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America's Heroes and Darlings: The Media

Portrayal of Male and Female Athletes

During the 2014 Sochi Games

Matthew K. Curtis

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

America's Heroes and Darlings: The Media Portrayal of Male and Female Athletes During the 2014 Sochi Games

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It has been well documented that female athletes receive much less media attention than male athletes, with estimates placing coverage of male athletes at 95% of all sport-related media (Coakley, 1986). While not to that extent, studies focusing on media portrayals of Olympic athletes also confirm that the media dedicates the majority of coverage to male athletes (Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Higgs, Weiller, & Martin, 2003; Lee, 1992; Kinnick, 1998; Pfister, 1978).

Some evidence suggests that media coverage of female athletes and the recognition of their achievements are slowly increasing (Higgs et al., 2003; Kinnick, 1998). While the aforementioned studies show many of the same results, no recent research on the subject was found. The majority of past research has focused on summer Olympians specifically, and no studies were found looking at the past five Olympic Games. This study will add to the literature by providing new data to compare to that of previous studies.

The author conducted a content analysis, looking at six online media outlets, and selecting 100 athlete profiles. The profiles were coded for any reference to the physical/emotional or strength/weakness characteristics of the athlete. The author analyzed the data using SPSS. Findings show no statistically significant relationships between gender and athlete characteristics, suggesting noticeable improvements in the quality and quantity of media coverage for female athletes when compared to previous studies.

Keywords: appearance, athlete profile, content analysis, framing theory, gender, Olympics, Sochi

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Chapter One: Introduction

Mass media have a powerful effect on our culture, including influencing how we view others and ourselves. Media coverage of sporting events is no exception to this—in fact, it may be amplified in some respects due to the amount of spectators who witness sporting events only through the media, as well as the number of individuals who do not view the events at all, but turn to the media for news about them.

Athlete profiles are frequently included in the mass media coverage of the Games, as many athletes are relatively unknown to the world at large until they become Olympic contenders. Historically, there has been much disparity with regards to representation of male and female athletes in the amount of coverage as well as the description of the athlete. Profiles of female athletes have often focused on appearance while those of male athletes focused more on their ability and performance.

Women first competed in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1900. Of the 997 athletes participating in five sports (tennis, sailing, croquet, equestrian and golf) there were 22 women who participated in golf and tennis. Females accounted for 44% of the athletes participating in the London Games in 2012 where, for the first time female athletes competed in every sport (International, 2013). The 2014 Winter Games in Sochi were scheduled to have 49 women's events and 49 men's events, evening out the field for the first time in history.

The International Olympic Committee, the Games' governing body, is constantly making adjustments to what sports are included, who can participate, and where and when the Games will be held. Part of this evolution has been the increased participation of female athletes. In fact, the Olympic Charter states that one of the International Olympic Committee's roles is "to encourage and support the promotion of women in sports at all levels and in all structures, with a

view to implementing the principle equality of women” (International , 2013). Each time the youth of the world gather together for the games, more and more female athletes are among those participating.

But inequality still exists. It was shown when Japan purchased economy airline tickets for its women’s soccer team while members of the men’s team sat in business class (Japan’s Women’s soccer, 2012). It was seen when “Jeremy L”, contributor to *Bleacher Report*, listed the “Ten Hottest Female Athletes in This Summer’s Olympics” (L, J, 2012). Inequality also exists when media portrayals of female athletes focus more on appearance than on athletic ability or more on emotions than on performance. Historically, media portrayals of female athletes are more likely to mention appearance, attractiveness, emotions, dependence and passiveness than the portrayals of their male counterparts. Male athletes are more likely to be portrayed as strong, independent, and aggressive.

This thesis proposes to examine the media portrayal of Olympic athletes during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. Research will focus on athlete profiles published by the top six Internet sport sites. A content analysis of the profiles published will be completed, looking for differences in how male and female athletes are portrayed. Kinnick (1998) identified three sources of bias with regards to gender differences in athlete portrayals: focus on appearance, linguistic sexism, and characterization of weakness. Research for this study will concentrate only on the first of these three.

Several studies have been conducted with regards to this topic over the last half-century. When looking at these studies, the researcher observed a continual shift with regards to how Olympic athletes have been profiled. The most recent study to specifically examine Olympic athletes was conducted during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. Ten years and five Olympics

later, this study will seek to identify changes in the profiling of these athletes. This study will also be the first of its kind to look at online media only, the previously mentioned studies having all examined newspaper and broadcast media.

This research took place during the 2014 Olympic Games, which ran February 7-23. Data will be collected starting and ending with the opening and closing ceremonies. Collected data will be analyzed using SPSS, a predictive analytics software package.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Duncan (1990) conducted research on the topic of gender and sports coverage in the United States. His results showed that the written press devoted 28.8 times more coverage to men's sports than it did to women's sports stories. But the inequality only starts with the quantity of articles. Print and broadcast media have historically reinforced gender stereotypes through selectively emphasizing some material while purposefully omitting other material. These two types of media have been referred to as the "central agents in the reproduction of gender inequality in the area of sport" (Lee, 1992, p. 198).

Lee (1992) identifies the following three "exclusionary and restrictive strategies" used by the media. First, female athletes receive less media coverage, making their status secondary to male athletes. Second, media representations of female athletes and media reports of women's sports do not accurately reflect the substantial increase in rates of participation, performance, and achievement by female athletes. Third, media reports that do include women's sports are often trivialized.

Results from Kinnick's research corresponds, and she states that, "The implicit message, when women are absent or underrepresented, is that female athletes either do not exist, or have no achievements that are newsworthy" (1998, para. 14). Lont (1995), whose research examined the 1992 Games found that stories of male athletes dominated the media, despite the fact that nine of the 11 medals won by the United States during those Games were earned by female athletes.

Myths concerning female involvement in sport have added to the negative typecasting of female athletes. These myths involve ideas such as women's fragile bone structure and the threat of damage to reproductive organs. Other myths originate from Western society's expectation of

women's subservience to men, discouraging females from participating in competitive sports, particularly those that allow the "demonstration of characteristics such as power, control, influence, and domination" (Lee, 1992, p. 198).

Gender Differences in the Media Coverage of Sport Competition

The American Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) conducted a 1990 study that examined six weeks of television news coverage (KNBC, Los Angeles) of both men's and women's sports. Included in the study were the 1989 "Final Four" basketball tournaments and singles, doubles, and mixed events from the 1989 U.S. Open Tennis Tournament. Findings of the study showed that 92% of the coverage was devoted to men's sports, 5% to women's sports, and 3% was considered to be gender neutral (Duncan & Messner, 1998). These findings prompted George Gerbner and Nartty Signoreli to refer to such lopsided coverage as the "symbolic annihilation" of media coverage for female athletes (Duncan & Messner, 1998). In 1994 the AAF repeated the study, this time examining six weeks of coverage on three television networks in the Los Angeles area. Results from this second study showed no significant change, with male athletes receiving 93.8% of the coverage (Duncan & Messner, 1998).

In their research of college and university produced television newscasts, Huffman, Tuggle, and Rosengard (2004) analyzed 157 broadcast stories and 285 print stories for gender differences. They found that although females comprise 41% of all collegiate student-athletes, 72.2% of the newspaper stories and 81.5% of the television stories in their sample were devoted to males. Both were found to be significant through chi-square analysis—broadcast $\chi^2(1, n=157)=53.52, p<0.01$; print $\chi^2(1, n=285)=48.02, p<0.01$ (p. 482). This study also found significant relationships between the gender of the reporter and the gender of the athlete. The

ratio of male/female journalists was comparable to the ratio of male/female athletes, but male reporters tended to write articles about male athletes (Huffman et al., 2004).

In a 1995 comparison of *The New York Times*' coverage of both the men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments, Silverstein (1996) found that the women's tournament was framed by the media as trivial. The women's event generated fewer articles on the cover of sports pages, and the articles that did appear were shorter in length and included fewer photographs.

Similar differences can be found when examining media representation of professional athletes. Wensing and Bruce (2003) explain that the mass media overwhelmingly view sport as part of the male domain, "with professional male sport represented as the pinnacle of sporting value and achievement" (p. 387). Furthermore, Pollack (2009) stated that, "sport by nature creates winners and losers. Without that our thirst for competition can't be satisfied and our desire to win can't be tested in battle. These traits are traditionally associated with the male gender" (Pollack, 2009, para. 1). An exploration and comparison of media coverage of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the National Basketball Association (NBA) illustrates some of the differences that underscore this issue.

In their 2009 study on televised news media, Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum (2013) analyzed three local news affiliates in Los Angeles (*KABC*, *KNBC*, and *KCBS*) as well as *ESPN's* SportsCenter. Findings from this study showed that 100% of the sampled programming had a lead story focusing on men's sports. During the time frame of this study, the women's basketball team at the University of Connecticut—a team that included Maya Moore, the first overall pick in the Women's National Basketball Association's (WNBA) draft—went

undefeated. Also occurring during this time was the WNBA All Star Tournament, the U.S. Open LPGA Tour, the World Cup Softball Tournament, and the World Figure Skating Championships.

Findings showed that coverage of women's sports, including basketball, golf, soccer, tennis and softball, shared less than 2.5% of the overall media. In comparison, men's basketball, football and baseball (referred to by the researchers as the "Big Three") garnered 68% of all coverage (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 212).

Even during the season the WNBA received "scant coverage" (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 213) from SportsCenter as well as the networks. There was significantly more coverage of the WNBA in the ticker at the bottom of the screen than in the main reports. This demonstrates a marginalization of the sport by the news media (Cooky et al., 2013). Similar findings were discovered during March Madness—the NCAA basketball tournaments held in March.

Women's basketball was "entirely ignored" by local affiliates while "token coverage" was given by *ESPN* (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 214).

In 2004, Cooky and her colleagues did find some reasons to be optimistic, however, noting a decline in the "disrespectful or insulting treatment of women" when compared with previous studies (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 216). Improvements were found once again in the 2009 sample, where "resources and time were devoted to delivering high quality and respectful reports on a women's sporting event" (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 214). At the same time, the researchers reported negative depictions of male athletes, such as the comment made about David Beckham by KNCB's Fred Roggin: "David Beckham was—*was*—a great player. But now he's the Anna Kournikova of soccer. Women love to look at him" (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 219).

Overall, the research by Cooky et al. (2013) showed not a narrowing of the gap between TV news coverage of men's and women's sports, but a widening—the coverage of women's sport during 2009 totaled 1.3% of the coverage on both *ESPN* and the networks examined.

Expanding on previous scholarship, which was mostly focused on traditional media outlets, researchers Lisec and McDonald (2012) conducted a narrative analysis of the content of WNBA-themed sports blogs such as *Deadspin* and *Women Talk Sports*. *Deadspin*, whose readership at the time of this study was reported at 700,000 page views per day, is targeted to and viewed mostly by males (91%). The editorial focus of the website is, in part, to provide readers with stories “where athletes are fascinating whether they're being tackled, being arrested or being lap-danced” (Lisec & McDonald, 2012, p. 160). *Women Talk Sports*, on the other hand, is a network of blogs that “embrace women's sport as an empowering and significant venue of interest” (Lisec & McDonald, 2012, p. 161).

Not surprisingly, findings showed that *Deadspin* articles perpetuated traditional gender bias when reporting (or not reporting) on women's sport through trivialization, mockery, and sexualization. Women's sports were under represented, and what coverage existed “blatantly suggests women athletes are inferior” (Lisec & McDonald, 2012, p. 160). What was surprising, however, were the findings that showed *Women Talk Sports* also portrayed female athletes in a sexualized manner. While the analyses provided were found to be more professional than those from *Deadspin*, the bloggers didn't seem to escape this historical gender ideology (Lisec & McDonald, 2012).

Gender Differences in the Media Coverage of Olympic Sport Competition

In her research, Lee states that barriers for female athletes have been perpetuated from the ancient Greeks and that despite an increase in the number of female athletes, women continue

to be excluded from several sports at all levels of competition (1992). At the time of her research, Olympic sports remaining closed to women included biathlon, bobsled, boxing, ice hockey, judo, modern pentathlon, soccer, water polo, weight lifting, and wrestling (Fuller, 1987). Today, the Olympic Games feature women's competition in all ten of those events. The only sports that do not currently include competition for female athletes are Greco-Roman wrestling and Nordic combined—all of the other 56 Olympic events include both men's and women's events, or are combined as is the case for all equestrian events as well as some figure skating (Sport and Disciplines, 2014).

Lee (1992) also reported disparity in distance events such as swimming and athletics (track and field) where female athletes have traditionally competed at shorter distances than males. This also has changed over the last several Olympic Games. Now male and female athletes compete at more similar distances in these events. Occasionally, women even compete in longer distances; for example, the 800m freestyle in women's swimming (Swimming, 2014).

Media Portrayals of Olympic Athletes

Several media portrayal studies have been conducted which looked specifically at Olympic athletes. Pfister (1987) analyzed articles from four German newspapers, looking at Olympic events between 1952 and 1980. He found that although female Olympic athletes received increased media attention during this time period, most of it focused on their age and appearance rather than being performance related.

Duncan (1990) examined newspaper and magazine coverage of the 1976 and 1984 Olympic Games using hermeneutics to analyze the portrayal of female Olympians. Her research focused on symbolism, looking at topics such as human rebellion, political dimensions, and religious overtones. Duncan's research revealed a recurring theme of contradiction throughout

the media observed. Female athletes were at the same time presented as strong and weak. One article referred to them as *powerful, courageous, precise, and in control*, as well as *cute, vulnerable, juvenile, and animal-like* (Duncan, 1990). Lee, speaking of Duncan's findings, states that "this theme is recognized in Olympics reporting because these Games are one of very few international sport competitions in which both men and women take part, although not equally" (Lee, 1992, p. 200).

More recent research comes from Lee (1992) and Kinnick (1998). Lee conducted research during the 1984 and 1988 Summer Olympic Games examining media portrayals of male and female athletes. Her population consisted of a Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, as well as *The New York Times*. Lee found that male athletes were over represented in the news coverage, being most highly represented in team sports as well as individual sports that were identified as emphasizing strength and endurance. Likewise, she found that female athletes were highly represented in some individual sports, those being identified as emphasizing aesthetics—grace, form, and beauty. Also of note was the finding that non-performance information, including appearance, body shape, and size, were more likely to be mentioned in the portrayals of female athletes and seldom occurred in articles profiling males. Overall, Lee (1992) found that male athletes were found to be more favorably portrayed than were female athletes. These findings were consistent for both Olympic years and for both countries' newspapers (Lee, 1992).

Katherine Kinnick (1998) studied gender bias in newspaper profiles of Olympic athletes during the 1996 Atlanta Games. Her study consisted of a content analysis of five major daily newspapers. These were *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Atlanta Constitution*. The first four newspapers were included as those with the largest circulation. *The Atlanta Constitution* was added to the population because

it “represents the host city of the Games, and its coverage reached not only regular subscribers, but thousands of visitors who attended the games” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 212).

Results of this study had several remarkable findings. With regards to overall representation, female athletes were proportionately better represented than males (female n=93, male n=77) and likewise, more female athletes (82%) were represented in photographs than male athletes (73%). This was not true among all the newspapers; 62% of the feature stories found in *USA Today* were written about male athletes.

The description of an athlete’s appearance was approximately the same whether referring to a male or a female athlete. This was an improvement over results found in previous studies where female athletes were far more likely to have comments made about their appearance than males (Pfister, 1987). Of the articles that did mention appearance, those profiling males were more likely to be uncomplimentary about their appearance. One example was a reference to a weightlifter as “stronger, faster, wider” accompanied by the headline “The Great Wide Hope” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 212). Another profile from *USA Today* (July 26, 1996) referred to a female athlete as “freckle-faced” with “light green Irish eyes.... She’s one feisty lady” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 212). Kinnick states that comments like these “frame the athlete as something to be gazed upon for other’s [sic] pleasure, and diminish their identity as athletes” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 212).

Athletes are also sometimes portrayed as non-adults, being referred to as *boys* or *girls*, or more often, as *kids*. In her study of Olympic athletes, Kinnick found that 7.9% of the female athlete profiles and 5.4% of male athlete profiles used these terms. Sabo and Jansen (1992) found that female athletes were often referred to as *girls* or *young ladies*, while the same articles referred to male athletes as *men* or *young men*. Other examples that fit in this category included *The Atlanta Constitution* (July 26, 1996) referring to adult judo athlete Amy Van Dyken as “a

national darling” and a “pixie” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 212). Admittedly, some Olympic athletes are quite young, and while referring to 14-year-old swimmer Amanda Beard as *a girl* might be accurate, a writer for *The Atlanta Constitution* infantilized her with the following comment: “With her big blue eyes and toothy smile, Beard is as cute as the teddy bear she carries to the pool” (July 23, 1996).

Female athletes are also more likely to be called by a nickname (Pfister, 1987) or to be referred to by their first name than are male athletes, who are on most occasions known by their surnames (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1990; Higgs, Weiller, & Martin, 2003).

Emphasis on relationships over athleticism was also observed by Kinnick (1998). Female athletes were more often defined by their relationships than were their male counterparts. Marital status was mentioned for 20% of male athletes and 35% of female athletes, accompanied at times with comments such as “Little Angel ain’t so little anymore. She is Angel Martino. Now a wife” (*The Atlanta Constitution*, July 22, 1996). No correlation was found between the gender of the reporter and the gender of the athlete with regards to mention of marital status. Male athletes were more likely to have profiles mention their parental status (17.2%) than were female athletes (14.2%), although female athletes were more likely to be characterized as an athlete struggling to balance her family and her career (7.8% of females, compared to 1.1% of male athletes profiled). Despite outstanding athletic ability, headlines like “Mommy with a Jumper” (*Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1996) define an athlete first as a mommy, not as an athlete. Kinnick found no similar headlines for male athletes. With regards to physical strength, males were more often cited as being stronger than females (29% vs. 23%). Likewise, female athletes were more than twice as likely as males to be characterized as weak (10% vs. 4.3%). Female athletes were more likely to be quoted expressing emotions and less likely than males to express confidence.

Kinnick (1998) also notes that although women's sports were extensively covered during the 1992 Games, most articles were likely to report on "sports which emphasize feminine ideals of elegance, glamour, and beauty, such as figure skating and women's gymnastics, and which reveal the athlete's body rather than concealing it under bulky equipment" (para. 16).

As has been mentioned, many changes have been made with regards to women's participation in Olympic events, and changes in media portrayals are being made as well. King (2007) reports that several longitudinal studies show the difference between newspaper coverage of male and female athletes is gradually being reduced.

More positive results come from Pfister's research where he found that newspaper coverage focused on female athletes increased from 14.6% in 1936 to over 29% in 1980 (Pfister, 1987). Later research found that between 1980 and 2004 coverage of male athletes dropped to 58%, and during the 2004 Games, two British newspapers dedicated more articles to female Olympians than males (King, 2007). King also found that female athletes received increased photographic coverage and that that coverage was more gender neutral. Recent studies show that some female athletes are starting to receive more coverage than male athletes (King, 2007; Urquhart & Crossman, 1999). While it appears that male athletes still garner the majority of the media coverage during the Olympics, the discrepancy is being reduced.

Higgs et al. (2003) found similar results after conducting a content analysis of television coverage of the 1996 Summer Olympics and comparing them with data from the Games four years earlier. Their finding suggested that while disparities still exist, there were "notable improvements in the way female athletes were presented" (p. 52). Their findings include the following:

1. Coverage for women increased in two team sports (basketball and volleyball) and in six of 11 sports analyzed.
2. Traditional coverage of gymnastics was still evident with disparities in strength/weakness descriptors and an emphasis on human drama, particularly in relation to the female gymnastics.
3. Qualitatively, basketball and volleyball were more evenly presented in the 1996 Olympic Games, with gender marking being the single disparity manifested.
4. Swimming and diving continued to be fairly evenly presented; however, both ambivalent and sexist commentary was still employed to describe female swimmers.
5. There was a lack of overtly sexist commentary in track and field as compared with the 1992 Olympic Games; however, some gender differentials in presentation of the narrative were still evident.
6. Overall, narrative analysis revealed a solid focus on the athleticism of the female athlete; however, for both male and female athletes, an intense focus on personal information (background, college attendance, playing experience) was noted.
(Higgs et al., 2003, p. 62).

Different reasons have been proposed as to why such gender differences exist in sports-media. Perhaps most agreed upon is that the overwhelming majority of sports writers are males. According to Lapchick's 2008 "Racial and Gender Report Card of the 'Associated Press Sports Editors'," males make up 87% of sports reporters, 88% of columnists, 94% of sports editors, 89% of assistant sports editors and 89% of copy editors (Cooky et al., 2013, p. 207).

Athletes in Photographs

Much research has been done concerning the differences in how women and men are photographed. Goffman (1976) studied newspaper and magazine photographs and found several gender differences including the posture and gesture of the subjects. Photographs often depict men in an elevated position when compared with photographs of women. Females tend to be posed leaning, bent, or even lying down—all positions that place the subject physically lower than her male counterparts.

Though the body of research on visual images and sports is not vast, the existing research points to differences in the visual representation of male and female athletes. In 1990, Buysse & Embser-Herbert (2003) studied photographs of male and female athletes in a sample of 307 NCAA Division I media guides. The media guides contained photographs of athletes of each gender participating in basketball, golf, gymnastics, tennis, and softball/baseball. The study was repeated in 1997 using 314 media guide covers, with photographs depicting athletes from the same sports. The researchers looked at the setting of each photo (on or off the court), the attire of the athlete (in uniform or not), the theme of the photo, and whether the athlete was in an active or passive position.

Findings from this study showed that while females were equally represented (51%) with regard to the number of photos, there was a significant difference between athlete gender and court location. Male athletes were depicted on court in 68% of the photographs compared to 51% for female athletes. This relationship was seen in both studies. Findings also indicated a significant relationship between gender and athlete position, with males being more likely to be photographed in action (59%) than females (43%) in the 1990 study. This relationship increased

in significance in the 1997 study where male athletes were active in 62% of the photographs compared to females at 41% (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2003).

Duncan examined photographic images of both male and female Olympic athletes during the 1984 and 1988 Games. These were photographs appearing in popular magazines, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Sports Illustrated*. She found that female athletes were often photographed crying while male athletes were not. Duncan (1990) also noted that camera angles would often place females below eye level, while placing men in elevated positions – this suggesting that females are inferior and weak. Male athletes were the subjects of 92% of the photographs in her sample, and when photos of female athletes did appear they seemed to “celebrate female sexuality rather than athleticism” (King, 2007, p. 188).

Although research by Kim, Sagas, & Walker (2011) did not concern Olympic athletes, their research on *Sports Illustrated*'s use of female athletes in their swimsuit edition agreed with the previous research in that the female athletes tended to be participants of *feminine* sports, usually tennis, beach volleyball, and figure skating, while male athletes in the issue were pictured engaging in football, baseball and basketball, all traditional *masculine* sports (Armstrong, 2013). Also agreeing with previous research, these researchers found that females were more often photographed in poses that were sexual in nature rather than athletic. “Female athletes’ marketability in sport media lies in their sexuality rather than their athleticism” (2011, p. 158).

In her study of photographs of Olympians, Duncan (1990) found that female athletes who met the glamorous ideal of “long hair, stylish clothes, and lavishly applied makeup” (p. 28) were more likely to be the subject of sports photographs than those who were not. Duncan also noted that females were more likely than males to be photographed crying.

Research examining Olympic photos during the 2000 Games shows that photojournalism made more progress towards gender equity between the 1998 and 2000 Olympic Games (Hardin, Chance, Dodd & Hardin, 2002). These scholars conducted a content analysis of five newspapers (*The Tampa Tribune*, *The Gainesville Sun*, *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Florida Times Union*, and *The New York Times*) during the 2000 Games, examining 1,425 images obtained from the front page and sports section of each newspaper. Comparing their study to Kinnick's (1998), Hardin et al. found that 648 photographs (48%) were of female athletes, and 741 (52%) were of males.

The researchers felt that photographs were “arguably more potent” (p. 66) and impactful than text, often portraying female athletes as passive and as participants in feminine sports, which they define as “non-contact, non-strength and non-team sports” (p. 66). Variables used in the study included strength, high-risk, aesthetics, and neutral (any sport not fitting into one of the above categories). Findings from this study showed men (43%) were more likely than females (36%) to appear dominant in photographs; females (22%) were slightly more likely than males (18%) to be portrayed as passive; male athletes (1.6%) were more likely than females (0.7%) to be photographed in a below eye-level position; and twice as many female athletes competed in “aesthetic” sports while three times as many male athletes participated in “strength” sports (Hardin et al., 2002). Additionally, the study found that female athletes participating in team sports were photographed more than male athletes. This is significant as it was the first Olympic Games to have equal number of male and female athletes participating in team sports (Hardin et al., 2002).

Theory

One theory that relates to this research is framing theory. Framing theory is related to agenda-setting theory, which stemmed from Walter Lippmann's book *Public Opinion* and which

Dr. Max McCoombs and Dr. Donald Shaw formally studied during the 1968 U.S. presidential election. One of the major assumptions of agenda setting is the idea that while the media does not tell the users what to think, it does tell them what to think about. While agenda setting deals with *what* the press is covering, framing deals with *how* it is covered. Framing “recognizes the ability of a text—or a media presentation—to define a situation, to define the issues, and to set the terms of a debate” (Tankard, 2001, p. 96). Framing also accounts for the possibility of subtle differences when a topic is presented in different ways. This theory offers “quantitative researchers a way to approach an ideology” (Tankard, 2001, p. 98) whereas before such subjects were more often dealt with by critical theorists. Framing places emphasis on the media content rather than simply looking at media coverage (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997).

The mass media “preserve, transmit, and create important cultural information” (Bernstein, 2002, p. 416). Dyer (1993) wrote that how individuals in society view themselves, and how they are viewed and treated by others is, in large part, determined by their media representation. Mass media may assume an even greater importance during a sporting event where the majority of spectators experience the event in its mediated version (Bernstein, 2002).

Wensing and Bruce (2003) state that research points “to the dominance of gender as a framing device” (p. 387), citing two decades of media research that found consistently lower coverage and inconsistent quality characterized the coverage of female athletes. These scholars identified five “rules” employed by the media when covering female participation in sporting events: 1) Gender marking, or the identification of an event as a *women’s event* while referring to men’s event as *the/an event*, 2) Compulsory heterosexuality, or the referring to female athletes as sex objects or as the mother, wife, or girlfriend of a male, 3) Emphasis of appropriate femininity, or the focus on what are considered to be traditionally feminine characteristics, including small

stature, weakness, beauty, and grace, 4) Infantilization, or the act of referring to female athletes as girls or young ladies, and the use of their first names, and 5) Non-sport related aspects including appearance, personality, personal life, and relationships (Wensing & Bruce, 2003).

Accordingly, these rules have not led to gender equity in sports journalism, but rather to ambivalence. This remains problematic, according to scholars, as it denies female athletes the recognition and prestige that they have earned through their efforts and successes (Wensing & Bruce, 2003; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988).

Historically, female athletes have participated more in sports that “tend to emphasize the aesthetic movements of the female body” (Daddario, 1994, p. 277), sports such as gymnastics, swimming, ice-skating and tennis. Men tend to participate in sports that show strength and stamina such as biathlon, pole vaulting, luge, or ski jumping—the ones that challenge the most “extreme possibilities of the male body” (Messner, 1988). Many reasons have been presented to explain why this has been the case, such as gender differences in upper-body strength and physical size, as well as apprehension that participating in such aggressive sports could be harmful to the female reproductive system (Daddario, 1994; Klein, 1988).

Daddario argues that the mass media reinforces the difference between male and female athletes by trivializing the achievements of female athletes and sexually objectifying them “in print copy or television commentary through condescending descriptors, gratuitous photography, and sexist television conventions” (1994, p. 277) and many other scholars agree (Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Klein, 1988; Sabo & Jansen, 1992). Duncan et al. (1988) also argue that the media frames male athletes as active athletic subjects and female athletes as reactive subjects. This is done through camera position, commentary, and on-screen graphics (Daddario, 1994).

Scholars have pointed out that framing theory has its power in both presence and absence (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). “One meaning is conveyed by what gets covered, but another equally powerful meaning is conveyed by what does not receive media attention (Huffman, Tuggle & Rosengard, 2004, p. 477). This aspect of framing theory lends itself to the context of sports-media research. “If culture is the stuff of everyday life—the frame through which we experience, interpret, mould, and represent everything that surrounds us—then sport occupies ... an uncommonly prominent position within it” (Rowe, 199, p. 23, as quoted by Huffman et al., 2004, p. 477).

While a thorough review of the literature revealed several studies examining the portrayal of Olympic athletes using traditional media such as newspapers or broadcast, no such research examining online media was found. If one is to account for changes in sport regulations as well as changes in societal attitudes towards female athletes, it is reasonable to account for changes in the media itself as well. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine how online sports media portrayed Olympic athletes in feature stories during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. The review of the literature regarding this topic has led to the following research questions:

- RQ₁ How many Olympic athletes are the subjects of articles by the top six Internet sports sites during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games?
- RQ₂ Are male and female athletes equally represented? Were there any statistically significant differences in the representations by male and female journalists?
- RQ₃ What significant differences exist in how male and female athletes are portrayed? Do any differences reflect previously identified forms of gender bias as identified in the literature review?

RQ₄ How are the athletes depicted in the photographs included with the profile? Do these photos reflect any gender bias with regards to gender of the athletes photographed, including camera positioning, setting of the photo, or glamorization of female athletes?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Sample Selection

This thesis aims to add to the research literature by investigating the portrayal of U.S. Olympic athletes during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. Data was collected throughout the duration of the 2014 Games, which ran February 7-23, 2014. The examination of articles published by the top Internet websites was chosen as the method for this study because of the increased number of sports fans who turn to the Internet to obtain the latest sports news (Madden & Rainie, 2003; Uslander, 2004). This methodology will serve to provide a greater understanding of how Olympic athletes are portrayed by the media through the use of the Internet. The sampling frame for this research consists of Olympic profiles obtained from the top five Internet sports websites as identified by eBizMBA, and as listed in Table 1. *NBC Sports* was also added to the sample due to *NBC*'s role as holder of the broadcasting rights to the 2014 Olympic Games. Coincidentally, *NBC Sports* also ranks sixth in the eBizMBA list.

Table 1.
Research Sources—Top Six Internet Sports Sites as Identified by eBizMBA

1. Yahoo Sports	http://www.sports.yahoo.com/
2. ESPN	http://www.espn.com/
3. Bleacher Report	http://www.bleacherreport.com/
4. CBS Sports	http://www.cbssports.com/
5. Sports Illustrated	http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/
6. NBC Sports	http://www.nbcsports.com/

eBizMBA.com is an eBusiness knowledge base that answers online business questions regarding online marketing, analytics, and website development. Their rankings of the top Internet sports websites were last updated in December 2013, and are derived from the average of each website's Alexa Global Traffic Rank and U.S. Traffic Rank from both *Compete* and *Quantcast* (Company Information, 2014).

All six of the included websites had an "Olympics" tab on the header of their home page, and those profiles appearing under these tabs were included in the population. A total of 190 profiles were collected, after which a random number generator was used to create a sample of 100 profiles for this research. The random number generator used was located at random.org, an organization that provides a true random number service. This service generates random numbers using atmospheric noise, "which for many purposes is better than the pseudo-random number algorithms typically used in computer programs" (Random, 2014, para 2). This sample was obtained using the site's random integer set generator, which generated 100 random integers from a range of 1-190. This is referred to as random sampling without replacement—"the most widely used random sampling method" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 95). In order to reduce researcher bias and avoid periodicity (a sampling error which can occur due to the order of the articles in the complete list) all articles were listed in the order that they were found on the websites. Profiles were captured each day, saved as .pdf files for later coding, and a master list was compiled using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. All six websites were visited once per calendar day during the time frame of the study, always in the same order: *Yahoo Sports*, *ESPN*, *Bleacher Report*, *CBS Sports*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *NBC Sports*. Within each website, articles were listed in the order they were posted by the site.

Content Analysis

Once the online athlete profiles were captured a content analysis was conducted. Articles were coded using a coding sheet created for this study adapting and incorporating coding questions from previous studies that examined athlete portrayal and gender bias (Kinnick, 1998). Additionally, the researcher took framing theory into account when creating the coding sheet, considering the major frames used by the media in previous studies, chiefly those by Kinnick (1998) and Lee (1992) for text and Duncan (1990) for photographs. Using these questions from previously published content analyses provided objective and detailed sampling procedures as well as appropriate operational definitions.

Each athlete profile was coded for the following characteristics (for operational definitions see Appendix 2). 1) Physical. This includes mention of height, weight, hair, body shape, and beauty or any other mention of appearance. 2) Strengths and weaknesses. Included would be any mention of form, grace, strength, weakness and endurance. 3) Emotional. This includes any mention of risk taking or pain endurance.

Athlete photographs were coded for setting (active vs. passive and sport-related vs. non-sport-related) as well as for placement and camera angle—whether the athlete was pictured below eye level, at eye level, or in an elevated position. Coding was also done for show of emotion in the photograph (crying, hugging, raising arms in victory, or collapsed from exertion), and female athletes only were coded for long hair, stylish clothing, and visible makeup. These variables are based on those previously used by Duncan (1990) and will add to the findings of this research.

When conducting any content analysis it is important that intercoder reliability be established using two independent coders and a select subsample of the athlete profiles. This

begins with careful training of the coders, where any disagreements are discussed and agreed upon. Two coders were used for this study. The second coder was given oral instructions and a copy of the coding sheet. Both coders coded a subsample of 20% of the total articles and reliability was established using the Cohen's Kappa statistic. Once reliability was established, the primary researcher coded the remainder of the sample. The results of Cohen's Kappa were as follows: height (1.000), weight (1.000), body shape (1.000), beauty (1.000), form (0.811), grace, 1.000), strength (0.811), weakness (1.000), endurance (0.714), risk taking (1.000), pain endurance (1.000). Cohen's Kappa results for the coding of photographs were: eye level (1.000), action/passive (1.000), sports/nonsports setting (1.000), crying (1.000), hugging (1.000), arms raised in victory (0.885), collapsed from exhaustion (1.000), fallen or crashed (1.000), look of disappointment (0.885), long hair (1.000), stylish clothes (1.000), and makeup (1.000).

Once reliability was established between coders, the author coded the remaining profiles. After coding was completed, the data were analyzed using SPSS, a predictive analytics program used for statistical analysis. SPSS allows the researcher to run descriptive statistics such as frequencies and cross tabulation. Analysis with the chi-square statistic (χ^2) helps to determine associations or relationships between variables (Michael, 2001).

Strengths and Weaknesses

Content analysis is unobtrusive, inexpensive to conduct, and is likely to yield results which will be useful for future researchers when looking at trends over a longer period of time. Content analysis is a commonly used method of research when examining communication and is used pervasively to study sports-related communications to the extent that Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, and Greenwell discuss the "popularity and importance of using such a technique when examining sport issues" (2010, p. 459).

Limitations to the scope of this research include the possibility of a substantially large amount of data, requiring a greater amount of time to analyze. The number of articles posted by the sites included in the population is unpredictable and therefore it is difficult to foretell the amount of data that will be collected. Another limitation is that content analysis is purely descriptive in nature, describing what is observed without revealing any underlying motives; it explains *what* but not *why*. Lastly, while the Olympics is at its core an international event, this study will examine U.S. athletes and publications only.

Chapter Four: Results

Results for RQ₁

Research question one asked how many Olympic athletes were the subjects of articles by the top six Internet sports sites during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. The sample for this study consisted of 100 randomly selected profiles of 47 Olympic athletes. This represents 20.4% of the 230 athletes that were nominated to the 2014 U.S. Olympic Team.

Results for RQ₂

Research question two asked about whether male and female athletes were equally represented in the online profiles. Table 2 shows that the majority (57.4%) of the athletes in the sample were females and that four of the six websites profiled more female athletes than male athletes. *NBC Sports* published the highest number (n=15) of female athlete profiles, with *Bleacher Report* having the highest percentage of female profiles (60.8%). Table 2 shows that *CBS* and *ESPN* profiled higher numbers of male athletes than female athletes (70.5% and 66.6%).

Table 2.
Frequencies of Athlete Profiles by Source and Athlete Gender

	Male		Female		TOTAL
1. Yahoo Sports	6	46%	7	54%	13
2. ESPN	4	67%	2	33%	6
3. Bleacher Report	9	39%	14	61%	23
4. CBS Sports	12	71%	5	29%	17
5. Sports Illustrated	7	47%	8	53%	15
6. NBC Sports	11	42%	15	58%	26
TOTAL	49	49%	51	51%	100

This research shows the total numbers of male and female athlete profiles to be very close, with just slightly more female athlete profiles (51%) than those for males (49%). See Table 3.

Each profile was also coded for length using Microsoft Word’s word count feature. Findings show that profile length for female athletes (\bar{x} =830 words) was greater than that for male athletes (\bar{x} =729 words) with the aggregate word count for all profiles totaling 43,998 for females and 34,279 for males. An independent sample T-Test for Equality of Means showed this difference to be insignificant. The longest and shortest profiles in the sample were *Sports Illustrated*’s profiles of alpine skier Mikaela Shiffrin (3539 words) and hockey player David Wise (40 words).

Table 3.
Reporter Gender by Athlete Gender

	Male Reporter		Female Reporter		Unknown
Male Athlete	32	41.5%	7	9.0%	8
Female Athlete	27	35.0%	11	14.2%	15

Frequencies and percentages calculated from the 77 profiles with known reporter gender.

Results for RQ₃

Research question three inquired as to any differences in how male and female athletes were portrayed in the profiles of these Olympic athletes. Profiles were first coded for the athletes physical characteristics, including any mention of their height, weight, hair, body shape or beauty (see Appendix 2 for operational definitions of these terms).

Physical characteristics.

The results (see Table 4) indicate that the most common physical characteristic mentioned for these athletes were height and weight, both of which were very similar across gender type.

Height and weight.

Of these 38 combined mentions of height and weight, all but two were simple demographic reports rather than editorial comments. The first of these two cases occurred in Eric Adelson’s profile of bobsled pusher Steven Holcomb published by *Yahoo Sports*. Holcomb strained his left calf during competition in Sochi, leaving his team to fear that he may not be able to race his remaining heats. According to Adelson, “Team coach Brian Shimmer quipped that his only other option for the race was to put Holcomb’s helmet on, stuff a few pillows under his shirt, and race as the lead driver” (Adelson, 2014, para 8). Also having her weight mentioned was summer-Olympian-turned-bobsledder Lolo Jones. Her weight was mentioned in discussing the differences in training required for her to participate in both sports. Jones’ stated ideal weight for track is 133 pounds. Bobsled, however, requires a much higher body mass. Jones consumed 9000 calories per day to increase her weight to 157 pounds for the Winter Games in Sochi (Silverman, 2014).

Table 4.
Frequencies of Mentioned Physical Characteristics by Source and Athlete Gender

		Height	Weight	Hair	Shape	Beauty
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	0	1	0	0	0
	Female	0	0	0	0	3
2. ESPN	Male	0	0	1	0	0
	Female	0	0	0	0	0
3. Bleacher Report	Male	0	0	0	0	0
	Female	0	1	1	1	1
4. CBS Sports	Male	6	4	1	0	0
	Female	1	1	0	0	1
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	0	0	1	0	1
	Female	1	0	1	0	0
6. NBC Sports	Male	5	5	0	0	0
	Female	7	6	0	0	0
TOTAL	Male	11	10	3	0	1
	Female	9	8	2	1	5

Hair.

Athletes' hair was mentioned in five of the online profiles, comprising three male athletes and two female athletes. Shaun White, who received much attention regarding his hair during the 2010 Vancouver Games again had his hair mentioned, the author stating, "The long cherry-red locks of hair that earned him the nickname 'The Flying Tomato' have been shorn, replaced by a shorter, more conservative look" (Linden, 2014, para. 9). U.S. hockey player Amanda Kessel was also the subject of comments regarding her hair, as *Sports Illustrated* journalist Sarah Kwak differentiated Kessel from her U.S. Olympic hockey-playing brother by describing her as the one "with long yellow locks and no apparent facial scruff" (2014, para 3). Other mentions referred to Kikkan Randall's pink hair (Wolff, 2014) and T.J. Oshie's perm (Isaacson, 2014).

Body shape.

Only one athlete profile contained a mention of body shape, that belonging to figure skater Polina Edmunds who, according to *Bleacher Report* columnist Carol Schram, "is still growing into her gangly frame" (2014, para. 17).

Beauty.

Beauty was used in six profiles to characterize five Olympic athletes, four of whom were female. Two of these mentions came from author Jeff Passan of *Yahoo Sports*. Kaitlyn Farrington was said to have "dimples that plunge like they're scared of the air" (Passan, 2014c, para. 20), and snowboarder Jamie Anderson was profiled as, "A young, photogenic American with personality to spare...and a big smiling face" (Passan, 2014a, para 2). Other references to athletes' beauty appeared in profiles for figure skater Meryl Davis (Sarkar, 2014), Kikkan Randall (Wolff, 2014), and a second mention for Kaitlyn Farrington (McCarson, 2014). *Yahoo*

Sports' profile of Steve Langton was the lone male athlete profile to reference beauty (Olympic Crush, 2014).

While not common among these results, it was apparent that some profiles were created with the express purpose of focusing on the athlete's body. This was most evident in the series of Olympic profiles by *Yahoo Sports* titled, "Olympic Crush." These articles contained no text, other than the captions that accompanied photographs of the Olympians by various photographers. One of the athletes profiled in this series was bobsledder Steven Langton. While other U.S. athletes were profiled in the series, including snowboarder Jamie Anderson and ski jumper Sarah Hendrickson, none were so blatantly focused on body image as that of U.S. bobsledder Steven Langton. Langton's profile consisted of 13 photographs, accompanied by captions such as "Those eyes, THAT SMILE," and "Steve Langton is really photogenic, isn't he?" (See Images 1-5).

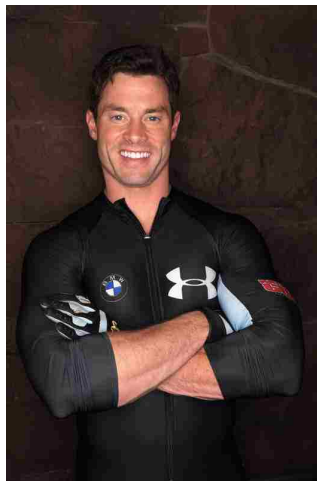


Image 1.
Steve Langton is really photogenic, isn't he?



Image 2.
Those eyes. THAT SMILE.



Image 3.
Steven Langton strikes a pose.

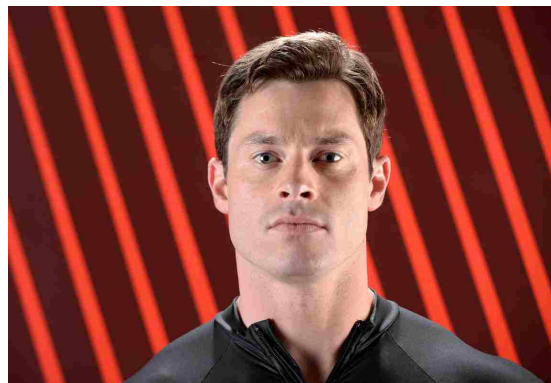


Image 4.
Steven Langton stares into our souls.



Image 5. Steven Langton shows off his uniform.

Strength and weakness characteristics.

After reviewing the athlete profiles for mentions of physical characteristics, the research looked for any references to the athletes' strengths or weaknesses. Included in this were form, grace, strength, weakness, and endurance (see Table 5).

Form and grace.

References to form and grace were two of the more commonly observed variables in this study (see Table 5). Form and grace are two characteristics that seemingly overlap at times, and in fact the results of this study show that they often go hand in hand. In order to code them as accurately as possible, extra care was taken to adhere to the operational definitions which defined form as any reference to *posture, body positioning, stance, balance, or gait*, and grace as *simple elegance or refinement of movement* (see Appendix 1).

Of the two variables, form was mentioned the most for both males (15) and females (17) followed by grace for males (7) and females (10). Chi-square tests on these two variables showed no relationship to either gender. While athletes participating in the traditional feminine sports of figure skating were often the recipients of comments regarding their form (as expected),

findings show that more references to form were made about traditionally masculine sports such as alpine skiing and ice hockey.

Table 5.
Athlete Strength & Weakness Characteristics by Source and Athlete Gender.

		Form	Grace	Strength	Weakness	Endurance
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	2	1	0	0	2
	Female	4	1	1	0	1
	Total	6	2	1	0	3
2. ESPN	Male	2	1	1	0	1
	Female	1	1	0	0	0
	Total	3	2	1	0	1
3. Bleacher Report	Male	2	1	2	2	1
	Female	4	5	3	1	3
	Total	6	6	5	3	4
4. CBS Sports	Male	6	2	2	2	4
	Female	3	2	0	0	2
	Total	9	4	2	2	6
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	2	0	2	1	2
	Female	3	0	0	0	1
	Total	5	0	2	1	3
6. NBC Sports	Male	1	2	2	0	3
	Female	2	1	0	0	4
	Total	3	3	2	0	7
TOTAL	Male	15	7	9	5	13
	Female	17	10	4	1	11
	Total	32	17	15	6	24

Count and % within athlete gender and source. All percentages truncated.

Form was mentioned when profiling ice dancer Meryl Davis, who was featured in six of the profiles in this study. Speaking of Davis and her partner Charlie White, Joe Posnanski of *NBC Sports* stated that they, as well as other great ice dancers, “move and spin in perfect synchronicity” and do so “flawlessly and without apparent effort” (2014a, para. 2). A different profile of Charlie White stated that he and Davis “flew around the ice at a frantic pace, seamlessly weaving dazzling lifts and synchronized swizzles into their dramatic performance” (Sarkar, 2014b, para. 9).

After remarking on Polina Edmund's gangly frame, *Bleacher Report's* Carol Schram observed that she had a "coltish grace to her skating" that impressed the judges with "the most technically demanding program of the competition, executing difficult combinations with seemingly effortless ease" (2014, para. 15). Dave Lozo, also with *Bleacher Report*, said something similar of hockey player T.J. Oshie, stating that he was slicing through the defense "like a hot knife through butter" (2014, para. 1). Also found were two references to alpine skier Hannah Kearney, whose "knees [were] seemingly magnetized together as she navigated the moguls" (Hannah Kearney, 2014, para. 9) and who "made the downhill moguls course, with jarring bumps and jumps, look like a walk in the park" (Gibbs, 2014, para. 4).

Some statements blended form and grace to such a level that they were coded for both. Statements such as, "blended technical near perfection with a mesmerizing musical rhythm" (Posnanski, 2014) or "Davis and White are more gracefully athletic, as evidenced by their first lift on Monday, when Davis swooped from her back, low and parallel to the ice, to White's shoulder" (Longman, 2014, para. 16). One profile gave a description of the form and grace displayed by alpine skier Ted Ligety, "Scraping the snow with his gloves and hips while taking wide turns around gates, his body swaying left and right with a pendulum's precision" (Fendrich, 2014, para. 4).

Strength and weakness.

As seen in Table 5, the profiles included in this study showed a much lower degree of reporting on athletes' physical strength or weakness. Three of the six online sources had zero mentions of weakness (*Yahoo! Sports*, *ESPN* and *NBC Sports*), these three comprising 45% of the sample frame. Among the remaining three sources there were a total of six mentions of athlete weakness: five references to male athletes and a single mention of female weakness in

Sports Illustrated's profile of cross country skier Kikkan Randall, which stated that she is not strong in the classical technique of the Olympic sprint (Wolff, 2014). There does seem to be some difference here with regard to gender, although chi-square tests show the difference not to be statistically significant. Male athletes were more likely to have their profiles mention strength (9) or weakness (5) than were female athletes, who had four profile mentions of strength and only one of weakness. These mentions do not account for any indirect references to an athlete's past performance, but rather to specific mentions of their ability or inability to perform physically demanding tasks.

Reports of physical strength include the comment that freestyle skier Hannah Kearny used her time off to become stronger (Gibbs, 2014) and Steve Holcomb's statement that, "I'm the fastest and strongest that I've been in a few years which I'm happy about" (Palmer, 2014, para. 11). Shani Davis was described as strong, powerful, and quick (Johnston, 2014) and Maddie Bowman was said to be "pretty tough" (Passan, 2014b, para. 6).

Reports of physical weakness include a report on Bode Miller only being able to perform at 80% of his capabilities (Baldwin, 2014) and Andrew Weibrecht struggling to barely qualify for the U.S. Olympic team (Pennington, 2014).

In Tim Daniels's profile of speed skater Shani Davis, Daniels quotes Davis who says of himself, "my desire and body will be the determining factors, and right now those are as strong as ever" (2014b, para. 13). While Davis profiles himself as strong, Daniels remarks that his "struggles continued at the 2014 Winter Olympics" (para. 1) and that his "results were underwhelming" (para. 3).

Endurance.

A chi-square test performed to examine the relation between genders showed no significant difference for mentions of endurance. Many of the references to endurance were in regard to an athlete's ability to perform in his or her sport after suffering a major injury or family tragedy. Examples include Bode Miller coming back after knee surgery and the death of his brother (Daniels, 2014a), Steven Holcomb battling blindness and depression with suicidal feelings (Palmer, 2014), and skeleton slider Noelle Pikus-Pace competing and winning a medal after getting hit by a bobsled, an accident that broke her leg in several places (Posnanski, 2014). The same profile of Pikus-Pace also mentioned that she had “come back from a freak injury, a hard comeback, a near miss, despondency, retirement, motherhood, another hard comeback and, why not?, a last-second concussion” (Posnanski, 2014b, para 1).

Emotional characteristics.

The final athlete characteristics included in this study were emotional, including risk taking and pain endurance (see Table 6). The findings indicate that males were 40% more likely than females to be profiled as risk takers, while pain endurance was mentioned in four athlete profiles, two for each gender.

Risk taking.

With regards to profiles discussing male and female athletes as risk-takers, a chi-square test showed no statistically significant difference. Alpine skier Mikaela Shiffrin was referred to as a risk taker in two different profiles, one describing her run down a steep course that ended in “near calamity” (Weir, 2014b, para. 13), the other stating that she skied without nerves in “sketchy visibility” (Weir, 2014a, para. 3). The other female athlete in this category was skeleton rider Noelle Pikus-Pace who, after incurring serious injuries when hit by a bobsled, was

profiled as a risk taker participating in a sport she describes as “a one-minute thrill-ride with danger along every single inch of the course” (Posnanski, 2014b, para. 2).

Table 6.
Frequencies of Mentioned Emotional/Relational Characteristics by Source and Athlete Gender

		Risk Taking	Pain Endurance
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	1	1
	Female	0	0
2. ESPN	Male	2	0
	Female	0	0
3. Bleacher Report	Male	1	0
	Female	2	0
4. CBS Sports	Male	2	0
	Female	0	1
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	1	0
	Female	0	0
6. NBC Sports	Male	0	0
	Female	1	1
TOTAL	Male	7	1
	Female	3	2

Risk-taking male athletes include “daredevil” Andrew Weibrecht (Pennington, 2014, para. 5), Charlie White, whose close proximity to skating partner Meryl Davis was considered “really hard and risky” (Snowden, 2014, para. 15), and snowboarder Alex Deibold who made cold-blooded passes around his competitors, on a diabolical, rain-soaked, crash-filled course (Murphy, 2014). Bode Miller was profiled twice as a risk taker, taking a daredevil, all-or-nothing approach down the hill (Keating, 2014). Diane Pucin (2014) from *Bleacher Report* compared Miller to a formula-one driver, and suggested that Miller’s fans “close your eyes until you know he’s reached the bottom” (Pucin, 2014, para. 3).

Pain endurance.

All mentions of pain endurance were in reference to competition-related injuries. The first was in reference to Steve Holcomb's calf injury which was sustained during an Olympic heat (Adelson, 2014, para 2). Next was skeleton slider Noelle Pikus-Pace who, as previously discussed, was injured when hit by a bobsled (Posnanski, 2014b). Last was snowboarder Alex Deibold who was hit during a mid-air collision (Murphy, 2014). No significant differences were found through chi-square analysis.

Gender bias

Research question three also asks if the findings include any differences that reflect previously identified forms of gender bias. While this has been addressed in each of the results categories, one form of bias that has yet to be discussed is that of athletes participating in what have been traditionally referred to as feminine or masculine sports. No studies were found during a literature review that discussed or listed winter Olympic sports as masculine or feminine, with the exception of figure skating. Following the pattern for identifying summer Olympic and non-Olympic sports as masculine or feminine, however, would place most of the winter Olympic events in the masculine category. For this study, traditional feminine sports included in the winter Games all fell under the umbrella of figure skating (men's, women's, pairs, and ice dancing), while masculine sports included ice hockey, alpine skiing, biathlon, and the sliding sports (bobsled, luge, and skeleton).

As illustrated in Table 7, alpine skiing was the overwhelming favorite sport of journalists, with 15 profiles of male athletes and 10 of females. These frequencies reflect the number of profiles, not individual athletes (several athletes are profiled multiple times). These findings show some reflection of previously identified gender bias, most noticeably with males receiving

the majority of coverage in alpine skiing (60%), and females the majority of figure skating coverage (75%). Females received more coverage than males in sliding sports (63%), and female ski jumpers received all the attention for their sport—an Olympic event that included female participants for the first time in 2014.

Table 7.
Frequencies of Profiles by Sport and Athlete Gender.

	Male	Female	TOTAL
1. Alpine Skiing	15	10	25
2. Biathlon	0	0	0
3. Bobsleigh	5	5	10
4. Cross Country Skiing	0	2	2
5. Curling	0	0	0
6. Figure Skating	3	9	12
7. Freestyle Skiing	6	6	12
8. Ice Hockey	5	3	8
9. Luge	1	4	5
10. Nordic Combined	1	0	1
11. Short Track Speed Skating	1	2	3
12. Skeleton	1	3	4
13. Ski Jumping	0	2	2
14. Snowboarding	4	5	9
15. Speed Skating	5	2	7
TOTAL	47	53	100

Nordic combined, a sport in which athletes compete in ski jumping and cross country skiing, was the singular event during the 2014 Olympics that excluded participation by female athletes—making it an automatic qualifier for the list of sports reflecting gender bias.

Results for RQ₄

The fourth research question inquired about how the athletes were depicted in the photographs included with their online profiles, and whether or not those photos reflect any gender bias. The 100 profiles in this sample contained 231 photographs, which were analyzed for setting (active vs. passive and sport-related vs. non-sport-related), placement and camera angle—whether the athlete was pictured below eye level, at eye level, or in an elevated position, and for show of emotion (crying, hugging, raising arms in victory, or collapsed from exertion). Additionally, female athletes were coded for long hair, stylish clothing, and visible makeup.

Photograph setting.

The majority of the photographs depicted athletes in active poses, with female athletes (77.6%) slightly higher than male athletes (73.8%). When looking at sport over non-sport setting, photographs of female athletes came in slightly lower (90.9%) than male athletes (92.7%). Neither of these findings align with previously identified gender biases. Photographs included in the profiles published by *NBC Sports* showed the greatest difference with regard to athlete gender. *NBC Sports* featured photographs of 44 female athletes and 24 male athletes, with females more often portrayed in active (82.5%) and sport (86.3%) settings than males (62.5% active, 75% sport setting). Photographs accompanying profiles from *Bleacher Report* showed the least amount of gender difference, with males (90.9% active, 95.4% sport) and females (84.6% active, 100% sport) both ranking quite high in these categories. See Table 8 for complete results.

Table 8.
Photograph Setting by Source and Athlete Gender

		Active	Passive	Sports	Non Sports	Total
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	18	14	31	1	32
	Female	13	11	20	4	24
	Total	31	25	51	5	56
2. ESPN	Male	6	0	6	0	6
	Female	2	0	2	0	2
	Total	8	0	8	0	8
3. Bleacher Report	Male	20	2	21	1	22
	Female	22	4	26	0	26
	Total	42	6	47	1	48
4. CBS Sports	Male	15	3	18	0	18
	Female	11	0	11	0	11
	Total	26	3	29	0	29
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	8	1	9	0	9
	Female	13	1	13	1	14
	Total	21	2	22	1	23
6. NBC Sports	Male	15	9	18	6	24
	Female	33	11	38	6	44
	Total	48	20	56	12	68
TOTAL	Male	82	29	103	8	111
	Female	94	27	110	11	121
	TOTAL	176	56	213	19	232

Photograph camera angle.

The vast majority (87%) of the 232 photographs analyzed depicted the athletes at eye level. This was true for both male athletes (84.6%) and female athletes (89.2%) alike.

Depictions of athletes below eye level, a previously identified trait of gender bias towards female athletes, made up 4.7% of the sample, with a total of 11 photographs—seven with male subjects and four with females. Photographs showing athletes in an elevated position were also less common, with a total of 8.1%. These 19 photos were nearly equally divided between male (10) and female (nine) athletes. These results do not show any previously identified gender biases as discussed in the literature review. See Table 9 for complete results of this category.

Table 9.
Photograph Position by Source and Athlete Gender

		Below Eye Level	At Eye Level	Elevated	TOTAL
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	3	29	1	32
	Female	0	19	5	24
	Total	3	48	6	56
2. ESPN	Male	0	6	0	6
	Female	0	2	0	2
	Total	0	8	0	8
3. Bleacher Report	Male	1	19	2	22
	Female	1	23	2	26
	Total	2	42	4	48
4. CBS Sports	Male	1	14	2	17
	Female	2	9	0	11
	Total	3	23	2	28
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	0	8	1	9
	Female	1	11	2	14
	Total	1	19	3	23
6. NBC Sports	Male	2	18	4	24
	Female	0	44	0	44
	Total	2	62	4	68
TOTAL	Male	7	94	10	111
	Female	4	108	9	121
	Total	11	202	19	232

Emotions in photographs.

The second phase of this research in regards to athlete photographs examined each picture for emotions shown by the subject. Past research has shown that female athletes are more likely than male athletes to be photographed while showing emotion (Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Messner, 1998; King, 2007). Results of this research contradict previously seen gender biases (see Table 10).

Crying.

Of the six online sports sites used in this study, two of them (*Yahoo Sports* and *ESPN*) depicted no athletes crying. The other six sites included a total of 11 photographs (4.7%)

showing athletes crying, and 10 of these were males. Females photographed crying totaled 0.4% of the sample. It should be noted, however that nine of these photos were of alpine skier Bode Miller, who was photographed during an emotional conversation with his wife after an event. These nine photos were acquired from four distinct profiles of Miller, two published by *CBS Sports* (Baldwin, 2014; Norlander, 2014) and the others from *Bleacher Report* (Foss, 2014) and *NBC Sports* (Daniels, 2014a).



Image 6. Bode Miller of the U.S. cries in the mixed zone after finishing in the men's alpine skiing Super-G competition during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics at the Rosa Khutor Alpine Center February 16, 2014. Photo by Leonhard Foeger/REUTERS.

Hugging.

A total of 14 profile photographs (6%) show athletes hugging, with seven profiles of male athletes (6.3%) and seven of female athletes (5.7%). Again, these findings do not agree with those from previous studies, showing no evidence of traditional gender bias as discussed by Duncan (1990) et al.



Image 7. Meryl Davis and Charlie White of the U.S. celebrate in the "kiss and cry" area during the Figure Skating Ice Dance Short Dance Program at the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, February 16, 2014. Photo by Lucy Nicholson/REUTERS

Raised arms.

Photographs of athletes with arms raised in victory are quite common in both Olympic and non-Olympic sports. Photos coded for raised arms included athletes holding up and often biting their earned medals, holding skis or other equipment above their heads, waving to crowds and high-fiving other athletes or family members. A total of 54 photographs were found to have depictions of athletes with raised arms, 25 males (22.5%) and 29 females (23.9%).



Image 8.
Lauren Williams with teammate Elana Meyers.
Photo by Dita Alangkara/ Associated Press

Collapsed.

Only three photos (1.2%) depicted athletes collapsed from exertion, two males and one female, including Ted Ligety after winning his second career gold medal.



Image 9.
United States' Ted Ligety celebrates winning the gold medal in the men's giant slalom at the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics, February 19, 2014, in Krasnaya Polyana, Russia.
Photo by Christopher Ena/Associated Press

Table 10.

Photograph Subject Emotion by Source and Athlete Gender

		Crying		Hugging		Raised Arms		Collapsed		Fallen or Crashed		Look of Disappoint	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Yahoo Sports	Male	0	32	1	31	7	25	1	31	0	32	0	32
	Female	0	24	0	24	5	19	1	23	0	24	0	24
	Total	0	56	1	55	12	44	2	54	0	56	0	56
2. ESPN	Male	0	6	0	6	2	4	0	6	0	6	0	6
	Female	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
	Total	0	8	0	8	2	6	0	8	0	8	0	8
3. Bleacher Report	Male	4	18	4	18	6	16	0	22	0	22	1	21
	Female	0	26	3	23	9	17	0	26	0	26	1	25
	Total	4	44	7	41	15	33	0	48	0	48	2	46
4. CBS Sports	Male	4	14	1	17	4	14	1	17	0	18	0	18
	Female	0	11	3	8	2	9	0	11	0	11	0	11
	Total	4	25	4	25	6	23	1	28	0	29	0	29
5. Sports Illustrated	Male	1	8	1	8	1	8	0	9	0	9	1	8
	Female	0	14	1	13	4	10	0	14	0	14	0	14
	Total	0	22	2	21	5	8	0	23	0	23	1	22
6. NBC Sports	Male	1	23	0	24	5	19	0	24	0	24	0	24
	Female	1	43	0	44	9	35	0	44	0	44	0	44
	Total	2	66	0	68	14	54	0	68	0	68	0	68
TOTAL	Male	10	101	7	104	25	86	2	109	0	111	2	109
	Female	1	120	7	114	29	92	1	120	0	121	1	120
	Total	11	221	14	218	54	178	3	229	0	232	3	229

Fallen or crashed.

None of the 232 photographs from the 100 profiles included in this sample showed an athlete who had fallen or crashed.

Look of disappointment.

Three photographs depicted athletes with looks of disappointment on their face. These included two males (1.8%) and one female (0.8%). While coding for a look of disappointment is more subjective than the other variables in this category, photos such as this one with Shani Davis after losing in his event, along with the headline. “Shani Davis shouldn’t dwell on disappointing individual showing” (Keeney, 2014) made for fairly straightforward coding.



Image 10.
Shani Davis shows his disappointment.
Photo by Matt Dunham/Associated Press

Female glamorization in photographs.

In addition to camera angle, setting and emotion, photographs of female athletes were also coded for glamorization – one of the previously identified gender biases identified by Duncan (1990). These photos were originally going to be coded no/yes for long hair, stylish clothing, and visible makeup. During the initial stages of coding, however, both researchers involved coding for intercoder reliability noticed that many female athletes had their heads and faces covered by helmets, goggles, masks, etc., making it difficult, and in many cases, impossible to see any details relating to their hair or face. For this reason, 47 of the 121 photographs of female athletes were not considered in the results of this variable. The remaining 72 photos were coded for the three variables listed (see Table 11).

Long hair, stylish clothes and visible makeup.

The majority (72.9%) of the female athletes in the profile photos had long hair. Photos of female athletes with hair pulled up in a bun (such as ice dancer Meryl Davis) or tucked under a baseball cap were coded as *not* having long hair, as the long hair did not appear in the picture. This seems to concur with Duncan's (1990) findings that females with long hair were more

likely to be photographed, but since this research did not account for the length of hair of those females not photographed, no conclusions to this can be drawn.

Table 11.
Female Glamorization in Photographs by Source

	Long Hair		Stylish Clothes		Visible Makeup		Total
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1. Yahoo Sports	15	0	11	4	6	9	15
2. ESPN	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
3. Bleacher Report	9	5	14	0	9	5	14
4. CBS Sports	8	1	7	2	2	7	9
5. Sports Illustrated	6	2	6	2	2	6	8
6. NBC Sports	14	12	25	1	14	12	26
TOTAL	54	20	65	9	35	39	74

The next phase of analysis for these photographs focused on the clothing of the Olympians being profiled. Stylish clothing, which included official U.S. Olympic apparel, was observed in 87.8% of the photographs analyzed.

The wearing of visible makeup was the final element examined, and 47.2% of the subjects in these photos were observed to be wearing makeup. This proved to be a more difficult task than coding for long hair or stylish clothing, as many photographs were small, or taken from too great a distance. Although Duncan (1990) originally coded for *lavish* makeup, this study considered *visible* makeup instead, hoping to reduce researcher bias by the subjectivity of what might be considered lavish. None of the subjects in the athlete photographs for this study would

have been considered to lavish, nor were any glamorized in evening gowns or other attire not fitting a sport setting—the basis of past gender bias described by Duncan.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The power of mass media lies in its ability to shape perception. According to Koivula who researched gender stereotyping in televised sports coverage:

Media does not merely communicate and reflect reality in a more or less truthful way. Instead, media production entails a complex process of negotiation, processing, and reconstruction. It not only offers us something to see, but also shapes the way in which we see by creating shared perceptual modes. (Koivula, 1999, p. 589)

Framing theory suggests that the media influences what we think about in regard to athletes and gender by defining the situation and issue for us, using gender as a framing device (Wensing and Bruce, 2003). History has shown this to be the case with considerable media research finding consistently lower attention and varying quality in the coverage of female athletics.

Previous studies, as discussed earlier in the literature review, have shown that while some minor improvements have been made with regards to gender equity and equality over the past decades, female athletes continue to receive less coverage than their male counterparts – and the coverage they do receive “tends to be ambivalent, meaning that it juxtaposes positive descriptions and images with descriptions and images that undermine and trivialize women’s efforts and successes” (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p. 387).

Hardin and her colleagues made the observation that studies showed “demonstrated improvement—but not equity—over the years,” (2002, p. 66) and Kinnick’s research of the 1996 Games resulted in findings that provided some reason to hope that perhaps the media was beginning to change for the better in the way it portrays female athletes. The research for this thesis adds to that hope with findings that show no significant differences in the online media

portrayals of male and female Olympic athletes during the 2014 Winter Games. Additionally, while stereotypes for both male and female athletes continue to exist at some level, the media appear to have made further progress towards gender equality as evidenced by the amount of overall coverage, which shows female athletes receiving slightly more coverage than males in number of profiles, and nearly 25% more when the length of that coverage was considered.

The idea of *feminine* and *masculine* sports has not disappeared, with female athletes receiving the majority of coverage in figure skating and male athletes in alpine skiing. This did not, however, carry over to other events where one might have suspected it to, such as the sliding sports and ski jumping, events considered to be masculine in nature, but represented in the sample by more female athletes than male.

With regard to Olympic athletes in photographs, Kinnick's 1996 study indicated that journalists were beginning to shift away from stereotypical coverage. Research conducted four years later (Hardin et al.) showed a continuation of this shift, and similarly, findings from this study also show this to be the case. When making comparisons to previous studies these results show noticeably less stereotyping in the coverage for female athletes, and near equality for amount of coverage given. Female athletes were shown as active participants in sport in higher numbers than ever before, even higher in percentage than male athletes.

One might have expected different, or at least less dramatic, results from this research. The history of media bias regarding athletes and gender has been well studied, with typical results showing that, "women may be athletes, but they are female first" (Buysee & Embser-Herbert, 2003, p. 68), and that physical attractiveness is often emphasized over athletic ability. Neither of these was found to be the case in this study. While there were some differences in how male and female athletes were portrayed, those differences appeared to favor female athletes

in some categories and male athletes in others. Perhaps the most significant finding from this study is that statistical analysis discovered no significant relationships between gender and any of the other variables. Undoubtedly there are improvements yet to be made, and it is hopeful that future research will show continued progress.

One of the biggest surprises of this study was that of *Yahoo Sports* Olympic Crush series, the point of which was clearly to focus on the physical attributes of the athletes included. What was unexpected was not that the series was written, but that of the two profiles from this series included in the sample, the portrayal of male athlete Steven Langton was much more sexualized than that of female athlete Mikaela Shiffrin. The series left some readers of the blog wondering as to its purpose, as one screen-named “Capone” posted, “hmm don’t really understand this story/article or segment Yahoo but ey o well” (Capone, 2014).

As the American public becomes less accepting of sexism in general, one would think that the tolerance for it in sports media might fade at the same rate. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be the case, although it does seem to be moving in the right direction.

While looking at how athletes are profiled by the media, it seems important to note that part of what draws spectators to some Olympic sports—and in fact, even partially determines the athletes’ scores for certain sports—is directly related to aesthetics and beauty. This may be truer for a sport such as ice dancing than any other. *NBC*’s Joe Posnanski stated:

Ice dancing, more than anything at the Winter Games, is subjective. There are a lot of judged sports at the Olympics, of course, but none of them are quite so mystifying for an average person to gauge... This is ice dancing. And, I think, it’s more art than sport. Well, the judges are trained to look at it through the more technical lens we attach to sports. They are trained to understand the components, the elements, the concepts of transitions

and linking and footwork and skating skills and all that stuff. But let's be honest: The real judges in all these sports are the people watching on television... Interestingly enough, I think that's part of the allure of what we do. It's that balance of athleticism and art.

(2014, para. 8-11)

CBS Sportswriter Mary Pilon wrote on February 17, 2014:

Hockey players gnash their teeth. Ski jumpers can hide their fear behind goggles.

Speedskaters huff and puff as they round the bend. Such is not the fate of Olympic ice dancers, who must maintain a stoic smile before an audience and a panel of judges, even if a boot fills with blood, a partner sinks a score or a spectator audience sneers. It is one of the more peculiarly theatrical pursuits of the Winter Games. (Pilon, 2014), para. 1-2)

As one Canadian ice dancer stated, "We're just as tired as any other endurance athlete gets during their sport but we have to look pretty when we're doing it. It's a little tougher" (Pilon, 2014, para. 4).

This is not to justify in any way any media bias with regard to either gender. Indeed, it is the hope of this researcher that all gender bias in sport-related media reporting will eventually become so insignificant that it becomes a non-issue. As Hardin et al. stated, "Accurate coverage that steers away from emphasizing sexual difference should be the objective" (2002, p. 65). Journalists should, however, continue to talk about beauty, form and grace when reporting on a sport that is in part about beauty, form and grace. At the same time, in fairness to the athletes and indeed the events themselves, journalists have an equal responsibility to report the athleticism and strength required of any Olympic athlete, and to treat both male and female athletes as *athletes* first. Fortunately, findings from this research seem to suggest that improvements have been made in this regard.

It is important that readers of this study are mindful of the notion that gender equity in the media coverage of an Olympic event does not carry over to that of non-Olympic sports coverage. Olympic and other global multi-sport events often see an increase in the quality and quantity of media attention for female athletes, according to Wensing & Bruce (2003), who refer to these occurrences as the *bending* of their five rules, which were discussed earlier. This, they say, is most likely due to the placing of national identity over identity markers such as gender (p. 388). Hardin et al. point out that Olympic media coverage has improved over the decades, but that “how the media frames female athletes on a week-by-week and month-by-month basis is the true test” (2002, p. 76).

Chapter Six: Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to examine Olympic athlete profiles published by the top six online sports websites during the 2014 Winter Olympic Games from which a random sample of 100 profiles was selected. A content analysis of the text and photographs from each profile in the sample was conducted, and data was analyzed using SPSS.

Results of the content analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between gender and any of the other variables coded, which included physical, strength/weakness, and emotional characteristics of each athlete. These results present a stark difference from those of many previous studies. Although some recent studies suggest an improvement toward gender equity in sport reporting by the mass media, this study indicates greater improvement than what has been reported.

Although the study showed improvement regarding fair and unbiased profiling of female athletes, some gender stereotyping still survives. Journalists must be challenged to continue to improve. Additionally, future research of this subject in both Olympic and non-Olympic sport should be encouraged. This would add to the body of research as well as further scholars' understanding of where the mass media lies along the path to gender equality in sports media.

A hundred years ago, women were not allowed to vote. They were not allowed to own property, nor were they allowed to join the military. Harassment was commonplace. A hundred years ago, gender was not an issue. Today, however, gender joins race and class as the basis of society (Kimmel, 2005). Kimmel tells the story of a public conversation between himself and two women, where the first, an African American woman, asks the second woman a question:

“When you wake up in the morning and look in the mirror, what do you see?” “I see a woman,” responded the white woman hopefully. “That’s the problem,” responded the

black woman. “To me, race is visible, because it is how I am not privileged in society. Because you are privileged by race, race is invisible to you. It is a luxury, a privilege not to have to think about race every second of your life.” I groaned, embarrassed. And, as the only man in the room, all eyes turned to me. “When I wake up and look in the mirror,” I confessed, “I see a human being—the generic person. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race and no gender. I am universally generalizable. I am everyman.” (2005, p.103)

It is the story of everyman and the story of the unprivileged that make this research important. Due to its central place in society, sport has shown its ability to advance positive social change around the world. It can be used to encourage equality, respect, and acceptance. Athletes and fans alike cut across all lines of gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Sport often drives social justice, fostering dialogue on topics such as education, poverty, race, and ethics.

One need not think long to identify African American athletes who have had incredible influences on sport, and in turn, on society—Hank Aaron, Jesse Owens, Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, to name a few. While great changes have taken place in recent decades with regards to racial discrimination in sports, lesser strides have occurred in regard to gender equality. Influential female athletes are also plentiful—Billy Jean King, Bonnie Blair, Sonja Henie, Danica Patrick, Lindsey Vonn, Venus and Serena Williams, and Maria Sharapova. Yet often these athletes are referred to as *great female athletes*, rather than simply *great athletes*.

It is the hope of this researcher that gender in sports reporting will become a non-issue and that athletes of all races and gender will be seen by themselves and others as “the everyman”—universally generalizable as *great athletes*. When we as a society get to the place where we look at both male and female athletes as athletes first, then perhaps we will have made

progress towards the greater issue of treating each other equally in all other settings as well—
education, healthcare, business, etc., and that will make the world be a better place for all of us.

Chapter Seven: Limitations and Future Research

This study had a limited number of variables that were designed to follow the methods of previous researchers, primary those used by Kinnick (1998) and Lee (1992) as well as Duncan (1990; Duncan et al., 1998). The study was designed so that comparisons to those studies could be made, but to do so completely would have resulted in a study too extensiveness for this thesis. The researcher chose instead to focus on three traits identified by previous scholars, those being physical, strength/weakness, and emotional characteristics. During this research, several thoughts emerged with regards to how the study could have been changed or added to, and ideas for future research were envisioned.

One limitation of this study was the small number of athletes participating in historically considered *feminine* and *masculine* sports. While many summer Olympic and non-Olympic sports have been identified as such, many winter Olympic sports have not. While this is a positive thing for gender equality, it was a limitation when looking for relationships between gender and gender-identified sports. Also, many sports had too few participating athletes included in the sample to run statistical analysis. Perhaps focusing research on specific sports and including all athletes participating in those sports would result in more significant findings.

Another limitation that warrants mentioning is that while some of the online sports sites included in this study, such as *Bleacher Report*, only post content created by their own writers, other outlets, such as *Yahoo! Sports* and *CBS Sports*, often post content created by news agencies such as Reuters or the Associated Press. Reports from these agencies are written by contributing authors, many of whom are unnamed, and then distributed for re-publication. While no duplicate profiles were randomly selected for inclusion in this study, the possibility of such an event was possible and would be prone to happen if the study were repeated.

Perhaps some of the results of this research, when compared to those of previous studies, may not reflect a socio-cultural shift as much as a they do a difference between what one would see in winter Olympic sport versus those of the summer Olympics—the latter being the predominant focus of previous research. Winter Olympic sports, by nature, require more clothing to be worn during competition. It seems plausible that journalists would find it easier to comment on an athlete's physical appearance or sex appeal in a situation where more of the athlete's body was being viewed. Photographs of beach volleyball players—of either gender—would likely spark different comments than would photographs of snowboarders.

Also worth mentioning is the probability that the amount of coverage an athlete receives is in some way directly related to their success over any other factor. For example, this study includes more profiles on female hockey players than male. While it is possible that the media was simply more interested in women's hockey, it seems more likely due to the fact that the U.S. women's hockey team advanced further in competition than did the U.S. men's team. Another example is that of successful alpine skier Mikaela Shiffrin receiving a great amount of coverage compared to speed skater Shani Davis, who did not have a successful showing at the Games. Winning athletes simply draw more attention. While this research did not include an analysis of the profiled athlete's success in competition, it would certainly be advantageous for future research to include such a variable. Accounting for success in competition would also aid in analysis of the photographs, allowing the researcher to look for relationships between winning athletes and the ways in which they are photographed.

One last limitation of this study, and something that the researcher did not account for, was the large extent to which journalists have turned to using video to profile athletes online. Many online profiles contained video clips or links to content on YouTube or other similar sites.

Many athlete profiles contained video content only and as such were not considered for inclusion in the sample frame of this study. By not including these video profiles, a rich store of multi-media content concerning these athletes remained untapped. One would assume that such content will only increase in the future and that its inclusion would greatly increase the strength and validity of any future research conducted in this regard.

It is also suggested by the researcher that future studies include the analysis of Paralympic athlete profiles. Although one such profile was part of the sample for this study, most media outlets had not posted any news or information regarding the Paralympics. This is mostly likely due to the time frame of the Paralympic Games taking place after the conclusion of the Olympics—but it is also likely that, similar to the historical underreporting afforded to female athletes, Paralympic athletes are less likely in general to receive coverage from the mass media.

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Appendix 1 – Coding Sheet

The Portrayal of Olympic Athletes During the 2014 Sochi Games A Content Analysis of Online Sports Sites			
Article Information			
Article Information	1	Sports Website	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo Sports <input type="checkbox"/> ESPN <input type="checkbox"/> Bleacher Report <input type="checkbox"/> CBS Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Sports Illustrated <input type="checkbox"/> NBC Sports	
	2	Author Name _____	3 Author Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
	4	Athlete Name _____	5 Athlete Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
	6	Sport _____	7 Sport: <input type="checkbox"/> Individual <input type="checkbox"/> Team
	8	Article Date _____	9 Article Title _____
	10	Article length _____	
Athlete Characteristics			
Athlete Character Traits	11	Height <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	12 _____
	13	Weight <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	14 _____
	15	Hair <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	16 _____
	17	Body Shape <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	18 _____
	19	Body Size <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	20 _____
	21	Beauty <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	22 _____
	23	Form <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	24 _____
	25	Grace <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	26 _____
	27	Strength <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	28 _____
	29	Weakness <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	30 _____
	31	Endurance <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	32 _____
	33	Risk taking <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	34 _____
	35	Pain Endurance <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	36 _____
Photographs			
Photographs	Is the athlete depicted		
	37	<input type="checkbox"/> Below eye level <input type="checkbox"/> At eye level <input type="checkbox"/> In an elevated position	<div style="background-color: #92d050; text-align: center; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold;">NOTES</div> <div style="height: 150px; border: 1px solid black;"></div>
	38	<input type="checkbox"/> Active <input type="checkbox"/> Passive	
	39	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Sports	
	40	Crying <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	41	Hugging <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	42	Raising arms in victory <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	43	Collapsed from exertion <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	44	Fallen Down/Crashed <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	45	Look of Disappointment <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
	For Female athletes:		
	46	Long Hair <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
		Stylish Clothes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
		Lavish Makeup <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
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Appendix 2 – Operational Definitions

Term	Operational Definition
Active	An athlete depicted doing something
Appearance	The way an athlete looks
Athlete	Official member of US Olympic Team in any participating sport
Beauty	Physical attractiveness such as <i>good looks</i> , <i>beauty</i> , or <i>cute</i> , etc.
Body Shape	Any mention of athlete’s skeletal structure, facial features, fat or muscle distribution
Endurance	Exerting oneself and remaining active for a long period of time. Ability to resist, withstand or recover from trauma, wounds or fatigue.
Form	Posture, body positioning, stance, balance, gait
Gender Titled	Men’s event, or women’s event, rather than simply event
Glamorized Appearance	Clothing, makeup or hairstyling more appropriate for a formal event than a professional or athletic setting
Grace	Simple elegance, refinement of movement
Hair	Any mention of hair length, color, style, etc.
Height	Any mention of height, whether by adjective (tall/short) or demographic (5’3”).
Martial Metaphor	War-making terms used in sport – kill, destroy, battle, fight, etc.
Non-Sports	Any photo setting not apparently sport related such as portraits or photos containing only faces with no identifying sport background
Pain Endurance	Ability to carry on through physical hardships or pain
Passive	An athlete depicted doing nothing; posing for the camera
Risk Taking	Any specific mention of “risk”, “danger” or an action with the potential outcome of injury or fatality
Sports	Any obvious athletic setting including active competition, sport venue, receiving awards, or wearing of athletic uniform.
Strength	Having the power to perform physically demanding tasks
Weakness	Lacking the strength or energy to perform physically demanding tasks
Weight	Any mention of weight, whether by adjective (thin/fat) or demographic (150 lbs.), or any mention of body size referring to weight.