

2017

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Megan Corcoran

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Recommended Citation

Corcoran, Megan (2017). Rio 2016: Gender Victories, Defeats, and Progress? Examining Gendered Language in Coverage of the 2016 Olympics. *Undergraduate Review*, 13, 73-90.

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol13/iss1/11

Rio 2016: Gender Victories, Defeats, and Progress? Examining Gendered Language in Coverage of the 2016 Olympics

MEGAN CORCORAN

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to see how gender was represented in different sports and media outlets during the Rio 2016 Olympics. Gender is a major component of social identity in our society and looking at how it is presented in sports coverage can show us whether and how females are making their mark in a once male-dominated realm. I performed a content analysis on articles written during the 2016 Olympics, coding each to see how the articles represented the athletes covered. This study shows varying results that both reinforce and push gender boundaries. Furthermore, one can see progress within the sporting world but also see strict gendered guidelines that get reproduced within articles written about the athletes.

Introduction

Organized sports are one of the many influences on the ways we produce, enact, and push against gender ste-

reotypes and social norms. In the case of the Rio 2016 Olympics there were many triumphs and heartbreaking losses for the women and men who took part in the games. To understand the ways in which these men and women were portrayed in the games and their sports, it is first important to understand how hegemonic masculinity is represented in sports and media, the overall way female athletes are viewed in society, and to look at any potential progress that has already begun.

Inequality shows its face in many aspects of everyone's lives whether we are aware of it or not. One of the major reinforcing agents of gender inequality, specifically, comes from organized sports. Gender inequality has made it extremely difficult for female athletes to be recognized as equally great athletes alongside their male counterparts. Weber and Carini (2011), discuss how women's sports leagues have been popping up for some time now, but, with little to no coverage in the media, it is hard for women's leagues to capture audience attention, audiences that could allow fans to become active consumers of the sports they want to follow. When fans are not accustomed to following female sports leagues it reinforces gender barriers, or this idea of hegemonic masculinity. Brandy (2016) writes that sports are far more complex now that a "cultural turn" in society has given scholars the chance to look into the influence of gender within sports. This cultural turn, or the changing perceptions of gender within our culture and sports culture, allows scholars to notice ways in which gender can be expressed or not expressed in the sports world. Since the Olympics happen only every four years, DeLorme (2014) found that athletes' sex may be pushed to the background because of nationalism and the sense of competition that is based solely on winning

and losing. Considering these two different views, one showing sports as male-dominated with female athletes discredited in terms of their success in sports, and another arguing that the Olympics put gender stereotypes on the backburner for three weeks, the aim of my research is to see if, within the Rio 2016 Olympic Games coverage, female athletes were reported on differently than males. Because of the male-dominated culture of sports, it is particularly important to notice or acknowledge gender progress or its lack. Learning if there has been any change in gendered representations in sports coverage could show us that we have made little progress and how much further we need to go before women and men are equally represented within sports and other aspects of society that are male-dominated, and it might allow us to move in a more positive direction as a society.

Literature Review

Hegemonic Masculinity in Sports and Media

When you think of sports, there is often an immediate image you get in your head; one of males showing their strength and prowess in the presence of other males to win championships and medals. In the United States and elsewhere, we have been socialized within our society to believe that masculinity is powerful and right; therefore, sports are seen as events in which males can express this power. A belief in the “rightness” of males in sports, rather than females, is explained by the concept of hegemonic masculinity (the practice of legitimizing male dominance over women and marginalized men using stereotypical ideas of masculinity). Rather than challenging the ideal of male dominance, stereotypes and sexism in media representations may enable the ideology of the patriarchy to remain dominant. By

looking at sources or media that enable or reinforce patriarchy, we can see that these beliefs transcend to the institutional level within sporting society, in which there is more focus on males and females get pushed to the side (Carlisle, 1993). Theberge and Cronk (1986) analyzed newspaper coverage of sports, and found that men’s sports matter in North America, and that an entire system of sports and fandom exists in support of male sports because of this reality.

Ideas of masculinity shape not only our own views of what makes an athlete great, but these ideas have the ability to weaken the potential success female athletes could have. Major magazines like *Sports Illustrated* minimize female athlete participation in sports, and because people continue to buy or read the magazine, women are presumed not to have the same athletic ability as men (Weber & Carini, 2011). In a study of previous Olympic athletes, gold medal winning female athletes were depicted using stereotypic language (beauty, passivity or subservience) that reinforces the beliefs of the gendered nature of sport and men’s supposed superiority (Jackson, Jones & Murrell, 1999). Carlisle (1993) writes when women are objectified in a magazine, by showing them as static objects that must be analyzed and examined, this gives others the ability to then be able to “own” them, figuratively and to objectify that object. Weber and Carini (2011) look at how the magazine uses that system of people “owning” the women in the magazines to sell products over reporting fairly to women and men competing in the sports world. Media profiles (profiles written about athletes’ accomplishments and personal matters) during the 2008 Olympics are another way to view women’s subordinate position to men. Many of the women’s profiles

contained more personal information than men's did (Casanova & Maume, 2015). Media profiles are used by the mass media, so when women's profiles have more personal information, rather than a focus on their sporting accomplishments, the hegemonic idea that men are good at sports and women are good at "soft skills" is reinforced (Casanova & Maume 2015). While media coverage could make a difference in the sports world, supporting and increasing interest in female athletes and teams, there has been, instead, a tendency to highlight gender norms and ideas of hegemonic masculinity.

Given the focus on male sports in North America (Theberge & Cronk, 1986), it is not surprising that mainstream publications reinforce gender norms. Kane (1988) did a study that showed, in the case of *Sports Illustrated*, there was a clear divide in how female athletes were talked about: for example, there was more focus on the females who participated in sports that are considered to be appropriate for women, and this focus meant that the media would describe the female athletes in a feminine way. These terms support gender stereotypes of female athletes, using feminine language for women.

Underlying hegemonic beliefs as well as coverage creates an impression that men are better in sports and that male sports are better than women's sports. When there is demand for something, there is often more money for it. Theberge and Cronk (1986) discuss how men have been the primary consumers of sports news in the past. Since sports are very commercial, newspapers are likely to report on male-dominated sports. Access, popularity, and ideas about gender make female represen-

tation in most media shallow. They do not get the credit they deserve as athletes, not just female athletes. While studies have shown that gender bias in sports media is strong, there are also chances that the media can help breakdown these intense views. Delorme (2014) concluded that the Olympics are a great way to help promote female participation, even in a male-dominated world of sports. Nations outside of the United States express differences in gender through nationalism and this often pushes the femininity discourse to the side, allowing athletes to be both great athletes and good people (Bruce 2015). Bruce (2015) goes on to state that there is an emergence of strong, tough and beautiful female athletes within media which shows there might be a new form of femininity that showcases their physical strength and excellence in respect to men. The internet may be changing how the media covers sports-women, such as giving female sports fans a place to talk about female sports, and giving those sports fans a chance to read articles on the female athletes that were not published in popular media outlets. These examples are just a small way that the internet is allowing female athletes to become cultural icons (Bruce, 2015). Media is changing in today's society and that is important to the success of female sportswomen, and their ability to challenge ideas of hegemonic masculinity.

Societal Views of Female Athletes

Looking more specifically at female athletes, there are many stereotypes that they either live up to or fight against; for example, saying that a female athlete is weak and cannot compete at a high level. Claude Steele's concept, called stereotype threat, is "that apprehension produced by one's awareness of widespread negative stereotypes about a certain dimension of one's identity

(race, sex, class, or any other collective marker) might cause sufficient psychological distress to disrupt one's actual performance" (Markovits & Albertson, 2012, p. 58)." This idea can have profound impacts on female athletes in the sports world, especially when they deal with the objectification of their bodies in media. Female athletes are evaluated using traditional ideas and widespread beliefs about gender whether they are participating in traditional gender sports or nontraditional gender sports (Jackson et al., 1999). Unfortunately, there is constant comparing of female athletes to male athletes within media coverage (Jackson et al., 1999). It is extremely hard for female athletes to stand on their own, without being compared to men and the expectations that society has placed on them. Theberge and Cronk (1986) discuss how journalists struggle with the deeply ingrained belief that men's sports are what people want to see, and while there might be an increase in female athletes, it doesn't mean this way of thinking is going to change that quickly.

Many female athletes in our society are viewed as sexual objects that are there for the men in society, and there are also ideas still in place that want to put women in the ideal "housewife" box. These ideas are reinforced in many different ways. Channon and Khomutova (2015) look at the 2013 LFL (Lingerie Football League) US season to examine the ways the LFL portrays the women that compete in the league while also examining how this is related to female athletes as a whole. The LFL is a football league for females, in which the women wear lingerie while playing in the games. Channon and Khomutova's study found that while on the surface women playing football seems promising for gender equality, in reality, the LFL is a continuation of heter-

onormative gender roles and male privilege because the women are displaying their sexuality to seem desirable to men. Males who play football do not dress as sexual objects. The contrast shows the cultural expectations that females must appear sexually attractive, and available, while the men do not (Channon & Khomutova 2015).

Weber and Carini (2011) talked about how women who read sports media should be able to focus on athletes' abilities, but are instead fed ideas about beauty and sexiness, because of gender bias. Even when women's success challenges historical gender beliefs, they are still compared to males, who play at a level that "really counts" in the eyes of society (Jackson et al., 1999). Jackson et al. (1999) went on to explain that when a female plays in "female-appropriate" sports the media is much kinder to her performance and stays task-relevant. On the contrary, when female athletes compete in sports that have not traditionally included many women, the media coverage tends to focus on matters that are irrelevant to the sport and the athletes (Jackson et al., 1999). Through these findings we can see that there are strict social boxes around female athletes, and if they try to push the boundaries, their femininity is used against them. Similarly, Kane (1988) examined coverage of female athletes and found that though it has increased, there was still restriction of the coverage, in the sense that coverage was limited to the sports deemed sex-appropriate (sports known to be dominated by members of one's own gender). Sports deemed sex-inappropriate were covered much less.

With the media focus on "gender-appropriate" roles, female athletes have been viewed more as *women* than as

athletes. Casanova and Maume (2015) examined profiles of the 2008 Olympic Athlete Guide to show that the women's profiles were 10% longer than the men's. The women's profiles contained 55% more discussion of their personal lives than did the men's. In these profiles the introduction of female athletes focused on family and hobbies (23%); most hobbies were determined to be feminine (85%) or things outside of their sport (Casanova & Maume 2015). When *Sports Illustrated* featured more than just professional sports, [such as the swimsuit edition or editorials], it was twice as likely to feature women (1954-1965), even during a time period of intense gender ideologies (Weber & Carini, 2011). The profiles (and other forms of media) have helped highlight a social idea that women have more to do outside of sports (i.e. domestic work) which works to maintain their femininity (Casanova & Maume 2015). The newspaper *Pioneer*, based in a southwestern U.S. city, receives information from wire service reports, so though they might not actually consider female sports as less, the coverage they are given access to is biased towards male sports because of the way male sports dominate the culture of sports (Theberge & Cronk, 1986). There are many factors that control the way we view or are able to view female athletes based on the way media portrays them. Kane (1988) looked at how there wasn't a big difference in the amount of coverage during and after Title IX, but there was a shift in regards to females who were able to now show their athletic abilities versus before Title IX when women were seen as nonathletic and their roles in society were bound to the ideas of femininity. There are more female athletes in the world now than in the past, but we still know so little about them and their leagues. Still, increasing numbers of female athletes and teams and

increasing numbers of female fans may help push for more changes in sports.

Progress within the Sporting World

What kind of progress has there been in terms of gender and sports? Promoting women athletes can have great effect on millions of females in society, but most media continue to portray women in stereotypical ways that are difficult to change (Weber & Carini, 2011). Coakley says that:

It is the organizational and institutional dimension of gender that now slows progress toward equity in sports. In other words, we can change out attitudes and personal relationships to be more inclusive and less constrained by orthodox gender ideology, but until we change the taken-for-granted gender logic that structures so much of sport and sport organizations, full gender equity will not be achieved (212).

There need to be changes in news-rooms, but there also need to be changes in the social structure of sports (Theberge & Cronk, 1986). Kane (1988) says that there have been changes in media with respect to the coverage of females in *Sports Illustrated* before, during, and after Title IX. Title IX allowed females to stick their foot in the door of the sports world, and stay there and fight for equality.

There was an increase in the type of coverage female athletes got during and after Title IX: there was a 77% increase of coverage during Title IX that was given to female athletes, and 82% after Title IX. This increase shows that we are starting to see female athletes as

serious athletes (Kane, 1988). The profiles discussed by Casanova and Maume (2015) do appreciate the female athletes' accomplishments, with career highlights, and awards, etc. Women get far more media coverage than they did, sometimes even more than men, which may indicate a changing tide in media coverage (Delorme, 2014). If the media is starting to shift the ways it views and reports on female athletes, it may allow for other aspects of gender stereotypes to change as well.

Like the other studies above, Channon and Khomutova (2015) found that not everything about the LFL was terrible. It can be said that the uniforms female athletes wear give viewers a chance to see the muscle and power these women possess. That muscle and power can then be seen as more masculine, which in some aspects can be contradictory to what was discussed previously. But this creates a different dynamic, where these women are lusted after but are also admired for their athletic abilities. These women can signify the deconstruction of gender boundaries dividing sex and athleticism (Channon & Khomutova, 2015). There are still a lot of stereotypes being displayed in the LFL and its coverage but if audiences are given the chance to view women as something other than sex objects it may be a small step in the right direction.

Weber and Carini (2011) say that the change that needs to occur is slow and requires social forces and fans' demand for more coverage and less sexist coverage of the female athletes. Bruce (2015) says that there is a far greater representation of female athletes in the media today than there was 30 years ago. Brandy (2016) discusses the "cultural turn" that is occurring in society and how this new view gives an understanding that

shows that sports aren't just a culture or social process but a major player in effecting culture. Sports give us a chance to look at hegemonic masculinity, stereotypes, and potential gender progress.

Methods

To evaluate potential gender progress in popular sports media, I conducted a content analysis of media coverage of the Rio 2016 Olympics. Many researchers have demonstrated gender bias in media coverage of sports, but others have noticed some change. With the Olympics just having passed, there is much to learn from how media either continues to reinforce ideas about traditional gender stereotypes or is shifting away from those stereotypes. I would like to think there has been a change and with this content analysis I aimed to examine media outlets during the Rio 2016 Olympics, analyzing the ways society still categorizes female and male athletes. In my study, I focused on three different sports, and for each sport I chose one male athlete and one female athlete from Team USA to compare their treatment. After that I made the decision to look at three different types of media outlets that ran stories on these athletes to see if the targeted audience of certain publications influenced gendered language. I looked at a total of 36 articles, from 6 separate media sources, and from these sources I looked at an article for 3 male and 3 female athletes within each of the 3 sports chosen.

I decided to look at three separate sports with different gender attributes: Swimming (semi-neutral), tennis (male-dominated) and gymnastics (female-dominated). Swimming is a sport in which the races are the same for both genders, therefore hopefully eliminating some forms of stereotypes about the athletes. There is also

fairly even media attention and air time given to both the male and female swimmers during the Olympics because of its new popularity and the big names on Team USA. Tennis has different rules based on gender; for instance, females play only three sets versus the five sets males play in a game, so I thought that it would be useful as a sport with different gender rules. Maybe as a result, tennis coverage seems to use more traditional gender stereotypes for the female athletes than the male athletes (i.e. choosing to focus more on the physical appearance of female tennis players over their abilities). Lastly, I focused on gymnastics because the women's team gets more recognition and attention than the men's team, which sees little of that spotlight. This is interesting and seems to be the opposite of most other sports in the Olympics. Gymnastics may be reverse in the sense of attention, but this reasoning is most likely connected still to hegemonic masculinity within society and what the media believes people want to watch. In gymnastics the females are put on display in form fitting leotards that can spotlight their bodies, while it is presumed that people don't want to watch men in leotards.

After deciding which sports I would research, I chose specific athletes from each sport to focus on. I chose one male athlete and one female athlete from each sport. For swimming, I chose Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky. Both of these athletes have high profiles both within and outside the swimming world, which means there are a lot of articles written about them that can give a good perspective on how the media portrays them overall. For tennis I chose to examine coverage of Serena Williams and Jack Sock because, like the swimmers, they have high profiles (mostly Serena Williams). Though Jack Sock is not as popular as Serena and other tennis

players, he still saw success in the 2016 games with his mixed doubles partner, Bethanie Mattek-Sands. For gymnastics I chose Aly Raisman, and because of lack of attention paid to the male gymnasts, I looked at articles that focused on the USA's male gymnastics team as a whole. Aly Raisman was not the number one star of the Final-Five (the name given to all five gymnasts competing for Team USA in the 2016 Olympics) this year, but she is a two-time Olympian. Looking at an athlete with slightly less media attention this Olympics might garner different results than looking at other popular gymnasts. Because Aly Raisman had been in the Olympics before, the media already had some basis on which to write stories about her. By looking at the male team as a whole, one may get a sense about the type of coverage they do get, though still small.

In order to add another layer to my research, I wanted to look at specific media outlets in order to see if there was any variation in the way they report on athletes based on the athletes' gender. I chose *ESPN* (in one case *ESPNW* was used) and *Sports Illustrated* because they are dedicated to sports reporting. I also analyzed *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*. Both are well-known, broad-ranging newspapers, therefore, my thought was that they would give me a perspective on sports that was less biased towards particular sports or gender roles within those sports. The last form of media I wanted to look at is the very available media or media that people who may not have even followed the Olympics might stumble across through social media or popular media. In this case I chose *The Washington Post* and *NBC Olympics* as sources that appear frequently on internet timelines.

Coding

In starting to think about how to go about trying to categorize specific things within the articles, I first wanted to code words as stereotypically masculine (e.g., strong, tough, powerful) or feminine (e.g., graceful, weak, tears, emotional) when referring to the athletes they are describing in the context of the articles. These words give the readers an image of the athletes they are describing; therefore, looking at these stereotypically masculine and feminine words we can analyze how the media wants the readers to view female and male athletes. This would show how these media described both male and female Olympic athletes in Rio 2016. I also considered how the language used to describe athletes related to sports, coding into several categories.

The first code is *task relevance*, referring to statements or words about the achievement of sport-specific tasks of the athletes (i.e., performance based content). The second code is *task irrelevance*, statements/words that focus on personal lives and other things that do not involve their sports-specific tasks (i.e., saying that an athlete went to the beach during their time in Rio). For these two codes, I look at whether the statements are positive or negative, instead of masculine or feminine, because the codes consider overall sports tasks and are written more often in complex language rather than specific gendered words. An example of a positive task relevant code is, “Ledecky has been unstoppable in the 400m distance” (Lutz, 2016). This statement clearly focuses on her performance during an event at the game, and it uses “unstoppable” in a positive way to describe her success. An example of a negative task relevant statement is seen when discussing the US men’s gymnastics team, “while they were plagued by mis-

takes on the pommel horse, their weakness at the 2012 Olympics as well” (Fincher, 2016). In this statement it focuses on how the men have struggled with the pommel horse by saying “they were plagued by mistakes,” but it is task relevant because it is describing their performances during the event. The third code is *performance*, considering the ways the articles describe what athletes are doing while playing their respective sports (e.g., strong match or poor race). The fourth code is *appearance/emotions*, discussions of how athletes look, either while playing or afterwards. This code can include how emotions are talked about in terms of their appearance, for example, noting that an athlete was crying when they walked away. The final code is *social engagements*, statements within the articles that speak to the athletes’ involvements outside the sports world (including personal lives or events, unrelated to their sports).¹ These codes are important because they give me a wide variety of ways words and statements can be used to impose gender stereotypes. With these codes I hoped to see whether there were clear distinctions between representations of male and female gender within the articles, but also whether there was a distinction between different types of media.

Data Analysis

Looking closely at the data collected, three major things stood out to me: first, popular and sports media use more gender stereotypes when talking about female athletes than male athletes; second, swimming coverage had a lack of obvious differences in representations of the female and male athletes; lastly, when looking at gymnastics, the female athlete and the men’s team were viewed using similar language—for example, the

appearance of the men was more feminized, while the female athlete was also described using similar terminology.

Table 1 details sports media specifically (*Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN*), considering all sports at the same time. Sports media had more descriptions of the athletes, both male and female, in terms of their appearances, than the other media analyzed in this study. Table 1 shows that female athletes are described more in feminine terms than male athletes, but when comparing sports media to other forms of media, even the males have more descriptions using feminine language, as I will show shortly. The task relevance code indicates that sports media does tend to stay on topic, with 28% task relevance for the male athletes and 22.4% for the females, unlike in the code for task irrelevance, which only shows 10.8% for males and 7.8% for females in the data. These two categories use more positive than negative language in talking about both male and female athletes, which is represented in the above percentages. The negative remarks were represented in only 7% and 9.5% for negative task relevance and 2.3% and 6% in

negative task irrelevance (males and females respectively). The 9.5% of the data represented in the negative column for female athletes could be attributed to the poor performance of Serena Williams in the games, or any other poor play by a female athlete. Similar results are shown in the performance column where there is great representation of language used to describe the athlete’s action in the game or meet, with 18.1% showing masculine language used to describe the males’ performance and 21.5% to describe a female’s performance in masculine terms. It is very interesting to note that female athletes get talked about in more masculine language than the male athletes within the performance because of the way society normally thinks of female sports or athletes as having less credibility within the sports world.

As soon as we look at codes that don’t focus on performance and task relevance/irrelevance, we see quite different results. In an *ESPN* article that featured Aly Raisman, a female gymnast, there was a focus on the way that she appeared after one of her events during the games, not during: “Raisman’s tearful exit from the

Media: Sport	Task Relevance		Task Irrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Totals
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
Male Athlete	(25) 28%	(6) 7%	(9) 10.2%	(2) 2.3%	(16) 18.1%	(6) 7%	(3) 3.4%	(7) 8%	(11) 12.5%	(3) 3.4%	88
Female Athlete	(26) 22.4%	(11) 9.5%	(9) 7.8%	(7) 6%	(25) 21.5%	(6) 5.2%	(8) 7%	(18) 15.5%	(3) 2.6%	(3) 2.6%	116

Table 1. Comparison of male and female athletes in the 2016 Olympics by Sports Media (raw data in parenthesis)

Media: Popular	Task Relevance		Task Irrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Totals
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
Male Athletes	(28) 37.3%	(8) 10.7%	(5) 6.7%	(2) 2.7%	(17) 22.7%	(7) 9.3%	(1) 1.3%	(3) 4%	(4) 5.3%	(0) 0%	75
Female Athletes	(21) 27.3%	(7) 9.1%	(16) 20.8%	(1) 1.3%	(17) 22.1%	(3) 3.9%	(4) 5.2%	(4) 5.2%	(4) 5.2%	(0) 0%	77

Table 2. Comparison of male and female athletes in the 2016 Olympics by Popular Media (raw data in parenthesis)

floor was a beautifully rare moment in the stoic sport of gymnastics” (Roenigk, 2016). This example uses words used for femininity (i.e. “beautiful”), and is one of many found within sports media that focused on the feminine way athletes appeared during and after their events in the games. This example also shows the way authors chose to focus on the appearance of the athletes after the event, race, or match, instead of the way they look while performing their sport, as represented in the 15.5% of the data that was used to describe the female’s appearance in a feminine way.

Table 2 is looking specifically at popular media outlets in this study (*The Washington Post* and NBC Olympics).

Table 3 is looking specifically at print media disregarding the sports (*The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*).

Popular and print media do not show the vastly different results that sports media do. The exception, perhaps, would be within the performance category in

Table Three that shows similar results as Table One when looking at masculine language to describe female athletes, both within sport (21.5%) and print media (24.5%). There are significantly more instances in sports media and print media where that is the case, while popular media uses masculine language fairly equally to describe the female (22.1%) and male athletes (22.7%). One reason for this may be that popular media appeals to a wider audience and writes articles to be read by more people at a quick pace.

Looking specifically at gymnastics coverage, there was more feminine language used for women and men, which is both interesting and troublesome. The US men’s gymnastics team finished fifth in the games, and this loss is indicated by negative task relevant language at 18.4% of the data, and for the feminine language used in describing their appearance with 8.2%. For example, when describing Leyva (a US gymnast), an article states, “he trudged off the floor” (Clarke, 2016). In this case, “trudged” was coded as feminine because it means to walk slowly with heavy steps, which one could envision a female being “dramatic” giving

Media: Print	Task Relevance		Task Irrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Totals
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
Male Athletes	(21) 34.4%	(6) 9.8%	(10) 16.4%	(3) 4.9%	(13) 21.3%	(5) 8.2%	(0) 0%	(2) 3.3%	(1) 1.6%	(0) 0%	61
Female Athletes	(25) 24.5%	(11) 10.8%	(15) 14.7%	(7) 6.9%	(25) 24.5%	(9) 8.8%	(1) 1%	(5) 4.9%	(0) 0%	(4) 3.9%	102

Table 3. Comparison of male and female athletes in the 2016 Olympics by Print Media (raw data in parenthesis)

stereotypic norms. The female gymnast, Aly Raisman, did much better at the games, with a silver all-around medal. Though one would expect such success to be celebrated through prideful language or more masculine language, Raisman was discussed, in fact, in a very feminized way for both her appearance (12.1%) and her performance (also shown in 12.1% of the data). The high numbers in the performance and appearance categories are not shocking given the way gymnasts are objectified through their clothing and body types. What is surprising about gymnastics' representations is how the men's team gets talked about with feminine language for performance (15.3%) and appearance (8.2%). The men's team saw significantly less air time during the games, while the women's team took center stage. The language used to describe the gymnasts shows the overall view of gymnastics in our society as feminine despite the highly muscular nature of the male athletes. In North America, gymnastics is clearly a female sport.

Table 5 shows that Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky are seen very similarly in terms of the articles I coded.

No category stands out as being clearly divided because of the gender of the athletes. Though Katie Ledecky does have a higher number in appearance for feminine language than Phelps at 8% versus his 4.3% of the data, she was still discussed in more masculine terms than he was at 4.4% versus his 1.1%. Both of these athletes are high profile in our society. I noticed that with higher task relevance numbers (36.6% for Phelps and 31% for Ledecky) there was also high task irrelevance (18.3% for Phelps and 17.7% for Ledecky). This could be attributed to the way the media focuses on their personal lives because they are such high profile athletes; more people may relate to them because of their personal lives outside of swimming. It may also be that there is less investment in swimming as a sport outside of the Olympics than other sports, so they really highlight their whole lives in the month they have the stage. In an article in *ESPN* where Katie Ledecky was the focus, they described her performance as, "Ledecky was simply too good, too dominant" (Drehs, 2016). A similar statement was used to describe Michael Phelps' performance in *The Boston Globe* stating, "Phelps

Sport: Gymnastics	Task Relevance		Task I rrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Tot als
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
U.S. Men's Gymnastics Team	(25) 25.5%	(18) 18.4%	(4) 4%	(2) 2%	(18) 18.4%	(15) 15.3%	(3) 3.1%	(8) 8.2%	(5) 5.1%	(0) 0%	98
Aly Raisman	(27) 29.7%	(1) 1.1%	(11) 12.1%	(5) 5.5%	(16) 17.6%	(11) 12.1%	(2) 2.2%	(11) 12.1%	(2) 2.2%	(5) 5.5%	91

Table 4. Comparison of U.S. Men’s Gymnastics Team and Aly Raisman across Sports, Popular, and Print Media (raw data in parenthesis)

finished a full body-length ahead of the field with total dominance” (Newberry, 2016). Both these quotes show that Ledecy and Phelps hold dominance within their sport which may cause their gender to be less salient. Swimming coverage appears to uphold my early belief that it is more gender neutral than other sports, though other factors may contribute to this sense of neutrality.

In tennis coverage, there are similarities to coverage of gymnastics. Serena Williams’ performance is talked about in highly feminized language (13.2%). When comparing the two charts (table four and six), there is a similarity in the amount of negative comments in the task relevance code. Additionally, the feminine performance column for both Serena Williams and the men’s gymnastics team are similar with 13.2% and 15.3% respectively. It is possible that if athletes do poorly in their events, their performance will not be described in masculine terms that are attributed to winning and dominance. Also, gymnastics is still seen as a female sport, despite men and women’s performance. Given Serena Williams’ extremely high-profile, it is possible

that feminine language underscores any performance that is not excellent. *Sports Illustrated* wrote about Serena Williams’ performance by saying, “Serena and Venus love playing together and it was crushing for them to suffer their first-ever Olympic loss together” (Werteheim, 2016). This example indicates that their performance caused them “suffering” and that it was “crushing” to them. The language speaks to the way that they are a unit (playing together and cooperating, feminine) and *they* must be hurt (feminine terms) because their performance wasn’t what was expected. Looking at Jack Sock, a less well-known athlete, his results are more typical. Sock had high positive task relevance (50%) and his performance was always talked about in a masculine way, with 20% and no language was used in a feminine way to describe his performance. His appearance was not brought up in the articles. These differences are not unusual and match what one would expect when reading about a male athlete. Tennis appears to be the most gender stereotypical of the three sports I examined in terms of athletes’ descriptions.

Sport: Swimming	Task Relevance		Task Irrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Totals
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
Michael Phelps	(34) 36.6%	(1) 1.1%	(17) 18.3%	(2) 2.1%	(22) 23.7%	(3) 3.2%	(1) 1.1%	(4) 4.3%	(8) 8.6%	(1) 1.1%	93
Katie Ledecky	(35) 31%	(0) 0%	(20) 17.7%	(2) 1.8%	(36) 32%	(0) 0%	(5) 4.4%	(9) 8%	(5) 4.4%	(1) .8%	113

Table 5. Comparison of Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky across Sports, Popular, and Print Media (raw data in parenthesis)

Conclusion

My research shows how gender was represented in different media and for different sports during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. There are clear differences when comparing the sports, and there are some surprising results between the different media as well. Swimming was, as I thought, a sport in which females and males are described similarly in all media. Coverage of Michael Phelps and Katie Ledecky shows that success can speak for itself. The incredible success of both these athletes shows that popularity can shift the way we describe athletes, disregarding their gender. Or, since the Olympics happen only every four years, it is possible that sex of athletes may be disregarded because of nationalism and a sense of competition based solely on winning and losing (Delorme 2014). While tennis and gymnastics coverage showed more gender norms in terms of describing the performance and appearance of the athletes, tennis shows far stricter gender boundaries when describing Serena Williams over Jack Sock. This may be due to the fact that Serena Williams is a much higher profile athlete than Jack Sock, or may be because tennis is seen as a masculine, male-dominated sport. Most ar-

ticles written about Sock have Mattek-Sands (a female tennis player) present as well, which could make the data collected on him slightly less in depth. But even with the lack of in depth data collected on Sock, there are still very clear gender divides in tennis. Gymnastics coverage continues gender norms, but vastly differently than most other sports because male athletes are also described with feminine language. This speaks to the way gymnastics has been interpreted as a female sport within our society. It also doesn't help that the media pays far more attention to the female gymnastics team during the Olympics: that kind of publicity reinforces that gymnastics is a female sport, therefore leaving the men to live in the women's shadows and in the world of feminine language, even if they are, physically, the definition of masculine.

As for the different media outlets, sports media proved to be interesting to analyze against popular and print media. Though popular and print media did not show shocking results, they did provide a useful alternative to sports media. Sports media showed gender norms in respect to appearance of female athletes, but also used

Sport: Tennis	Task Relevance		Task Irrelevance		Performance		Appearance		Social Engagements		Totals
	Pos.	Neg.	Pos.	Neg.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	
Jack Sock	(15) 50%	(2) 6.7%	(3) 10%	(2) 6.7%	(6) 20%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%	(2) 6.7%	(0) 0%	30
Serena Williams	(10) 11%	(26) 28.6%	(9) 9.9%	(8) 8.8%	(15) 16.5%	(12) 13.2%	(4) 4.4%	(6) 6.6%	(0) 0%	(1) 1.1%	91

Table 6. Comparison of Jack Sock and Serena Williams across Sports, Popular, and Print Media (raw data in parenthesis)

more masculine terminology when describing the female athletes' performance. While still gendered, this may indicate some progress. This progress may not seem significant, but may indicate where things may be heading. Looking at different and more articles within each of these three categories would allow me to consider differences between media in more depth.

One potential error within my research was analyzing athletes of such varying popularity, because if an athlete was not as well known, he or she would likely not get the same amount of press as a very popular athlete, regardless of gender. Therefore, gathering data on specific athletes did not yield the type of rich data I'd hoped. If I were to do the study again, I might look into studying athletes of similar popularity even though that may require looking at different sports than I chose to focus on, or by focusing on international athletes that are well known. This study was too small to make any generalizable claims, but it was a great place to start. This study allowed me to make inferences about gen-

der based on news coverage of the 2016 Rio Olympics. While more female athletes are discussed and known now in sports, and while we are clearly seeing progress in the acceptance of women as true athletes in society, women are still not represented as equals to men in media coverage of their sports. We have come a long way but we have a long way to go.

Note

1. Initially, I also coded for "race." This code is gender neutral and aims to look at how one's race was depicted within the articles, and if there is any overlap with gender. Race uses another placement category, negative or positive, instead of masculine or feminine, because the code is supposed to be gender neutral. This code did not appear in any of the articles so it was excluded from the findings, but it is still interesting to note this lack of appearance.

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About the Author

Megan Corcoran is a graduating senior majoring in Sociology, with a concentration in Global Studies and Social Justice. Her research project was completed in the Fall Semester of 2016 under the mentorship of Dr. Norma Anderson (Sociology). Megan presented this paper at the Mid-Year Symposium in 2016 at Bridgewater State University. She plans to find an internship or job in her field of study upon graduation in 2017.