

**PRINT MEDIA COVERAGE  
OF WOMEN'S SPORT IN  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**A.E. Goslin**

**ABSTRACT**

Gender equity in sport is regarded as a matter of consequence at global and national levels. Examining print media coverage of women's sport is a fundamental approach to monitor the status of equity in sport. The print media constitutes an influential role player in equity as it portrays the dominant images in society. A substantial international body of evidence has been generated measuring media coverage of women's sport but South African data is notably absent. The primary aims of this study were to record the coverage of women's sport in the South African print media and to ascertain if different sport disciplines received differential coverage in the print media in terms of gender equity. A content analysis was used as research instrument in accordance with the benchmark research methodology of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles for studies in this regard. Five South African newspapers representing 65.20% of total newspaper readership represented the sample and 2806 articles were analysed. Results suggested that despite priority given to gender equity in South African sport policy documents inequalities existed in the coverage of women's sport in the print media. Overall findings furthermore revealed considerable under-representation and under-reporting in all six variables of the content analysis namely extent of coverage, type of sport reported on, length of article, number and type of photographs and gender of photographer. Overall trends recorded in this study replicated longitudinal findings in the USA, Australia and United Kingdom. The findings of this study might be indicative of a larger issue underlying gender equity in print media coverage namely that of agenda setting.

**Key words:** Print media, women's sport, South Africa, media coverage.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In 1972 an American federal antidiscrimination law, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, mandated non-discrimination in all educational programmes funded by federal funds (Stafford, 2004). Title IX undoubtedly triggered increased global awareness and emphasis on gender equity in sport at all levels and dimensions of participation and has since been perpetuated by influential sport organisations and groups such as the Women's Sports Foundation, the International Working Group on Women and Sport and the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. The South African government aligned itself with these growing initiatives by institutionalizing gender equity as matter of consequence in South African sport through Priority Six of the White Paper on Sport and Recreation (South African Government, 2004). As equity in sport implies the practice of fairness and the application of social justice to decision making processes in all situations, individuals should be respected, have equal access and opportunities and have protected rights. It is logical then that these social values prevail in the spectrum of sport products and services (Sport England, 2004). This perception, however, is often not apparent. Supportive lip service to access and equity often becomes the norm.

A fundamental approach to monitor the status of equity in sport spawned by Title IX is to examine print media's coverage of selected indicators of equity in the sport industry of a specific country. The print media constitutes an influential sport product provider and has the potential to create and achieve an environment that promotes and supports the principles of equity. (SportScotland, 2004; George, 2001). In this regard George (2001) argued that the media has become one of the most powerful institutional forces for shaping values, perceptions and attitudes in modern culture. Mass media portrays the dominant images in society and, as such, are important shapers of equity. George (2001) suggested that how the printed media addresses or ignores the pressing issue of equity in sport becomes a critical exercise in power. By under-reporting women's sport the printed media is contributing to the general public's insufficient knowledge base on women's accomplishments in sport.

Research focusing on sport coverage in the media to ascertain their contribution to equity in sport has been undertaken by a number of scholars since 1972. Until the 1990's these works focused primarily on gender, stereotyping and race as indicators of equity in the print media and television.

As early as 1984, Rintala and Birrell (1984) concerned themselves with the availability of female role models in the print media and explored the research question of differential treatment of males and females in the *Young Athlete* magazine compared to actual sport participation rates. Theberge and Cronk (1984) also focused on limited coverage of women in the sports media due to biased newspaper production processes based on the assumption of greater public interest of male sports coverage.

Kane (1988) examined feature articles in *Sports Illustrated* on the impact of Title IX legislation (American federal legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in federally funded educational institutions) over 8-year time spans: before (1964-1971), during (1972-1979) and after (1980-1987) Title IX to determine if there has been a shift away from negative social stereotypes associated with women's sport participation. Lumpkin and Williams (1991) also analysed *Sports Illustrated* feature articles for the period 1954 to 1987 in terms of equity variables related to type of sport, gender, race, length of the article, number of pictures, individuals pictured and descriptive characteristics. The work of Duncan (1993) focused on sport media texts to identify mechanisms in historical and cultural

contexts to reveal gender stereotyping, while Messner and Solomon's research (1993) took an ideological framing angle by analysing the newspaper coverage of boxer Sugar Ray Leonard's wife abuse story. Hatch and Kluka (1993) found the same consistent pattern of under-representation of women's sport in the newspaper coverage given to the 1991 NCAA Division 1 men's and women's national Basketball Championships. From 1990 to 2005 the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles commissioned a series of research reports (1990; 1994; 1999; 2000; 2005a; 2005b) applying content analysis as a research method to investigate gender, children and gender stereotyping in televised sports and sports media. The common result of all these studies reiterated the pattern of under-representation of women's sport. Similar longitudinal research based on content analyses was undertaken in Australia and England. An extensive longitudinal Australian study on the media coverage and portrayal of women's sport in 2000, showed that although Australian sportswomen are more professional than ever, they still struggle for consistent, long-term coverage. Even though newspaper reportage of women's sport has doubled since 1992, only 10.7% of newspaper space was devoted to women's

sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2000). Comparable longitudinal research by the Women's Sport Foundation of the United Kingdom (2003) recorded similar trends and concluded that despite pockets of exposure, women are under-represented at all levels of sports media over time.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT AND AIMS**

More than thirty five years passes since Title IX was enacted. A substantial body of evidence has since been generated measuring media coverage of women's sport. Achieving equity in sport requires a multi-dimensional approach. The equity framework for sport as proposed by SportEngland (2004) suggests the dimensions of participation, leadership, policy and communication as minimum key performance standards for auditing the status of equity within a sport industry. In South Africa, key performance indicators for auditing and managing the status of equity in sport focus on ethnic demographics as reflected in sport management, leadership, participation and coach profiles, access to facilities, private sector sponsorship profile, infrastructure, media coverage with reflection for social responsibility, professional management development, fair employment practices contributing to Black economic empowerment and content of sport

management training curricula (South African Rugby Football Union, 2006). The contribution of the print media as an influential instrument to achieve, reflect and maintain equity becomes a key driver and variable in managing transformation in sport. Data on the South African situation are, however, notably absent from the concerted global drive to address the huge disparity in print media coverage of women's sport. While the topic of quantifying and evaluating print media coverage of women's sport is certainly not new, a literature search revealed only one related South African work (Serra, 2005). This work, however, narrowly focused on only one newspaper in a localised geographic area. The primary aims of this study set in a South African print media context correlated with the benchmark aims set by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles studies, and were to (1) record the coverage of female and male sport in the print media; (2) ascertain if different sport disciplines received differential coverage in the print media in terms of gender equity. Secondary aims were to contribute to the existing global body of evidence on print media coverage of women's sport and to provide a baseline for future longitudinal studies in this regard in a South African context.

## **RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

The research methods and procedures applied in this study are in accordance with the research protocol benchmarked by the then Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (now LA84) for measuring media coverage of female sport to facilitate comparisons between South African and international results in this regard.

### **Research design**

The study followed a descriptive research design by applying content analysis as a data collecting strategy to ex-post-facto (printed media articles) data and transforming it into quantitative data. This appropriate design merely recorded and described a detailed quantitative picture of a particular phenomenon (print media coverage of female sport) without attempting to test or build a theoretical model (Walliman, 2006).

### **Research sample**

A stratified random sample of print media articles in five South African newspapers for a three month period during 2006 was done. To eliminate bias towards specific sport disciplines the research period included no major international sport events.

Newspapers were included in the sample based on the five highest national circulation figures. The included newspapers represented 65.20% of total newspaper readership in South Africa and represented both weekly and daily papers. All articles on sport were included as items in the content analysis when they contained prose. Listings, results and supplements of newspapers were not included. This sampling strategy yielded 2806 articles reporting on sport.

### **Research instrument**

A quantitative content analysis was applied as research instrument in accordance with the standardized AAFLA protocol. Six variables were included in the content analysis: the extent of coverage, length of articles in column centimetres, number of photographs, type of sport reported on, sport issue reported on in the article and gender of reporter. Articles were placed in four categories: male only, female only, both and neutral. Neutral articles focused on issues such as facilities, events, horse racing and equipment while articles in the both category focused on sports such as mixed doubles in tennis. Data of each newspaper were captured on coding sheets.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Overall trends**

Overall findings revealed significant under-reporting and under-representation in all of the variables, namely, extent of coverage, type of sport reported on, length of articles, number and type of photographs and gender of reporter. These overall trends replicated and supported longitudinal findings recorded in the comprehensive studies commissioned by the AAFLA from 1990 to 2005, Australian Sports Commission (2000) and United Kingdom (2003) despite gender equity in sport initiatives such as Title IX, the International Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport, Windhoek Call for Action, Montreal Communique and Kumamoto Workshops on gender equity in sport (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 2007) and South African sport transformation and equity policies.

### **Extent of coverage**

The extent of print media coverage of female sport measured the number of articles reporting on male and female sportspersons in the five newspapers and is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Extent of print media coverage

NEWSPAPER	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	NEUTRAL	TOTAL
Sowetan	292 (85.5%)	8 (2.30%)	22 (6.4%)	20 (5.8%)	<b>342</b>
Sunday Times*	155 (92.3%)	4 (2.4%)	8 (4.8%)	1 (0.6%)	<b>168</b>
Rapport*	160 (80.8%)	4 (2.0%)	26 (13.1%)	8 (4.0%)	<b>198</b>
The Citizen	872 (86.5%)	46 (4.6%)	66 (6.5%)	24 (2.4%)	<b>1008</b>
Beeld	940 (86.2%)	57 (5.2%)	87 (8.0%)	6 (0.6%)	<b>1090</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2419 (86.3%)</b>	<b>119 (4.2%)</b>	<b>209 (7.4%)</b>	<b>59 (2.1%)</b>	<b>2806 (100.0%)</b>

\* Weekend newspaper.

Table 2: Number of photographs by gender

NEWSPAPER	MALE	FEMALE	BOTH	NEUTRAL	TOTAL
Sowetan	148 (90.81%)	9 (5.53%)	4 (2.43%)	2 (1.23%)	<b>163</b>
Sunday Times	172 (95.55%)	3 (1.67%)	4 (2.22%)	1 (0.56%)	<b>180</b>
Rapport	160 (80.81%)	4 (2.02%)	26 (13.13%)	8 (4.04%)	<b>198</b>
The Citizen	273 (82.23%)	24 (7.23%)	26 (7.83%)	9 (2.71%)	<b>332</b>
Beeld	339 (93.13%)	12 (3.30%)	11 (3.02%)	2 (0.55%)	<b>364</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1092 (88.28%)</b>	<b>52 (4.20%)</b>	<b>71 (5.74%)</b>	<b>22 (1.78%)</b>	<b>1237 (100.0%)</b>

From this table it is clear that coverage of women's sports was under-represented during the period of research. The sheer number of articles reporting on male sportspersons far outweighed the number of women's stories. Males received 86.3% of the coverage, females 4.2% and gender neutral topics 2.1%. Coverage of men's sport outnumbered women's articles by a 20:1 ratio. All five newspapers demonstrated a similar pattern of under-reporting on women's sport. On average, no difference between the pattern of under-reporting of weekend and during-the-week newspapers was recorded. It seemed further as if print media coverage distorted the extent of actual male (42.3%) and female (11.2%) overall participation rates (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2005).

Females were noticeably (4.2%) under-represented and males over-represented (86.3%). With the considerable under-reporting of women's sport, few role models were presented with whom young female participants can identify and which young males can recognize.

Overall female participation in South African sport seems already low (11.2%) due to cultural barriers and traditions (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2005) and unless the issue of role modelling in the print media is addressed, the issue of low participation might be perpetuated.

In this regard George (2001) rightly stated that there is a lack of exposure to and understanding of the outstanding performances of female athletes, coaches and teams and as women's sport is trivialized or ignored, this results in the public's impression of women's sport as marginal, not really popular or worthy of print media coverage.

### **Length of articles**

Results reflecting the length of articles measured in column centimetres dedicated to male and female sportspersons again indicate male dominance. On average articles on males were 442.46 column centimetres while articles on females were 279.72 column centimetres. Articles on neutral topics were an average of 307.49 column centimetres. The latter high average can be attributed to full page articles on South Africa's preparation for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup.

### **Number of photographs by gender**

Again the pattern of unequal coverage was apparent from the number of photographs in all five newspapers as evident from Table 2. The ratio of 19:1 in favour of photographs depicted male participants was consistent with the ratio of 20:1 recorded for the number of articles. Topics of photographs concentrated primarily on the four traditional South African male

sports of rugby, soccer, cricket and boxing. Photographs in newspapers with a majority of Black readers (Citizen, Sowetan) favoured the sports of soccer (92%) and boxing (8%) consistent with the actual participation and spectator figures in those sports, while newspapers with a majority of white readers (Beeld, Rapport) focused on photographs depicting rugby and cricket, again consistent with the ethnographic participation in these sports (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2005). Photographs of women only covered the sports of tennis and track and field. From the results recorded and presented for the variables of extent of coverage, length of coverage and number of photographs, it can be concluded that male and female sportspersons received differential treatment in the print media.

### **Sport disciplines covered in the print media**

Fifty eight (58) different sport disciplines received media coverage in the 2806 analysed articles. The "top ten" sports disciplines covered in the print media sample are displayed in Table 3. This table indicates that the "top ten" sports received nearly 90% of the print media coverage while the remaining 47 sports shared the remaining 10% of the coverage.

Table 3: Sport disciplines covered in the print media

<b>SPORT DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>SOWETAN</b>	<b>SUNDAY TIMES</b>	<b>RAPPORT</b>	<b>THE CITIZEN</b>	<b>BEELD</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>% OF TOTAL COVERAGE</b>	<b>CUMULATIVE %</b>
Rugby	7	40	101	192	550	890	31.72	31.72
Soccer	242	70	1	246	43	602	21.45	53.17
Cricket	11	22	34	191	242	500	17.82	70.99
Tennis	1	1	8	87	13	130	4.63	75.62
Boxing	30	6	0	46	2	84	2.99	78.61
Track and Field	2	0	17	30	26	75	2.67	81.28
Golf	4	3	11	0	45	63	2.25	83.53
Cycling	0	0	0	19	42	61	2.17	85.70
Motor racing (F1)	3	0	1	17	14	35	1.25	86.95
Road running	13	0	0	10	9	32	1.14	88.09
Swimming	1	4	2	6	19	32	1.14	89.23
Rest of sport disciplines (n=47)						302	10.77	100.00

Table 4: Topics covered in articles (more than one topic could be covered)

<b>TOPIC (n=5696)</b>	<b>SOWETAN</b>	<b>SUNDAY TIMES</b>	<b>RAPPORT</b>	<b>THE CITIZEN</b>	<b>BEELD</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>% OF COVERAGE</b>
Participation in sport	279	128	144	727	923	2201	38.64
Sport events	125	67	101	558	385	1236	21.70
Personal profiles	59	51	135	255	488	988	17.35
Management	118	64	59	315	256	812	14.26
Sport development	34	10	14	27	46	131	2.30
Economic impact of a sport event	11	11	20	16	63	121	2.12
Youth sport	25	5	12	24	28	94	1.65
Sport facilities	18	13	0	22	34	87	1.53



Comparing the “top ten” covered sports in the print media to actual participation in the “top five” (soccer, cricket, netball, track and field, rugby) sports in all nine provinces of South Africa, revealed considerable congruence except in the case of netball. Actual participation (3%) in netball (the primary female sport in South Africa) recorded a higher participation rate (2%) than rugby (2%), a dominantly male sport, but received only 0.46% of print media coverage (Sport and Recreation South Africa, 2005). In this regard Rowe and Brown (1994) refuted the argument that men's sport is more prominent in the media simply because there is more male than female sporting activity. They pointed out that this line of argumentation ignored the significance of the self-reinforcing and so reproductive function of existing coverage and went on to state that it was apparent that levels of participation do not always correlated with levels of media representation. The gender-based disparity between player registration and media representation usually favoured male sport. The overwhelming focus on three sports (soccer, rugby, cricket) in the South African media subtly marginalised those sports outside the “big three” and could send a message that some sports are more important than others.

### **Gender of reporters**

More males than females were represented as authors of articles. Ninety three per cent (93.25 %) of the articles were written by male reporters and the 6.75% female reporters only reported on sports (netball and swimming) with a relatively high percentage of female participants.

### **Topics covered in print media articles**

Table 4 indicated major topics addressed in the print media articles. Reporting on played sport matches (38.64%) and coming events (21.70%) dominated the coverage. Reporting on sport management topics (14.26%) related predominantly to mismanagement in national sport governing bodies. Topics on sport and social responsibility were only recorded in 0.04% of the articles. Impacting gender equity in South African sport could be regarded as a dimension of social responsibility and this finding was thus in accordance with the broader international pattern of under-reporting on women's sport.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study was designed to assess the coverage of women's sport in five South African newspapers to contribute to the international body of research on this topic.

The predominant finding indicated that collective results of this study are consistent with findings of several longitudinal international studies done in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States of America. Coverage of male sport dominated the print media in all six variables set for this study. It seemed that despite priority given to gender equity in the South African White Paper on Sport and Recreation inequalities exist in the coverage of women's sport in South African newspapers. Although the focus of this research was only on print media coverage, similar trends occurred in televised sport. A comprehensive sample of credible studies on media coverage of women's sport compiled by the Women's Sports Foundation (2007) revealed insignificant coverage on the ESPN, ABC, CCN, NBC as well as TNT television networks (Women's Sports Foundation, 2007). It has been postulated that the amount of newspaper coverage of women's sport has not kept pace with the growth of women's sport and as such presents a compelling argument for change in the newsgathering, reporting and editing process (George, 2001). The findings of this study might be indicative of a larger issue underlying gender equity print media coverage namely that of agenda setting. In all the relevant research there was

agreement that the achievements of female athletes constitute a significant contribute to global sport achievements yet their achievements receive limited coverage. The agenda setting function of the print media undoubtedly plays a role in this regard and should be researched in more depth. The results of this particular study can serve as a baseline for future longitudinal studies in this regard to assess progress of women's sports coverage in the print media in a South African context.

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**ERRATUM**

AJPHERD Vol. 14, No. 3, September 2008 carried an article titled, "Print media coverage of women's sport in South Africa" on pages 299-309. The said article indicated A.E. Goslin as the sole author. AJPHERD has been reliably informed that the names of the three other co-authors of the article were inadvertently omitted from the paper. AJPHERD confirms that the following names should appear on the article as co-authors: Prof Dr Darlene Kluka, Dr J G U van Wyk and Mr. S Burger, all of the Department of Biokinetics, Sport and Leisure Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa. AJPHERD regrets the error.