

# The photographic representation of female athletes in the Spanish digital sport press during the Rio Olympic Games

## Representación fotográfica de las atletas en la prensa deportiva digital española durante los Juegos Olímpicos de Río

### *Representação fotográfica dos atletas na imprensa desportiva digital espanhola durante os Jogos Olímpicos do Rio*

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**ABSTRACT** | This paper studies the representation of female and male images in the Spanish digital sport press during the 2016 Olympic Games to show if the visual framework is different for each gender. We conducted a content analysis of 3738 news items through eight different variables: athlete's gender, photographs' quantity and size, sport, image content, action of the protagonist, presence of gender biases or stereotypes and their typology. Findings show that there is an underrepresentation of female visual coverage and a trivialization of women's sports with visual ambivalence in the images. This is because, even though there is not a differentiated context by gender, media tends to represent female athletes in so-called gender-appropriate sports and in a passive way. In addition, we found gender biases and stereotypes derived from frames of sexualization and beauty, degrading images, greater emphasis on female emotions, motherhood, and family life. All of this can impact the audience's perception as they understand that women's sports are less relevant than men's.

**KEYWORDS:** women; media; sport; photograph; sport press; digital press; Olympic Games; photographs frames.

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**RESUMEN** | Este artículo estudia la representación de las imágenes femenina y masculina en la prensa deportiva digital española durante los Juegos Olímpicos de Río 2016 para desvelar si existe un encuadre visual diferenciado de género. Se analiza el contenido de 3738 noticias a través de ocho variables: género del protagonista, cantidad y tamaño de las fotografías, tipo de deporte, contenido de las imágenes, acción del protagonista, presencia de sesgos o estereotipos de género y sus tipologías. Los hallazgos muestran una infrarrepresentación en la cobertura visual del deporte femenino y su trivialización mediante un encuadre noticioso ambivalente: aunque de forma general no ofrece un contexto diferenciado de género, tiende a representar a las deportistas en mayor medida en disciplinas consideradas apropiadas en función de su sexo y de una forma pasiva. Asimismo, se ha encontrado una cierta presencia de sesgos y estereotipos de género mediante marcos de sexualización y belleza, imágenes degradantes y mayor énfasis en las emociones, en la maternidad y la vida familiar femeninas. Todo ello puede sesgar la percepción de la audiencia, que puede valorar el deporte femenino como menos relevante que el masculino.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** mujeres; medios; deporte; fotografía; prensa deportiva; prensa digital; Juegos Olímpicos; encuadre fotográfico.

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**RESUMO** | Este artigo estuda a representação das imagens femininas e masculinas na imprensa desportiva digital espanhola durante os Jogos Olímpicos do Rio 2016 para revelar se há um enquadramento visual diferenciado por gênero. É realizada uma análise de conteúdo de 3738 notícias através de oito variáveis diferentes: sexo do protagonista, número e extensão das fotografias, tipo de esporte, conteúdo das imagens, ação realizada pelo protagonista, presença de preconceitos ou estereótipos de gênero e suas tipologias. Os resultados mostram que existe uma sub-representação de cobertura visual do esporte feminino e uma banalização através de um quadro noticioso ambivalente, embora em geral não ofereça um contexto diferenciado por gênero, tende a representar as mulheres atletas em maior medida em disciplinas consideradas apropriadas de acordo com o seu sexo e de uma forma passiva. Além disso, foi encontrada uma certa presença de preconceitos e estereótipos de gênero através dos quadros de sexualização e beleza, imagens degradantes e maior ênfase nas emoções femininas, na maternidade e a vida familiar. Tudo isto pode afetar a percepção do público ao compreender que o esporte feminino é menos relevante do que o masculino.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** mulheres; meios de comunicação; esporte; fotografia; imprensa esportiva; imprensa digital; Jogos Olímpicos; enquadramento fotográfico.

## INTRODUCTION AND STATE OF THE ART

Images have been described as objective and true, mirrors of the events they represent, due to the “photographic verisimilitude” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 171) that reinforces the myth of mechanically captured naturalness. They do not record the objective truth, since they represent events, contexts, and participants that are cropped, retouched, and framed (Barthes, 1977). Images, cultural constructs, produce specific visions of racial, social, or sexual differences shown as universal and transmitted through the media (Rose, 2012). Thus, by disseminating and reinforcing sexual differences (Goffman, 1974), they can produce otherness and reproduce patriarchal relations through gender stereotypes (Duncan, 1990).

In Western societies, biological differences between the sexes have given rise to a sociocultural construction of the feminine and masculine based on attributing differentiated gender roles (Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014), which produces a hierarchization. The male and masculine are linked to physical strength, aggressiveness or power, leading them to dominate activities such as sports. Ramón-Vegas (2012) states that this institution is socially and symbolically constructed by a male hegemony that naturalizes, preserves, and privileges its power. The masculine role is complemented by a feminine one associated with dependence and subordination to men, as well as with physical weakness, passivity, and beauty, which has historically excluded women from practicing sports, having access only to those sports considered appropriate for them, such as gymnastics or tennis, based on less physical and more aesthetic qualities (Alfaro et al., 2011). These roles are naturalized, reproduced, and perpetuated by the sports media, when they disseminate gender stereotypes that underrepresent and trivialize women’s sports (Salido-Fernández & Muñoz-Muñoz, 2021a).

Media images can make viewers identify with what they see, such as the success of an athlete, empowering them by presenting them as triumphant, strong and active, and giving them attributes linked to sport and masculinity (Borcila, 2000). It can also give the consumer a position of power and dominance when women are presented in images as emotional, passive, and weak in the face of injury (Smith & Bissell, 2014). Women are shown as beautiful, in suggestive poses, in a sexualized way (King, 2007) and as an object of desire for the male audience (Muñoz-Muñoz & Salido-Fernández, 2018). In a world organized on the basis of sexual imbalance, the pleasure of looking is divided between active-male and passive-female, where women are simultaneously seen and exhibited, making their appearance coded according to the male gaze with a strong visual and erotic impact (Mulvey, 1999). Thus, to appear in the media, they must comply

with certain canons of beauty, which according to Weber and Carini (2013) turns them into consumption objects, belittles them, and limits their professional development, determining the place they will occupy both in sport and in society.

Studies on female photographic representation in sports coverage find a notorious lack of equity, in the number of images, their size, and their position (King, 2007). Women are marginalized, excluded, or underrepresented in visual coverage (Fink & Kensicki, 2002), and their achievements are invisibilized or distorted, which implies their symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978). Early research on sports images in the 1990s found three times as many photographs of males than of females (Duncan, 1990). In the early 2000s, Pedersen (2002) and Vincent (2004) found female coverage to be between 30%-39% and by the end of the decade, around 42% (King, 2007). In recent years, there are large differences between the low daily coverage of traditional and online sports media (Weber & Carini, 2013) and that of major events such as the Olympic Games, which seem to offer a higher level of equity, with around 40-45% female visual coverage (Godoy-Presland & Griggs, 2014; Dafferner et al., 2019). These data are more in line with the percentage of female sports participation in the Tokyo 2020 Games, which reached 49% (“Trailblazing Tokyo...”, 2020), an improvement that would occur partly due to the nationalistic nature of the event, where each country tends to overrepresent its athletes (Delorme & Testard, 2015).

The research conducted in Spain also reflects this increase. Sanz Garrido (2015) finds it in the national and regional press during the London 2012 Games, with 44% presence of female athletes in *Marca* (<https://www.marca.com/>). The author also perceives a notable presence of gender stereotypes linked to female beauty and emotions, more coverage of sports considered appropriately feminine, and stereotypical images. Digital media, despite their ability to innovate, follow the same patterns of traditional media in gender representation (Franquet et al., 2006). In this vein, Perrino Pena and Pascual Fibla (2019) find in the coverage of Rio 2016 a lack of equity in representation and the maintenance of discriminatory content (Ada-Lameiras, 2019); in the social networks of generalist and sports media there is female stereotyping through images associated with beauty and glamour. Likewise, the content concerning them is of a sexualized nature (Salido-Fernández & Muñoz-Muñoz, 2021b).

Female images are increasingly examined from qualitative studies to delve into other aspects, such as the type of photograph, its location, or the framing used. This enables to reveal whether the way in which they are constructed differs according to the protagonist's gender (Pedersen, 2002; Berstein & Kian, 2013; Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2019).

## Framing theory

Frames refer to aspects of reality perceived in text or images that are highlighted by communicating them above the rest (McCombs, 2006). The framer has greater agency than the people framed (Goffman, 1974), which can create views and stereotypes about groups based on gender, race, or social class that influence what consumers think and decide (Hardin et al., 2002). The media assume the strategic value of establishing what is talked about and how it is talked about, transmitting narratives that become culturally embedded and ingrained over time (Reese, 2001).

Framing work focuses on selecting, emphasizing, repeating, and excluding words or images (Tankard, 2001; Angelini & Billings, 2010); hence their usefulness in studying the representation of the sexes in the media and the content patterns used in sports media (Berstein & Kian, 2013). In the case of images, they give an account of how the world is (or how it should be, according to the photographer), and can influence audiences more than verbal frames, having a greater and faster impact than text (Dixon, 2008). Aspects such as size, location in the medium, color and camera angle, as well as facial expressions, postures and movements of their protagonists influence them (Coleman, 2010; Godoy-Pressland & Grigg, 2014). Works on visual frames in the media find an evolution from a more overt and demeaning sexism to a softer one (Jones, 2003; Musto et al., 2017), but that still invisibilizes women, normalizes hierarchy, and reinforces sexual differences in sport (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Hardin et al., 2002). Mechanisms of ambivalence are used to this end (Berstein & Kian, 2013; Cranmer et al., 2014). Contradictory messages are delivered in a subtle way that makes them go unnoticed, e.g., by celebrating, but at the same time trivializing and downplaying, a women's sport triumph (Cranmer et al., 2014).

This ambivalence also disempowers women in sport through photographs that reinforce femininity, vulnerability, dependence, emotion, or female sexuality among many other traditional gender markers (Smith & Bisell, 2014). Women are shown as passive and weak, with aesthetic and immobile postures (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Lynn et al., 2004; Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2019), employing closer shots focused on the aesthetics of the individual and not so much on their sporting activity (Hardin et al., 2005; Jones, 2006). Framing that puts the focus on female sport is rare (Berstein & Kian, 2013). These studies find that female athletes are undermined through the image's angle, shown in a high-angle shot and looking at the ground, which reduces their power versus low-angle shots, which favor athlete superiority (Duncan, 1990; Hardin et al., 2002). The technical production of event coverage, camera angles, types of shots and special effects can influence viewer interest, as in the Athens 2004 Olympic Games (Greer et al., 2009), with greater presence and variety in male coverage. Thus, there is discussion about a technical

construction of the event that differs according to gender (Borcila, 2000), making the audience see the female coverage as naturally less interesting and visually less exciting than the male coverage. Bissell and Duke (2007) analyze the angles of the images of women's beach volleyball in those same games and find that the athletes are objectified, as close-ups of their breasts and buttocks are repeatedly shown. Delorme and Testard (2015) see higher levels of fairness in aspects such as posture, camera angles, or sports during the coverage of the London 2012 Games in the French press, although they perceive a clear female underrepresentation in the images. Other researchers find in different Olympic Games that coverage of female aesthetic and individual sports, such as skating or gymnastics, is prioritized over other team and physical contact-based sports, like soccer or field hockey, considered masculine (Koivula, 1999; Jones, 2006; Coche & Tuggle, 2017).

All the above affects the interest and perception of viewers, who see female coverage that highlights other aspects more than sports (Weber & Carini, 2013). Thus, the value of female sporting achievement is undervalued, as it is seen as less relevant than male achievement (Davis & Tuggle, 2008). This prevents the development of referents for girls and young women (López-Diez, 2011), and encourages female objectified profiles intended for the mere entertainment of the male audience (Muñoz-Muñoz & Salido-Fernández, 2018); all the latter, despite the current context of greater female sports participation (Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014).

In that vein, this paper examines the photographic representation of female athletes in the Spanish digital sports media with the largest audience during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, to see if greater gender equity is perceived in the images, both in the quantity and content of the coverage, and if there is a differentiated gendered visual framing.

The following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.* The coverage of the images reflects an unequal participation of each gender, both in number and extent.
- H2.* Female athletes have greater visual coverage in sports considered appropriate for women and male athletes in those considered appropriate for men.
- H3.* Male athletes are overrepresented in sports images and female athletes, in non-sports contexts.
- H4.* Female athletes are shown in a more passive attitude, while male athletes are shown in an active one.
- H5.* Female images contain more gender biases and stereotypes than male ones.

**METHODOLOGY**

We collected the news published between August 5 and 21, 2016, about the Rio Olympic Games on the websites of the four digital sports newspapers with the highest readership in Spain, which also have paper editions: *Marca* (4,547 million unique daily users in 2016), *As* (with 2,246), *Sport* (1,281), and *Mundo Deportivo* (1,195) (<https://reporting.aimc.es/index.html#/main/internet>). We used keywords in the search boxes: *Juegos Olímpicos*, *JOOO*, *Juegos Olímpicos Río*, and *Río 2016*, eliminating duplicities and news from different editions. Of the 5,108 pieces of information obtained, we manually selected an intentional sample, which contained at least one photograph and whose protagonist was a male or female athlete, Spanish or foreign (N=3,738), discarding news with other visual elements such as figures or videos, as well as those referring to both sexes. The number of athletes in each image was also not counted.

We performed a mixed content analysis (Krippendorff, 1990) applied to sports information (Andrew et al., 2011) to quantify the amount of total visual coverage by gender, and to know the gender representations in the images in a qualitative way (Bryman, 2016). Only the main image of each news item was analyzed, so that the data from each were exclusive. This type of analysis allows us to decode messages, to clarify patterns of representation in the media (Strinati, 2000), and to describe in a systemic and objective way the content of messages and images of historically oppressed groups (Hardin et al., 2002). As for the limits, we cannot know the intention of the producers of these contents or the ambiguity with which these media may represent each gender.

Coding, classification, and analysis of the data used IBM SPSS v.24 statistical software. Both researchers manually and independently coded the data using a system of reliable, mutually exclusive, predetermined, and exhaustive categories from a coding form based on the work of Billings and Eastman (2003), adapted to the research objective (Wimmer & Domminick, 2011), and we adopted an inductive approach for news that did not fit into the existing categories.

We established eight variables (table 1).

|                      |                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Protagonist’s gender | Photo content                        |
| Sport type           | Image protagonist’s action           |
| Number of pictures   | Are biases or stereotypes perceived? |
| Photo size (in cm2)  | Types of stereotypes present         |

**Table 1. Classification of the analyzed variables**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

| Stereotype categories                          | Description                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Traditional roles (López-Diez, 2011)           | Feminine: beauty, motherhood, family care. Male: violence and aggressiveness                                     |
| Emotional expression (Borcila, 2000)           | Protagonist cries, shows physical or mental weakness or vulnerability                                            |
| Non-verbal communication (Bisell & Duke, 2007) | Expressions or postures that are demeaning or humiliating, denigrating the protagonist (e.g.: a strange grimace) |
| News about women athletes                      | Absence of female images<br>Sexualization framework                                                              |

**Table 2. Stereotype categories present in the analyzed images**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The content of the picture was coded based on whether the image occurs in a sporting or non-sporting context (Fink & Kensicki, 2002) (0=sporting image; 1=non-sporting). An athlete scoring a goal is considered a sports image and the same athlete visiting the city, not. If the context was not clear enough to classify it, accessories (sports environment or clothing) were considered. Another variable is the action of the protagonist (0=active; 1=passive; 2=non-applicable), i.e., if athletes are shown competing or training or, on the contrary, motionless posing in front of the camera (Pedersen, 2002; Delorme & Testard, 2015); non-applicable is used for photographs in which the activity they perform is not appreciated. Finally, it is established whether the image has gender biases or stereotypes (0=yes, 1=no, 2=non-applicable/not appreciated) and if yes, what stereotypes they show, in the following categories (table 2).

For the last category, we coded three subcategories: skin exposure, i.e., whether the athlete appears nude, semi-nude, or fully clothed (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Daniels & Wartena, 2011); body position, referring to showing a sexually suggestive pose or not (Duncan, 1990), and camera angle, i.e., whether the image offers any part of the body as a focal point where the public’s gaze is directed. This will be considered inappropriate when the attention falls on body parts such as buttocks or breasts (Bisell & Duke, 2007; Cranmer et al., 2014; Wasike, 2017).

We used descriptive statistics with frequency and percentage tables, inferential, cross and contingency tables, as well as Pearson’s chi-square tests of nonparametric statistical significance (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011), to measure significant differences between the expected and observed information units ( $p < 0.0001$ ). To quantify coverage by eliminating possible methodological biases,

athlete participation was used as an independent standard. This “standard reflects the proportionality of coverage in relation to the number of participating athletes of specific genders” (Eagleman et al., 2014, p. 463).

The reliability between the two coders was calculated for 16.5% of the sample (600 news items in total), with Cohen’s Kappa coefficient, considering a data overlap of 10-20% acceptable (Riffle et al., 2005). The variables obtained Kappa coefficients above .75, an acceptable range of reliability.

**RESULTS**

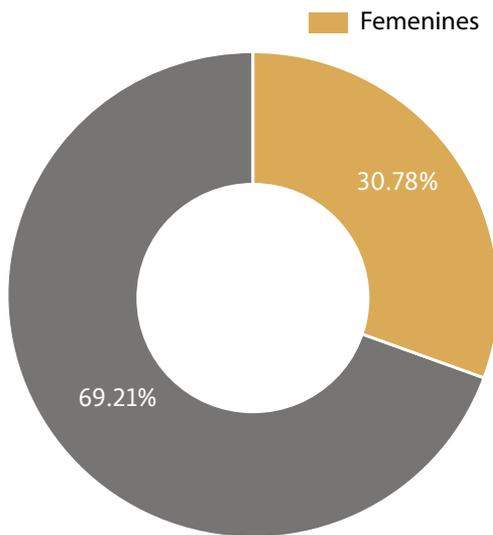
**Amount of photo coverage**

To demonstrate the first hypothesis of greater male than female coverage in the news and images, we used as an independent standard the participation of each sex in the Games (n=5,059 women and n=6,179 men; <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/rio-2016>). Balanced coverage would reflect proportionality between the number of participants of each gender and the coverage received (Eagleman et al., 2014). Of the total of 11,238 athletes, 45% were female and 55%, male. Regarding the Spanish case (309 athletes), 165 men (53.4%) and 144 women (46.5%) participated (Comité Olímpico Español, 2016). Combining the participation data with the overall coverage, it is found that of the total news analyzed (n=3738) women barely reached 34% (n=1,271) and men, 66% (n=2,467) (table 3).

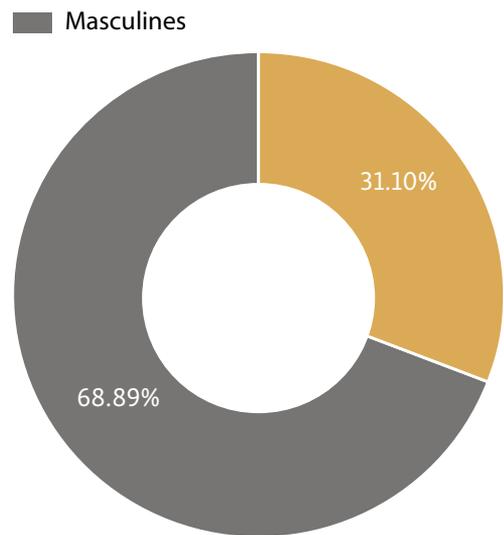
| Gender | Participation |       | Coverage |       | Visual coverage |        |
|--------|---------------|-------|----------|-------|-----------------|--------|
|        | N°            | %     | N°       | %     | N°              | %      |
| Women  | 5,059         | 45.02 | 1,271    | 34.01 | 2,464           | 30.78  |
|        |               |       |          |       | (-1,139)        | (-15%) |
| Men    | 6,179         | 54.98 | 2,467    | 65.99 | 5,539           | 69.21  |
|        |               |       |          |       | (+1,139)        | (+15%) |
| TOTAL  | 11,238        | 100   | 3,738    | 100   | 8,003           | 100    |

**Table 3. Amount of news and image coverage by gender**

*Source: Own elaboration*



**Figure 1. Number of images by gender**



**Figure 2. Extent of images by gender**

Source: Own elaboration.

As for the number of images ( $n=8,003$ ) (figure 1), 30.78% (2,464) are female and 69.21% are male ( $n=5,539$ ), which means a variation of the expected results according to the participation rate of -15% in the female case and +15% in the male one. In terms of total  $cm^2$  (figure 2), the total area of female images would reach  $582,859.50\text{ cm}^2$  (31.10%) and male images would reach  $1,290,693.55\text{ cm}^2$  (68.89%).

### Presence of type of sports considered appropriate for each gender

For the type of sport, we compiled the ranking of the 10 sports events with the highest coverage (table 4), to compare according to gender. Basketball, athletics, and tennis are the three sports with the highest number of news and images (57.3%), followed by swimming (9.2%), and soccer (6.6%). In the last positions are handball and badminton, each with less than 2% of visual coverage. If we compare this general table with the following one (table 5), which illustrates the sports with the highest coverage by gender, the three most followed correspond to the top three male sports. In seven of the 10 sports with the greatest media interest, men outnumber women in terms of news and images, except in swimming, although with very similar data in images (4.6% female and 4.5% male), despite the fact that the Spanish team won two female medals and there were no male medals.

The same occurs with the two sports with the least visual coverage in the overall table, handball (1% female and 0.1% male), with no participation of the Spanish men's team -the female team obtained an Olympic diploma-, and badminton (1.5% female vs. 0.1%), with two Spanish participants, one of each gender, and a female gold medal.

| Sports              | News total |      | Images total |      |
|---------------------|------------|------|--------------|------|
|                     | Nº         | %    | Nº           | %    |
| Basketball          | 723        | 19.3 | 2,714        | 34.0 |
| Athletics           | 525        | 14.0 | 1,058        | 13.2 |
| Tennis              | 348        | 9.3  | 811          | 10.1 |
| Swimming            | 338        | 9.0  | 734          | 9.2  |
| Soccer              | 247        | 6.7  | 530          | 6.6  |
| Water polo          | 96         | 2.6  | 105          | 1.3  |
| Boxing              | 85         | 2.3  | 125          | 1.6  |
| Field hockey        | 83         | 2.2  | 105          | 1.3  |
| Stillwater canoeing | 82         | 2.2  | 157          | 2.0  |
| Handball            | 78         | 2.1  | 91           | 1.1  |
| Badminton           | 78         | 2.1  | 136          | 1.7  |
| Other sports        | 1,055      | 28.2 | 1,437        | 17.9 |
| Total               | 3,738      | 100  | 8,003        | 100  |

**Table 4. Ten sporting events with the greatest coverage.**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

| Gender | Sport                  | News total |      | Images total |      |
|--------|------------------------|------------|------|--------------|------|
|        |                        | Nº         | %    | Nº           | %    |
| Male   | 1º Basketball          | 582        | 15.6 | 1,635        | 20.4 |
|        | 2º Athletics           | 363        | 9.7  | 794          | 9.9  |
|        | 3º Tennis              | 266        | 7.1  | 713          | 8.9  |
|        | 4º Soccer              | 217        | 5.8  | 495          | 6.2  |
|        | 5º Swimming            | 157        | 4.2  | 364          | 4.5  |
|        | 6º Boxing              | 79         | 2.1  | 114          | 1.4  |
|        | 7º Stillwater canoeing | 71         | 1.9  | 145          | 1.8  |
|        | 8º Water polo          | 58         | 1.6  | 63           | 0.8  |
|        | 9º Field hockey        | 55         | 1.5  | 74           | 0.9  |
|        | 10º Golf               | 54         | 1.4  | 73           | 0.9  |
|        | Other sports           | 554        | 14.8 | 1,046        | 13.1 |

Table 5 - Continue on next page

|        |              |                       |       |      |       |      |
|--------|--------------|-----------------------|-------|------|-------|------|
|        | 1°           | Swimming              | 181   | 4.8  | 370   | 4.6  |
|        | 2°           | Athletics             | 161   | 4.3  | 264   | 3.3  |
|        | 3°           | Basketball            | 141   | 3.7  | 539   | 6.7  |
|        | 4°           | Tennis                | 82    | 2.1  | 98    | 1.2  |
|        | 5°           | Badminton             | 64    | 1.7  | 123   | 1.5  |
| Female | 6°           | Handball              | 64    | 1.7  | 77    | 1.0  |
|        | 7°           | Sailing               | 45    | 1.2  | 50    | 0.6  |
|        | 8°           | Water polo            | 38    | 1.0  | 42    | 0.5  |
|        | 9°           | Synchronized swimming | 37    | 1.0  | 47    | 0.6  |
|        | 10°          | Artistic gymnastics   | 36    | 1.0  | 78    | 1.0  |
|        |              | Other sports          | 433   | 11.6 | 799   | 10.0 |
|        | <b>Total</b> |                       | 3,738 | 100  | 8,003 | 100  |

$\chi^2=0.0001$

**Table 5. Ten sporting events with the highest male and female coverage**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

The visual coverage broken down by gender shows that more presence is given to sports considered appropriate for each sex. In basketball, despite the silver medal for female Spanish athletes and the bronze medal for men, male images (1,635, 20.4%) are three times more than female ones (539, 6.7%). The same happens in soccer. There is no Spanish participation in both genders, but male visual coverage reaches 6.2% of the total (495 images) compared to 0.8% for women (30 images). In athletics, Spanish participation resulted in a women’s gold medal, which was not enough to match the men’s silver medal in terms of coverage or images. Men had more than three times as much coverage as women (9.9% versus 3.3% of the total). Similar was the case of taekwondo, with a female silver medal and a male bronze medal and more than twice as many male images as female (27 vs. 65) or weightlifting, with a female bronze medal and more than twice as many male images (126 vs. 23). This also occurred in other traditionally male sports, such as water polo and shooting. The Spanish women’s team achieved more, but male athletes got more coverage in all of them. In the opposite case, we find that women have a higher presence in sports such as artistic gymnastics, despite there being more male than female participation (78 female images and 22 male) or beach volleyball, with the same participation in both sexes (72 female images and 27 male), and no medals.

| Pictures     | Women |      | Male  |      |
|--------------|-------|------|-------|------|
|              | N     | %    | N     | %    |
| Sportive     | 1,111 | 89.9 | 2,130 | 90.8 |
| Non-sporting | 125   | 10.1 | 216   | 9.2  |
| Total        | 1,236 | 100  | 2,346 | 100  |

$\chi^2=0,05$

**Table 6. Sports content of the photograph by gender**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

Sports considered gender-neutral (tennis or golf) continue to be seen as masculine. The skills and attributes involved favor male athletes more in their coverage, who become the referents par excellence in these disciplines (Angelini, 2008). Men’s tennis reaches 8.9% of the total visual coverage compared to only 1.2% for women, and men’s golf reaches more than twice as many images as women’s golf (1.4% compared to 0.6% for women).

**Picture content**

As to whether there is an overrepresentation of male sports images, similar percentages are found: female sports images reach 89.9% and male images, 90.8%. Female non-sportive images slightly outnumber male images in percentage (10.1% vs. 9.2%). In total numbers, both male sports and non-sportive images outnumber female images (table 6).

**Type of action in the image according to gender**

Women are presented as active in 57.3% and passive in 36.1%. In the case of men, the active feature is shown in 62.1% and the passive, in 30% (table 7). Men are shown in almost five percentage points more in active images, in full competition or training; women, in passive and static images, without performing their profession.

|           | Women |      | Male  |      |
|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|
|           | N     | %    | N     | %    |
| Active    | 729   | 57.3 | 1,531 | 62.1 |
| Passive   | 458   | 36.1 | 753   | 30.5 |
| Not shown | 84    | 6.6  | 183   | 7.4  |
| Total     | 1,271 | 100  | 2,467 | 100  |

$\chi^2=0.005$

**Table 7. Type of athlete’s action by gender**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

### Presence of gender bias and stereotypes in images

As shown in table 8, 10.9% of the female news items have gender stereotypes in the images, compared to only 2.2% of the male news items. Of the total number of news items with stereotypes (n=193), 72.0% refer to women and 27.9%, to men.

If we classify the stereotypes present in the images (table 9), we find a percentage concentrated in the sexualization frame (22.7%): almost all are female photographs with inappropriate camera framing (15%), mainly in women's beach volleyball and athletics, by putting the focal point on the chest and buttocks, followed by naked or semi-naked bodies (4.1%), and suggestive poses (3.6%). This type of news was found in all media, with examples such as *Las más bellas de los Juegos* (The prettiest of the Olympic Games) (2016), and *Los selfies íntimos de la deportista expulsada por un escándalo sexual* (Intimate selfies of athlete expelled for sex scandal) (2016) in *Marca*, or *Milica Dabovic, la deportista de Río que calienta Instagram* (Milica Dabovic, the athlete from Rio who heats up Instagram) (2016) in *Mundo Deportivo*, with female sexualized images mostly extracted from their social networks. No male images of nude or semi-nude bodies were found in this group. The images that include sexualizing frames such as semi-nudity or suggestive poses are mainly non-sporting in nature, extracted from advertising campaigns or social networks of female athletes.

The next most common stereotype is the presence of humiliating images (20.2%), capturing a moment in which the facial or body expression of the athlete is degrading or ridiculous. The female case again occupies almost the totality (36 images) compared to three male ones. Stereotyped photographs showing the athlete expressing emotion (crying) account for 15.6% of the total (25 female and five male).

Images that group several stereotypes would be in fourth place, with 10.9% of the total. They include various aspects of sexualization, such as semi-nude bodies, beauty, and suggestive poses. Those related to men's basketball standout, where female cheerleaders appear with provocative clothing and postures and a camera framing focused on their breasts and buttocks. In the miscellaneous category, other photographs combine stereotypes such as motherhood and emotion. The images based on transmitting a marked masculinity through nonverbal communication of aggressiveness and violence reach 9.3%, all male, mainly about soccer and boxing. The group of female absence is made up of news items that, while referring to female athletes or teams, do not include images of female athletes (8.8%) but rather generic images of facilities, their male teammates, or their coach.

|           | Women |      | Men   |      |
|-----------|-------|------|-------|------|
|           | N°    | %    | N°    | %    |
| No        | 1,130 | 88.9 | 2,403 | 97.4 |
| Yes       | 139   | 10.9 | 54    | 2.2  |
| Not shown | 2     | 0.2  | 10    | 0.4  |
| Total     | 1,271 | 100  | 2,467 | 100  |

$\chi^2=0.0001$

**Table 8. Presence of biases and stereotypes in images**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

| Stereotypes present in images  | Female | Male | TOTAL |      |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|-------|------|
|                                | N°     | N°   | N°    | %    |
| Aggressive or violent attitude | 0      | 18   | 18    | 9.3  |
| Female absence                 | 17     | 0    | 17    | 8.8  |
| Degrading/ demeaning image     | 35     | 4    | 39    | 20.2 |
| Emotional expression (crying)  | 25     | 5    | 30    | 15.6 |
| Motherhood and family          | 12     | 3    | 15    | 7.8  |
| Beauty                         | 9      | 0    | 9     | 4.7  |
| Sexualization frame:           |        |      |       |      |
| Nude or semi-nude body         | 6      | 2    | 8     | 4.1  |
| Suggestive pose                | 7      | 0    | 7     | 3.6  |
| Inappropriate focus/framing    | 29     | 0    | 29    | 15.0 |
| Various                        | 17     | 4    | 21    | 10.9 |
| Total                          | 157    | 36   | 193   | 100  |
| %                              | 81.3   | 18.7 |       | 100  |

**Table 9. Type of gender biases and stereotypes in images according to sex**

*Source: Own elaboration.*

News about family and maternity represent 7.8% of the total number of news items with stereotyped images (17 female). Several news items about the Russian athlete Yulia Stepanov, shown at home feeding her son, and athlete Maialen Chourraut stand out. Her recent maternity becomes the central news element of the story and not her gold medal chances, finally achieved. *Mamá, no te saltes una puerta* (Mum, don't miss a door) (Mundo Deportivo, 2016) or *Maialen Chourraut, una mamá a contracorriente* (Maialen Chourraut, a mother against the tide) (Marca, 2016) show the athlete hugging her daughter. Three images with references to fatherhood were found, all about swimmer Michael Phelps, although in the images it is his wife who is waiting for the champion with the child in her arms. This subcategory also includes images about future weddings and sentimental relationships and, in all of them, the protagonist is proposed to. This personal facet was not found for male athletes. Lastly, images about beauty and physical appearance (4.7% of the pieces) are linked only to women. Sportswomen appear showing their painted nails, details on their delicate clothing or in close-ups –both athletes and amateurs–, described as beauties.

When all these stereotypes are broken down, the differences between genders widen even more. In male news there are 18.7% of stereotypes about men, but female stereotypes are also included in 81.3% of the cases, which is not the case the other way around. Thus, traditional gender stereotypes are permanently reinforced in information concerning both men and women.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Following previous work on female underrepresentation in the sports media, the aim of this study was to learn about the photographic representation of female and male athletes in order to verify whether progress is being made towards greater gender equity in both the amount of coverage and its content. Of the five hypotheses established, four were verified.

Hypothesis 1, which predicted that females are underrepresented in both the number and extent of photographs (Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014), is confirmed. The percentage of coverage in number and size was higher than expected in male athletes (almost 70%) and lower in females (they did not exceed 30%). This contributes to invisibilize women in sport by conveying a message of lower female sporting interest (Delorme & Testard, 2015). It also strengthens the male hegemony in the photographic coverage of media that constitute the majority of the Spanish sports press with an undeniable influence in elite sport, as well as in non-professional sport. These findings support previous studies on female underrepresentation in sports media (Fink & Kensicki, 2002), although they do not coincide with some previous research that found more favorable coverage in mega events such as

the Olympic Games (Eagleman et al., 2014; Godoy-Presland & Griggs, 2014) due to a tendency towards nationalism that offers greater visibility to female athletes (Delorme & Testard, 2015).

Significant differences between gender and sport represented in the media were also confirmed (H2:  $\chi^2=713.176$   $df=42$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis 2 is accepted, which states that female athletes have a higher level of visual coverage in sports considered appropriate for women, and males in other sports considered masculine (Koivula, 1999; Jones, 2006).

There are no significant differences between the athlete's gender and the type of photograph, so hypothesis 3 is rejected ( $\chi^2=0.771$   $df=1$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and the null hypothesis is accepted, since no differences are found in the context frames, as evidenced by Cranmer et al. (2014). Females are represented in sport contexts similarly to males (89.9 vs. 90.8%), with little presence of non-sport ones for both cases (10.1% female and 9.2% male). These results contradict previous studies that suggest that women are denied such a context, favoring the extra-sport context (Hardin et al., 2005; Fink & Kensicki, 2002).

Hypothesis 4 was also validated (H4:  $\chi^2=11.70$   $df=2$ ,  $p<0.005$ ), as significant differences were found between the categories athlete's gender and the type of action performed in the image. A representation of female athletes in a passive attitude is confirmed to a greater extent than males (36% vs. 30%). The latter are shown more actively (62% vs. 57%), as described in previous studies (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Lynn et al., 2004; Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2019).

Finally, hypothesis 5 is also broadly validated, as there are significant differences in the correlation between the athlete's gender and the presence of gender stereotypes ( $\chi^2=132.330$   $df=2$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). Female images include more gender biases and stereotypes than male ones (10.9% vs. 2.2%), implying that there are more probabilities of gender stereotypes in the images when they are starred by women. This is confirmed by the analysis of visual framing (Coleman, 2010), which shows the presence of female sexualization frames in the sports context (Cranmer et al., 2014) through images with inappropriate focus (Bissell & Duke, 2007; Wasike, 2017), nude or semi-nude bodies (Daniels & Wartena, 2011), and suggestive poses (Duncan, 1990) that seek to convey sexual incitement (King, 2007; Weber & Carini, 2013). Frames are also found that trivialize female achievements through images of weakness and expression of emotions versus those of male strength and aggressiveness (Borcila, 2000), plus degrading female images, as well as of aspects related to family, motherhood, sentimental relationships, or beauty (López-Diez, 2011). Such visual frames contribute to an ambivalent representation of these women and to transmit that, although both genders can practice sports, men are athletic and powerful and women are aesthetic and weak.

In summary, the Spanish digital sports media during the Rio Olympic Games show an imbalance in the visual coverage of each gender, given that they contribute to female underrepresentation in the images (Godoy-Pressland & Griggs, 2014). They convey frames of ambivalence by presenting female athletes in sports considered appropriate for each sex (Jones, 2006), and passively to a greater extent than male athletes (Fink & Kensicki, 2002; Lynn et al., 2004; Delorme & Testard, 2015). Although no differences have been found in the representation of both sexes in the sports context (Cranmer et al., 2014), this has not been the case in transmitting biases and stereotypes, mainly based on women's sexualization (Duncan, 1990; Bissell & Duke, 2007; Daniels & Wartena, 2011; Wasike, 2017), but also through degrading images, expression of female emotions and weakness versus male aggressiveness (Borcila, 2000; Jones, 2006). Similarly, aspects of private life are highlighted, such as motherhood and sentimental relationships (López-Diez, 2011). All this contributes to trivializing women's sports and reinforcing male hegemony by transmitting to audiences the idea that sports practiced by women are less relevant. Thus, society in general, especially women and girls, receive the message that professional practice and female skills are not enough to appear in the media, so they have to be completed with sensuality, beauty, and other extra-sporting aspects, which will influence their professional development (Weber & Carini, 2013).

Future research could delve deeper into media frames to reveal qualitative aspects of representation; e.g., how masculinity is shown in sports considered feminine when practiced by men, such as artistic gymnastics, or analyze the coverage of other macro-events to establish comparisons between them or between countries, in search of differences between national and foreign teams based on gender. Another line could extend studies on photographic coverage in the new digital media and even to their social networks, some as visual as Instagram, to see if sexual differences persist or if they offer greater levels of gender equity. This will make it possible to delve deeper into the reality of female coverage and promote measures from institutions, organizations, and media to advance in a more balanced representation of women's sport.

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