

A Gender Analysis of NBC's Coverage of the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics

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Context

Traditionally, certain activities, tasks, and behaviors have been labeled as masculine or feminine, and one such area is sport, which has traditionally been viewed as predominantly masculine. It is believed that sport “is a representation of the sociocultural system in which it occurs,” reflecting the beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of that system. Sports considered acceptable for female participation are those that portray women in the light of their stereotyped roles and expectations, and allow them to maintain their beauty so as to provide pleasure to spectators. This objectification of females in sport is perpetuated to a large extent through the media.¹

According to the framing theory, developed by Erving Goffman, the way the world is viewed is profoundly affected by the way it is framed and presented to audiences.² The media is the largest of these framers, selecting, excluding, and emphasizing information and news for audiences worldwide. Therefore, when media organizations in the United States sexualize, trivialize, and devalue women’s sporting events through discrepancies in allotted television coverage between male and female athletes and gender-biased commentary, they are not only perpetuating a stereotypical perspective on the modern female athlete, but are also giving audiences the perception that women’s sports are less important. By doing so, it has “set limits to interpretations and meanings of women’s engagement in physical activity, as well as limiting how their athleticism is to be demonstrated.”³

¹ Nathalie Koivula. (2001). “Perceived Characteristics of Sports Categorized as Gender Neutral, Feminine, and Masculine”. *Journal of Sports Behavior*, 26(3), 272-284.

² Roxane Coche & C. A. Tuggle. (2016). “The Women’s Olympics? A Gender Analysis of NBC’s Coverage of the 2012 London Summer Games”. *Electronic News*, 10(2), 121-138.

³ Mary Jo Kane, Susan L. Greendorfer. (1994). “The Media’s Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotyped Images of Women in Sport”, in P.J. Creedon (ed.) *Women, Media and Sport: Challenging Gender Values*. London: Sage.

Nonetheless, since the implementation of Title IX, women have taken great strides in the realm of competitive spectator sport.⁴ With a huge increase in participation, as well as a noticeable improvement in the coverage of women's sports by the mass media, it seems that female athletes are beginning to receive more of the athletic spotlight. This spotlight shines the brightest during the Olympics, where the best athletes of both genders compete in the same venue with a common goal: a medal. Nonetheless, female athletes in the Olympics have still encountered the aforementioned obstacles that have prevented them from reaching equality in the world of sport.

Gender analysis studies from previous Olympics suggest significant improvements throughout recent decades in many aspects of media coverage; however, they also show that there is still a significant way to go to achieve complete gender parity. This begs the question, to what extent did gender bias occur through the broadcasting of the 2016 Rio Summer Olympics? Can this be measured more specifically through analyses of commentator dialogue and discrepancies in coverage of women's versus men's events? Addressing these questions through a mixed-method content analysis will provide more recent data on trends and the presence or absence of gender bias in the Olympics, allowing for a more updated discussion of its implications and ramifications.

Review of the Literature

Commentator Dialogue: An Overview

Televised sports commentary contributes to the construction of gender and racial hierarchies by marking women's sports and women athletes as "other". In a study comparing the

⁴ Alina Bernstein. (2002). "Is It Time for a Victory Lap? Changes in the Media Coverage of Women in Sport". *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37(4), 415-428.

verbal commentary in the NCAA men's and women's Final Four basketball tournaments in 1989 and some of the men's and women's matches in the 1989 U.S. Open tennis tournament, authors Michael Messner, Margaret Duncan, and Kerry Jensen found that verbal commentary can be divided into two categories: gender marking, and gendered hierarchy of naming.

Their results showed that gender marking is most common in women's basketball, occurring both graphically and verbally. For example, announcers reminded the audience that they are watching the "*Women's* Final Four", which include "some of the best *women's* college basketball teams". During the men's games, however, gender marking was rare, as they were generally referred to universally. The researchers admit that although gender marking is occasionally necessary to distinguish between events, a difference in the commentary, where women are continuously marked as "other", implies that female athletes are inferior to their male counterparts.

A gendered hierarchy of naming occurs when there are "stark contrasts between how men athletes and women athletes are referred to by commentators." For example, female athletes in both the tennis matches and the basketball games were commonly called "girls", while male athletes are rarely called "boys"; only "men" or "young men". Additionally, commentators tended to refer to women using their first names only, while men were commonly referenced using their last name. These discrepancies in the commentary between the two genders not only reflects, but also reconstructs gender inequality and the notion that women are of a lower status than men.

Ultimately, Messner concluded that "commentators today are less likely than their predecessors to sexualize or trivialize women athletes overtly." However, it is important to note that their language "tends to mark women's sports and women athletes as other, infantilize

women athletes, and frame their accomplishments negatively or ambivalently,”⁵ and through analyzing the occurrence of gender marking and hierarchy of naming, researchers have been able to further assess the prevalence of these tendencies in the Olympic Games over time.

Commentator Dialogue: Analyses of Previous Olympics

In a gender analysis of the 1992 Olympics published in the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, authors Catriona Higgs and Karen Weiller collected randomized coverage of the games and analyzed quantitative discrepancies in the coverage of men’s and women’s events as well as qualitative differences in the portrayals of male and female athletes by commentators. Their results showed that gender marking was significant in women’s team sports such as basketball and volleyball. During women’s basketball games, the United States team was always presented as the “U.S. Women’s Team”, meanwhile the men’s team was most often introduced as the “U.S. Olympic Team”. In fact, most same-sport events “often featured gender marking of women’s events, sexist descriptors, [and] biased commentary.”⁶

Other descriptions of female athletes had an obvious focus on their appearances and occurred throughout the coverage. Such comments included “she’s much prettier now with long hair-- that other look didn’t become her”, “those long beautiful legs”, “the chief fashion plate of the Olympic Games”, “she’s a little too chunky for this event” and “She’s featured this month in the Dutch edition of *Penthouse*... Of course, it’s only a sport interview”.⁷ Blatantly sexist comments were also prevalent, such as after the success of the men’s and women’s 4x100 meter

⁵ Michael Messner, et al. (1993). Separating the Men From the Girls. The Gendered Language of Televised Sports. *Gender and Society*, Volume 7, Issue 1, 1993, pp. 121–137.

⁶ Catriona T. Higgs, & Karen H. Weiller. (1994). “Gender Bias And The 1992 Summer Olympic Games: An Analysis Of Television Coverage”. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 18(3), 234-246.

⁷ Ibid.

relay events, when a commentator said during an interview with the women's team that he was "not used to being around fast women", but to the men he said "Boy, I wish I had the speed of one of you guys when I was playing football".⁸

The results also showed a strong distinction in the presentation of narratives surrounding male and female athletes. While narratives used in men's events "exemplified the themes of competition, conflict, and the American ideology of winning and domination" with a focus on strength, power, ability, and the fight for a gold medal, narratives accompanying women's events often delved into their personal lives, painting them as housewives or mothers with "a new focus in life with her baby", or as reliant on their husbands when "she gets up early with her husband to train".

The "Cinderella story" was also a common theme in female narratives, especially in gymnastics, where opening descriptions such as "her parents traded her childhood for dreams", "for the first time the world met the Cinderella of gymnastics whose dreams are as fragile as the body that carries them", and "the little girl who wanted nothing more than to be the best", were used to set the stage to effectively reflect society's image of the classic Cinderella.⁹

In an analysis of the 1996 Games conducted by Higgs, Weiller, and Scott Martin, also published in the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, gendered biased commentary was found to be less blatant and more balanced. Gender marking, such as "U.S. Women's Team" was still evident throughout the coverage of women's team sports, however the use of "girl" in reference to a female athlete --something that was a problem in the 1992 Olympics-- was rarely used. In the spectrum of individual events, ambivalent and sexist language was still relatively common;

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

however, there was a noted lack of overtly sexist commentary --especially in track and field-- as compared to 1992, signifying greater similarity in the dialogue surrounding those athletes.¹⁰

The coverage of women's gymnastics was still accentuated with soap opera narratives that were "replete with interpersonal conflict as well as personal catastrophe,"¹¹ and the overall presentation of narratives throughout the Games still consisted of a focus on athletes' personal lives, such as that of Jackie Joyner Kersee, whose narrative focused on her marriage with her husband, who is also her coach, as well as her doubts, fears, and family. One female cyclist was called "Mommy medalist", with emphasis on her struggle to train properly while having to perform her motherly duties. A male commentator spoke of her family as "hearing about Mom's trip to Atlanta", and how "it's time for the others to help with the dishes."¹² The narratives surrounding male athletes also touched on their personal lives, but the majority of their descriptions were dedicated to the completion of their goals, the gold medal mindset, and their fierce competitive attitudes. Meanwhile, a French female cyclist was criticized as being "arrogant" due to her "fiery competitiveness and focus of attention."¹³ Overall, the researchers concluded that there was a visible effort and improvement on the part of NBC to portray women in a stronger manner; however, "there still remains an underlying message that while competing, women should still conform to society's image of what is deemed appropriate. Until the media

¹⁰ Catriona T. Higgs, Karen H. Weiller, Scott B. Martin. (February 2003). "Gender Bias in the 1996 Olympic Games: A Comparative Analysis". *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Volume 27, No. 1. Pp. 52-64.

¹¹ Daddario, G. (1998). *Women's Sport and Spectacle: Gendered Television Coverage and the Olympic Games*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

¹² Catriona T. Higgs, Karen H. Weiller, Scott B. Martin. (February 2003). "Gender Bias in the 1996 Olympic Games: A Comparative Analysis". *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Volume 27, No. 1. Pp. 52-64.

¹³ Ibid.

can totally view women as ‘athletes’ and not ‘bodies’, it is likely that this situation will continue.”¹⁴

The analyses of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, 2004 Games in Athens, and the 2012 Olympics in London did not include a qualitative analysis of the dialogue surrounding the athletes.

Discrepancies in Coverage: Analyses of Previous Olympics

In a gender analysis of the 1992 Summer Olympic Games, authors Catriona Higgs and Karen Weiller found that of a sample of 60 hours of television coverage, 68% was allotted to same-sport activities (events for which there are men’s and women’s categories), and of that time, 56% of the coverage was of men’s events, and the other 44% was of female events. Although female athletes were represented significantly, the event that received the most televised attention was gymnastics (84%), an individual sport that is considered appropriate for female participation. It was found that there was little to no coverage of women’s team events such as basketball and volleyball, whereas a large section of time was devoted to the coverage of men in those events.¹⁵

Similarly, in the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, “61% of the coverage devoted to women focused only on three sports: swimming, diving and gymnastics, with gymnastics receiving more than one-third of all coverage devoted to female athletes”.¹⁶ However, results showed that, compared with the 1992 Olympics, the coverage of women’s sport increased in 6 of the 11 events analyzed, and the male sport coverage decreased in 4 of the 11 events analyzed,

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Higgs, Weiller. “Gender Bias in 1992 Olympics”. p236.

¹⁶ Bernstein. “Changes in the Media Coverage of Women in Sport”. 418.

demonstrating that women were given more televised coverage than men. The most notable increases in coverage occurred in the realm of women's team sport, in which basketball received 26% of coverage and volleyball 69%.¹⁷ This increase is significant due to the fact that in 1992, female athletes in these events received minimal amounts of coverage.

During the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, although female participation was at a record high, competing in 118 events, they were still excluded from events such as boxing and wrestling, and despite the increase in participation, they only comprised 30% of the athletes at the Games.¹⁸ An analysis of NBC's prime-time Olympics coverage by C.A. Tuggle, Suzanne Huffman, and Dana Rosengard found that "women received proportionately less coverage in 2000 than they did in 1996 on the US network, and that coverage focused on individual events, with women competing in team sports receiving relatively little coverage."¹⁹ Not only did men receive more overall coverage, but male team events were also covered more extensively, with the majority of women's coverage dedicated to individual events. The study also found that, similar to 1992 and 1996, coverage of women's powersports (which included weightlifting, rowing, throwing events such as shotput and discus, judo, taekwondo, boxing, wrestling, canoeing, and kayaking) were relatively nonexistent, despite significant medal success in that area.²⁰ It was ultimately concluded that the coverage of the 2000 Sydney Olympics showed significant improvements when compared to a time when female sports were discouraged, and it is clearly communicated that high success in women's competition is attainable, however the

¹⁷ Higgs, Martin, Weiller. Gender Bias in 1996 Olympics. P54.

¹⁸ Bernstein. Is It Time for a Victory Lap? P416.

¹⁹ Huffman, Rosengard, Tuggle. (2002) "A Descriptive Analysis of NBC's Coverage of the 2000 Summer Olympics". Mass Communication & Society. 5(3). 361-375.

²⁰ Ibid.

coverage still conveys the message that women should only compete in sports that perpetuate social expectations of how they should look and act.²¹

Similar to the 2000 Olympics, an analysis of NBC's prime-time coverage of the 2004 summer Olympics in Athens by C.A. Tuggle, Suzanne Huffman, and Dana Rosengard found that more prime-time coverage was dedicated to male athletes than female athletes, but the margin was relatively small.²² With 47.9% of total coverage, female athletes received more airtime than their male counterparts in team events, with about three quarters of team coverage dedicated to gymnastics and beach volleyball, and the majority of individual event coverage dedicated to swimming, track, diving, and gymnastics. Men, on the other hand, received more coverage in individual events due to the wider variety of events available for male competition, and were covered on a much larger scale in power sports (which included weightlifting, rowing, throwing events such as shotput and discus, judo, taekwondo, boxing, wrestling, canoeing, and kayaking) than women.²³ The study concluded that "the network has repeatedly dropped the ball in regard to finding new ways of representing gender in its Olympic coverage"²⁴, seeing as there has been little change in the portrayal of women in their "appropriate" events

However, by the London Olympics in 2012, an analysis by Roxane Coche and C. A. Tuggle found that each participating team had at least one female athlete, and on the United States team, female athletes outnumbered their male teammates in overall numbers as well as in the number of medals won. In total, female athletes took part in 136 of the 302 events, and "for the the first time since 1996, NBC's prime-time coverage included more women's sports than it

²¹ Ibid.

²² Huffman, Rosengard, Tuggle. (2007). "A Descriptive Analysis of NBC's Coverage of the 2004 Summer Olympics". *Journal of Sports Media*. Volume 2. 53-57.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

did men's sports"²⁵, effectively earning the 2012 Olympics the nickname of "the women's games". In London, women's team sports were given almost twice as much coverage as in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and the men 20 minutes less. Nonetheless, despite the significant improvement, gymnastics and beach volleyball received the most team coverage, while events such as track and field received only 5% of the total. Overall, more than 96% of the coverage of women's sports was of those deemed appropriate and acceptable for females, even though there was significant female success in power sports.²⁶ This further perpetuates the trend seen throughout previous Olympics.

Method

The content analysis of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games followed a mixed-method design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The quantitative analysis was developed from the methods of the gender analysis of the 2000, 2004, and 2012 Summer Olympics. Quantitative data included 7 days of running time of NBC's prime-time coverage. This was chosen in lieu of a randomized sample of regular coverage for two main reasons: (1) prime-time coverage is a chosen sample of the day's events deemed most important and most likely to maximize viewers, and (2) the primetime program has the largest audience. Therefore, an analysis of the prime-time coverage is crucial to furthering the discussion surrounding gender bias in the media portrayal of sports and understanding the extent and quality of such bias, as it is tailored for nationwide audiences.

²⁵ Coche, & Tuggle. (2016). "Gender Analysis of 2012 Games". P127.

²⁶ Ibid.

The content analysis included the total running time of the sport covered, the total running time of the women's segment and men's segment of the event, and whether the segment was a power sport (involving physical power and hard body contact). These sports include boxing, canoeing, kayaking, weight lifting, judo, rowing, cycling, and Tae Kwon Do. After collecting the entirety of the data, the time devoted to each gender (per event) was calculated as a percentage of the total running time of that event, and the overall coverage time devoted to men and to women was calculated as a percent of the total primetime coverage running time. This provided the ability to distinguish differences between coverage of women's and men's events. No inferential statistics were used.

The qualitative analysis was developed from the analyses of the 1992 and 1996 summer Olympics, and the data involved a focus on narratives, which included themes presented by commentators when weaving such narratives. Instances of gender marking and hierarchy of naming in reference to male and female athletes and teams were tallied, totalled, and then compared to reveal any discrepancies in the discourse surrounding each gender. Other notable instances of gender bias or discrimination that were significant enough to be included but were not within the specifications and parameters of the rubric were described and an explanation of their significance was provided. Such features are influential parts of the dialogue surrounding athletes, teams, and events, as they serve to set the scene for competition, and "frame perceptions of events, providing drama, human interest, and appeal necessary to attract and keep viewers."²⁷

Limitations

Before discussing the research results, a few limitations must first be addressed. Due to a change of access rights to NBC's prime-time coverage videos, they were removed from the

²⁷ Higgs, Weiller. "Gender Bias and the 1992 Olympics". p234.

internet during the research process, and therefore only 7 out of 16 days of the coverage were analyzed. This narrows the range of events that were included in the data, and therefore the scope of any implications stemming from it, as different events were featured on different days throughout the two weeks.

Results

Quantitative Analysis Results

At the Rio Olympics, the United States Olympic team consisted of 292 female athletes, which accounted for 53% of the total-- the most female athletes in history to compete for the United States at the Olympics. Of the 7 days of prime-time coverage analyzed, 61% was allotted to these women, and 39% to men. Events included gymnastics, swimming, beach volleyball, diving, track and field, rugby, cycling, rowing, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, soccer, shooting, fencing, and judo. Table 1 shows the amount of coverage given to each of these events.

Table 1

Sport	% Male	% Female	Total Time
Gymnastics	28%	71%	6h 10m
Swimming	53%	47%	9h 19m
Beach Volleyball	0	100%	2h 16m
Diving	57%	43%	1h 1m
Track and Field	49%	51%	1h 8m
Rugby	100%	0	40s
Cycling	0	100%	3m
Rowing	0	100%	10s
Basketball	0	100%	16s
Field Hockey	0	100%	7s
Volleyball	0	100%	8s
Soccer	0	100%	22s
Shooting	0	100%	2m
Fencing	0	100%	20s

Judo	0	100%	20s
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Compared to the lack of female representation throughout history, 61 percent of coverage shows notable and encouraging improvements; however, it is necessary to examine the events that made up the majority of this coverage. As shown in Table 1, women received significantly more coverage than men in gymnastics and beach volleyball. In swimming and diving, women received slightly less airtime than men, however only by a matter of minutes. The nature of these activities are individual, and team events (in which athletes compete simultaneously²⁸) such as rugby, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, and soccer received little to no coverage. Out of the predetermined power sports (boxing, canoeing, kayaking, weight lifting, judo, rowing, cycling, and Tae Kwon Do), the only events to receive coverage were judo (20 seconds), rowing (10 seconds), and cycling (3 minutes).

Qualitative Analysis Results

Of the 7 days analyzed, gender marking of events occurred 59 times for women's events, compared to a total of 40 times during men's events. The most commonly gender marked events were swimming, gymnastics, and track and field for both genders. During swimming, women's races were gender marked 27 times, and men's 29 times. Gymnastics showed more discrepancy, with 14 times for women's competition, and 5 times for men's. Women's and men's track and field were gender marked 10 and 6 times, respectively, diving 3 and 0, and --despite the fact that men's beach volleyball was not covered during the analyzed prime-time coverage-- women's beach volleyball was gender marked 5 times.

²⁸ Huffman, Rosengard, Tuggle. (2007). "A Descriptive Analysis of the 2004 Summer Olympics". P62.

A hierarchy of naming was used 5 times in reference to female athletes with phrases such as “little girl”, and “girl”, and 3 times in reference to male athletes, including phrases such as “kid”, “boys”, and “big boy race”. The majority of these references were used during swimming or gymnastics competitions, with the exception of one reference in diving.

The narratives offered by commentators during women’s events had a large focus on the personal lives of the competing athletes, as well as on the drama and emotional toll of competition. The focus on the athletes’ personal lives outside of competition included a large emphasis on the balance between motherhood, housewife duties, and training for athletes who recently had babies or who were mothers with busy family lives. Such narratives included comments such as “momma on a mission”, in reference to four-time Olympic swimmer Dana Vollmer who had recently had her first baby, and “little hang time there for the mother of three” after a play by beach volleyball player Carrie Walsh-Jennings.

Other narratives of personal lives focused on the families of athletes, and how their legacies contributed to the success of their young Olympians. United States swimmer Maya Dirado has a family of successful Stanford graduates, and the audience was frequently reminded that she could not have achieved such a high level of success without their legacy. Similarly, the success of Dirado’s teammate, Simone Manuel, was attributed to her athletic family who gave her the drive and competitiveness to win a gold medal.

Perhaps the most prominent theme surrounding the personal lives of the female athletes was the focus on their husbands. Hungarian swimmer Katinka Hosszu is considered one of the best female swimmers in the world, more specifically in individual medley events and the backstroke; however, her success is largely attributed to her husband. The audience was constantly subjected to camera shots of her husband and his reactions during her races,

accompanied by comments such as “he instilled this confidence in his wife, and now she is an entirely different swimmer”, “swimming more events than she ever has been, that is a recipe that her husband adopted”, and “there’s the guy responsible for turning Hosszu into a completely different swimmer. Her husband was instrumental in the turnaround of his wife.”

Other common themes included appearance, “growing up”, drama, and emotion. Throughout the coverage of swimming, “beautiful” was a common description for female performances. Although a large focus on gymnastics star Simone Biles was her childhood with her grandparents, as well as her perseverance and good attitude, she was described as a “classic teenager” who likes makeup and getting her nails done. Similarly, the focus on Jamaican world-class sprinter Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce was largely on her “bubbly personality” and her hair instead of her incredible strength and speed. This included a long-winded discussion of her different hairstyles for every race, and a debate over whether her current hair color consisted of the national colors of Jamaica or Brazil.

The weaving of drama and emotion served as the most important anchor in the female narrative. 2012 swimming star Missy Franklin, described as a “17 year old little girl in London [who] is all grown up” was the center of drama in swimming due to her underachievement, which was attributed to the fact that “she was in a cocoon when she was younger and is now facing the real world”. Also in swimming, a large focus surrounded the drama of Yuliya Efimova, who had recently been allowed to compete in the Olympics after a doping scandal, as well as the emotional toll of the negativity towards her scandal. The audience was shown many shots of Efimova downtrodden and in tears. Many such shots were also seen during gymnastics performances.

In contrast to the female narrative, those surrounding male athletes and competition had a large focus on redemption, competition, conflict, domination, power, and athleticism. In the few times that family or significant others were mentioned in relation to an athlete, it was most commonly in a background position of moral support. In gymnastics, descriptions of athletes focused on their brute strength and athleticism, as well as their battle for perfection and their ability to overcome setbacks. The theme surrounding team USA in gymnastics was largely that of redemption, as their performance in London was subpar. Commentators weaved the narrative of Michael Phelps in a way that glorified his Olympic career and his drive for perfection, with many scenes of his previous medals and close competitions, which created an overarching theme of domination and power. There was only one mention of the drama surrounding his legal trouble with DUI charges, his rehabilitation, and his severe struggle with retirement from swimming, all of which was painted in an “overcoming setbacks” theme.

Other themes of overcoming setbacks and redemption included the story of Cody Miller, who overcame a caved chest throughout his childhood and swimming career to make it to the Rio Olympics and fulfill his dreams, and Anthony Ervin, who won a gold medal at the Olympics when he was 19, and at 35 years old came out of retirement to win another. The most prominent narratives of domination and power included that of the men’s 4x100 swimming relay final, which consisted of a variety of displays of power, prowess, and tension between the competing teams, leading up to the question of “who is going to do the smashing”, and that of Usain Bolt, who was back at the Olympics to prove once again that he is the fastest man alive.

Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

From the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona through the 2004 Olympics in Athens, men consistently received more coverage than their female counterparts. However, a large change was seen at the London Olympics in 2012, where women received more coverage than men. This increase can be seen in Table 2, which shows the total amount of coverage dedicated to men and women in the 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2012 Olympics. Access to the gender analysis of the 2008 Summer Olympics was unattainable.

Table
2

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2012	2016
Male (%):	56%	52.6%	55.2%	52.1%	46.11%	39%
Female (%):	44%	47.4%	44.8%	47.9%	53.03%	61%

Although the amount of analyzed coverage was shorter than those of previous gender analyses, the results of the quantitative analysis began to show similarities to those of NBC's prime-time coverage of the London Olympics. Women received more coverage than men for the second time. This is encouraging when considering that before 2012, there was a rather significant discrepancy in the amount of coverage given to women and men. However, when taking a closer look at the coverage, a few notable shortcomings become prevalent.

Of the 12 hours and 10 minutes of women's coverage, 11 hours and 4 minutes were dedicated to women's gymnastics, swimming, and beach volleyball, followed by track and field (35 minutes) and diving (26 minutes), all of which are considered socially acceptable for women to participate in. The event that received the most coverage was gymnastics (4 hours and 25 minutes), "a sport often perceived as feminine for the grace and flexibility it requires, which is

natural to women.”²⁹ It is also noted that it is expected for athletes in these events to wear the equivalent of a bathing suit. Critics of NBC’s coverage of the 2012 Olympics claimed that their broadcasting focused too much of its coverage on events that required women to wear leotards and swimsuits³⁰, and that the gender gap of the 2012 coverage is a result of “the network’s focus on women’s gymnastics and women’s beach volleyball” instead of giving more coverage to “a variety of sports in which U.S. women were successful.”³¹ These criticisms are seen to still be relevant in the coverage of the 2016 Olympics.

It could be argued that more coverage was given to gymnastics, swimming, and beach volleyball because American women have had significant success in these events, and were expected to excel again in Rio. Although producers take this into consideration when choosing what to include in prime-time, it is certainly not the sole deciding factor, and despite significant success and several medals from women’s team events, the bulk of female coverage was allotted to individual events. This is a trend that has been seen throughout previous Summer Olympics, and has not made many significant improvements, even though “women’s team sports are important because they help break stereotypes of women holding ancillary positions by showing them in active leadership and decision-making roles”³². It is plausible that the women’s team sports that received little coverage during the analyzed days (rowing, basketball, field hockey, volleyball, and soccer), received more in the later days of prime-time coverage that were not analyzed, along with men’s rugby-- the only male team sport that received coverage during the seven days.

²⁹ Baroffio-Bota, D., & Banet-Weiser, S. (2006). Women, team sports, and the WNBA: Playing like a girl. *Handbook of sports and media* (pp. 485-400). Mahwah, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum.

³⁰ Billings, A. C. (2008). Clocking gender differences: Televised Olympic clock-time in the 1996-2006 summer and winter Olympics. *Television & New Media*, 9, 429-441.

³¹ Billings, A. C., et al. (2014). (Re)calling London: the gender frame agenda within NBC’s primetime broadcast of the 2012 Olympiad. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91, 38-58

³² Sabo, D. (1985). Sport, patriarchy, and male identity: New questions about men in sport. *Arena Review*, 9(2), 1-30.

Although men also received less overall coverage than women, the events that were covered for the longest amounts of time were the same as the women's events, with the exception of beach volleyball --which was not covered during prime-time for men-- and basketball, rowing, cycling, field hockey, volleyball, soccer, and judo, coverage of which was only given minimally to women. Also, coverage of female power sports amounted to 3 minutes and 25 seconds, which included judo (20 seconds), cycling (2 minutes and 55 seconds), and rowing (10 seconds). While these times are consistent with the minimal coverage allotted to women's power sports in previous years, men did not receive coverage in any of these events. This does not follow the trend from previous Olympics, where more men's power and team sports were covered, and for a significantly longer period of time than women. Similarly to the men's team events, however, it is likely that men would receive more time in later coverage.

While it is encouraging that women received more airtime than men in the analyzed coverage from NBC's primetime segment, further examination into the types of events shown reveals that this change only scratches the surface of the issue of gender bias in such coverage. Similarly to previous summer Olympics, female athletes only received significant airtime in events in which their participation is deemed appropriate, which serves to reinforce the belief that women should only participate in socially acceptable sports. Conversely, unlike previous Olympics, the coverage allotted to male athletes does not perpetuate the ideal of male dominance and power in sports, as they received less coverage overall and no time in power sports. However, this could be a result of the limitations of this research, as the total scope of primetime events were not included in the analysis.

Qualitative Analysis

Gender analyses of previous summer Olympics have emphasized the presence of ambivalent commentary in reference to male and female athletes, which includes instances of gender marking of events, a hierarchy of naming, and the weaving of narratives. Results from the analyzed coverage of the 2016 Olympics show a decrease in the instances of gender marking and hierarchy of naming, but show that there are still many similarities to previous Olympics in the way athletes are portrayed through the use of narratives.

The narrative is arguably the most important part of the dialogue surrounding an athlete. It maintains the audience's attention and interest, and creates a personal connection and investment in the competition that enhances the viewer's experience. Yet when woven in a certain way, such narratives can "reinforce messages that enhance male hegemony in sport as well as in other spheres of life"³³, while trivializing the accomplishments of female athletes and "diminishing their acceptability as strong and effective athletes."³⁴ These characteristics were still seen in the Rio, where prominent themes included drama between athletes, the emotional toll of competition, the motherhood and training balance, family and/or husband-attributed success, and appearances in narratives of female athletes, and a focus on power, domination, redemption, conflict, and competition with male athletes. The focus on personal lives in the narratives of women --especially the attribution of their success to other factors instead of their own athleticism, drive, and competition-- plays a large role in the trivialization of their accomplishments and strength.

Due to the limitations of this research, it is difficult to discuss the extent to which these differences affected the Olympic audience, as it is only half of the total prime-time coverage, and more narratives had yet to be revealed. Nonetheless, in the ten-year span from 1996 to 2016, it is

³³ Higgs, Weiller. (1994). Gender bias and the 1992 Olympics. p244.

³⁴ Ibid.

safe to conclude that improvements have been made in the differences in dialogue surrounding athletes of both genders. While this progress is positive, it has been gradual and in some cases small, as the themes in narratives still pose a problem of inferiority and insignificance for women in the sporting world. Until commentators can acknowledge and focus on the personal attributes that these female athletes possess that lead them to such high levels of success, complete parity in the qualitative coverage of the Olympics will not be attained.

Implications

Considering the size of the coverage that was analyzed, the scope of the implications of these results is more limited than that of previous studies. It is dangerous to make assumptions about the rest of the coverage, as gender bias is a sensitive subject, and the discussion of its prevalence depends largely upon objective analyses, as well as on the sport and the athletes. Therefore, using inferential statistics or predictions could wrongly quantify data, skew the results, and consequently provide for an inaccurate discussion of its implications. For these reasons, the ability to generalize the results of this research is limited, making it difficult to effectively discuss its implications. However, the results do tentatively suggest that there are still steps to be taken in addressing the qualitative differences in the dialogue surrounding the athletes, as well as the variety of events covered. Until then, the coverage of the Olympics-- the platform that allows audiences worldwide to witness athletes compete at the highest level in the most revered international competition, will never be truly even for men and women.

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