

Title:

“It feels like it matters”: Journalists explain the relative improvement in women’s sports coverage during the Olympic Games

Abstract:

The representation of women in sports coverage by public broadcasters in Australia, the UK, Canada and New Zealand reflects the broader and historically similar gender ideologies of those societies. Using online coverage of women’s and men’s sporting events as its context, and written portrayals of athletic performances as the texts, content analysis of the 2008 Olympic Games identified differences in the manner in which women’s and men’s sports were framed collectively and on the individual websites of four broadcasters – the ABC, BBC, CBC and TVNZ (Jones 2010, 2012, 2013). A disproportionate focus on male athletes, inferences that the female body is not well suited for sports requiring strength or endurance, frequent and gratuitous attention to women’s marital and family roles, romantic and other relationships to men, and the absence of comparable coverage of men, suggest reinforcement of the traditional ideology of sport as a male domain. This paper reports on the second stage of my study of gendered sports coverage by public broadcasters. Drawing on interviews with 15 national and international sports journalists about the manufacture of sports news for their online and broadcast audiences, it argues that a cocktail of nationalism, opportunity, success and convenience accounts for relative improvements in women’s sports coverage during elite contests such as the Olympic Games.