**Gender mainstreaming in sport: italian television sport coverage of women’s sports during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games**

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**Introduction**

Several actions have been taken to promote the recognition of women's sport and to reduce existing economic, social and cultural inequities between men and women in sport (European Parliament, 2003; IOC, 2004). Recently, considerable attention has been given to the relationship among sport, media and gender in contemporary culture. Studies showed that women's sports was allotted a significantly lower amount of media coverage when compared to men's sports, especially in non-Olympic events (Capranica and Aversa, 2002; Messner, 2000). Therefore, the aim of the present study was to have a gender perspective in Italy of the 2004 Summer Olympic Games, inclusive of television coverage, television audience, and involvement of professionals.

**Methods**

The Italian television airtime data and the minute by minute monitoring of the television audience of the 2004 Summer Olympic Games were provided by AUDITEL and AGB ITALIA. The statistical sample was divided in eight age groups for both genders. Audience parameters were: 1) the mean audience per minute; 2) the share, which is the percentage of audience for a given television channel as compared to the whole television audience over a given time period; 3) the appreciation index, which is calculated combining the duration of the programme, the permanence of audience on the programme, and the share related to the programmes broadcasted by other Italian channels. The sport events were classified into three categories: men-only (M), women-only (F), and mixed-gender (FM). Furthermore, the Italian athletes, coaches, staff members and journalists included in the official Olympic list were considered. ANOVA was applied (p<0.05) to test gender differences in the Olympic delegation, mean audience, share parameters, and appreciation index latest also as a function of gender of the sport events.

**Results**

The Italian Olympic delegation was made up of 659 members (377 athletes and 282 staff members). The male delegation was significantly higher than its female counterpart both within athletes (63% vs. 37%) and within staff members (91% vs. 9%). Gender differences also emerged within the 61 Italian television employees (52 males and 9 females) who worked in Athens. Women's sport was allotted significantly less air-time than men's sport (54h 28' 49" females) who worked in Athens. Women's sport was allotted significantly less air-time than men's sport (54h 28' 49" vs. 98h 56' 16' 9). As compared to the overall athletes' participation (females 41%, males 59%), gender differences in the Olympic broadcast were more pronounced (females 30%, males 54%). No gender effect in the placement of women's sport within the television broadcast emerged. The broadcasted Olympic events hit a total 1063574446 mean audience, with the female audience subgroup representing 45% of the total. Mean audience significantly (p < 0.001) differed as a function of gender (F (1, 7260) = 100.8), and age (F (7, 7263) = 741.1), and also a significant age x gender interaction emerged (F (7, 7263) = 7.9). Furthermore, no significant interaction between the gender of the viewers and the gender of the sport events was found. Male share was significantly higher (37 ± 14%) than female’s (26 ± 11%). The male share for male, female, and mixed-gender Olympic events was 36%, 37% and 23%, respectively. The respective figure for female share was 26%, 26% and 23%. Also, the analysis of share parameters showed significant (p < 0.001) main and joint effects of age and gender of the audience (Gender: F (7, 7263) = 267.4; Age: F (1, 7263) = 1548.2; Age x Gender: F (7, 7263) = 32.4). Overall appreciation index was significantly higher (F (2, 438)=5.54 p<0.01) for men's sport events (132 ± 52) than for women's (120 ± 42) and mixed-gender events (114 ± 31). This gender difference was reduced to a non significant level (F (1, 272) = 0.18; p=0.67) when only those sports that received both female and male coverage were considered (124 ± 47 vs. 122 ± 44). Furthermore, a significantly higher (F (1, 438) = 12.16; p=0.001) appreciation index was found for the sports where Italian athletes won Olympic medals (129 ± 50) with respect to sport without any national achievement (111 ± 29).

**Discussion/Conclusion**

The present study shows a stable strong male hegemony in sport related careers. The lack of gender difference in the placement of women’s Olympic events within the television broadcast might be due to a general agreement concerning the Olympic programme, which tended to avoid gender inequities (Capranica & Aversa, 2002). Although a larger male main audience was found, the appreciation of men’s and women’s sport events seems to be balanced after equating differences of media coverage of female and male sports events. Moreover during the Olympic Games, a nationalistic fervor might have an effect on the trend to equality of gender coverage.

**References**


