

Brazilian women in the sports press: a case study

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ABSTRACT

Knijnik JD, Soares de Souza JS. Brazilian women in the sports press: a case study. *J. Hum. Sport Exerc.* Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 12-26, 2011. The media is a powerful tool in creating sports legends. However, international studies have proved that the media tends to favor male athletes and their feats and neglects female sports players. The main purpose of this paper is to determine how many articles one of the most important daily newspapers in Brazil published about male and female athletes. The data was gathered over a number of months at the beginning of this decade. The analysis demonstrated that men usually are mentioned much more frequently than women, that journalists tend to write more about the appearance of female athletes than about their real talents for sport. The findings lead to the conclusion that gender inequality in sport in Brazil is common and that the media, instead of contributing to the decrease in levels of gender inequality, is contributing to this inequality in wider society. **Key words:** BRAZILIAN SPORT PRESS, FEMALE ATHLETES, GENDER INEQUALITIES.

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil is known world-wide as the 'soccer country'. However, soccer today is still mainly a sport for men, a sport in which women do not generally participate, or participate only as spectators or supporters. Recently, even though soccer continues to predominate, other sports have been attracting the interest of the Brazilian population, such tennis, volleyball and basketball. The number of Brazilians playing or supporting different kinds of sports is increasing, and among them, women are more and more involved with a range of sports, playing different roles, from supporters to athletes, from managers to coaches.

A clear indication of the increasing participation of women in Brazilian sports is the number of female athletes playing in major sports tournaments. In 1980, at the Moscow Summer Olympic Games, there were only 15 female athletes in Brazil's Olympic team; twenty years later, at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, there were 94 women, comprising more than 40 percent of the Brazilian delegation. At the Athens Olympics in 2004, women athletes made up nearly 50 percent of the country's delegation: 122 women athletes. Despite these figures, which would suggest a wholly positive development in terms of gender equality, it must be noted that the female athletes are still subjected to gender-specific standards of behavior regarding their bodies and sexuality. Stereotypes are reinforced by the way the media often broadcast sports news covering women, not focusing on the talents and achievements of women athletes but, rather, focusing on perceived sensuality and beauty, and even in 'femininity'.

On this point, the main question of this study is: how have women athletes portrayed in the media? Did they have any prominence in the media? And if they do, in what ways have they been portrayed? Is the press's treatment of women similar to that given to men and their tournaments, or the opposite, favoring old gender stereotypes and focusing on the women's appearance and neglecting their athletic capacities?

The media can create positive images of athletes as part of their coverage of sport, helping individual athletes to develop a positive image and in the process helping them to attract sponsorship. It is, therefore, important to assess how the media portrays women athletes; media images of these women can also influence children and teenagers and their engagement in the world of sport. The authors would argue that women who are part of this world should be able to receive the same amount of attention and exactly the same treatment from the media as male athletes.

The objective of this research, then, is to study and highlight gender relationships in Brazilian sports as conveyed in the media. The discussion is based on quantitative data gathered from the sports section of one of Brazil's most important daily newspapers, the *Folha de São Paulo*.

To achieve this objective, the strategies used in this research were to:

- check how many articles the *Folha de São Paulo* dedicated to female and male athletes;
- verify the length of the articles; and
- verify how often the reporters make comments about the gender of the athletes.

In accordance with international studies as well as the objectives of this research, the authors have put forward three hypotheses:

H1- It is expected that the number of articles regarding male participation in sports is larger than that about the female participation;

H2- It is expected that the length of the articles covering male athletes is longer than those that concern female athletes;

H3- It is believed that in the articles concerning women in sport, more comments about gender and appearance may be apparent than in those dealing with men.

Media and social representation

The press, also known as *the Fourth State* in democracies (after the Judiciary, Legislative and Executive), exerts a strong influence in many aspects of our lives. Through its presentation of all kinds of images and texts – photographs, jokes, articles, cartoons - the media plays a crucial role in the development of opinions and ideas about all aspects of society, reinforcing social representations of events and people which may or may not be factual.

The media is the agency that 'chooses' what facts and people are going to be noted by the public. This is a brutal process; according to Lobo (2003:15), 'if something was not diffused, it did not exist'.

Politics, business, love affairs, educational programs - everything is filtered and decoded by the media. Subjects such as gender relationships are also covered and prejudice against those that do not conform to standardized social patterns can be intensified.

Notions of masculinity and femininity are also displayed by the media. Pathways on how to be a man or a woman are continually being normalized by the media. Even with the perceived decrease of homophobia and the increase of pro-feminist thinking in Western countries, the mainstream media still showcases men and women in contrasting ways, and especially in its coverage of sport.

Sports and the media

Sport is considered by Castellani Filho (1997) as one of the most important cultural phenomenon of modern times, and that is why it has a strong presence in the press.

The relationship between sport and media is clear. Almost everything that happens in the sports world is quickly made public, reaching huge numbers of people avid for news about their favorite sports (Vargas, 1995). There are hundreds of sports related magazines, newspapers, TV channels, websites and radio programs. As a consequence, people are highly influenced by what the media broadcasts, as the majority of the information they receive about sports is from the TV, or from surfing the internet or reading newspapers (Koivula, 1999).

This link between sport and the public is so central that sports organizations, leagues and even individual athletes are subject to the demands of the media in order to attract support from respectable companies.

Media and sports are interdependent, since sport sells media and media sells sport. The relation between sports and the press is based on mutual financial benefits. According to a survey by Clarke and in 1984, two thirds of newspaper readers would like to read more about sport. The advantages for sports include free advertisements and coverage that attracts more potential consumers to their products (Urquhart & Crossman, 1999).

Without media coverage, the financial benefits that come from sports spectators would be much more limited. Information in the media about sports events generates wide public great awareness, and it is this that drives the sale of tickets, concessions, parking lots and teams' trademarked products (Coakley, 2001).

Even capturing such notability in the media, the media sports coverage still displays women and men in unequal ways. The media focuses on such things as three frequent controversies regarding female athletes' uniforms, for example when leading sports managers declare or even require that the female uniforms should be more 'sensual', even if these uniforms can jeopardize the performance of women athletes.

The media is also capable of promoting role models, turning athletes into idols for thousands of children and teenagers who imitate these idols when expressing emotions and interests. The media can also support involvement in sport through programs which stimulate participation and oppose the increasingly sedentary nature of modern life.

Girls and women, however, have few idols or examples, because the efforts and achievements of successful female athletes are mostly ignored by the media. This lack of exposure leads to the general perception that women are not important or deserve attention (Toohey, 1997).

Differences between the treatment given by the media to men and to women practising sports have been reported in scientific research. Fink (1998), for example, pointed out that only 15 percent of media sport coverage was of female athletes and that only five percent of television news was about women in sports. In a survey by Koivula (1999), 86.7 percent of the total sports coverage time on television was dedicated to men, while women got only 11.7 percent. These surveys also suggested that one possible consequence of this gap in press coverage was the reinforcement of the myth of female passivity and fragility.

Gender and the social world

We are born into a world ruled by gender relations. Our parents, teachers, friends and coaches talk to us as boys or girls. The differences between the treatment given to boys and that given to girls helps boys become independent and powerful, while girls tend to be more sensitive, emotional and dependent. Gender is such a huge influence; it is difficult to determine its dimension (Gill, 1994).

The word 'gender' conveys concepts that have been changing since the 1970s, mainly as a consequence of feminism's questioning the process of 'sex role' development. The new concept of gender is that gender is linked to the social world; it is through historical and social process that sex differences emerge into the social world (Scott, 1990). Derived from the field of women's studies, this concept of gender is different from the concept of 'sex'; according to Louro (1996), sex designates the anatomical / physiological characterization of human beings and sexual relations while *gender refers to the social world of human beings*, based on notions of masculinity and femininity embedded in each social group.

Based on the idea that highlights gender as a social construct, feminist groups perceive as well as denunciate the current gender system as oppressive and unequal. They perceive women as an oppressed group within society and seek the elimination of what they argue are oppressive social processes. Feminists also believe that society has not yet attained gender equality, and that we live in a patriarchal world that favours men as a group.

Despite women's achievements in sports and their overcoming of constant prejudices and stereotypes related to gender, women in sport are still treated in a different way than men. The media is particularly concerned to show how women athletes deal with their personal and family lives, leaving little time to explore and explain how they have made it into the sports world, apart of the importance of being respectable mothers, wives and friends (Antúnez, 2001).

Women and sport in Brazilian history

Rui Barbosa (1849 -1923), an important lawyer and Brazilian politician who was senator and Ministry of Education, drafted and approved a law in 1882 that established gymnastic sessions and compulsory physical education in every school. Barbosa's law stated that physical education should be compulsory for both sexes, but that special attention needed to be given to girls, for example, taking into account the female body and the girls' future as mothers (Castellani Filho, 1997). Before that date, women and girls were not allowed to exercise or sweat in public, as physical activities were considered appropriate only for men, a site in which men could display their virility and strength (Lima, 2001).

During the 1920s, medical voices were very influential in the still new Brazilian republic. These doctors thought that physical education classes for girls should be designed to protect and improve their maternal capacities. This was the ideology of *higienismo*, which saw physical education classes as a complement to the development of an awareness of the importance of hygiene. As part of this subject, during physical education classes, girls were to be given specific attention: the purpose of their body training was to give them the capacity to produce strong citizens (Mourão, 2000; Lima, 2001).

It was only in the following decade that women played competitive sports in Brazil (Rubio and Simões, 1999). However, in 1941, the Brazilian Sports Council passed legislation that forbade women to practise a number of sports such as wrestling, soccer, weight-lifting and baseball. According to Castellani Filho (1997) the background of this legislation was the medical concept that women should not play any kind of sport which was not compatible with their physical capacities.

This discrimination between psychical activities that could be practised by men and those by women was based on the assumption of the superiority of the masculine over the feminine. It provided countless opportunities for boys and men to develop their sports abilities; on the other hand, girls and women were subject to the strict 'feminine' patterns permitted to them during that period of history (Castellani Filho, 1997).

In the second half of the last century, women sought a new place in society, understanding that they could handle tasks that were formerly designated only to men. In order to achieve this, aesthetic patterns had to be changed: women abandoned the 'fatty', 'chubby' body look, which people used to believe was symbol of fertility, to a thinner and more dynamic body form that could bring more energy to the new lifestyle (Castellani Filho, 1997).

Looking for new ways to explore their femininity and to increase their freedom, women found different sports to be places where they could increase their strength, limits, competitiveness and resistance, both physical and psychological. Through sports, women also changed the social role they were expected to play and explored new forms of social relationships (Alonso, 2003).

It was only in 1986, however, that the Brazilian Sports Council declared that it was clear there should be more incentives to women to participate in all kinds of sports (Castellani Filho, 1997).

As a result of these changes women's participation in sports has increased. For example, 46 percent of the total number of athletes in Brazil's team at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 were women, while the average of the other 199 participating countries was 38 percent. However, that does not mean that in Brazil there is any kind of organized incentive for women to practise sports, or to get involved with any physical activities. Sports and leisure policies do not support girls well enough, nor do they give women appropriate conditions so they can overcome the socio-cultural differences that keep them away from the sports practice (Mourão, 2003).

This is why only a small portion of Brazilian women participates in sports activities, and it needs to be emphasized that most of this activity occurs during school years as girls consider school the only appropriate (and sometimes the only place) they have to practice any kind of physical activities. Men, however, have more opportunities to play, in such places as streets, square and vacant lots. And even during school breaks, boys tend to go to sports courts, while girls spend breaks sitting and talking (Knijnik, 2010).

Sport and gender socialization

Women had to struggle to achieve equal recognition in the world of sport: they had to deal with the traditional dominance of men, lack of media coverage and the lower value of prizes compared to those given to men at the end of tournaments. As well, a very public manifestation of inequality, there were fewer female athletes taking part in sports competitions such as the Olympic Games. Powerful ideologies continued to question the athletes' femininity and sexual orientation (Dunning & Maguire, 1996).

There are differences between women and men when it comes to power in sports. Social representations of gender still link men to strength, rationality, vigor and objectivity and women with fragility, emotions, passivity and subjectivity. Those differences are based on what is seen as the 'naturalization' of human beings. Men are 'innately' brave, violent, and more rational; women are 'innately' emotional, even hysterical, and affectionate. The division between 'female' sports and 'male' sports is based on these conceptions (Gonçalves, 1998).

It is argued that achievement in sport is linked to skills of velocity, strength and resistance; sports, therefore, favor men and male bodies are seen as exemplars while female bodies do not have such importance (Lenskyj, 1998).

In Western societies, boys are praised for competitiveness and aggression, girls for submission and charm. Alonso argues that in sports competitions and events, differences between women and men could be dissipated if, for example, attention was focused on the breaking of records. If this were the case, sports practice would offer women the opportunity to gain respect, dismantling false stereotypes associated with to women's perceived physical and psychological weaknesses (Alonso, 2003).

The media plays a crucial role in forming the public's image of athletes. Women are portrayed as the opposite of men: men are presented as possessing of great competitiveness, strength and courage, while women are mostly mentioned in terms of their appearance, femininity, non-competitive behavior or personal relationships (Kolnes, 1995).

Issues of power, strength and ability to defeat the opponent are basic to the sports world; what is required is 'rough' play by the athletes whether male or female. Such action is, however, considered inappropriate for women, and this leads to negative attitudes, jokes, insinuations and prejudice, because, in the end, 'rough' play is not considered appropriate for women in any arena (Knijnik and Vasconcellos, 2005).

Prejudice and discrimination are worse against women who play traditional male sports. Brazilian soccer is an example of this phenomenon, as professional female players are clearly excellent athletes but their skills and achievements are not recognized by the public (Knijnik and Vasconcellos, 2005). These women are constantly worried about being 'feminine' when practising 'male' sports such as soccer and handball. For them, it is important to be seen as capable athletes as well as 'real' women. They make a huge effort to prove to the public, and to themselves, that they are 'real' women (Kolnes, 1995).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In accordance to the goals outlined above, the aim of this article is to analyze sports coverage in the *Folha de São Paulo* from the perspective of gender. The data, however, allowed the authors to go beyond mere quantification. The analysis of the articles in the newspaper made the difference between the treatment given to men and women readily apparent.

Sample

This research sample was articles in the sports section of the *Folha de São Paulo* between 9 August and 9 September, 2002 and 3 February and 3 April, 2003. The total number of articles amounted to 2,125.

Since the 1980s, *Folha de São Paulo* has been one of the most important and influential of Brazil's newspapers, with 350,000 sold copies on weekdays and 430,000 on weekends.

Instruments

As a first step, the number and size of the articles mentioning female or male sports participation was assessed. Articles about sports practised in groups or as individual sports were considered, as well as interviews with athletes and coaches. Articles which were nonspecific, that is, reports which were not about any gender in particular but which covered women and men in sports, or sports in general, such as the Olympic Games, promotions and information about sport events, were also considered.

A second level of analysis was focused on the language, the words and terms, used and their frequency in the texts (Richardson, 1999).

According to our objectives, the following items were selected in order to verify how often they appear in the texts:

- gender marks (soccer *for women*, basketball *for men*, for example);
- the way the athlete is portrayed (whether in childish terms or not; the use of adjectives regarding gender);
- use of the athlete's first name, surname or nickname;
- comments regarding the athletes' appearance (for example: beautiful, strong, well-built, feminine);
- comments about private life (for example: mother, father, housewife, husband, wife);
- the type of sport the athlete practise and whether or not the sport is considered appropriated for women, man or for both. In this analysis, sports were categorized according to a study by Koivula

- (1995) which reports the opinion of people about 60 different sports on whether they are appropriate to women or men;
- group or individual sports;
 - comments about the athlete's abilities and whether he / she is a leader, idol, hero / heroine.

Data analysis

The study was made through an analysis of percentages. Data on the size of articles was collected simply by counting the number of words. The analysis was based upon literature in order to help to create the terms and words. The results were also compared and analyzed through the frequency in which they appeared (Koivula, 1999).

RESULTS

According to the information available in international literature and also in accordance with the first hypothesis of this study, this three month sample revealed a clear disproportion between the media coverage given to men and women. The sports practised by women were given much less attention than those practised by men.

Between August and September 2002, articles devoted to sports practised by men were 85.16% of the total coverage, while women got only 11.49% (Table 1). It is interesting note that during those months, there were a number of sports events taking place in and outside of Brazil. Some of the events were just for women, and some were for both sexes; in the latter, the participation of women was stable

Table 1. Number of reports and percentage about the total. August - September/2002 and February-March/2003.

	August/September	February	March
Men	689 – 85.16%	503 – 88.4%	657 – 87.95%
Women	93 – 11.49%	23 – 4.04%	35 – 4.68%
Neutral	27 – 3.33%	43 – 7.55%	55 – 7.36%

At this particular time, the National Volleyball League for women was being held in Brazil; in Germany, there was the Volleyball World Championship; in the US, the final WNBA matches; in Asia, the Under-19 Women's World Championship. Brazil's female basketball team was also training for the World Championship in China at this time.

There were other events for both sexes inside and outside the country. In Brazil, there was the international half marathon in Rio de Janeiro and a major tennis tournament in Costa do Sauípe in Bahia. Overseas, there was the US Open Tennis Championship, the Pan-Pacific Swimming Championship and a major judo tournament in Switzerland.

At this time, when there was a huge number of sport events for both women and men, the *Folha de São Paulo* published only 93 articles about women in sports in contrast to 689 about men, a difference of approximately 700 percent.

In the second period examined, February 2003, the difference was even bigger: men received 88.4 percent of the total coverage while women only had 4.04 percent. There was also a huge disparity in March, with men getting 87.95 percent coverage and women 4.68 percent (Table 1).

Not only were there fewer articles about women, but the size of articles covering women was smaller than that dealing with men. This confirmed the second hypothesis of this study. During all three months that were analysed, the average number of words of each article was larger when the articles dealt with men.

Between August and September 2002, the average number of words per article was 212.2 words for men and 138 for women (Table 2). In February 2003, the difference was even greater, with 246 words for men and only 32.4 for women (Table 2); the difference did not change at all in March 2003, with men getting, on average, 215.3 words and women just 78.7 (Table 2).

Table 2. Average of words in reports (three months).

	August/September	February	March
Men	212.2	246	215.3
Women	138	32.4	78.7
Neutral	69.4	116.4	231.5

The huge disparity in the coverage of male and female participation in sport found in *Folha de São Paulo* can also be observed in other forms of media outside Brazil.

A study by Toohey (1997) showed that in Australia, in 1992, sports practised by women got 4.2 percent of total newspaper coverage and only two percent on television. A survey by Urquhart and Crossman (1999) of coverage of the 16 Winter Olympic Games between 1924 and 1992 in the Canadian newspaper *Globe and Mail* has demonstrated that the attention given to sports practised by men was four times greater.

Urquhart and Crossman's study also indicated that during the Olympic Games, the difference between the attention given to sports practised by men and women athletes is still in evidence, but that it is not as large as what is normally found when there are no really big or important events taking place. Vincent et al. (2002) suggest the reason for this is the increasing number of girls and women playing sports and the fact that they comprise a significant number of potential consumers of sport equipment, a fact that is not lost on large sports enterprises. The increase in coverage is simply an opportunity to develop advertising strategies.

Table 3 shows that between August and September 2002, most of the articles regarding sports practised by men and women were about team sports, since the articles mentioned neutral and team sports most of the times. According to our third hypothesis, references to gender were much more frequent for women, and both men and women were cited by their last names. Men were cited as fathers and husbands or because of their physical skills. Comments regarding athletes' appearance were more usual when the articles were about women.

Table 3. Frequency of terms - between August/September 2002 and February/March 2003.

	Men			Women		
	Aug/Sep	Feb	Mar	Aug/Sep	Feb	Mar
women sports	0	1	0	9	2	11
man sports	537	407	538	8	3	1
neutral sports	152	95	119	76	18	23
team sports	548	403	508	59	5	14
individual sports	141	100	149	34	18	21
remarks on gender	8	13	31	42	23	39
first name	729	496	653	78	31	46
surname	979	591	769	125	43	80
nickname	447	299	446	39	11	6
mother/father	6	2	3	3	0	1
husband/wife	7	0	5	1	0	0
skilfull	2	7	5	0	0	1
charismatic	0	4	4	0	0	0
hero	2	4	8	0	0	0
Idol	6	0	12	1	0	1
leader	2	0	1	0	0	0
Negative sides of habilities	0	0	0	1	0	1
Positive sides of habilities	1	4	0	5	1	0
Negative sides of appearance	0	0	0	2	0	0
Sides out of the sporting environment	0	0	0	3	1	0

Although the majority of the articles were about men playing sports, the gender references in these articles (52 in all) are exactly half the number of such references found in the articles about women athletes (104). This clearly indicates that when a sport is played by a male athlete, it is considered what we might term 'normal': when an article is about men, it is not necessary to specify gender because it is implied; when women are the subjects of the article, it seems to be necessary to indicate that the modality is being played by women. We therefore seem to have, for example, soccer and 'soccer for women' and handball and 'handball for women', as if they are different sports, ruled by different norms.

This can be also verified in a study by Duncan et al. (1994), in which it is said that gender references were usual when the press commented about matches between female teams and even in the graphics (scout) showing the match's scores. This did not occur when a game was between male teams.

Articles about matches between male teams usually described the match itself and gave details about the players, sometimes with a short secondary article about a specific player or other relevant facts. However, articles about games played only by women tend to be short and objective, only with basic information.

One of the justifications made by the press editors for the difference between the coverage in the media of men and women is that most people who buy sports newspapers and magazines or watch sports programs on television are men, and that they prefer to watch and read about sports played by men. However, a study by Capranica & Aversa (2002) has showed that in Italy, women made up 40 percent of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Game's total television audience, and that there was no relevant difference between the sports played by men and those by women.

These results demonstrate that women do indeed watch sports programs; there is no study which proves that audiences only prefer to watch men playing. What actually happens is that the media creates the preference for sports played by men.

Most of the articles published in the *Folha de São Paulo* were about team sports, and these were generally considered as appropriate only for men (Koivula, 1995); only one article was about a sport seen considered 'right' for women. However, the articles about women were usually neutral, and there was a balance between the team and individual sports, with a slightly advantage to the ones practiced in teams.

These results indicate that people still believe that there are some sports that should not be practised by women, and others that men should not try practicing. When the athletes, both men and women, get past through this belief, they have to face strong prejudices and they get almost zero coverage from the media, what takes away their merits.

These results confirm Koivula's (1999) view that women receive greater coverage when the sport is considered neutral or appropriate for women and men when the sport is appropriated for male athletes.

Table 3 also indicates that in February 2003, coverage of team and male sports for men was quite frequent, and that neutral and individual sports were usually associated to women. Gender references were much more in evidence when the articles were about women and both men and women were cited by the surname most of the time.

In contrast to the data in the study by Duncan et al. (1994), in which women were usually referred to by their first name (52.7 percent), unlike men (7.8 percent), the results of this present research demonstrate that both men and women are usually referred to by family name. It is possible that this is because women athletes receive limited media coverage, readers tend not to know their nicknames, and so sports writers use first and family names to avoid confusion.

It should also be noted that the fact men were described as husbands and fathers did not mean that assessment of their athletic abilities was downplayed. What was evident was that brief notes about an athlete's personal life was added to a longer article focusing on the athlete's latest achievement such as which competition he was currently playing in. The same format did not occur in articles about women because the majority of these articles were brief, there was no direct reference to any individual athlete and therefore no comments about their personal lives.

Table 3 shows that in March most of the articles regarding men were about male or team sports, while the majority of those about women were about neutral and individual sports. References to gender were much more frequent for women and both genders were often cited by their last names. Men were referred to as husbands and fathers, but their abilities as sports players were not forgotten. However, women got negative comments about their skills.

The language used in media coverage reveals a difference between the treatment given to sports practised by men and those practised by women. Men are seen as heroes, idols and leaders. Women are often referred to in terms that emphasize normative femininity. Articles relating to women are full of childish terms; women are almost always referred to by their first names, while men are usually referred to by their surnames and described in more adult language. Language creates and legitimates male superiority in sports (Koivula, 1999).

According to Fink (1998), sports coverage of female athletes usually focuses on their roles as mothers, wives or as examples of 'femininity', barely mentioning their achievements in the sports world. Therefore, instead of leading to change, the media perpetuates supposedly 'appropriate' female characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The results presented in this research demonstrate that in Brazil, as well as in other countries, female athletes are still greatly ignored by the media, despite the increasing number of successful sportswomen.

There is a new, steadily increasing presence of women in sport and this is helping to create a new representation of the female athlete in people's minds: it would seem that there are no longer prejudices or perceived differences and women and men are seen to be on the same level.

However, what this research reveals is that the press, one of the key components of the sports world, treats the genders in an unequal and sexist manner. The data speaks for itself: women are 'invisible' when it comes to media coverage of women in sport in Brazil. This analysis had the *Folha de São Paulo*, a newspaper considered to be Brazil's most important and progressive newspaper, as its standard. During August and September 2002, the number of articles dealing with male athletes was seven times bigger than that about women; in February 2003, the number was twenty-one times bigger.

While this work was being written, in conversations between the authors and other researchers, when commenting on the results that were being revealed, the reaction was always the same: 'Oh, but it's soccer, the national passion!' It seemed obvious to everyone that as soccer is the 'most popular sport in the country', men should get more coverage than women.

What should be questioned is the reason for the absence of coverage of women's soccer's in the newspapers and, another issue, the small number of women playing the 'national passion'. As Mourao (2003) argues, men and boys have easier access to the free areas for their sports practices than women and girls. Public spaces, parks and streets 'belong' to men and in those places the sport most practised is soccer.

However, what this research reinforces is that the data goes beyond what can initially be seen as 'obvious': not only are there more articles about men in sports but these articles are longer. The smallest difference was found between August and September 2002, when the word average for articles regarding men was 212.2 and that for women 138. In February 2003, the difference was huge, with the word average for men (246) seven times bigger than that for women (32.4). In March 2003, the men's word average (215.3) was almost three times bigger than that for women (78.7). This clearly indicates that the press favors men when it comes to length of articles.

Besides this basic element of analysis, the treatment given to each gender - here verified by the gender references - reveals a huge difference in the way writers refer to athletes. Gender references and comments related to the athletes' looks are much more frequent for in articles about women. For men, sports ability is highlighted. Articles about female sports players usually emphasize issues of femininity and beauty.

These differences indicate that despite the increasing number of women competing in almost every type of sports modality, there is still a displacement in the coverage women athletes attract from the media when compared to coverage of men. The lack of attention to women prejudices the development of their reputations, what is not helpful when, for example, they are looking for sponsorship, better training conditions or simply trying to improve the image people have of them.

These results also demonstrate that merely increasing the coverage of the athletes is not enough: it is necessary to modify the way they are portrayed. This reckless coverage given to them diminishes appreciation of their athletic skills and potential influence on the public, along with the importance of women playing sports. There is an urge to change the present mentality, so the public's attitudes towards women in sports can also be changed.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that this study is limited to only one example of one kind of media (print newspaper) and that the methodology could be used as the basis for further research into a wider range of media (television, magazines, the internet, other kinds of newspapers), allowing more detailed comparisons to afford a more specific analysis of the attention given to female athletes by the Brazilian media. This research could also help to analyze the sports coverage by different ways, revealing more about the typical impression the public receives from the media coverage of women athletes.

A huge effort has been made in recent decades to make visible the history of women in sports, to show that they have always been present in this field, which was wrongly seen by the public as restricted to men (Struna, 1994). For readers of articles about sport in newspapers, however, women remain 'invisible'. The new chapter of the history of women in sports is focused on revealing the unequal way the media treats the genders, relying on old stereotypes that rob athletes of dignity.

Women are still invisible in the Brazilian media sports coverage. This invisibility sums up what this work discloses: in the 21st century, the life of Brazilian women athletes is still full of obstacles to the achievement of an equal sport practice, free of prejudices and discrimination. As well, this research can lead to a deeper analysis of the attitude and role of the media, a media which might contribute positively to creating a world where differences can be the source of meaningful experiences for all people regardless of gender.

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