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## Gender-related Media Coverage and the Olympic Games: An Integrated Literature Review.

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# Gender-related Media Coverage and the Olympic Games: An Integrated Literature Review

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## Abstract

The media coverage of female athletes and women's sports at the Olympics has been pronounced since the 1990s. A number of studies have shown unique and varying findings and raised issues regarding the media coverage of female athletes and their sports at the Olympic Games. The purpose of this review is to identify key issues and discover trends in the literature on media coverage of gender regarding the Olympics and Olympic athletes. The data collection method used here is centered on the collection of articles pertinent to the research topic using three electronic databases. The findings and discussions center on publication and methodological profiles, coverage differences, and emerging issues that include Olympics and nationalism, hegemonic masculinity in sports media, utilization of new media, and the cultural background of female athletes. Future research areas that highlight gender equality, unique Olympic settings, and perspectives on traditional versus new media are provided.

**Key words:** Olympic Games; media coverage; gender; integrative review

## 1. Introduction

Sports in historical and contemporary eras have privileged men over women. The first modern Olympic Games in 1896 did not offer women's events, but since then, women have been given increasing sporting opportunities with each Olympiad (Teetzel, 2011). Recently, Women's participation in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics have significantly increased, and a total of 44 gold medals were awarded to female athletes compared to 49 gold medals to male athletes (IOC, n.d.). With legislation, the participation rates of women and girls in sport increased, as it happened in the United States, with the passage of Title IX (Blaufarb, 1975; Kane, 1988). In recent times, sports institutions such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and governments have made efforts to promote the growth of women's sports and their participation, but when it comes to media coverage of women's sports, there is a limited focus both in terms of quantity and quality (Bruce, 2016; Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013). According to Toffoletti (2016), media tends to marginalize women in sport and favors male athletes, which is problematic given its importance and influence in society (Bernstein, 2002).

Many studies regarding media coverage of female athletes and their sports in non-Olympic settings have been conducted. Fink (2015) reviewed the various findings and implications of these studies and found that most studies agreed that female athletes and their sports are still underrepresented in terms of the quantity and quality of coverage. Media coverage of female athletes and women's sports at the Olympics has been pronounced since the 1990s. The Summer and Winter Olympic Games are the largest mega sporting events in the world, and they attract a viewing audience of billions over various types of media (Billings, 2008). Given the global presence of the Olympics, the media coverage of female athletes and their sports could demonstrate equality and the importance of women in society and sport institutions. While some Olympic studies compared to non-Olympic setting studies indicate that unbalanced coverages clearly exist, some studies found that more media coverage and qualitatively less-prejudiced representations were given to female athletes and their sports during the Olympics. Due to the fact that the Olympic Games are international sporting events, various media outlets tend to highlight the nationality and culture of athletes. Some studies on the media coverage of the Olympics indicate more balanced trends both in the quality and quantity of the coverage of female athletes and their sports in this global multi-sport mega event (Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

However, no systematic and comprehensive review of the literature on gender and the Olympics has been completed to date. Because a number of studies have shown unique and varying findings and issues regarding media coverage of female athletes and their sports at the Olympic Games as compared to a non-Olympic setting, a study that reviews literature and conceptualizes the key findings and issues regarding the topic is needed. By identifying appropriate issues that are associated with the Olympic media coverage in the context of gender, trends and directions of phenomena could be explored. Therefore, the purpose of this review is to identify key issues and discover trends in the literature on media coverage of gender regarding the Olympics and Olympic athletes and to generate a new understanding of gender in the context of media research.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the extant literature on the use of secondary data sources to conceptualize the key issues and trends about gender-related media coverage at the Olympic Games. Also, this review identifies research areas that underscore gender equality, the unique Olympic settings, and the generation of perspectives on traditional versus new media that inform future research.

## ***2. Integrative Review Method***

Scholars have employed the integrated review method because of its various advantages. The integrated review method provides opportunities to integrate a range of empirical and theoretical studies that help create a consistent and comprehensive analysis of complex concepts (Souza, Silva & Carvalho, 2010). This method consists of defining concepts, reviewing theories, examining evidence, and investigating issues related to a topic, and allows scholars to employ a rigorous research framework that demonstrates clear methodological strategies and processes that ensures academic precision (Broome, 2000; Torraco, 2005). Also, the integrative method considers a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that can provide guidelines for future research initiatives (Schulenkorf, Sherry & Rowe, 2016).

While integrative reviews are popular in other domains, such as nursing and health, they are also used in the context of sports. For example, Schulenkorf et al. (2016) and Walzel, Robertson and Anagnostopoulos (2018) examined scholarship related to sports for development and professional team sports organizations' corporate social responsibility to portray a holistic picture of these specific fields. Torraco (2005) mentioned that the use of integrative review serves the purpose of reviewing, critiquing, and reconceptualizing new knowledge developments while also allowing for dissonance in knowledge discovery, especially when it comes to trends or the direction of phenomena (Ganong, 1987). Utilization of the integrative review method would be useful in the conceptualization of new ways to understand knowledge production in the literature and in identification of trends within the field of sports with reference to media coverage of female athletes and their sports at the Olympic Games.

### ***3. Methods***

Research reviews are considered research of research; thus, a consistent methodological standard to review literature is required for a rigor of study (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Whittemore and Knafl (2005) delineated the five-step process of conducting an integrative review, and this framework is appropriate for the review because it considered the method-specific issues and the challenges of combining diverse data sources. The five-step process consists of problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation stages. The researchers in this study used this framework to conduct a comprehensive and transparent literature review of gender-related media coverage during the Olympic Games.

#### ***3.1 Problem Identification***

This stage centers on the identification of problems and review purposes (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Currently, there is no research that rigorously reviews and synthesizes previous studies on the gender-related media coverage in association with the Olympics despite the prevalence of research on the media coverage of gender in Olympic sports.

#### ***3.2 Literature Search***

An integrative review method requires clearly defined parameters for the literature search (Parent, DeBlaere & Moradi, 2013). Key terms that delineate the boundary of the literature search were carefully selected from published literature on media coverage on gender regarding the Olympics and Olympic athletes. The researchers narrowed the search terms to Olympic Games, media, and gender to cover the topic of inquiry. The term Olympic Games includes the Summer and Winter editions of the event. Media encompasses print, broadcast, and new (online) media coverage, and gender referring to female and male athletes or any standard set gender notions that are socially constructed (Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013).

Studies for this integrative review were identified via the inspection of two sources: electronic databases and selected articles' reference list. The three electronic databases—Scopus, Web of Science (WOS), and SPORTDiscus—were searched in December 2018 for sports, media, and gender-related research. WOS covers the data period since 1900, which is the broadest in terms of period coverage and has strong coverage with citation and bibliographic data in various subjects within the social sciences. Social Science Citation Index

(SSCI) is one of six online databases of the WOS (Falagas, Pitsouni, Malietzis & Pappas, 2008). Launched in 2004, Scopus also covers peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences and is known for an expanded spectrum of journals within the field (Reid & Prupas, 1998). SPORTDiscus, the international database for sport managed and distributed by the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) in Canada, is an index of physical education journals that cover various sport and health-related subjects (Lee, 1992).

The database search was followed by an inspection of reference lists. The terms Olympics AND media AND gender were entered into the domains under an advanced search function for each search engine. The search was limited to peer-reviewed, full-text articles written in the English language and published after 1997. The year 1997 was chosen as a starting point because there was little research on the topic before this time except one outlying pioneering work by Lee in 1992 (Coffey, 1996). Research work on gender and Olympics flourished after the 1996 Olympics and there was a significant increase in the coverage of women's sports (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). A 20-year timeframe was employed to provide a wide enough window to examine the topic and to discover related research trends similar to Schulenkorf et al.'s study completed in 2016.

### ***3.3 Data Collection Procedures and Evaluation***

The relevance of literature was evaluated and the final decision for inclusion was made in this stage. Data collection involved utilization of three electronic databases, Scopus [n=1,712], Web of Science [n=96], and SPORTDiscus [n=1,674], which yielded a total of 3,482 relevant articles (see Figure 1). The titles and abstracts of the articles derived from the initial database search were evaluated for relevancy of the publication for review. A full-text review was conducted if titles and abstracts were not sufficient for screening, and as a result, a total of 169 articles remained for review at this stage. For example, the papers that focused on media coverage of gender outside the Olympics and gender issues without inclusion of the media were excluded from this study.

Figure

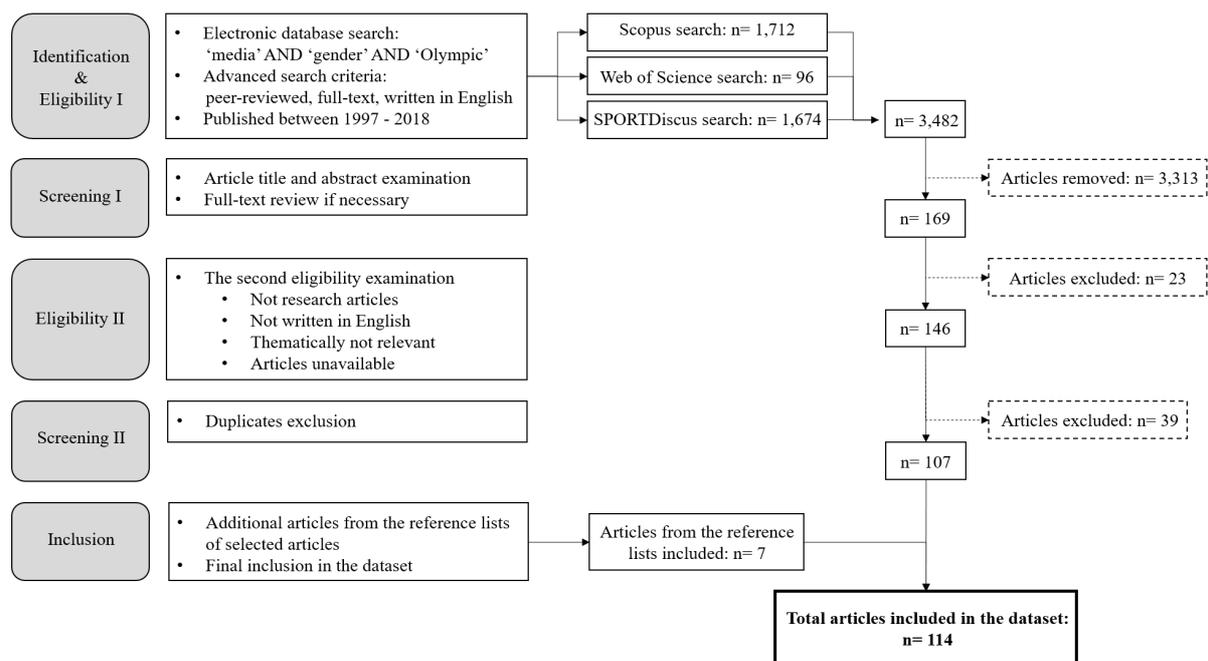


Figure 1. Literature search process

A secondary eligibility examination was conducted to ensure the inclusion eligibility of articles (e.g., article type, language, relevance, and availability), leading to the exclusion of an additional 23 articles. Finally, the dataset was checked for duplication, which resulted in the elimination of another 39 articles. In addition to the above steps, reference lists from remaining articles were reviewed to determine if any additional articles could be included as part of the final dataset (seven were added at this point). Finally, using this process of determining articles for this research, a total of 114 articles served as the data set for this study.

### 3.4 Data Analysis: Data Charting and Analysis

Data analysis consisted of ordering, coding, categorizing, and summarizing the literature in the dataset in response to the research problem of the review. A total of 114 articles were inductively analyzed where open coding was conducted. This process generated the three main categories: publication and methodological profiles, coverage differences, and emerging issues, with some categories being further subdivided (see Table 1). Arksey and O'Malley (2005) emphasize the importance and usefulness of charting as a technique for organizing and interpreting data into pre-determined qualitative themes. Microsoft Excel was used for data extraction and charting as well as to process the information from the literature in the dataset on the themes and sub-categories. The first author served as the primary reviewer of the analysis results of the selected articles (n=114). The three authors confirmed the relevance of the articles to reach a consensus.

Table 1

Article examination category

Category	Sub-category	Data Examination Method
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Publication & Methodological Profiles	Research publication trend Research methods	Direct extraction
Coverage Differences	Quantitative coverage differences Qualitative coverage differences Trends towards more balanced coverage	Direct extraction & Interpretation
Key Issues	Olympic effect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Olympics and the IOC as a promoter of balanced media coverage</li> <li>- Olympics and nationalism</li> </ul> Hegemonic masculinity and differential framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hegemonic masculinity in sport media</li> <li>- Over-emphasis on femininity</li> </ul> Emerging trends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New media</li> <li>- The cultural background of female athletes</li> </ul>	Direct extraction & Interpretation

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The final step of the integrative review process is the presentation of research findings. In this integrative review study, a detailed examination of research on gender-related media coverage regarding the Olympics and Olympic athletes was completed. The findings and discussions center on publication and methodological profiles, coverage differences, and emerging issues in the Olympic media coverage, with a discussion of key issues and implications being added to provide scholars with ways to consider future investigations. While all 114 articles in the dataset were reviewed and analyzed to derive the themes and trends, selected articles are discussed in the current study (see Table 2).

Table 2.  
Examined articles summary

Study	Quantitative Difference			Qualitative Difference			Issues				
	Male covered more	Equally covered or female covered more	Balanced coverage trend	Covered more during the Olympic Games	Underrepresentation	Equally covered	Balanced coverage trend	New media	Cultural background	Nationalism	Others
Toohey (1997)	O			O							
Daddario (1997)											Feminine narrative techniques
Andrews (1998)											Feminine narrative techniques

Kinnick (1998)		0	0	0	0	0		
Tuggle & Owen (1999)		0		0	0	0		
Eastman & Billings (1999)	0				0	0		
Mikosza & Phillips (1999)					0			
Jones, Murrell, & Jackson (1999)					0			
Urquhart & Crossman (1999)	0		0		0			
Borcila (2000)					0			
Tervo (2001)					0			
Mayeda (2001)					0			Ethnicity
Vincent et al. (2002)		0		0	0			
Capranica & Aversa (2002)	0						0	
Goodman, Duke, & Sutherland (2002)					0	0		
Hardin et al. (2002)		0			0	0		
Billings & Eastman (2002)	0				0		0	Ethnicity
Tuggle, Huffman, & Rosen-gard (2002)	0							
Fink & Kensic-ki (2002)					0			
Billings & Eastman (2003)	0						0	Ethnicity
Higgs, Weiller, & Martin (2003)			0		0	0		
Bishop (2003)	0							
Vincent et al. (2003)					0			
Wensing & Bruce (2003)				0	0	0		0
Shields et al. (2004)	0		0		0			0
Jones (2004)			0	0	0		0	0
Weiller, Higgs, & Greenleaf (2004)					0	0	0	

Capranica et al. (2005)			0	0				0	
Jones (2006)		0				0		0	
Crolley & Teso (2007)	0		0				0		
King (2007)	0		0						
Billings & Angelini (2007)	0					0		0	Ethnicity
Billings (2007)						0			
Arslan & Koca (2007)	0			0				0	
Tuggle, Huffman, & Rosen-gard (2007)		0	0			0			
Daddario & Wigley (2007)						0		0	
Bissell & Duke (2007)						0			
Billings (2008)	0								
Capranica et al. (2008)	0							0	
Billings et al. (2008)	0					0		0	Ethnicity
Pratt et al. (2008)	0					0			
Greer, Hardin, & Homan (2009)						0			
Yu (2009)						0		0	0
Angelini & Billings (2010)						0			
Billings, Ange- lini, & Duke (2010)	0			Wide- ning		0			
Selami (2010)	0					0			
Jones (2010)	0					0		0	
Galily, Cohen, & Levy (2011)	0			Wide- ning			Wide- ning		
Li (2011)						0		0	0
Jones (2011)						0			
Jones & Greer (2012)		0		0			0		
Burch, Eagle- man, & Peder- sen (2012)	0					0		0	

Sailors, Teetzel, & Weaving (2012)				0			
Tolvhed (2012)				0			
Amara (2012)							0
Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings (2012)	0			0			
Poniatowski & Hardin (2012)				0			
Vincent & Crossman (2012)				0	0	0	
Jones (2012)	0			0			0
Davids & Tugle (2012)		0		0			
Ličen & Billings (2013)	0			0			
Cohen (2013)	0			0			0
Petca, Bivolaru, & Graf (2013)				0		0	0
Jones (2013)				0			
Merklejn (2013)				0			
Hedenborg (2013)	0		0			0	0
Angelini, Billings, & MacArthur (2013)				0			
Kian, Bernstein, & McGuire (2013)				0			
Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, & Smith (2014)		0	0	0			
Billings et al. (2014)				0			
Eagleman, Burch, & Vooris (2014)	0		0				0
Eagleman, Rodenberg, & Lee (2014)				0			
Mishra (2014)		0		0 (Males)		0	0
MacArthur et al. (2014)				0 (Males)			
Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings (2014)				0 (Males)			

Godoy-Pressland & Griggs (2014)	0		0		0		0			
Delorme (2014)		0								
Creedon (2014)								0		
O'Neill & Mulready (2014)	0		0							
Smith & Bissell (2014)		0			0	0				
Packer et al. (2014)	0		0							
Godoy-Pressland (2014)	0				0					
Bie & Billings (2015)					0			0	0	
Jakubowska (2015)	0		0		0					0
Eagleman (2015)					0					
Boykoff & Yasuoka (2015)					0					
Carter, Casanova, & Maume (2015)		0			0			0		
McGannon et al. (2015)					0				0	
Delorme & Testard (2015)		0				0				
Samie & Sehlikoglu (2015)					0			0	0	
Hellborg & Hedenborg (2015)										
Zhang (2015)					0			0	0	0
Pfister & Gems (2015)					0					
Geurin-Eagleman & Burch (2015)								0		
Coche (2015)	0		0					0		
Ravel & Gareau (2016)					0	0		0		
Laine (2016)		0	0			0				
MacArthur et al. (2016)		0	0		0					
Delorme & Pressland (2016)	0 (partially)	0 (partially)								
Smith (2016)					0					

Ethnicity

Franks & O'Neill (2016)								Gender of sports writers
Coche & Tugle (2016)		0	0					
Jaworska & Hunt (2017)		0	0		0		0	Ethnicity
Billings et al. (2017)	0 (partially)	0 (partially)					0	
Jakubowska (2017)		0		0			0	
MacArthur, Angelini, Smith, & Billings (2017)	0			0				
MacArthur, Angelini, Billings, & Smith (2017)				0				
Ho (2017)				0			0	Ethnicity
Dashper (2017)				0				
Arth et al. (2018)	0 (partially)	0 (partially)	0		0		0	
Villalon & Weiller-Abels (2018)		0	0	0				
Litchfield (2018)				0		0		
Xu, Billings, & Fan (2018)	0			0			0	0
Litchfield & Kavanagh (2019)			0	0		0		

## 4.1 Publication and Methodological Profiles

### 4.1.1 Research publication trend.

Publications on gender-related media coverage in association with the Olympics increased from 1997 and peaked between 2012 and 2015. Publications may have flourished after the 1996 Olympic Games, which significantly increased interest in the coverage of women's sports (Coffey, 1996). Additionally, the 2012 London Olympic Games marked the first Olympics for which every participating country sent at least one female athlete, yielding the phrase "the Year of the Woman" by the media (Kian, Bernstein & McGuire, 2013). Some publications on the media coverage of gender associated with the 2008 Beijing Olympics appeared, but Olympic Games hosted by non-Western countries within the timeframe of this review (1997–2018) such as the 2016 Rio Olympics and the 1998 Nagano Olympics were less frequently examined by researchers. It is apparent that media coverage on the Olympic Games held in non-Western countries is meager. From this standpoint, the number of publications on

the Olympic media coverage of gender may continue to decelerate in the foreseeable future as Olympics are held in Asian countries (i.e., 2020 Tokyo and 2022 Beijing).

#### **4.1.2 Research methods.**

The research methods conducted by the scholars of the literature dataset were fairly balanced as 27 articles used a quantitative approach while 41 articles used a qualitative approach. Additionally, 45 studies employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A total of 72 articles at least partially conducted quantitative approaches while 86 articles employed a qualitative approach. Therefore, although a slight difference exists in numbers, it could be concluded that the research methods employed by the researchers were relatively balanced.

An interesting point to note is that the articles that employed a quantitative approach decreased while studies with qualitative approaches increased over the last two decades, which indicated a shift in the use of research methodologies. Scholars expressed the need for a qualitative research approach for the broader spectrum of analysis. Delorme and Pressland (2016) argued that “the qualitative type of coverage is equally of value in evaluating gendered media coverage,” (p. 329). Also, Toohey (1997) pointed out that “a combination of both qualitative and quantitative analyses would provide a more complete picture of the interaction between Australian television, gender, and the Olympic Games,” (p. 27). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses demonstrated gender inequality in media coverage. Thus, as scholars advocate, analysis using both quantitative and qualitative approaches is acknowledged in order to deliver a more comprehensive understanding of trends and provide research implications.

#### **4.1.3 Analytical methods.**

While various analytical methods were employed in the research studies under examination, a couple of analytic methods (e.g., content analysis, statistical analysis) were most frequently used. Content analysis served as the main analytical method, and statistical analysis was used as a tool to analyze the collected data. Unlike the shift that was witnessed in the main research methodological approach over time, no apparent shift occurred regarding data analysis trends. Content and statistical analyses were consistently employed throughout the time frame of this review.

### ***4.2 Coverage Differences***

#### **4.2.1 Quantitative coverage differences.**

The number of female athletes in sports has quantitatively increased, along with their athletic progress (Cooky et al., 2013). We see a similar scene in the Olympic Games. For example, approximately 42% of the competitors at the 2018 Olympic Games in Pyeong-Chang were female athletes, which was a record number for the Winter Games (IOC, 2018). Despite such considerable progress, a difference in the media coverage of female Olympic athletes and their sports compared to male athletes still exists in terms of quantitative coverage, namely frequency and time. Fifty-nine research articles in the dataset discussed the quantitative aspects of gender bias in media coverage; more than half (n=39) found that women received less Olympic media coverage in comparison to men. Godoy-Pressland and Griggs (2014) analyzed a total of ten UK print media outlets over a two-year period (2008–2009)

and discovered that sportswomen were significantly under-represented. Only 3.6% of all sports reporting covered female athletes and their sports, and the coverage only fractionally increased even during major sporting events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Recent work by Xu, Billings and Fan (2018) examined the Chinese Central Television's (CCTV) 2016 Olympic broadcast of gymnastics and found that female athletes received less clock-time and name mentions than male athletes.

On the other hand, 23 studies in the dataset indicated that women received more or equal coverage than men, while three studies had mixed results. While a number of studies found that women athletes receive a fairly balanced media coverage in terms of quantity, Billings et al.'s (2014) study on the National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) 2012 primetime Olympic telecast showed that women athletes received the majority of on-air mentions and the clock-time. Billings et al. (2014) noted that "Forty years after the passage of Title IX ... the seventeen-night NBC network primetime Olympic broadcast proved to be an historic chapter in televised sports," (p. 48). Some scholars found mixed results. For example, Delorme and Pressland (2016) analyzed gender equity in French, British, and Spanish newspapers regarding the coverage of the 2014 Sochi Winter Games. Mixed results were found as French newspapers significantly underrepresented female athletes and the Spanish coverage was more balanced. Interestingly, the British coverage showed a notable underrepresentation of male athletes, which shows a totally different tone within the three countries' newspaper coverage of female athletes during the Winter Olympics (Delorme & Pressland, 2016). Some scholars, such as Laine (2016), asserted that coverage of women's sports was not marginalized when the number of participants and their level of success were considered. There was no consensus among the research studies as to whether women were covered less in the media during the Olympic period.

#### **4.2.2 Qualitative coverage differences.**

In terms of qualitative coverage, there was a consensus that some gender biases existed in media coverage. Among the articles that qualitatively analyzed gender in media coverage, the majority found unfair coverage by the media, including words or expressions that undermined females' athleticism, leading to gender marking and infantilizing. For example, Jones (2012) investigated the extent to which the three online media channels of public broadcasters in Australia, UK, and Canada framed the participants. Certain stereotypes that devalued the activities of women and privileged men were prevalently found in the media, namely focusing on female athletes' appearance, personal relationships, sexual orientation, and gendered commentary (Jones, 2012). In addition, Greer, Hardin and Homan (2009) analyzed the visual production techniques NBC used to telecast the 2004 Olympic track and field events. The visual coverage on male athletes was "presented as more visually 'exciting' than women's" (p. 173) by applying more shot types, camera angles, and motion special effects (Greer et al., 2009). As a result of the difference in the visualization techniques, there were perceptions that female athletes and their sports are less exciting than or inferior to male athletes, which reinforced males as the symbolic authority in sports.

While not prevalent, some scholars argued that female athletes and their sports have been portrayed in a relatively unprejudiced manner in terms of qualitative media coverage. Specifically, in the study that examined gender cues that were presented in the 2010 Winter Olympics, Jones and Greer (2012) found that although gender stereotyping such as emphasi-

zing the female athletes' aesthetic side existed, male and female snowboarders "received coverage marked with equal and ample masculine and feminine cues," (p. 617). Moreover, some studies revealed that even male athletes in certain sports have been underrepresented in media in terms of differential framing. Angelini, MacArthur and Billings (2014) analyzed the gendered-biased language used in NBC's telecast on male Winter Olympians and found that significantly different dialogues were used to telecast the figure skaters as compared to the aggregate of other male athletes. Such distorted representations (along with underrepresentation of women's sports) could render the convoluted role of perceived masculinity in sport.

#### **4.2.3 Trend towards more balanced coverage.**

While it might be a little premature to ascertain that a trend exists toward more balanced media coverage regarding gender in Olympic settings, some research revealed that efforts are being made towards equal representation in terms of the quantity of coverage, quality of coverage, and both. Higgs, Weiller and Martin (2003) compared NBC's televised coverage on the 1992 and the 1996 Olympic Games in terms of both quantitative and qualitative coverage aspects. The authors highlighted that while many disparities remained, there were significant improvements (i.e., less sexist comments) in the way female athletes were covered in the 1996 Olympics as compared to the 1992 Olympics. In addition, Eagleman, Burch and Vooris (2014) examined news websites in Australia, Brazil, China, Kenya, UK, and the U.S. regarding the 2012 London Olympic Games to determine the different gender constructions that were presented. The results tell that there has been a shift in the agenda set by the media outlets, and only a few gender biases existed in all of the examined countries' coverage. Eagleman et al. (2014) especially noted that a shift in presentations and agenda of gender by the media outlets is meaningful as "if sustained over time, can have great societal implications in the form of shifting long-held biased or inequitable views on certain topics," (p. 465). However, despite its bright implication, only a portion of the literature in the dataset acknowledged such a trend towards more balanced coverage.

### ***4.3 Conceptualizing Gender Issues in Olympic Media Coverage***

#### **4.3.1 Olympic effect.**

##### **4.3.1.1 The Olympics and the IOC as a promoter of balanced media coverage.**

Many studies examined aspects of quantitative or qualitative media coverage of the Olympic athletes' gender and their sport and highlighted the extent of imbalances regarding gender representation. While unbalanced coverage still exists, a sizable literature in the dataset indicated that female Olympians and their sports have experienced more media coverage in terms of quantity and qualitatively fewer prejudiced representations. In particular, several authors explicitly acknowledged the Olympics or the IOC as an important agent that played a role in such a result. Vincent, Imwold, Masemann and Johnson (2002) mentioned that the Olympic Games have functioned as a path-breaking event for media coverage of women's sports. Capranica et al. (2005) specifically emphasized that, "greater coverage of women's sport during the Olympic Games might be due... to strategies to promote gender equity in sport coverage," (p. 2014). Increasingly, the IOC is putting forth many efforts to promote women's participation in sports because gender equality is one of the top priorities of the Olympic Movement (IOC, 2019). The IOC strongly encouraged media organizations and sports communities to work together to guarantee a comprehensive and accurate representa-

tion of women and their sports. As Kane (1988) highlighted, “the mass media have become one of the most powerful institutional forces for shaping values in modern culture,” (pp. 88-89), the media tends to reflect on what is important and influential in society. Thus, a well-planned and sustainable media plan that promotes a more balanced media portrayal of gender regarding the Olympics is necessary.

#### 4.3.1.2 Olympics and nationalism.

In addition to the IOC’s efforts to promote women’s participation in sports, some studies underline the strong nationalistic passion ignited by the Olympics as a factor that led to more gender-balanced media coverage. By examining media coverage of a female athlete during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Wensing and Bruce (2003) explored the implications of nationalism during the Olympic Games and asserted that, “national identity overrides all other identity markers such as gender,” (P. 388). Jakubowska (2015) also acknowledged that the national context could influence the perceptions of female athletes. She claimed that nationality makes the notion of men versus women, or feminine versus masculine, less significant because female athletes representing their countries and considerably performing well turn the viewers’ attention away from her appearance and stereotypes (Jakubowska, 2015). These studies claimed that the Olympics are “nation-focused” events due to audiences’ interests, and the media are weighted toward the nationality of the athletes rather than toward the gender of the individual. As such, the nationalistic fervor ignited by the Olympic Games’ competitive settings caused less disparity in media coverage during the Olympic Games in comparison to non-Olympic periods.

### **4.3.2 Hegemonic masculinity and differential framing in sport media.**

#### 4.3.2.1 Hegemonic masculinity in sport media.

Hegemonic masculinity has a broad meaning, as it refers to any stereotypical masculine traits that are over-emphasized (English, 2017). Connell (2005) highlighted hegemonic masculinity as ideological practices that reinforce the supremacy of men putting women in a subordinate position in society. Sport, especially sport media, is an institution that reinforces a strong masculine hegemony because it naturalizes male domination and provides men with power and privilege over women (Sabo & Jansen, 1992). Fink (2015) proposed hegemonic masculinity as an explanation for disparate gender media coverage in sport by arguing that, “the incredibly enduring and pervasive demonstration of quantitative and qualitative differences in the coverage of women’s sport and female athletes suggests the sport media purposely propagate a hierarchy aimed to privilege men and marginalize or ignore women,” (p.337). While the idea that sport media’s purposeful schemes are aimed to privilege men needs further investigation, sport media coverage surely has a significant impact on gender issues associated with athletes, which stem from the influences of hegemonic masculinity such as sexism, heterosexism, infantilizing, and femininity (English, 2017; Fink, 2015). For example, female athletes’ hegemonic images, along with a male-dominating perspective, have been reinforced through visual and textual media portrayals (Billings, Angelini & Duke, 2010; Duncan, 1990). Such representations have been further extended to sexualization and over-emphasis on the femininity of female athletes. As suggested by Hardin, Lynn and Walsdorf (2005), hegemonic masculinity could be perceived as “natural” occurrences because the authority of dominant group (i.e., males) is perpetuated and accepted in sport settings. As a re-

sult, various issues associated with the media coverage of gender in female athletes and their sports are casted by sport media.

#### 4.3.2.2 Over-emphasis on femininity.

Strong hegemonic masculinity proliferates the sense of male superiority while minimizing female athletic performances. Such an impression is often intensified with the media's, especially commentators', different framing of male and female athletic abilities (Kinnick, 1998). Female athletes were often associated with their sexual appearance, physical and emotional fragility, and with their domestic roles of being a wife, girlfriend or mother. Kinnick (1998) articulated that, "the historic male domination of sport means that men's competitions often have long lores of history and tradition, giving them a more colorful context to write about than newer women's events which lack such a history," (pp. 219-220). In addition, Villalon and Weiller-Abels's (2018) study on the televised media presentation of female athletes who competed in the 2016 Olympics found that the narrative coverage on female athletes was often heterosexualized in which the sexiness of athletes was emphasized upon. Moreover, their roles as wives and mothers were often highlighted in the media coverage, which had nothing to do with their performance at the Olympics.

It is especially important to consider how media outlets portray sports as gender-appropriate and how people perceive it, because these factors could have an impact on the acceptance and recognition of sports according to each gender. Jones, Murrell and Jackson's (1999) study on the coverage of the U.S. women's Olympic gold medal-winning teams discusses how female athletes competing in a sporting event that is considered to be more masculine normally receive comments that have little to do with sports or performance. Additionally, Jones' (2011) research suggested that, "athletes participating in gender-appropriate sports (i.e. male athletes participating in masculine sports) are verbally and visually portrayed differently from athletes participating in gender-inappropriate sports," (p. 199).

While Fink (2015) defined female-appropriate sports as "sports that require more feminine attire, are aesthetically pleasing, and which do not require physical contact amongst participants," (p. 334) our study extended the scope and used the term gender-appropriate sports because there were some cases in which male athletes received biased comments from not participating in "male-appropriate" sports (Angelini et al., 2014; MacArthur, Angelini, Billings & March, 2014; Mishra, 2014). Even male athletes competing in sports that are considered feminine were marginalized as a result of gender-inappropriateness and hegemonic masculinity (English, 2017). Angelini et al. (2014) found that male athletes competing in figure skating—which is usually considered a feminine sport—received significantly different dialogue or comments (i.e., about their more outgoing nature and attractiveness) compared to other male Winter Olympic athletes. In a similar study by MacArthur et al. (2014), male gymnasts were described as modest or introverted, and their emotional state was described more than all other male athletes. Such stereotyped comments and descriptions from the media regarding athletes in some events, which are considered as gender-appropriate sports, may worsen the stereotypes. The researchers in the field of media coverage of gender acknowledge the importance of coverage on gender-appropriate sports; thus, many studies so far have examined this issue.

#### 4.3.3 Emerging trends.

#### 4.3.3.1 New media.

The term “new media” encompasses online news articles, websites, and social media services such as Twitter and Facebook. In particular, with the advent of web 2.0., social media platforms have enabled users to generate their own content, which indicates a shift from consumption to presumption (Zajc, 2015). Therefore, even athletes are able to take a more active part in presenting themselves, which could potentially counteract their depictions in mass media (Smith & Sanderson, 2015). Accordingly, a number of recently published articles in the dataset have focused on social media to examine the gender gap in sports coverage. Litchfield and Kavanagh (2019), for example, revealed that the quantity of coverage received by women on the Twitter pages of “Team GB” and the “Australian Olympic team” during the 2016 Olympic Games showed a significant stride forward. Some characteristics of new media such as active subscriber (consumer) engagement, real-time, accessibility, and ubiquity may allow it to have a significant impact on viewers and society in comparison to print and broadcast media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

A notable trend was seen in the form of new media. Among the three types of media examined in this review, traditional media (print and broadcast) was studied more extensively than new media. The main functions of the traditional Olympic media coverage include news, advertising, features, and educational functions (Slater, 1998). However, the advent of the internet has influenced the consumption of traditional media, such as radio, television, and newspapers (Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Stempel III, Hargrove & Bernt, 2000). Furthermore, new media technologies have changed the production, delivery, and consumption of sports and created a new dynamism among sports fans, athletes, teams, governing bodies, and the mainstream media (Dart, 2015; Hutchins & Mikosza, 2010). Indeed, the user numbers, coverage, and frequency of new media including social media have increased exponentially since the 2004 Athens Olympics, and naturally, the number of studies that focused on new media has increased (Liu, 2016).

In contrast to studies on the two traditional forms of media, new media studies tend to focus on multiple countries (Coche, 2015; Petca, Bivolaru & Graf, 2013). Petca et al. (2013) analyzed three online images of Brazil, Germany, and the U.S. regarding the 2004 and 2008 Summer Olympic Games. Coche (2015) conducted a longitudinal quantitative content analysis of eight sports news websites from four countries: the U.S., Canada, France, and the UK. In addition, the results of studies on new media indicate different findings regarding the gender gap in the coverage in terms of quantitative aspects (Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2019; Petca et al., 2013). For example, Burch, Eagleman and Pedersen’s (2012) study revealed a significantly greater percentage of online website article content for the 2010 Winter Olympics devoted to male (64.5%) than female athletes (35.5%). However, Petca et al. (2013) commented that, “following the quantitative increase of female athletes’ participation in sports in general and to Olympic Games in particular, the media started reporting more on female athletes,” (p. 612). Similarly, Litchfield and Kavanagh (2019) concluded that the analysis on social media coverage of the 2016 Olympic Games demonstrated “significant strides forward in terms of the quantity of coverage received by women in online spaces,” (p. 1). These results could be supported by new media’s expandability and spatial parameters that are less restricted in new media (Eagleman et al., 2014; Kian & Hardin, 2009). However, in terms of the portrayal

(qualitative), most studies show that considerable gaps still exist between female and male athletes and their sports.

#### 4.3.3.2 The cultural background of female athletes.

The Olympic athletes' gender issues were discussed under the cultural background of female athletes in some studies (Samie & Sehlkoglou, 2015; Yu, 2009; Zhang, 2015). Samie and Sehlkoglou (2015) analyzed the print and online media coverage from the U.K., France, the U.S., Canada, and Australia regarding Muslim female athletes at the 2012 London Olympic Games. The authors argued that some Western media discussed, defined, and represented Muslim sportswomen to Western audiences as strange, incompetent, and even out-of-place. Furthermore, Zhang's (2015) rhetoric analysis of British and Chinese print and online media on a Chinese female swimmer who set a world record in the 2012 Olympics was constrained not only by gender-biased comments, such as infantilizing, but also strong cultural and political boundaries. Western journalists portrayed the female athlete as a passive victim of China's unethical child training programs while Chinese news media depicted her as a dutiful daughter, which is an example of normalized assumptions that submissiveness is an appropriate female behavior. The findings of these studies are especially alarming because the perpetuation of stereotypes based on gender and cultural stereotypes about females from both cultures (the East and the West) make it twice as hard for Muslim/Asian female athletes to be recognized by the media for their outstanding achievements. As such, due to pervasive stereotypes in Western media (as well as their own), non-Western female athletes' achievements at the Olympics were less recognized. In addition to nationalism and the cultural context regarding the Olympic sport media coverage of gender, the differential depictions of athletes based on ethnicity were examined by a few researchers. These studies cast important implications as they revealed that white or male athletes earned more coverage time or mentions (Billings & Angelini, 2007), thus implying that a certain ethnicity and gender hold hegemony in sport and sport media.

#### **4.4 Future Research Directions**

The IOC announced that the 2020 Tokyo Olympics would feature 18 mixed-events (double the number that was held in Rio) and also pointed out that the proportion of female athletes will reach nearly 49% (up from 45.6% in Rio) (Chappel, 2017). Mixed events in which both female and male athletes compete together have not been extensively covered in previous studies. Therefore, the Olympic mixed events could be a new area of research regarding the gender differences in terms of media coverage because both genders will play at the same time, which provides a setting where direct comparisons can be made. Another future research area could involve longitudinal studies which could provide greater insight into how the media covers gender during the Olympic Games over time. How gender is covered in the Olympic media could shift over time. As such, longitudinal studies may be able to shed light on whether the results of recent coverage on gender in media regarding the Olympics are trends or just mere aberrations.

Linkages between gender and society and cultural background exist, yet relatively few articles consider culture-specific social norms. Thus, examining countries that are culturally more or less conservative toward certain gender(s) may generate novel findings. Future research should aim to replicate results from stereotypes on Asian or Muslim sportswomen to

further examine stereotypes for Asian male athletes. By analyzing how Asian and Muslim male Olympic athletes are covered by the media, a clearer sense of the media coverage disparity regarding genders along with cultural backgrounds could be gained. Also, comparatively very little research has been conducted regarding the coverage of African and Latin American female athletes in the media. A study that considers African and Latin American cultural perspectives on gender and the coverage of their athletes in association with the Olympic Games could be an important area for future research.

Examining various new media channels based on the consideration of each channel's attributes might prove an important area for future research. New media has comparatively more sub-forms through which to deliver news or information and to communicate (e.g., online news, forums, blogs, and social media). Thus, examining various new media outlets' gender coverage regarding Olympic athletes and comparing the results among the outlets could be an area of research for scholars to explore. The findings of some studies indicate less of a gender gap in new media coverage (mainly quantitative aspects) due to new media's expandability and less restricted spatial parameters. Bruce (2015) points out that "new media spaces such as those afforded by social networks and Web 2.0 interactivity offer new ways of thinking representations of sportswomen," (p. 384). Based on the findings of the review of the dataset and previous literature, examining new media's coverage on certain groups, namely female athletes from non-Western countries, could be an interesting topic for future work.

Last but not least, future research could consider the potential roles of the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement in promoting fair media coverage on gender fronts. Some studies point out that the gap between the quantity and quality of gender coverage has narrowed regarding the Olympic Games and that female athletes' coverage has improved over time. However, ironically, none of the articles in the dataset argued that the Olympic Games could serve as a platform to solve such serious disparity in media coverage. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Olympics can serve as a means to improve gender imbalance in sports by promoting fair gender media coverage.

## **5. Conclusion**

This integrative review focused broadly on the Olympics, media, and gender research categorizations, but it is not without limitations. Due to the general nature of these key terms, some studies that used the terms that are issue—and situation—specific might have been omitted from the review dataset. Although widely accepted among the literature review studies, reviewing only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English could be a potential limitation. There is a chance that studies that deal with gender inequality in the Olympic Games media coverage of other cultures or non-Western regions may have been published in their own languages. More in-depth analysis could be made when local researchers conduct analyses on media in their own languages with considerations of culture. Moreover, some materials that were not peer-reviewed journal articles such as books and book chapters were excluded during the literature selection process; yet, these materials are valuable sources of knowledge (Billings, Angelini & MacArthur, 2017; Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2015). Therefore, potentially valuable contributions that could be made by the articles in non-English languages and non-journal articles should be recognized even if they were excluded in the dataset of the current review.

Nonetheless, utilization of an integrative literature review yielded a total of 114 articles on media coverage on gender regarding the Olympics and Olympic athletes. This research serves as the database of literature and provides an overall picture of media coverage in reference to gender and the Olympics since 1997, and it contributes to the extant literature on the use of secondary data sources to conceptualize the key issues and trends about gender-related media coverage at the Olympic Games. As a result of the review, publication and methodological profiles and media coverage differences were discussed. The issues and trends in gender-related media coverage at the Olympic Games, such as the Olympics and nationalism, hegemonic masculinity in sport media, new media, and the cultural background of female athletes were underscored. Finally, the current review identified the research areas that highlight gender equality, the unique Olympic settings, and the generation of perspectives on traditional versus new media that inform future research.

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