were selected: Belgium, French lan-
The number of articles was counted. In general, if an article contained prose, it was considered a story. Photo captions weren’t considered stories. Columns addressing multiple topics and summary round-ups were treated as single stories. Teams’ standing charts, statistical leader lists, box scores, and similar listings weren’t taken into consideration.

2. The column length and breadth a story, including its title, were measured and multiplied. Blank spaces were not measured, and no adjustments were made for differences in typeface size. Thus, this variable measured the size of the article and indicated its importance.

3. The placement of the article (e.g., the page on which the article began) was recorded.

4. The number of photographs was counted.

5. The size of the picture was measured. Pictures of columnists and photographs in advertisements were not considered. Photographs depicting one or more male athletes as the primary subject of the picture were counted as men’s photographs, regardless of spectators or others in the background. The same procedure was adopted for women’s photographs.

For gender comparison, stories and photographs were classified into three categories: men only (M), women only (F), and mixed men and women (MF). The MF category included articles and photographs on both men’s and women’s sports. Also, stories and photographs were labeled according to the athletes’ nationality. For example, if a Belgian athlete was the subject of an article published in a Belgian newspaper, that article was labeled “National” in the Belgian data, because he or she was a member of the Belgian national team. Instead, if the same Belgian athlete was the subject of articles published in the Danish, French, or Italian newspapers, the articles were labeled “International” in the Danish, French, and Italian data.

A preliminary analysis investigated the last two research questions (i.e., national identification and influence of readers’ gender). National identification in relation to gendered sports coverage was tested using the Belgian model. Belgium emerged as a nation state in 1830, with two coexisting French and Flemish language communities that polarized political, social, and cultural life. Furthermore, Belgian sport remains an area of dispute between the communities (Vanreusel, Renson, & Tolleneer, 2000). Thus, we compared the three Belgian French language and the three Belgian Flemish language newspapers. We tested the influence of reader gender on the amount of coverage of women in sport using the Italian model. Italian national newspapers have male and female readers, while Italian sport newspapers have almost exclusively male readers (Audipress, 2000). To test this research question, three newspapers were included in each Italian subgroup (national and sport newspapers). When no significant difference was found between the studied variables for the national subgroups, data were pooled together for further statistical analysis. A .05 level of significance was selected for Chi-square analysis and analysis of variance to test for significant differences of percentages or sizes, respectively.

Results

Participation to the Olympic Games

A total of 10,382 athletes participated in the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney (6,435 men: 62%; and 3,947 women: 38%). Compared to the 1996 Atlanta Games, there were 326 more female athletes (+4%). Women competed in 25 sports and 132 (44%) of the total 300 events. Table 1 shows the national participation and achievement of the Belgian, Danish, French, and Italian teams. Although the numbers showed a higher participation of Italian and French female athletes, relative to the overall Olympic participation, the Belgian and Danish teams showed higher percentages of female athletes (+8% and +7%, respectively), while there were lower percentages for the French (-1%) and Italian (-10%) teams. Compared to the previous 1996 Atlanta Games, the percentage of female athletes included in the national delegations showed a 13% increase for the Belgian team (2000: 46%; 1996: 33%) a 3% increase for the French team (2000: 37%; 1996: 34%), a 10% decrease for the Danish team (2000: 45%; 1996: 55%), and a 2% decrease for the Italian team (2000: 28%; 1996: 30%).
National Identification

Preliminary analysis of the effects of national identification on gender sport coverage of the Olympic Games compared the number and size of articles and photos allotted to female and male athletes in three Belgian French language and three Belgian Flemish language newspapers. Regarding written coverage, the Flemish newspapers showed a significantly higher, \( F(1, 2457) = 44.92, p < .0001 \), coverage of Olympic events with respect to their French counterparts. However, no significant difference was found for both articles and photos between the gendered coverage and its interaction with the two language subgroups. Thus, the Belgian data were pooled for further statistics.

Gender Coverage in Relation to Reader Gender

Sport coverage in relation to reader gender was investigated by comparing the number and size of articles and photos allotted to female and male athletes in three Italian national newspapers with male and female readers and three Italian sport newspapers with almost exclusively male readers (see Figure 1). A significant gender difference was found only for the number of articles (\( \chi^2 = 41.86, p < .0001 \)), with national newspapers showing a higher proportion of gendered articles than sport newspapers, and the size of the articles, \( F(2, 1996) = 4.92, p < .01 \), with national newspapers allotting similar space to all three categories, while the sport newspapers allotted larger areas to the MF category. Thus, only the data relating to the photos in Italian newspapers were pooled together for further statistics.

Women’s Sport Coverage in Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy

Women’s sport coverage was ascertained comparing the number and size of articles on female and male athletes. The number of articles was used as the actual frequency. Both the observed frequencies (number of articles) and expected frequencies (percentages of female participation in the Games) were used for statistical comparisons. From the day before the opening ceremony to the day after the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, the 20 newspapers under consideration published 5,557 stories; 29.3% of all the articles were on women’s sports, 51.8% were on men’s sports, and 18.9% fell into the mixed category (see Table 2). Comparing the female to the male category only, the percentage of distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Coverage in Relation to Reader Gender</th>
<th>Women Participation</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olympic</td>
<td>3,947</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Coverage in Relation to Reader Gender</th>
<th>Men Participation</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olympic</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Female and male athletes: Olympic participation, national participation and national achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Coverage in Relation to Reader Gender</th>
<th>Women Medals</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Sport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgian</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Italian national and sport newspapers: Number of published articles (a) and means and standard deviations of their area (b).

* \( = p < 0.05 \)
was 36.1% and 63.9%, respectively. Although significant differences were found for the number of articles relative to gender ($\chi^2 = 298.5; p < .001$), the distribution of newspaper reports was similar ($p = .67$) to the distribution of participating athletes and events (see Table 3).

When the size of articles was considered (see Figure 2), higher values were found for the mixed MF category (234 ± 285 cm²), as compared to the M (212 ± 217 cm²) and F (197 ± 207 cm²) categories. Significant differences were found among genders, $F(2, 5,556) = 9.10; p < .001$, countries, $F(4, 5,556) = 180.56; p < .001$, and the interaction between genders and countries, $F(8, 5,556) = 3.65; p < .001$. However, no significant difference was shown for genders when the article size was compared only to male and female subgroups. Instead, significant differences were found among countries, $F(4, 4,506) = 363.69; p < .001$, and for the interaction between genders and countries, $F(4, 4,506) = 3.20; p < .05$.

The number and size of photos allotted to female and male athletes were used to verify whether female athletes received different visual coverage in the selected newspapers. The number of photos was used as the actual frequency. Both the observed frequencies (number of photos) and expected frequencies (percentages of female participation in the Games) were used for statistical comparisons. From the day before the opening ceremony to the day after the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, the 20 newspapers considered published 3,011 photos; 33.5% of all the photos were on women’s sports, 56.2% were on men’s sports, and

| Table 2. Number of articles and photos published in the national newspapers and percentages of gender coverage |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Newspapers                                            | $N$             | Articles        |                   |
|                                                       | Women (%)       | Men (%)         | Men/Women (%)    |
| Belgian ($n = 6$)                                     | 2,460           | 32.0            | 45.0             | 23.0            |
| Danish ($n = 5$)                                      | 708             | 37.4            | 51.0             | 11.6            |
| French ($n = 3$)                                      | 387             | 34.2            | 63.0             | 2.8             |
| Italian national ($n = 3$)                            | 472             | 28.0            | 62.3             | 9.7             |
| Italian sport ($n = 3$)                               | 472             | 20.3            | 57.1             | 22.6            |
|                                                      | 1,201           | 37.7            | 50.0             | 12.3            |
|                                                      | 360             | 48.6            | 48.3             | 1.9             |
|                                                      | 310             | 34.8            | 63.3             | 1.9             |
|                                                      | 1,140           | 24.0            | 63.2             | 12.1            |

| Table 3. Percentages of national newspaper coverage and national athletes participating |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gender                                                | Belgium         | Denmark         | France          | Italy           |
|                                                       | $C$             | $A$             | $C$             | $A$             |
|                                                       | $C$             | $A$             | $C$             | $A$             |
|                                                       | $C$             | $N$             | $C$             | $S$             | $A$             |
| Women                                                 | 42              | 46              | 42              | 45              | 35              | 37              | 26              | 31              | 28              |
| Men                                                    | 58              | 54              | 58              | 55              | 65              | 63              | 74              | 69              | 72              |

Note. $C =$ national newspaper coverage; $A =$ national athletes participating; $C-N =$ Italian coverage, national newspapers; $C-S =$ Italian coverage, sport newspapers.

| Figure 2. Means and standard deviations of the area of articles published relative to male and female sports in four European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy). |
10.3% fell into the mixed category (see Table 2). The gender distribution of the number of photos was comparable \((p = .70)\) to the distribution of the participating female and male athletes. When the size of photos was considered (see Table 4), higher values were found for the F category \((189 \pm 196 \text{ cm}^2)\) compared to the mixed MF \((182 \pm 179 \text{ cm}^2)\) and M \((176 \pm 204 \text{ cm}^2)\) categories, and significant differences were found only among countries, \(F(3, 3,009) = 68.70; p < .001\).

Finally, the placement of articles and photos relating to the athletic achievement of female and male participants was investigated. Independently from gender and national medal winners, the most covered sport was track and field (Belgium: 20.9%; Denmark: 15.7%; France: 30.5%; Italy: 15.2%). On the other hand, national differences among countries in the percentage of other sports coverage are in relation to the medals won (see Figure 3). Track and field was also the most photographed sport (Belgium: 24.6%; Denmark: 17.8%; France: 33.7%; Italy: 16.8%), independent of gender and national medal winners. Of all the stories, 341 began on the front page; 38.4% were on women’s sport, 37.3% on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>MF</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M = male athletes; F = female athletes; MF = male and female athletes.

Figure 3. National (a = Belgium; b = Denmark; c = France; d = Italy) percentages of the most covered sports [Figure 3 cont. on p. 219].
men's sport, and 24.3% on both men and women. With respect to gender participation, the front-page placement did not show any significant difference.

Discussion

The overall print media coverage of sport is strongly affected by the masculine hegemony of professional men’s sports (Alexander, 1994b; Baden, 1983; Blinde, Green-dorfer, & Shanker, 1991; Crossman, Hyslop, & Gutrie, 1994; Duncan et al., 1991; Kane & Parks, 1992), and regional differences depend on local sport habits and preferences. On the other hand, every 4 years the modern Olympic Games offer the world almost simultaneous visibility of several sports, reconfiguring social, cultural, and regional differences in sport coverage and allowing cross-cultural comparisons (Vincent et al., 2002). The global-local aspects of the Games should not be underestimated, as they might represent a key factor to transcending the boundaries of nation states. In fact, the results from

Figure 3. [cont. from p. 218] National (a = Belgium; b = Denmark; c = France; d = Italy) percentages of the most covered sports.
the international study, "Women, Leadership and the Olympic Movement" (2004b), provided evidence of the importance of the IOC in addressing inequitable representation of sport participation and leadership.

Supply-and-demand has been considered crucial in prompting publishers and editors to give the public the various athletic events they want to see. In the research literature (Duncan et al., 1994; MacNeill, 1994; Messner et al., 2000; Stevenson, 2002; Theberge & Cronk, 1994), underreporting women's participation and achievement in sports has been attributed to the scarce interest of the male target audience. However, recent data (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Capranica et al., 2001; Pfister, 1987; Urquhart & Corssman, 1999; Vincent et al., 2002) showed that, during the Olympics, there is increased media attention in women's competitions, probably due to the representation of national identity attributed to Olympic athletes, independent of their gender (Lippe, 2002; Stevenson, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

To contribute to debates about sport and gender, the aim of the present study was to provide a cross-cultural analysis of women's sport press coverage during the 2000 Olympic Games, in relation to female participation and achievement. Specifically, a cross-cultural analysis examined the amount of newspaper coverage allotted to female and male athletes in four European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, and Italy), which differ in terms of history, geography, climate, language, politics, currency, economy, and sport preferences. Furthermore, the role of national identity on gendered coverage of Olympic Games and the differences in women's sport coverage according to reader gender were investigated.

The overall female participation in the 2000 Summer Olympic Games (38%) increased by 4% compared to the previous Atlanta Games (34%). The expanding percentage of female participation, together with the number of events in which they participated (44%) reflects a growing acceptance of women's sport (Lines, 2000). However, male athletes still largely outnumber female athletes, showing that equality has not yet been attained. Except for the Italian delegation, the percentage of female athletes included in the teams studied tended to increase and/or be higher than that reported for overall Olympic participation, indicating a trend toward gender equity in sport in the European countries considered. Instead, the decrease in female athlete participation on the Italian team could indicate a certain decline in women's elite sport in Italy. In fact, Olympic participation depends on both sport achievement and national sport politics, which often allocate fewer resources for female athletes and/or selected sports (Cole, 2003).

A content analysis assumes that people are influenced by the mass media (Pedersen, 2002; Rintala & Birrell, 1984). Through this, it should be possible to draw inferences on how the printed medium covers and portrays female and male athletes (Vincent et al., 2002). Several authors (Mathesen & Flatten, 1996; Pedersen, 2002; Theberge & Cronk, 1994; Van Zoonen, 1994) claimed that a biased coverage provides barriers to female participation in sports. In agreement with the literature (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Capranica et al., 2001; Pfister, 1987; Toohey, 1997; Urquhart & Corssman, 1999; Vincent et al., 2002), the present data suggest that female athletes receive an equitable amount of coverage during the Olympic Games, especially when their national participation rate is considered. Although all the European countries belong to the "western word," the differences in coverage shown in the four countries confirm the local disparities in women's sports. These disparities might be due to complex cultural and geographical differences, with Mediterranean countries confirming a clear patriarchal structure in sport (COMPASS, 1999; Lanfranchi, 2002). On the other hand, the size of articles and photos was similar for both genders, indicating that the discrepancy between genders is not present in Olympic Games coverage. It is interesting to note that articles tended to cover both female and male events, probably due to the fact that the Olympic program is designed to present male and female sport events simultaneously.

Another research question was whether male dominance within the sporting spectacle was sustained through a predominance of coverage on male sporting success and achievement. Duncan et al. (1990, 1994) claimed that women's sports during non-Olympic events are covered more often in the middle or toward the end of the broadcast. The present study confirms previous data that showed no gender effect on coverage placement during the Olympic Games (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Capranica et al., 2001; Vincent et al., 2002). Furthermore, independent of national achievement, the most covered Olympic sport was track and field, widely considered the most representative sport event of the Games (Capranica & Aversa, 2002; Capranica et al., 2001; Toohey, 1997).

Silk and Andrews (2001) studying the sport, transnational advertising, and reimagining of national culture proposed that "nation is of central and prefigurative importance in global promotional imperatives" (p. 198). The authors claimed that even when sport is globally presented, it has such a local resonance and cultural practice that transnational advertisers have to negotiate the global-local nexus. Because different types of collective identity (gender, race, language, religion) may overlap or combine with national identity, it is difficult to identify a national marker to parcel out these aspects. In the present study, we attempted to study the role of national identity in the increased media attention to Olympic women's competitions, measuring the gender cover-
age of Belgian French and Flemish newspapers. In fact, these newspapers represented local rivalries and reflected sport tensions in this country. In particular, the dual French-Flemish identity of sport is an ongoing dispute in national competitions (Vanreusel et al., 2000). In the present study, the lack of significant differences between the Belgian-Flemish and French language newspapers confirms that in international competitions national identity could overcome not only local rivalry but also gender discrimination. Knoppers & Elling (2001) claimed that nationalism plays such an important role in Olympic coverage that “invisible” female athletes become visible when national identity is at stake. Studying the 1998 European handball championship in five European countries, Lippe (2002) noted that recognized female athletes tend to be those who participate in sex “appropriate” sports and attributed the difference in national coverage to both the cultural and success expectations of the female teams. Instead, studying the national coverage during the 2000 Olympic Games, Capranica & Aversa (2002) and Wensing & Bruce (2003) found that the strong nationalistic fervor ignited by the Olympics overrides the gender signifier of identity. In the present study, 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 expectations, 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.

Supply-and-demand has been considered crucial in determining the various athletic events publishers and editors cover. This issue was investigated using the Italian model, which includes national newspapers with a mixed target and sport newspapers with an almost exclusively male target (Audipress, 2000). The higher percentage of mixed male and female sport coverage in the Italian sport newspapers would indicate that the Italian male audience shows little preference for whether male or female athletes perform an athletic event (Capranica & Aversa, 2000). However, in the present study, gender comparisons considered only Olympic events, although professional men’s soccer; which dominated the Italian sport newspapers even during the Games, were not included in the analysis. Thus, when the entire coverage of sport is considered, it is evident that Italian sport journalism is strongly male oriented. Several authors (Duncan et al., 1994; Lines, 2000; MacNeill, 1994; Messner et al., 2000; Stevenson, 2002; Theberge & Cronk, 1994) claimed that sport journalists might construct stories geared to their male target audience and often undercut women’s sport by subtle or heavily gendered language. Although differences in how newspapers depict women can be expected (Lines, 2000), a qualitative analysis was beyond the scope of the present study. In fact, among the different cultures, it is difficult to interpret the same qualitative indicators when no validity has been previously established.

The observed trend to overcome the gender inequalities in media coverage during the Olympic Games may also be due to the IOC’s actions to promote increased participation of women in sport activities and to publicize their achievements. Recently, a women and sport working group, composed of representatives of the Olympic movement and specialists, was established to advise the IOC executive board on measures to promote the advancement of women in sports. On the other hand, the reported scant visibility of women’s sport in media during non-Olympic national events (Bishop, 2003; Duncan et al., 1990, 1994; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Messner, Duncan & Wachs, 1996; Pedersen, 2002) confirms that other contextual forces, such as nationalism, contribute to gender mainstreaming in sport coverage and substantiates that the Olympic Games represent exceptions rather than the rule.

As recommended by European Women and Sport (2000, 2004), it is necessary that political authorities, economic powers, scholars, and media apply their best efforts to develop female participation in sport-related careers. As a result of these positive actions and research data used in the policy debate about sport, the European Commission has made a commitment to promote gender equality in sport. Under the banner “gender mainstreaming,” the European Parliament published the A5-0167/2003 resolution on women and sport in June 2003. Among other aspects, this resolution:

...calls on government and sports authorities to ensure the elimination of direct and indirect discrimination suffered by female athletes in their work; calls on businesses to step up their efforts to sponsor top-level sportswomen, seeking to enhance their image and promote women’s sport as a whole; calls on media to provide balanced coverage of male and female sport and to represent women in sport in a nondiscriminatory manner; and proposes that Member States must include women’s sport competitions in the list of such events and broadcast them. (p. 6)

In conclusion, although female athletes tend to receive more coverage when they compete in major international sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, it is not implied that the newspaper coverage of non-Olympic events can be generalized from the
present data. In fact, more is needed on media coverage throughout the regular sporting year, as large gender discrepancies still exist (Bishop, 2003; European Parliament, 2003; Pedersen, 2002). The present study has illuminated several facets of the sport-media complex that advocate caution when studying gender coverage. This study also promotes future cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparisons to grasp important features of gender mainstreaming in global/local sports-media complex. In fact, because of the limited number of cases presented, further research is required, particularly in Eastern and African countries. Finally, structured investigations into the impact of qualitative aspects of gender coverage are greatly needed.

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