

10 YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF GENDER IN SPORTS COVERAGE OF THE US AND SPANISH ONLINE NEWSPAPERS (2003–2004 VS. 2013–2014)

Jillian E. Frideres,^{1, A, B, D} José M. Palao^{1, A, B, C, D}

¹ University of Wisconsin – Madison (Extension), FoodWise, United States

² University of Wisconsin – Parkside, Department of Health, Exercise Science and Sport Management, United States

^A Study Design; ^B Data Collection; ^C Statistical Analysis; ^D Manuscript Preparation; ^E Funds Collection

Address for correspondence:

José M. Palao
University of Wisconsin – Parkside. SAC D140A
WI 53, 144, Kenosha, United States
E-mail: palaojm@gmail.com

Abstract The purpose of this paper was to assess the evolution of sports coverage regarding gender in online newspapers in two western societies Spain and the United States, in a period of ten years (2004 vs. 2014). A total of 2,951 articles with athletic content from the online newspapers *usatoday.com* and *elmundo.es* were analyzed. The variables registered were gender, placement in the newspaper, word count, inclusion of photographs, and the sports disciplines. The results show a significant reduction in sports articles in the two online newspapers for both genders. This reduction resulted in a decrease in the variability of sports articles. Further, there was a significant imbalance in sports news between the two genders. There was a significant reduction in the proportion of sports articles in both online newspapers for women, significantly reducing the accessibility of articles about women's sports. The gender imbalance was higher in the Spanish newspaper than in the U.S. newspaper. The gender imbalance was higher in the Spanish newspaper than in the U.S. newspaper. Both online newspapers showed an image of sport that is male-orientated, focused on elite-level sport and with an overall low number of sport disciplines.

Key words communication, mass media, online newspaper, gender, sport

Introduction

Sport, as part of our society, provides an image of how we develop on a physical level. Athletes' and teams' performances show how we improve, compete, overcome failure, and try to meet new challenges (e.g., faster, higher, and stronger). Sport has been predominantly male territory from its creation to current times. In the last few decades, however, there has been a significant increase in women's participation in sports (Garcia-Ferrando, Llopiz, 2010; NCAA, 2006; NFHS, 2006), although this increase has not been accompanied by changes in the presence of female athletes presented in the media (Cooky, Messner, Hextrum, 2013; Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Sport media provide an image of sport that is male, elite and selective (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiché, Clément-Guillot, 2013; Clarke, Ayres, 2014; Duncan, 1992; Lebel, Danylichuk, 2009; Trolan, 2013). Previous

research in politics, business, health, and marketing has demonstrated the media's influence over the public's perception of an issue or topic (Carroll, McCombs, 2003; McCombs, Shaw, 1972; Ogata, Denham, Springston, 2006). Greater accessibility of news about a topic involves more awareness and interest about this topic for the public. The image provided by sport media contributes toward maintaining the characteristics, traditions, interests, etc. of a society regarding sport, although the sport practice, with regard to gender and participation, has changed.

The imbalance in the way men's and women's sport is covered by the media is clear and well reported. Data from research and governmental reports show there is a significant imbalance regarding the number of news articles, their length, their importance, the orientation of the news, etc. (European Commission, 2014; United Nations, 2007). Though in recent decades there has been a slight improvement in the presence of female athletes in the media, women still appear in less than 10% of media coverage (Richards, 2015). Nevertheless, some improvements have been reported in the way women's sports are covered regarding the tone, language observations, content and more (Crolley, Teso, 2007; Lumby, Caple, Greenwood, 2014). Despite these improvements in the image of female athletes, it is still far from the role model, the professional model, or even the status of national heroes given to male athletes by media (Richards, 2015). Media are still providing a patriarchal image of sport and maintaining patriarchal traditions (Chalabaev et al., 2013; Duncan, 1992). The analysis of media content shows that articles about male athletes are more complex and elaborate than articles about female athletes. Only specific, occasional events, like the Olympic Games, slightly change these tendencies in the media (Packer et al., 2014).

In the last few decades, governments of various countries, as well as national and international institutions, have emphasized the importance of reducing this imbalance to allow both genders the same opportunities (European Commission, 2014; United Nations, 2007). However, not all countries have the same culture and level of professionalization of their sport. Therefore, the culture of each country and the sport structure must be considered in the study of this gap (Chalabaev et al., 2013; Frideres, Mottinger, Palao, 2008). For example, the profile of the United States is due to the importance of four competitive sports in the media: American football (professional and college), basketball, baseball, and hockey (Cooky, Messner, Musto, 2015). However, for many other countries in the world, the focus is on national and international soccer (BR, 2011). Spain, with club teams such as Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, has been a reference in this regard.

The current data show that the image of women's sport provided by the media around the world is far from equal to that of men's sport (Cooky et al., 2013; Godoy-Pressland, 2014). Traditional media has increased the possibility to reach a higher number of readers using online versions of their newspapers in the last decade. The evolution of online media makes it necessary to periodically monitor the image that media present to our societies. This could provide information about the current imbalance between male and female coverage (Chalabaev et al., 2013; Di Carlo, Cezar, 2014). The purpose of this study was to assess the evolution in sports coverage in relation to gender in online newspapers in two western societies, Spain and the United States, in a period of ten years (2004 vs. 2014).

Method

All articles with athletic content from the online newspapers *usatoday.com* and *elmundo.es* were analyzed during the two-week spans of October 13–26, 2003 (first register), February 16–29, 2004 (second register), October 13–26, 2013 (third register), and February 9–22, 2014 (fourth register). A total of 2,951 stories were analyzed, 1,816 from *usatoday.com* and 1,135 from *elmundo.es* (Table 1). In accordance with a study by the Amateur Athletic

Foundation of Los Angeles (Duncan, Messner, Williams, 1991), in general, articles were analyzed if they contained prose, though columns were not included. The following were not considered articles: free-standing statistics, surveys, and fantasy sports; however, when rankings contained prose descriptions of the team, they were included. Articles were analyzed daily at 11:00 p.m. local time (Pacific Summer Time for *usatoday.com* and Central European Summer Time for *elmundo.es*). *Usatoday.com* and *elmundo.es* were chosen because of their circulation at the beginning of the study. In 2001, USA Today was the United States' largest-selling newspaper, with an average daily circulation of 2.3 million, while the online version, *usatoday.com*, received over 25 million monthly visits (Commission Junction, 2001). Similarly, with over 25 million visits in September 2003, *elmundo.es* was the most-read online national newspaper in Spain (Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión, n.d.).

Table 1. Articles analyzed by online newspaper

	usatoday.com	elmundo.com	Total
1 st Register	610	422	1,032
2 nd Register	632	313	945
3 rd Register	337	169	506
4 th Register	237	231	468
Total	1,816	1,135	2,951

The variables included: gender (men-only, women-only, both genders, neutral), placement (front page of the newspaper, front page of the sports section, individual sports page), word count and inclusion of photographs. The gender basis of articles was analyzed to determine whether content was men-only, women-only, both or neutral. A minimum of 10% of the text had to be devoted to each gender for it to be considered in the "both genders" category. Neutral articles covered topics that were not focused on men's or women's athletics. Some examples include stories about the International Olympic Committee or articles about horse racing that focused on the horses.

Four trained observers carried out the analysis of the article (Anguera, 2003). Inter-observer and intra-observer reliabilities were calculated using a Kappa index and intraclass correlation coefficient (two observers demonstrated inter-observer reliabilities greater than 0.93, and there was an intra-observer reliability of 0.98). Descriptive and inferential analyses of the data were carried out (chi-square test, likelihood ratio, and Student's t-test). Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. The statistical analysis was completed with the SPSS 21.0 software.

Results

Significant reductions in articles with athletic content were found between the years 2003–2004 and 2013–2014 (1st and 2nd register vs. 3rd and 4th register). Regarding gender (Table 2), a significant difference between men-only (88.4% of total articles) and women-only (5.9%) articles was found, when analyzed according to newspaper, register periods and total. Similar percentages of women-only articles were found in *elmundo.es* and *usatoday.com* in the 2003–2004 period. In the 2013–2014 period, a significantly lower percentage of women-only articles was found in *elmundo.es* than in *usatoday.com* (5.3% vs. 9.2%, respectively). In the 2013–2014 period, a significantly lower percentage of men-only articles was found in *elmundo.es* and in *usatoday.com* in comparison with the years 2003–2004. Further, in this period, the number of neutral articles increased significantly, while the men-only articles

decreased significantly in both newspapers. In contrast, in the 4th registration period (i.e. February of 2014), the number of women-only articles increased significantly in both newspapers. In this data collection period, the increase in women-only articles was significantly higher in *usatoday.com* than in *elmundo.es*.

Table 2. Number and percentage of sports articles in relation to gender

Newspaper	Register	Women		Men		Both		Neutral	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2003–2004									
<i>usatoday.com</i>	1 st Register	35	5.7	522	85.8	27	4.5	24	3.9
	2 nd Register	38 [#]	6.0	552	87.3	23	3.6	19	3.0
	Total	73 [†]	5.9	1,075 [†]	86.6	50 [†]	4.0	43 ^{†##}	3.5
<i>elmundo.es</i>	1 st Register	25	5.9	387	91.7	6	1.4	4 [#]	0.9
	2 nd Register	18	5.7	286	91.1	6	1.9	4 [#]	1.3
	Total	43 [†]	5.8	673 [†]	91.4	12 [†]	1.6	8 ^{†##}	1.1
2013–2014									
<i>usatoday.com</i>	3 rd Register	18 [†]	5.3	286	84.9	11	3.3	22	6.5
	4 th Register	35 ^{†##}	14.8	177	74.7	10	4.2	15	6.3
	Total	53 [†]	9.2	463	80.7	21	3.7	37 ^{†##}	6.4
<i>elmundo.es</i>	3 rd Register	3 [†]	1.8	143	84.6	2	1.2	21 [#]	12.4
	4 th Register	18 [†]	7.8	185	80.1	6	2.6	22 [#]	9.5
	Total	21 [†]	5.3	328	82.0	8	2.0	43 ^{†##}	10.8

Note: [†] Statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{††} statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test); [#] statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{##} statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test).

The difference in word count between men-only articles and women-only articles reduced significantly through the different data collection periods (Table 3). Variations in the words per article in the different periods studied were found for women-only, men-only, both genders and neutral articles. A significant increase in word count in women-only articles was found between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014 in both newspapers.

Table 3. Average number of words per article in relation to gender

Newspaper	Register	Women		Men		Both		Neutral	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2003–2004									
<i>usatoday.com</i>	1 st Register	278.1 ^{†#}	201.7	579.9 ^{†#}	421.6	555.1 [#]	194.0	516.3	307.2
	2 nd Register	568.6 ^{†#}	426.3	568.9 [†]	441.5	618.1	329.4	640.5	567.2
	Total	429.3 ^{†#}	366.0	574.2 [†]	431.8	584.1	264.0	571.2	439.8
<i>elmundo.es</i>	1 st Register	243.2 [#]	79.5	400.1 [†]	151.9	282.5	127.0	328.8	82.9
	2 nd Register	343.1 ^{†#}	107.7	402.6 [†]	176.9	443.0	139.6	237.0	149.7
	Total	285.1 ^{†#}	103.9	401.2 [†]	162.9	362.8	152.4	282.9	122.3

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2013–2014										
usatoday.com		3 rd Register	564.2 [#]	309.2	465.7 [#]	288.3	448.6 [#]	272.9	460.6	230.1
		4 th Register	483.3 [#]	241.2	548.7 ^{**}	370.0	533.2	178.4	737.9	788.1
		Total	510.8 [#]	266.1	497.4	324.1	488.9	231.1	573.0	539.9
elmundo.es		3 rd Register	345.0 [#]	150.9	461.8	190.0	612.5	232.6	486.8	211.9
		4 th Register	428.2 [#]	233.7	451.9 ^{**}	190.2	416.7	168.8	559.3	214.9
		Total	416.3 [#]	222.7	456.2	189.9	465.6	190.5	523.9	214.0

Note: ^{*} Statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.05$ (Student's t-test for independent sample); ^{**} statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.001$ (Student's t-test for independent sample); [#] statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.05$ (Student's t-test for independent sample); ^{##} statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.001$ (Student's t-test for independent sample).

As for where these articles were placed (Table 4), in usatoday.com, a significant increase in the number of women-only articles on the front page of the newspaper and the front of the sports pages was found between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014. On the front of the sports pages, there was also a significant increase in the neutral articles and articles related to both genders between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014. No significant differences were found in elmundo.es.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Sports Articles in Relation to Gender and Placement in the Newspaper

	Placement	Women		Men		Both		Neutral		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
2003–2004										
usatoday.com	Front Newspaper	1 ^{**}	1.5	60	89.6	3	4.5	3	4.5	
	Front Sports Page	22 ^{**##}	6.2	317 ^{##}	90.5	8 ^{##}	2.3	5 ^{##}	1.4	
	Not Front Page	50	6.1	697	85.0	39	4.0	35	3.5	
elmundo.es	Front Newspaper	1	6.7	14	93.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Front Sports Page	10	3.5	268	93.4	6	2.1	3	1.0	
	Not Front Page	32	6.6	391	90.1	6	1.4	5	1.2	
2013–2014										
usatoday.com	Front Newspaper	2 ^{**}	6.9	26 ^{**}	89.7	0	0.0	1	3.4	
	Front Sports Page	27 ^{**##}	13.9	131 ^{**##}	67.5	16 ^{**##}	8.2	20 ^{**##}	10.3	
	Not Front Page	24 ^{**}	6.8	306 ^{**}	87.2	5 ^{**}	1.4	16 ^{**}	4.6	
elmundo.es	Front Newspaper	8	4.8	135	80.4	3	1.8	22	13.1	
	Front Sports Page	3	4.3	60	87.0	3	4.3	3	4.3	
	Not Front Page	10	6.6	133	81.6	2	1.2	18 ^{##}	11.0	

Note: ^{*} Statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{**} statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test); [#] statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{##} statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test).

In usatoday.com, a significant increase in women-only articles with photographs of athletic content was found (Table 5). This increase was lower in proportion to those found in men-only articles. In elmundo.es, the same significant tendency was found in men-only, both genders, and neutral articles. In women-only articles, there was a significant reduction in the percentage of total photographs.

Table 5. Number of sports articles with photographs (n) and percentage with respect to sports articles by gender (%)

	Women		Men		Both		Neutral	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
2003-2004								
usatoday.com	24 ^{##}	32.9	459 ^{##}	42.6	13 ^{##}	26.0	14 ^{##}	32.6
elmundo.es	34 ^{##}	79.1	576 ^{##}	85.6	9 ^{##}	75.0	4 ^{##}	50.0
2013-2014								
usatoday.com	53 ^{##}	100.0	462 ^{##}	80.7	20 ^{##}	95.2	36 ^{##}	97.3
elmundo.es	21 ^{##}	48.8	326	99.4	8 ^{##}	100.0	41 ^{##}	95.3

Note: The table represents frequency of data and percentages are of total articles in that category. ^ˆ Statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{ˆˆ} statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test); [#] statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{##} statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test).

Table 6. Number of sports articles by type of sports (n) and percentage with respect to sports articles by gender (%)

	usatoday.com				elmundo.es			
	2003-2004		2013-2014		2003-2004		2013-2014	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female								
Basketball	27 ^{##}	37.0	0 ^{##}	0.0	0 ^ˆ	0.0	0	0.0
Soccer	7 ^{##}	9.6	0 ^{##}	0.0	2 ^ˆ	4.7	0 ^ˆ	0.0
American Football	1 ^ˆ	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Softball	1 ^ˆ	1.4	0 ^ˆ	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tennis	14 ^ˆ	19.2	12 ^ˆ	22.6	31 ^{##}	72.1	2 ^{##}	9.5
Motor	0	0.0	5	9.4	0	0.0	1	4.8
Golf	8	11.0	6 ^ˆ	11.3	2	4.7	0	0.0
Hockey	0	0.0	3	5.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Cycling	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Olympic Games	0 ^{##}	0.0	24 ^{##}	45.3	0 ^{##}	0.0	13 ^{##}	61.9
Other (n = 37)	15 ^{##}	20.5	3 ^{##}	5.7	8	18.6	5	23.8
Male								
Basketball	225 ^{##}	20.9	58 ^{##}	12.5	112 ^{##}	14.5	48 ^{##}	14.6
Soccer	31	2.9	15	3.2	243 ^{##}	31.4	185 ^{##}	56.4
American Football	270	25.1	149	32.2	0	0.0	2	0.6
Baseball	184 ^ˆ	17.1	75 ^ˆ	16.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tennis	15 ^ˆ	1.4	14 ^ˆ	3.0	86 ^{##}	11.1	17 ^{##}	5.2
Motor	73	6.8	18	3.9	63	8.1	40	12.2
Golf	65	6.0	22	4.8	48 ^{##}	6.2	2 ^{##}	0.6
Hockey	109	10.1	68	14.7	0	0.0	2	0.6
Cycling	6	0.6	0	0.0	66 ^{##}	8.5	5 ^{##}	1.5
Olympic Games	0 ^{##}	0.0	31 ^{##}	6.7	0 ^{##}	0.0	17 ^{##}	5.2
Other (n = 37)	97 ^{##}	9.0	13 ^{##}	2.8	156 ^{##}	20.2	10 ^{##}	3.0

Note: ^ˆ Statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{ˆˆ} statistically significant between newspapers, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test); [#] statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.05$ (chi-square test); ^{##} statistically significant between registration periods, $p < 0.001$ (chi-square test).

In *usatoday.com*, between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014, there was a significant reduction in women-only articles about basketball, soccer and other sports; a significant reduction in men-only articles about basketball and other sports; and a significant increase in men-only and women-only articles about the Olympic Games (Table 6). In *elmundo.es*, between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014, there was a significant reduction in women-only articles about tennis; a significant reduction in men-only articles about tennis, golf, cycling, and other sports; a significant increase in women-only articles about the Olympic Games; and a significant increase in men-only articles about soccer and the Olympic Games.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to assess the evolution of the accessibility of sports news regarding gender in the online media of two western countries, Spain and the United States. The data analysis is based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that it is well documented that there is a significant imbalance between coverage of men's and women's sport by the media (Chalabaev et al., 2013; Clarke, Ayres, 2014). The second assumption is that a topic's greater presence in the news affects the reader's perception of this topic (Carroll, McCombs, 2003; McCombs, Shaw, 1972). The media's current agenda-setting contributes to establishing what is seen by both the media themselves and their readers as normal (McCombs, 2004). The purpose is to try to better understand how the changes in online media newspapers of two countries with different sport cultures influence the accessibility of news about both genders. Theoretically, this may contribute to establishing a possible solution to reduce the gap.

The results show a significant reduction (i.e. 50–60%) of the sports news in the online newspapers of both countries. The information collected in the study does not allow us to assess the reasoning for this reduction. Possible causes include the evolution of online media and the financial crisis of 2008. With regard to the evolution of online media, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube did not exist when this study began. However, in 2014, these sources were part of the way society obtained news and information, and they affected the way online newspapers evolved (Barthel, Shearer, Gottfried, Mitchell, 2015). Concerning the effect of the economic crisis, it impacted the overall funds that reached online newspapers (Michael, Barthel, 2015; Armentia, 2011). Regardless of the causes, in the ten-year period that was analyzed, these online newspapers significantly reduced the number of articles with athletic content, which dramatically affects the amount and type of information available for their audience. Therefore, due to the fact that the online newspapers' resources were reduced (e.g. space, number of journalists), the competition for visibility in the media between the different sport leagues, events, and organizations increased. This reduction in sports articles means that sports or events seen as most important will be the ones that are still visible in the news.

Traditionally, the study of the gap between genders has been analyzed as a zero-sum game. An increase in women's visibility in the news means a reduction in men's visibility, due to the fact that the number of journalists remains unchanged. However, the reduction of media resources involved a change in certain aspects of the zero-sum game. As an analogy, the pie to be shared is smaller. This change makes it more difficult for women's news to make the cut in these online newspapers, as well as men's news for nontraditional sports. In this new situation, traditional and professional sports will have the advantage due to being considered more important; additionally, they have more resources to get greater visibility (e.g. public relations and media structures). The United States and Spain have different sports structures, traditions, or levels of professionalism in the sports; thus, each online newspaper studied had different sports coverage. Another aspect that was found in the analysis of both newspapers

was that a significant difference was found between the registration periods in 2014. These differences show two different tendencies in online sport coverage: normal sport coverage and the particular impact of the Winter Olympic Games.

Regarding normal sport coverage, in *usatoday.com*, accessibility to women's sports news worsened from 2004 to 2014, affected by the reduction of total of articles published. The analysis of the proportions shows no change in the gender imbalance, as 5% of news was still about female athletes. The analysis of the number of articles about females shows a reduction in the available articles for the readers. In 2004, a reader could find approximately 2.5 articles about female athletes daily, but in 2014, a reader could find 1.25 articles about female athletes daily. This reduction in the number of articles affected the variability of sports that were reported on. Data show that it is easier for women's sports news to make the cut if only it does not compete directly with men's U.S. professional sports or if the news is related to outstanding athletes or performance, such as achievements reached by Serena Williams. In this context, no articles were found about women's basketball or women's soccer in the 2014 periods studied.

These findings may be the result of the increase in competitiveness caused by the reduction in the number of news articles. Previous studies found this reduction in women's sports coverage starting in 2009 for televised news and highlight shows (Cooky, Messner, Musto, 2015). The reduction in news also affected men's coverage. For example, men's basketball went from 225 articles in 2004 to 58 articles in 2014, which stands for three times fewer articles. In this context, *usatoday.com* did not report on any game or news from professional or college women's basketball in the period studied in 2014.

In *elmundo.es*, the situation was worse. The proportion of women's articles went from 5% in 2004 to 1.8% in 2014. In other words, in 2004, a reader could find approximately 1.5 articles about female athletes daily, while in 2014, a reader could find 0.21 articles about female athletes daily. The evolution of the online newspaper, due to the increase in competition in the online media as well as financial difficulties, has negatively impacted the already-low visibility of women's sport. The reduction of spots in the news affected all male sports, and it reduced the variability in the period studied. This tendency is similar to the one found in the U.S. online newspaper, although with differences in regard to their traditions. The professional and more traditional sports had a smaller reduction in the number of articles, and they increased or maintained their proportion of the news. In *usatoday.com*, around 75% of the articles in 2004 and 2014 were about American football, baseball, basketball, or ice hockey. In *elmundo.es*, soccer news went from 31.4% of the news in 2004 to 56.4% in 2014. Data confirm that media have a clear and set agenda about what is important in sport, and it is affected by the traditions of each country (e.g. Spain is all about male soccer).

Regarding the impact of the Winter Olympic Games on sport coverage, during the period of time that this competition occurred, there was an increase in the coverage of women's sports in the media, but it did not have a permanent effect (Packer et al., 2014). In both online newspapers there was a significant increase in women's articles (from 5.3% to 14.8% in *usatoday.com* and from 1.8% to 7.8% in *elmundo.es*). There were, however, different tendencies in the two newspapers.

In the Spanish online newspaper, there was an increase in women's sports articles during the Winter Olympic Games. This increase was facilitated by the increase in the total number of sports articles in this period of time, due to the tradition of providing information about this event. This was not associated with a change in the normal zero-sum game of the normal coverage. In the U.S. online newspaper there was no increase in sports articles during this period of the Olympic Games. The increase in women's articles was due to a reduction in men's articles

and neutral articles, changing the normal zero-sum game of regular coverage. These differences can be due to traditions related to winter sports and this international event. The higher number of sports articles related to the Winter Olympic Games found in *usatoday.com* than in *elmundo.com* can be related to the fact that in Spain, due to its geographical latitude, there is less tradition of winter sports. During the months leading up to and the period of celebration of the Olympic Games, there was an increase in the neutral news that contributed to reducing the spots in the sports articles and the accessibility to men's and women's articles. These articles were related to the facilities, institutions, countries, etc.

The reduction in women-only articles affected the content of articles in both online newspapers in the normal coverage of sport news and during the Olympic Games. In *usatoday.com*, between 2003–2004 and 2013–2014, there were changes in the placement of women-only articles, there was an increase in the use of photographs in articles, and there was a slight increase in the length of the articles. In 2014, all the articles about women had photographs although only 80% of articles about men's sport were accompanied by a photograph. These findings are similar to improvements previously reported regarding the way that women's sports are covered (Crolley, Teso, 2007; Lumby, Caple, Greenwood, 2014). These tendencies were not found in the Spanish online newspaper. There, the number of photographs for women's articles decreased significantly by 30%, while the number of photographs for men's articles increased significantly. These findings can show how the women's sport or the winter Olympics were covered in a different way by each newspaper.

The results confirm the data from previous studies (Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Sainz de Baranda, 2014). The imbalance is not improving, and it is affected by the traditions of the country, or sport structure. Changes in online media have reduced the accessibility of the readers to articles about women's sport (total available news). This reaffirms the difficulty female athletes have in obtaining visibility, sponsorship, etc., as well as the difficulty for the general population to obtain information about what happens in women's sport. Data show a reduction in articles outside of traditional professional sports: football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey in the United States and soccer in Spain. The sport image put forth by these newspapers provides a reductionist image of the sport that is a partial and unfair perspective of the sport world.

Data show that when financial changes or competitive issues arise, online media maintain the traditions, or they use it as a strategy to increase their audience. Data confirm that from some online media, sport is still seen as something done by and for men. Online media are maintaining the traditional and stereotyped idea of sport (Chalabaev et al, 2013; Duncan, 1992). The problem is that younger generations are accepting this imbalance as normal, and they are not critical of it (Lebel, Danylchuk, 2009). These differences show the need for specific education and intervention approaches for each country and society. The media's presentation of just one perspective of sport (e.g. men's professional sport) as the reality of sport contributes to maintaining the beliefs and perceptions of society that there is no other perspective.

Data show that the visibility of the female athlete has deteriorated. The fact that this is caused by a reduction in the total men's and women's sport articles makes it a difficult problem to solve. The magnitude of the problem and the trend in recent decades show the need for specific multidisciplinary interventions, such as informational campaigns, education programs, awards to the media sources that promote equity, etc. It is necessary to inform our societies of the status of women's sport and the existence of the gap. Our young generations, both boys and girls, must be aware and critical of this situation. Society is the one that consumes the product offered by the media. Therefore, we have a role in the process. Monitoring and periodically informing about the gap is the first step in

correcting this imbalance. Changes involving the sport culture of a country or society require the involvement of all the stakeholders: governments, institutions, politicians, schools, teachers, coaches, audience, etc. The evolution of the way that society attains information about the world and specifically about sport is another possible way to break the cycle and reduce the gap. Traditional newspapers are utilized to obtain news, but this tradition can be changed or is changing through the use of online sources. Media companies are businesses that try to sell a product. However, if the image that they provide is not adequate, maybe other options that treat men's and women's sports in the same way need to be considered (Chalabaev et al, 2013; Di Carlo, Cezar, 2014). Media can contribute to reducing the obstacles that female athletes have to overcome and to placing importance on women's sport (Clarke, Ayres, 2014; Fink, 2014). Nothing can justify this imbalance. Sports practice changed decades ago, though the media do not yet show an image that reflects the reality and the diversity of current sport. One possible explanation is that media companies are businesses, and they are trying to sell a product. Publishers perceive that their market is the male population. The expectations and pressures of readership influence the type of news they generate. The goal of selling more and getting more revenue by paid commercials ends up altering the reality of sports news to which readers have access. Future studies are needed to test this hypothesis.

Conclusions

The online newspapers studied from Spain and the United States showed an imbalance in the image of sport between genders. The significant decrease in sports articles found in the online newspapers *usatoday.com* and *elmundo.es* has significantly reduced the possibility of their readers to access news about men and women's sports. The reduction has also decreased the variability of the sports articles. Due to the lower appearance of women's news, these reductions affected more the total available number of women's coverage. The imbalance is greater in the Spanish newspaper than in the US newspaper. The reduction of the sports articles has increased the competitiveness which has benefitted traditional and professional sports. Data show the image of sport provided by these online newspapers is male-orientated, focused on elite sport, and focused on a low number of sports. Online newspapers maintain and perpetuate the tradition that sport is done by and for men. The event of the Winter Olympic Games increased the visibility of female athletes and of different sports. This impact was higher in the online newspaper from the United States than in the online newspaper from Spain. The inclusion of the Winter Olympics Games, in the fourth registered timeframe, altered the normal women's coverage. Future studies are needed to confirm the findings of this paper.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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