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Public and Private Perceptions : Press Representations of Australian Women Athletes at the Sydney Olympic Games

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**Public and Private Perceptions: Press representations of Australian
women athletes at the Sydney Olympic Games**

**By Rachel Payne
Bachelor of Communications Honours**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Bachelor of Communications Media Studies (Honours).
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Abstract

In the year 2000, Australia assumed its role as Olympic host, with the summer Games held at Sydney in September. The Games of the Millennium, like any Olympics, was historically significant but, for sportswomen, the Sydney Olympics marked an important milestone as this was the year to celebrate the centenary of female athletes' involvement in the Olympic Games.

Within the context of mediated Olympic presentation, it was the Australian press' duty to convey this moment, and other events involving female athletes, to the public in a manner in which it believed to be most suitable, and/or newsworthy. In the past, many authors have argued that the print journalists represent sportswomen inadequately in comparison with male athletes, and that female athletes have been trivialised in the eyes of the public as a result.

Unlike many studies of the status of women's sport in the media, this thesis will employ a four-part process of analysis which is used to assess the Sydney Olympic press coverage of female athletes only. This coverage will be studied from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Australian female athletes' and sports journalists' points of view, as depicted through interviews, will also be discussed.

This thesis will specifically examine press reports written for four Australian newspapers which served national, eastern and western readerships during the two-week period of Sydney Olympic competition – *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times*. The primary focus will be on the factors and influences involved in the production of news material about Australia's female Olympic competitors at Sydney. Drawing on past literature on women in sport and Australian studies of female athletes in the press, this thesis will aim to reveal how representations of sportswomen have evolved since these works were written, and to identify any particular improvements or remaining inadequacies in contemporary women's sport journalism. In addition, new ways of seeing the position of women in sport and sportswomen in the press, based on the press' portrayal of Australian female athletes at Sydney, will be offered.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
- (iii) contain any defamatory material*

Signed:



Date: 9/9/2002

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Contents

	Page
Abstract	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Rethinking Women in Sport and Sportswomen in the Press	4
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	15
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS	
Section One: Quantitative Analysis of Women's Olympic Coverage	22
Section Two: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Female Athletes	35
Section Three: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Sports Journalists	45
Section Four: Qualitative Analysis of Women's Olympic Reports	55
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	67
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION	77
REFERENCES	80
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Athletes' Interview Questions	85
Appendix B: Journalists' Interview Questions	86
Appendix C: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related paragraphs	87
Appendix D: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related photographs	88
Appendix E: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related photographs by size (Large, Medium and Small)	89

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Olympic Games is the largest and most internationally inclusive sporting event held in the world, with 199 nations and one independent team (East Timor) having been represented at the most recent Games at Sydney in 2000. The Olympic movement, in its modern form, was officially established in 1896 with the aim to bring “people together in peace to respect universal moral values” (IOC, 2002a, para.1). This concept of uniting people from many nations and diverse cultural backgrounds through sport has made the Olympic Games a unique spectacle which, in many ways, transcends sport.

Originally, women were excluded from this athletic symbol of global unification. They were barred from competing at the first Olympics, held at Athens in 1896, by Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who conceptualised and implemented the modern Olympic ideal, and had to overcome numerous struggles to gain acceptance from the Olympic movement (Blue, 1988, p.1; Gordon, 1994, p.75; Phillips, 1996, p.6; Toohey & Veal, 2000, p.161). At the second Olympics, at Paris in 1900, women were granted permission to compete – albeit under great restriction. From the outset of their Olympic participation, women have almost always had to fight to be included in the sports offered by the Olympic Games.

In recent years, female athletes have begun to receive more recognition for their contribution to the Olympic movement and for the feats they have achieved in competition. The 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games was proclaimed a “coming of age” for female athletes, who were promoted as ‘stars’ by the media and marketers, and whose events were enjoyed by record numbers of spectators (Stefan, 1997, p.22). If Atlanta was a “coming of age” for women at the Olympics, at Sydney in 2000 female athletes shone. In 2000, their role in this sporting spectacle was greater than ever. The number of sports available to women rose from 21 at Atlanta to 25 (out of a total of 28) at Sydney. Events rose from 97 (plus 11 mixed) to 120 (plus 12 mixed), and participation figures improved from 34% to 38% of the total participating athletes

(Australian Sports Commission, 2002a, para.2) Successful sportswomen, both local and foreign, such as Cathy Freeman, Susie O'Neill, Marion Jones and Inge de Bruijn, were given celebrity status, widely being referred to as 'stars', and even 'superstars'.

The year 2000 also marked the centenary of women's Olympic participation, and the President of the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC), John Coates', choice to honour this milestone at Sydney's opening ceremony was arguably one of the most significant gestures ever made towards women in sport. In preparing to host the Sydney Games, "Coates made the decision to involve [six] women as the final torchbearers" leading into the main stadium at the conclusion of the ceremony and invited athlete Cathy Freeman to light the Olympic cauldron (McDougall, 2000, p.8). Freeman was not the first woman to light the Olympic cauldron, Enriqueta Basilio being the first to do so at Mexico City in 1968 (Blue, 1988, p.viii). But when the Australian female champions took the forefront at such a prominent stage of the opening ceremony, it signified that women are now considered to be a highly regarded part of the Olympic movement. Australia's women's hockey captain Rechelle Hawkes was also included in this acknowledgement of female Olympians when she read the athletes' oath at the ceremony.

Academics and sport historians have widely discussed the significance of the Olympic Games to society. Its histories and personalities have been well documented both internationally and within Australia. Media analyst Wilson (2000, p.154) advises readers and writers of Olympic texts to consider that "the Olympic Games [is] a rich and complex object of study, one which must not be left to official historians and broadcasters." The implications of Wilson's statement stretch further than conventional depictions of inspirational athletes and nationalism, or adverse political incidents that have overshadowed Olympic history. Instead, there are several opportunities for other elements of 'Olympism' to be identified and explored more extensively within many disciplines of study. With regard to this notion, this thesis will examine a specific medium, the Australian press, and its representation of female athletes at the Sydney Olympic Games.

The research findings for this thesis will be divided into four sections, with the Olympic coverage printed by three Australian daily newspapers, *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian*, and one weekly Western Australian newspaper, *The Sunday Times*, being chosen for these analyses. In the

first section, this coverage will be assessed quantitatively in order to evaluate the textual and pictorial space allocated to all female athletes during the Sydney Olympics.

The second and third sections will focus on qualitative interviews with five female athletes who competed at Sydney and four journalists who covered the Olympic competition for two of the selected newspapers. In section two, the athletes, who represented Australia in women's beach volleyball, hockey, sailing, swimming and water polo, will convey their thoughts about the press coverage of Australia's female Olympians at Sydney, including themselves, and compare the reports with their personal experiences and insights. They will also comment on the role of the opening ceremony, assessing its influence on their own performances and on press reports.

Section three will add another dimension to this study by presenting explanations from the selected sports journalists regarding how they constructed articles about Australian female athletes at Sydney. They will discuss the processes and decisions involved in their, and other sports journalists', prioritisation of information about women's Olympic events.

The fourth, and final, section of the research findings will involve a textual analysis of the Sydney Olympic reporting, focusing on the language used by the sports journalists from the selected newspapers to describe Australian female Olympians and their performances.

The results of these four elements of research will be drawn together and examined further in Chapter Five, the Discussion of Findings.

The Sydney Olympics were of great importance to Australia, as decisions made by the Australian Olympic Committee, local organisers, and the media determined how Australian culture would be presented in the global spotlight. Stoddart (1986, p.4) and Sinclair (2000, p.37) respectively explain the importance of sport and the Sydney Olympics in building national respect within Australia and gaining recognition from countries overseas. This research will be indicative of the ways by which our national press portrayed Australia's female Sydney Olympians to the local and global public, and the attitudes held by the Australian press towards women's Olympic events.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rethinking Women in Sport and Sportswomen in the Press

Academic literature written about women in sport has grown in volume significantly since the early 1980s. Many sports-related books written during the past twenty years discuss issues concerning women in sport culture, usually in what Stoddart cynically calls – in his own chapter titled *Playing Like a Girl* – “an obligatory chapter on women in sport” (1986, p.134). Other authors, such as Dyer (1982; 1989), Mitchell and Dyer (1985), Blue (1987; 1988), Stell (1991), Creedon (1994), Phillips (1996), and Robinson (1997), have dedicated entire texts to women in sport, and these works cover a comprehensive range of anecdotes and arguments regarding the status of Australian and international women in sport culture.

In reviewing these works, plus other research reports, chapters and journal articles written on women in sport and sportswomen in the media, it is evident that there has been no noticeable evolution in the arguments presented over this twenty-year period. As will be discussed further in this review, contrasting authors’ arguments are known to exist within individual publications – some pessimistic, some optimistic, and others incorporating several viewpoints. A selection of these authors’ works will be contrasted with each other and with current research to show how the status of women in sport and sportswomen in the press, and the role of sports journalism, is changing, and how we should begin to rethink established arguments about issues of women in sport culture.

While specific academic perspectives have not developed uniformly in recent years, an important shift in the status of women in sport did occur in the early 1980s. A boom in women’s sporting participation in the early 1980s signalled that women in Western nations had finally earned the right to freely participate in many sports at both a recreational and competitive level (Blue, 1987, p.xiii). As a result, women’s

Olympic participation increased greatly between the years 1980 and 2000 from 21% to 38% of the total Olympic Games competitors. The positive way of interpreting this statistic is that sportswomen are now edging towards equal Olympic representation. However, some authors in the 1990s argue that the progression towards equality is being hindered by developing and Islamic nations (Lucas, 1992, p.134; Stefan, 1997, p.23). While this argument was valid at the time of their publication, further research by the Australian Sport Commission (2002a) conducted at the time of the Sydney Olympics now proves otherwise:

Of a total of 199 nations, 53 countries had teams comprising 50% (or more) female athletes. It is notable that the majority of these countries were from Asia or Africa, with the highest female representation (85%) being from Myanmar. Of the so-called "Western" nations, only seven had female representation equal to, or exceeding male representation. (para. 5)

Among these seven nations were Canada and Norway, but not Australia, the United States of America or Great Britain. If Lucas (1992) and Stefan (1997) were to revise their arguments after the 2000 Olympics, they should take these statistics into consideration as well as recent progress in the participation of Islamic and Middle Eastern women. It is therefore necessary to update our perceptions of the presence of female athletes representing developing countries at the Olympics, because significant changes have occurred in the short time since many popular Olympic texts were written. Some of these differences were noted by the Australian press during the Sydney Games:

At the opening ceremony in Seoul, we counted the number of Middle Eastern countries marching without women. In Sydney, we celebrated the victories of Islamic women, running with naked legs in front of men, wiping tears from their faces with national flags as if they were silken chadors. (Masters, 2000, p.21)

The message conveyed by these past and present examples is that for women to achieve equal Olympic representation, their participation must continue to be supported by both developing *and* Western nations.

The 1980s participation boom was a momentous step forward for the status of women in sport, but it also gave rise to a new struggle for sportswomen. Although women had earned the right to participate in sport, they now had to start fighting for

adequate media recognition of that participation. British author Adrienne Blue was one of the first sport academics to specifically recognise this transition: "The most important story of our era has been the emergence of women in sport. Most of the media have missed it; all of them have under-reported it" (Blue, 1987, p.xiii). In Australia, from 1980 onwards, researchers began to regularly monitor the acknowledgement of sportswomen in the press quantitatively and qualitatively. Results of these research reports support Blue's observation by revealing that women's sport consistently receives minimal press coverage in an everyday context.

There have been four major research reports published in Australia since 1985; *Women, Sport and the Media* (Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women, 1985), *Invisible Games* (Stoddart, 1994), *An Illusory Image* (Phillips, 1997) and *Inching Forward* (Mikosza, 1997). Other research was conducted during the 1980s and early 1990s, using different methods from the above reports, for unpublished works and for book and journal compilations (Menzies, 1989; Embrey, Hall & Gunter, 1992).

Like sportswomen's rates of participation, the results of the four major research reports show that – despite a regressive fall recorded in 1984 at 1.3% – press coverage of sportswomen has gradually improved since 1980, when women's sport comprised an average of only 2% of sport coverage in Australian newspapers (Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women, 1985, p.102). Stoddart (1994, p.3) found this figure had risen to 4.5% in 1992, and Phillips (Australian Sports Commission, 2002b, para.8) discovered it had more than doubled again to 10.7% in 1996. It must be noted that these figures exclude women's content within mixed sport articles, so if this was to be added the total percentages would be slightly higher. While these results show the coverage of women's sports in the press has improved quantitatively, it is still very poor in comparison with the coverage given to men's sports.

There is one parity between the studies outlined above, which is that their research was always conducted within an Olympic year, but never during Olympic competition. Mikosza (1997) does not follow this trend as she examined coverage printed during an Olympic period, the 1996 Atlanta Games, and a two-week period in 1997, a non-Olympic year. Mikosza's 1996 results indicate that a sharp rise in the press coverage of sportswomen occurred when the Atlanta Olympic Games took

place. The percentage calculated for this two-week period was 33.1% (Mikosza, 1997, p.6), much higher than Phillips' non-Olympic findings from the same year. Findings from the 1997 study, however, show that these Olympic-related improvements in press exposure did not flow on to the following non-Olympic year when sportswomen's coverage again dropped to a low 5.8% (Mikosza, 1997, p.12). While this thesis uses a different method of quantitative analysis from any previous study, its results are similar to Mikosza's. Comparisons between this 1996 research and my quantitative analysis of the Sydney Olympics' press coverage will be examined in the research findings section of this thesis.

All of the previous studies on women's sport in the Australian media focus only on gender-related coverage, comparing sportswomen's coverage with the more extensive coverage consistently given to sportsmen. These comparisons often arrive at similarly pessimistic, yet probably valid, conclusions that the media believes women's sport "is not intrinsically as worthy or important as men's sport" (Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women, 1985, p.32). This comparative approach will be avoided in this thesis. Instead, the press coverage of female athletes at the Sydney Olympics will be evaluated in its own right from the total space given to gender- and non-gender-related articles.

Although my chosen topic purely relates to women in sport, this thesis will not take a radical feminist stance which sees sport as an aggressive masculine pursuit, as exemplified by Bryson (1989, p.21):

Fundamentally, the major problem for women's sport is men's sport As women participate they are in danger of reinforcing masculine values and men's power. This has the effect of tacitly devaluing things that women do and making their achievements seem inferior.

It is true that women have been the victims of marginalisation in sport culture, however if women accepted Bryson's (1989) assertions and excluded themselves from sport altogether this would be much more detrimental than beneficial to the status of women in society. Sport historians, such as Stoddart (1986), strongly oppose such feminist arguments by pointing out that in the past women actually contributed to the diminishing of their own sporting pursuits by "imposing ... restrictions upon themselves" (p.148) and enforcing a conservative sporting etiquette upon all sportswomen.

Eleven years after Bryson's views appeared in a compilation of essays on women in sport edited by Dyer (1989), Toohey and Veal (2000) applied a similar feminist approach to their analysis of representations of sportswomen in today's press. Toohey and Veal argue that increasing the amount of articles about women's sport in the press, which they believe concentrate too much on athletes' appearances and traditional notions of femininity, would hinder, rather than promote, the status of women in sport and reinforce the dominance of men's sport (2000, p.169). Although the press may "not always emphasise athletic performance traits" of female athletes, this thesis does not follow Toohey and Veal's opinion that all reports written about sportswomen "trivialise, marginalise and at times demean females" (2000, p.169). Instead, it will contend that an absence of all reports about female athletes, including those taking angles based on glamour and stardom, would be counterproductive to public and private perceptions of women in sport.

Little academic commentary has been written in retrospect about the cultural impact of Sydney Olympic Games, aside from eight journal articles written for *Media International Australia* (November 2000). Only five of these articles address briefly the role of women at the Games. Three of these articles, written by Greenfield and Williams; Powell; and Sinclair and Wilson (2000), provide evidence to disprove Toohey and Veal's (2000) assumption that non-performance-related portrayals of female athletes harm the status of women in sport. *Media in Australia* contributors Greenfield and Williams (2000, p.53) highlight the many articles, emphasising both athletic performance *and* physical appearance, that promoted female athletes at the Sydney Olympics as an essential ingredient to the event's success:

The flood of stories about [Cathy] Freeman ... swimmer Susie O'Neill, as well as the focus on American track and field star Marion Jones, and in a different vein the flight of Marie-Jose Perec, along with reporting a host of winning performances and medals to Australian women, all combined to make it 'women who ... captured the sporting imagination' Or Paul Kent's contribution about runner Melinda Gainsford-Taylor: 'In her sunny way she is cultivating the Australian public and all are being wooed by the blond ponytail and dimples.' (Greenfield and Williams, 2000, p.53).

These examples indicate that women's sport, like any reporting, is assigned news values and is thus subjected to the hierarchical process of news production and dissemination. The concept of news values has been defined and explored by a

number of media scholars, including Creedon (1994), Jones and Jones (1999), Masterton (1998), and White (1998), and is exemplified here by van Dijk (1988, p.119): "The notion of news value has often been used to explain the selection of news items, their chances of being published, or the actual formulation of news." Women competing at the Sydney Olympics were seen to be worthy of gaining press exposure through various news values, such as success, profile, proximity, drama and appearance. The news value of female Olympians at Sydney will be explored further throughout this thesis.

Media in Australia contributors Powell (2000) and Sinclair and Wilson (2000) also demonstrate how public portrayals of female athletes at the Sydney Olympics proved to enhance their position in sport culture. Sinclair and Wilson (2000, p.7) explain that Australian female athletes had an uplifting influence on the Australian media and public's attitudes towards hosting the Olympic Games, during both the opening ceremony and the subsequent competition:

The media treatment in Australia seemed to fall into three broad stages: the sceptical, the euphoric and the post-climactic It was really the arrival of the Olympic flame which began the transition to the second phase [euphoric] ... with its triumphant foregrounding of the themes of national reconciliation and the achievements of women Olympians So great was the euphoria sustained over the next two weeks that it seemed the media never wanted it to end. (Sinclair & Wilson, p.7)

This view that the public's awareness of female athletes throughout the Sydney Olympics helped to foster their positive perceptions of sport – and women in sport – is supported by Powell, who illustrates the spectators' perspective:

We roared even louder, though our throats were choked with emotion, when our very own women Olympians, in celebration of 100 years of women in the Olympics, passed the flame from one legend to another. (Powell, 2000, p.86)

Greenfield and Williams; Powell; and Sinclair and Wilson (2000) each conveyed in their articles their own interpretations of the concluding torch relay of Australian female Olympians at Sydney's opening ceremony. None of the authors, however, fully explained the significance of the honour, nor its possible implications for the media's portrayal and the public's perceptions of the role of female athletes in

Olympic history. One aim of this thesis is to assess whether the opening ceremony's acknowledgement of the centenary of women's Olympic participation had any influence on Australian press reporting.

In returning to the arguments of scholars such as Toohey and Veal (2000), who see the press representations of sportswomen as problematic, there is one particular historical example of press misrepresentation, which is often used by sport academics to demonstrate how the media have had a negative impact on women's status in sport. After the first 800-metre athletics race for women was run at the Olympic Games in 1928, its participants, despite showing little evidence of fatigue, were described by the press as "knocked out and hysterical females floundering all over the place" (in Phillips, 1996, p.36). Consequentially many authors, including Blue (1988); DeFrantz (1997); Phillips (1996) and Toohey and Veal (2000), see the 1928 press as the primary antagonist to the acceptance of women in sport, as it encouraged prolonged restrictions to the Olympic programme for female athletes. The press reportage of this incident, according to DeFrantz (1997, p.20) "effectively prevented women from competing in any race longer than 200 metres in the Olympic Games for the next 32 years."

The 1928 women's 800-metre race is an important example to help readers understand the obstacles sportswomen have battled to overcome in the past, however, it should now be noted that 72 years later at the Sydney Olympics the media's stance had fundamentally shifted. It celebrated, rather than antagonised, female athletes' feats in distance events, especially the women's marathon – introduced for women in 1984. Australian journalists heralded Sydney's women's marathon winner, Naoko Takahashi, of Japan, as having run "one of the greatest men's or women's marathons ever" (Duffield, 2000, p.10), giving an indication of the more positive role today's press has in the portrayal of women in sport.

The above examples show how we can look to the present to rethink popular assumptions about press representations of women in sport. They also indicate how representations of female Olympians at the Sydney Olympics in 2000 have changed since the 1988 and 1992 Olympics, when an increasing quantity of reports about female Olympians began to emerge (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). Kane and Greendorfer, in their chapter written for *Women, Media and Sport*, edited by Creedon (1994), described this early advance in Olympic press coverage of women as

“represent[ing] a modernized attempt to reinforce traditional stereotyped images of femininity and female sexuality” (1994, p.28). While this thesis will examine how this type of Olympic reporting has changed, it will not be able to assess whether everyday representations of sportswomen have improved – although it is assumed that they have.

Australian author Stell (1991) and Canadian author Robinson (1997), in their texts solely dedicated to women in sport, notice a large difference between the everyday reporting of sportswomen and the reporting of sportswomen during major international events like the Olympics, as exemplified by Stell (1991, p.232):

Except at times of ... Commonwealth and Olympic Games, Wimbledon or golf championships (when the deeds of swimmers, athletes, tennis players and golfers were too difficult to ignore) women disappeared from the sporting pages.

These are generally quantitative observations, but authors who have qualitatively studied press representations of sportswomen at non-Olympic times do not draw on comparisons with representations at Olympic times. In analysing the content of media reports about women's sports and sportswomen, authors published throughout the last twenty years, including Duncan and Messner (1998), Dyer (1982), and Wilson (1997), have expressed their concerns about particular language used by journalists to describe female athletes. Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson (1997) identify three problematic types of labels commonly used, “gender markers”, “infantilisation” and first names, when referring to female athletes (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.180-1; Wilson, 1997, p.44). The question to be asked here is how sensitive is the public – and the athletes, for that matter – to these labels, or are they now simply taken for granted? Many female leagues and teams take the prefix of “Women's” or “Ladies” voluntarily, many female athletes refer to their teammates as “girls” (as can be seen in the athletes' interview responses in this thesis), and since the 2000 Olympics the name “Cathy” has become synonymous with our national sporting hero Cathy Freeman.

These labels are seen to be less offensive than other uses of language identified by the listed authors, which include repetitive references to appearance, sexuality or sex-role stereotypes (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.182-3; Dyer, 1982, p.105; Wilson, 1997, pp.44-5), and the emphasis of “weak descriptors” in women's

reports as opposed to the “strong descriptors” used in men’s reports (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.175). The latter problematic use of language is seen less often at the present, particularly in women’s tennis which is now characterised by powerful competitors like Serena and Venus Williams. The presence of these flaws outlined above in the press reportage of female Olympians at Sydney will be discussed further in the section on qualitative research findings in this thesis.

The greatest of all concerns, however, is that women’s achievements are too often ignored completely by the daily press. In the same book in which Bryson (1989, p.21) dismisses women’s association with sport, Menzies (1989, p.220) conversely argues that women’s sport is important to society and “in a country like Australia, where sport is so important, and where the media **do** decide attitudes, the value of women’s sport winning a place in the media can’t be over emphasised [emphasis in original].” This thesis intends to support Menzies’ statement.

Few texts published about women in sport have drawn directly on athletes’ personal perspectives about their experiences in sport and the media, as this thesis proposes to do. Mitchell and Dyer (1985) did allow Australian female athletes to contribute chapters to their text, and of these athletes Dawn Fraser and Raelene Boyle spoke about the media. Fraser, speaking of one of her world record achievements in 1956, highlighted the role of the press as a supplement to the atmosphere of her event, and to the momentousness of her achievement: “I really had to read the newspapers to find out what I had done, and what it all meant” (in Mitchell & Dyer, 1985, p.26). Boyle, on the other hand, expressed her dissatisfaction with the way she was negatively characterised by the press: “I don’t like the killer image that the press has always given of me – the aggressive, killer, nasty person” (in Mitchell & Dyer, 1985, p.43). Other texts, including Blue (1988), Gordon (1994) and Phillips (1996), have also allowed female athletes to speak of their experiences in sport, but few references are made to their portrayals in the press. Since the Atlanta Olympics there has been very little written academically allowing today’s female athletes to convey their views about the current status of women’s sport in contemporary culture.

This study will give both athletes and sport journalists a forum in which they can convey their thoughts and opinions about the representations of female Olympians in the Australian press. There are few academic texts available to

demonstrate sports journalists personal perspectives, explaining ways by which they prioritise and present their information. Helen Menzies was a prominent spokesperson for female sports journalists in the 1980s, and her work is featured in two women's sport texts compiled by Dyer (1985; 1989). The first details her own experiences as a sports journalist for an Australian newspaper (1985, pp.177-191), and the second draws on a questionnaire of Australian newspapers' sport departments on their allocation of press space to women's sport and the number of female sports journalists working at their newspapers full-time (1989, pp.220-231).

There is now an increasing number of authors who have analysed the changing role of the sports journalist, including sports journalist for the EFE Agency, Natalia Arriaga (1997), and sports journalist for *The West Australian*, David Marsh (1998). They believe contemporary press reporting demands a more athlete-oriented and analytical approach, as media like television and the Internet can now provide a more instant and illustrative coverage of sporting events (Arriaga, 1997, p.46; Marsh, 1998, p.5). Marsh, Arriaga and other authors (Cashman, 1998; Rowe, 1999; Stoddart, 1986) have also highlighted the growing pressure on sports journalists to improve their knowledge of the sports they are covering in order to produce more superior quality articles about athletes and events. Criticisms of sports journalists will be detailed further in the research findings section of this thesis relating to interviews with local sports journalists.

In conclusion, past research has found that there has been a substantial increase in women's sporting participation since the early 1980s, yet this has not been reflected in the press in the day-to-day reporting of sport. The only time researchers notice these higher participation rates being reflected in press coverage of women's sport is during Olympic competition. At Olympic times female athletes are given a more prominent place in the press due to the news values believed to be accorded to them at that sporting event. Unfortunately, sportswomen are not seen to be as newsworthy at non-Olympic times, and Australian and international authors focus mostly on this lack of day-to-day coverage. However, in contemporary times the least preferred way to address this situation would be to adopt a standpoint, similar to Bryson (1989) and Toohey and Veal (2000), that blames sport, men and the media for the misrepresentation of women in sport. Instead, we must rethink the current status of women in sport in light of new evidence, shown through the analysis

of Olympic reportage from Atlanta and Sydney, that media – and global – attitudes towards sportswomen are changing for the better.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Two types of data are central to the analysis of press representations of female athletes at the Sydney Olympics: newspaper material and interviews with several of the subjects (athletes) and creators (journalists) of that material. This requires the study to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research involving the use of four Australian newspapers, and interviews with five female athletes and four sports journalists who attended the 2000 Games. The newspaper material is utilised for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, whilst the interviews are assessed qualitatively only.

Both local Western Australian newspapers, *The West Australian* (Fairfax-based Olympic coverage) and *The Sunday Times* (News Limited) were chosen for analysis due to their availability and direct association with the proposed locally based interviewees. *Sydney Morning Herald* (Fairfax) was selected because of its immediate proximity to the 2000 Games, and also *The Australian* (News Limited) newspaper was included for its representation of news with the most national relevance. *The Sunday Times* gave full coverage to events held on Saturdays which did not always appear in the three dailies.

Articles printed between September 16, 2000 and October 2, 2000 were selected for analysis, as this time period covered all reporting of the Sydney Olympic competition and other Olympic Games-related articles and photographs published during the Sydney Games.

Each newspaper's Olympic coverage was presented differently and this has to be considered, especially in the quantitative element of analysis in which the amount of press coverage given to female athletes at the Sydney Games will be calculated. Both *The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times* had liftouts which consisted entirely of Olympic coverage, but also included Olympic reports in their main newspapers, whereas *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian's* Olympic

coverage was kept completely separate from their main newspapers. *Sydney Morning Herald* issued three editions of its newspaper each weekday, however only its morning edition is used in the analysis.

Data collected from transcripts of the interviews will be evaluated qualitatively and compared with the content of the selected newspaper articles in order to establish the relationships and conflicts existing between the athletes' interviews, the sports journalists' interviews and the newspaper copy. This technique of qualitative analysis, according to McCracken (1988, p.19), is known as the "matching process".

The concept of news values will play an important part in the evaluation of both the quantitative and qualitative data. News values will be drawn upon in all four aspects of the research, to discuss why particular athletes received more press attention than others, and to assess the factors which determined how articles written about female athletes were placed in the newspapers. A criteria of news values, found to be most frequently accorded to female athletes at the Sydney Olympics, will then be identified in the discussion of findings. This method is drawn from Masterton (1998, pp.85-103), who devised a set criteria of news values accorded to general news stories based on a survey of journalists from around the world. Other authors (Jones & Jones, 1999; van Dijk, 1988; White, 1998) have similarly developed news value criteria in their analyses of journalistic processes.

The four following subheadings outline the research questions central to this thesis, and explain the methods used in gathering the information to answer these questions and form a basis for comparison.

How much coverage did sportswomen receive during the Sydney Olympics? A quantitative analysis.

Researchers who incorporate quantitative analysis in their studies do so with an aim to gain specific and accurate understandings of the statistical implications of their chosen topics. Much previous research on women's sport in the Australian press has involved the use of quantitative analysis to determine how much media exposure is given to sportswomen in respective mediums over selected periods of time. The Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women (1985), Stoddart (1994), and Phillips' (1997) studies were conducted over two-week periods of

selected Olympic years – excluding the Olympic competition itself – being 1980 and 1984, 1992, and 1996 respectively. Mikosza (1997) used a different approach, evaluating the press coverage of women during the two-week period of the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996, and the same two-week period in 1997, a non-Olympic year. These studies all use a similar methodology, which is explained in the quantitative research findings, but this differs from the methodology employed in this thesis.

The use of quantitative analysis in this study will show what proportion of the total space allocated to the Sydney Olympic Games in the Australian newspapers selected for analysis included women. In order to calculate the coverage of women's sports and athletes at the Sydney Games two categories of coverage were identified:

1. Text and photographs of female athletes or teams and women's Olympic events;
2. Other (Text and photographs of male athletes or teams, men's Olympic events and miscellaneous Olympic content).

Thus, the intention of this method of research and analysis is not to provide a basis for contrasting women's and men's Olympic coverage, but to demonstrate the extent of Australian press coverage representing female athletes during a contemporary international sporting event.

The textual space allocated to each category will be calculated by counting individual paragraphs, which includes paragraphs within all articles and news briefs. There are many instances in which sport articles are mixed in nature. At the Olympics, for example, rowing and sailing articles usually covered more than one division, class or gender's event due to the space restrictions imposed on those particular sports in the newspapers. There is never a case by which all of a newspaper's sports reports have exclusively female, male or miscellaneous content, therefore content within individual paragraphs provides a more detailed indication of the coverage present. This is considered to be a fairer method than a more generalising one used by other authors, who estimate that 30% of every mixed sport article is female content.

It is also appropriate to devise a method of categorising photographs in order to estimate the proportion of pictures to particular pages. The three basic categories

of picture types are small, medium and large. As a guide to the researcher, pictures were estimated in relevance to the size of the newspaper text: i.e. small is approximately one column by one paragraph or less; medium, one to three columns by two to three paragraphs; and large, three or more columns by four or more paragraphs. Pictorial percentages will also be calculated without dividing the pictures into size categories.

In the occasional instance where female athletes and male athletes or others share one paragraph or one photograph they would be counted as one paragraph or one photograph in each category.

The resultant data from each newspaper is tabled separately to assist the researcher in calculating the total press coverage allocated to women and other content and comparing each newspapers' space allocation of their Olympic coverage.

How do press representations compare with athletes' personal experiences at the Sydney Olympics? Qualitative interviews.

The second focus of the research draws on qualitative interviews with a selection of five Australian female athletes who competed at the Sydney Olympics. McCracken (1988, p.9) explains the purpose of the qualitative interview is "to step into the mind of another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves." In this case, the athletes were asked to provide insights into events represented in the newspapers from their own perspective based on their personal experiences at the Sydney Olympics, and conveyed their feelings and opinions about the reportage of Australian female Olympians during the Sydney Games.

The athletes selected range from first-time to experienced Olympians competing in individual, pairs and team sports; established, new and newer Olympic sports. The athletes approached, who all agreed to participate in the study, were hockey gold medallist (1988, 1996 and 2000) Rechelle Hawkes, beach volleyball bronze (1996) and gold medallist (2000) Kerri Pottharst, sailing gold medallist (2000) Belinda Stowell, water polo gold medallist (2000) Danielle Woodhouse, and Australian Olympic swim team member Jennifer Reilly. All of these athletes currently reside or have resided in Western Australia. Pottharst and Stowell are now based in New South Wales and therefore were interviewed by telephone, while Hawkes, Reilly and Woodhouse were each interviewed in-person.

Before the interviews were to be conducted it was necessary to read articles – printed in the chosen newspapers – the athletes would have been likely to have read or seen in order to be familiar with some of the points that may have arisen in the interview situations.

Nine interview questions (Appendix A) were constructed for the athletes' interviews focusing on their feelings about the role of Australian women in the opening ceremony and its influence on Olympic reporting, the press coverage of themselves and other Australian women during the Sydney Games, how they believe articles about female athletes are constructed, and the differences between coverage of women's sport at Olympic and non-Olympic times. A separate, concluding question allowed the respondents to comment on aspects of the topic they felt were not addressed in the main interview questions.

What factors did journalists consider when constructing articles on women's sport at the 2000 Olympics? Qualitative interviews.

In order to add a further dimension to the study of public and private perceptions of press representations of female athletes at the Sydney Olympics, four sports journalists from *The West Australian*, whose articles were also used by Fairfax newspapers, including *Sydney Morning Herald*, during the Games, were also interviewed. This 'behind-the-scenes' approach intended to demonstrate actual thought processes behind Australian journalists' prioritisation of women's sports reports at an Olympic Games.

With the aim to limit the study to a few specific sports for the core analysis, the researcher tried to choose sports journalists who covered the sports in which the athlete interviewees competed. The Olympic sports reporters matching this criteria who were available to be interviewed were hockey writer Gené Stephan, sailing writer Steve Lague and swimming writer Bevan Eakins. As *The West Australian* had no water polo or beach volleyball journalists in attendance at the Sydney Olympics, cycling writer David Marsh was chosen as the fourth interviewee due to his experience as an Olympic journalist and his background in the field of media studies.

The athletes were asked to provide opinions regarding how they thought journalists treated news stories about female Olympians and assessed the influences and preferences that shaped the press coverage during the Games. The sports

journalists were correspondingly asked to explain what actually occurred in the selection and construction of their own reports, and agree or disagree they were influenced in any way by certain factors like the acknowledgement of women at the opening ceremony.

While this study does not intend to compare the treatment of female and male athletes in the press, the journalists were asked to comment on any similarities or differences they believed were evident between women's and men's Olympic reports as this must be considered as a possible factor in the prioritisation of coverage. Similarly to the athletes, the journalists were also asked which female athletes received more press attention than others and what implications the Olympic occasion had for the coverage of women's sports.

The journalists were asked only five questions (Appendix B), plus a separate concluding question allowing the journalists to add any further comments.

How were Australia's women athletes portrayed by the national press? A qualitative media textual analysis.

The fourth section of analysis will focus on language used by sports journalists from the selected newspapers to describe Australian female athletes competing at the Sydney Olympics. This qualitative media textual analysis will be based on a method used by Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson (1997) in their comparative analyses of television coverage of women's and men's sporting events in America in 1990 and 1994. While Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson (1997) applied their methodology to a different medium in another country, the language categories they identified are applicable to press representations of female athletes in Australia.

Three of Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson's (1997) language categories will be used to compare these authors' findings with treatment of Australian female athletes in the selected newspapers' Olympic coverage. The first draws on references to strengths and weaknesses (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.175; Wilson, 1997, p.44), and reasons attributed to successes and failures (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.177-9). The second will be used to assess whether female athletes are labelled in accordance with these authors' findings. This category specifically looks at uses of "gender marking", "infantilisation" and first names to refer to

sportswomen (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.180-1; Wilson, 1997, p.44). The third category examines the “sexualisation” of female athletes through use of language, identifying reports which emphasise athletes’ appearances, sexuality and gender roles (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.182-3; Wilson, 1997, p.45).

This thesis will aim to find examples, in the Sydney Olympic reports, of language these authors believe to be typically used to describe female athletes and their performances. Furthermore, this thesis will seek to contrast with Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson’s (1997) findings, by detecting incidences where sports journalists used supposedly male-oriented terms in their reporting of female athletes at Sydney.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Section One: Quantitative Analysis of Women's Olympic Coverage

As explained in the section on methodology, the Olympic coverage of women's, men's and general newspaper articles and photographs were initially studied quantitatively. The results of this quantitative analysis aims to indicate the amount of textual and pictorial space allocated to all female Olympians – national and international – within four Australian newspapers' – *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The West Australian*, and *The Sunday Times* – Olympic coverage.

The newspapers' coverage came in two different formats, with *The West Australian* and *The Sunday Times* each featuring both Olympic liftout supplements and Olympic articles within their main newspapers, and *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald* each producing separate liftout supplements only.

The general outcome of this research shows that female athletes and women's Olympic events fared well textually and pictorially in all of the selected newspapers during the Sydney Games in comparison with the non-Olympic coverage of women's sport.

Past Analyses of Women's Sport Coverage in Australian Newspapers

Past research has highlighted the Olympic Games' impact on the coverage of female athletes in Australian newspapers. *Inching Forward*, a research report compiled by Womensport Australia (Mikosza, 1997), is the most recent study of Australian daily newspapers' allocation of women's sport coverage. Unlike preceding Australian research reports (Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women, 1985; Stoddart, 1992; Phillips, 1996), *Inching Forward* did not only calculate percentages of women's sport coverage during a non-Olympic period, it also analysed the two-week period of the Atlanta Olympic Games.

Inching Forward's analysis included pictorial coverage, but excluded gender-neutral sport stories. Using a different method from the one used in this thesis, Mikosza (1997) calculated the overall newspaper coverage of female athletes by taking exact percentages of articles written exclusively about women's sport, and adding these to a 30% portion of mixed sport articles they had estimated as having female content. This is assumed to be a less precise method than one involving the counting of individual female-related paragraphs within both women's and mixed sport reports. However, both methods of research arrive at similar outcomes. *Inching Forward* forms a base for comparison between Olympic and non-Olympic coverage which reveals press exposure given to female athletes increases significantly when Olympic Games are held.

In keeping consistent with this research, percentages calculated by Mikosza (1997), representing *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* and *The West Australian's* coverage (they did not include *The Sunday Times*) during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and a similar two-week non-Olympic period in 1997, will be used to demonstrate the extent of this difference. (The following percentages are my calculations, using the above methodology to add together exclusive women's content and women's content estimated within mixed sport articles.)

At the Atlanta Games in 1996, *Sydney Morning Herald* led the three dailies in its coverage of women with 38.3%. The national daily, *The Australian*, came a close second with 38% women's coverage, and *The West Australian's* female content was slightly lower at 36.2% (Mikosza, 1997, p.6). When the same two-week period was reviewed the following year in 1997, *The Australian's* women's sport-related coverage was the greatest of the three newspapers. However, with 8.7% (p.13), it was proven to be a poor representation of women's sporting events in comparison with press exposure given to female athletes by the same newspaper during the Atlanta Games. *Sydney Morning Herald* (8.4%) and *The West Australian* (6.7%) similarly showed a significant decline in their coverage of female athletes since the 1996 Olympics (p.13).

While the non-Olympic coverage of women's sport in 1997 seems meagre, it is, in fact, an improvement on past studies' findings. In 1992, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian* and *The West Australian* respectively allocated 3.5%, 5.1% and 6% of their sport coverage to women (Stoddart, 1992, p.3), and eight years

earlier in 1984 their figures were even lower at 1.8%, 3.05% and 1.2% (Australian Sports Commission and Office of the Status of Women, 1985, p.105).

While these past studies chose to couple textual and pictorial coverage of women in their analyses, these elements of coverage will be analysed separately in this thesis.

Analysis of Textual Allocation in the Sydney Olympic Coverage

Textual coverage totals in this research on the Sydney Olympics were calculated by counting individual paragraphs within articles and newsbriefs. Results pages were not included in the assessment of coverage.

Of the four newspapers, *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted the greatest amount of paragraphs (20,758) to the Sydney Olympics from Saturday September 16 to Monday October 2, 2000. This underlines *Sydney Morning Herald's* position as being the host city's broadsheet newspaper. In contrast, Australia's national newspaper, *The Australian*, only allocated approximately half of this total (10,809 paragraphs) to its Olympic coverage. Furthest away from the action in Australia, *The West Australian* again only had half of *The Australian's* coverage at 5,551 paragraphs. *The Sunday Times*, in its three issues, provided 2,697 paragraphs of Olympic-related text, and stands out as being remarkably consistent in its allocation of coverage to female athletes throughout the Sydney Olympics.

These coverage totals were divided into two categories for analysis, the first including female content and the second excluding female content (male or miscellaneous Olympic content).

Local and international women competing at Australia's 'home' Olympics gained a rise in press recognition, just as they had in 1996 during the Atlanta Games. Almost a third or more textual space out of the selected newspapers' entire Sydney Olympic coverage – including non-gender-related Olympic news stories – was allocated to female athletes (Appendix C).

The percentages calculated in this study are similar to those estimated in *Inching Forward* (Mikosza, 1997). The outcome of this analysis, however, observes a reverse trend to Womensport Australia's findings in regard to the three daily newspapers' standings. This time, *The West Australian's* Olympic coverage

contained the largest portion of female athlete-related text (39.6%) of the three daily newspapers. *The Australian* was again in second place with 36.4%. However, conversely to *Inching Forward's* Atlanta Olympic coverage findings, *Sydney Morning Herald* had the least portion of female-related paragraphs in 2000 at less than one third (32.2%) of its total Sydney Olympic coverage. This result is another reminder of the Sydney broadsheet's role as a local informant for people within the host city, carrying many non-athletes related Olympic stories. *The Sunday Times*, the fourth newspaper included in this study, allocated 38.2% of its Olympic coverage to female athletes, resultantly placing the Western Australian press' coverage of female Olympians above the nationally and easterly circulated newspapers' coverage.

Breaking down the results of the paragraph analysis day-by-day (Figure 1.; Appendix C) reveals that female athletes received an even better coverage on particular days during the Olympic period.

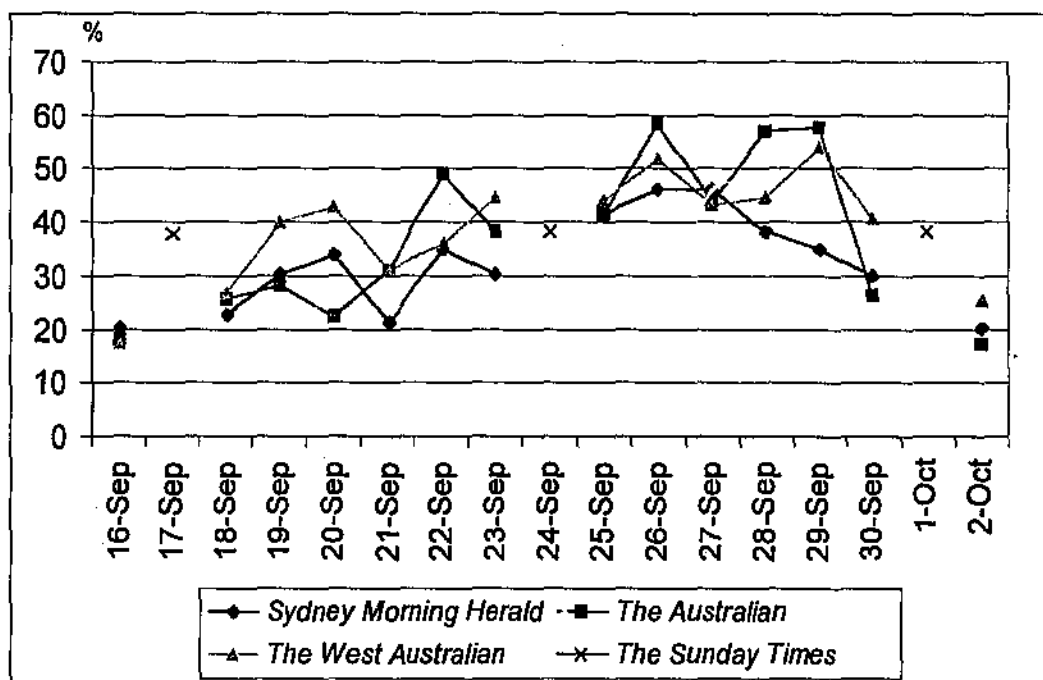


Figure 1. Daily percentages of female athletes' textual coverage

In both *The Australian* and *The West Australian* newspapers, women were allocated more than 50% of these newspapers' textual Olympic coverage on at least two days of competition. These high-coverage days all occurred in the second week of Olympic competition, with the greatest percentages being recorded in *The*

Australian on Tuesday September 26 (58.5%) and in *The West Australian* on Friday September 29 (54.2%).

Many significant women's events and incidents, involving national and international female athletes, were reported on these two days. September 26 was the day after Cathy Freeman won her much-anticipated 400m race in athletics, the women's beach volleyball pair of Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook won gold, Russian-born Australian Tatiana Grigorieva surprised for silver in the pole vault and the Australian women's hockey team qualified for their event's gold medal match. *The Australian's* emphasis of successful Australian women on the day it most extensively covered female Olympians, highlights two important news values, which rate even higher when combined, being proximity and success. Had these athletes failed in their attempts to succeed for Australia, the allocation of space to women in *The Australian* would most likely have been well under 50%.

Two international women, who made headlines on September 26, were involved in drug scandals. The first revelation was of US sprint star Marion Jones' husband, CJ Hunter, who had tested positive to steroids. The second was Romanian gold-medal gymnast Andreea Raducan, who had tested positive to pseudoephedrine after taking a banned cold medication. These incidences, in contrast with the Australian examples, underlined the news value of controversy. In this case, the negative implications these drug scandals had on the reputations of two high-profile international athletes proved to be influential on *The Australian's* allocation of coverage to women.

September 29 recollected a day of drama for female athletes when Australian Jane Saville was disqualified from the women's 20km walk and Andreea Raducan's appeal to reverse her drugs charge, which revoked her individual gymnastics gold medal, was denied. The tragic unfolding of these incidences was accented in *The West Australian*, suggesting the news value of drama largely contributed to the newspaper's extensive coverage of female athletes on this day. Australian female athletes had again enjoyed success the day before, with women's sailing pair winning gold in the 470-class, and Australian women won bronze in the inaugural synchronised diving event. The addition of proximity and success to the news value of drama therefore lifted *The West Australian's* coverage of female athletes to over 50% of its total Olympic coverage on this day.

Sydney Morning Herald and *The Sunday Times* also published the greatest portion of female-related paragraphs on days in the second week of competition. On Wednesday September 27, the day US and Australian sprint stars Marion Jones and Cathy Freeman were set to contest the 200m race. Based on both women's high profiles and successes in earlier events, this rivalry helped boost *Sydney Morning Herald's* coverage of female athletes to 46.3% of its total Olympic coverage. Jones was also still in the spotlight on September 27 due to her husband's drugs predicament.

The Sunday Times recorded its largest percentage at the beginning of week two's competition on September 24 (38.4%), the day after the Australian women's water polo team took gold in their inaugural Olympic competition. The background behind water polo team's inclusion into the Olympic Games made their triumph highly reportable as both a human interest and success story. The expectation of Marion Jones to win five gold medals in Sydney was another feature of *The Sunday Times'* coverage of women, after Jones took gold in her first race on Saturday.

In all of the newspapers, the days with the least textual and (almost always) pictorial coverage of female athletes coincided with either the opening or closing ceremonies. Few sporting events occurred on ceremony days, with the newspapers publishing mostly previews on the day after the opening ceremony (September 16), and reviews of some events on the day after the closing ceremony (October 2). Most Olympic content published on September 16 (and September 17 in *The Sunday Times*) focussed on the opening ceremony's cultural acknowledgement of indigenous peoples – including Cathy Freeman's lighting of the Olympic cauldron – and symbols of Australianness, with some reference to the concluding torch relay of female Olympians.

Excluding ceremonies, the findings again showed that the days with the least female textual representation varied between the selected newspapers, and in this case all occurred in the first week of competition.

On Thursday September 21, *Sydney Morning Herald* recorded the lowest percentage of women's content (21.4%) of the four newspapers. Reports on this day featured the surprise success of Australian archer Simon Fairweather, and Russell Mark's silver medal for Australia in shooting. Dutch swimmers Pieter van den Hoogenband and Inge de Bruijn continued their dominance of the swimming

competition, but on this day van den Hoogenband, along with other successful international male swimmers, received more press recognition for his achievements than his female compatriot. With Australians having been upset in swimming and softball, and other team events being in progress, women were altogether allocated less coverage on September 21. However, several general Olympic issues relevant to the local public, visitors and Olympic volunteers, referring to drugs, scalpers and celebrities, received a large portion of coverage in *Sydney Morning Herald* on this day.

Coverage of female athletes was similarly low at 22.3% in *The Australian* on Wednesday September 20. High-profile Australian swimmer Susie O'Neill had celebrated her gold medal win the day before, but her success was outnumbered two-to-one by Australia's men's swimming relay team and all-male equestrian team who had also won gold medals. International women did not feature prominently in *The Australian's* coverage on September 20. *The Australian* did pay attention to several general Olympic issues and news stories, such as the hijacking of an official Games car by a local prison escapee. The emphasis of this general issue in particular highlights national anxieties about the safety of 'our' Olympics, and how any threat to its security would be considered highly newsworthy.

The West Australian's lowest percentage, at 26.6%, was found to have occurred on Monday September 18. Again, an Australian male athlete, shooter Michael Diamond, took the headlines after winning a gold medal the day before. Annemarie Forder, also a shooter, had been the only successful Australian female athlete in a medal-deciding event, winning an unexpected bronze medal. Dutch swimmer Inge de Bruijn had begun her dominance of the women's swimming competition with a world record and her first gold medal. Her exceptional performance also attracted media attention, but other female athletes were not able to enhance the coverage of women any further on this day through their performances. Cultural debate and feedback regarding the opening ceremony boosted non-gender-related coverage in *The West Australian* on this Monday, and this was extended throughout the first week of competition.

The Sunday Times stands out as being quite unique in this study due to its remarkably consistent allocation of textual coverage to female athletes. While only three issues of *The Sunday Times* were released during the Olympic period, they each

included between 38% (September 17) to 38.4% (September 24) women's sport content. So although September 17 had only 0.4% less coverage than September 24, it still resultants in *The Sunday Times* 'lowest day of coverage for women. There were, however, two noticeable differences in the achievements of Australia's female and male athletes reported on September 17 which may have influenced this. There were 'upsets' in women's triathlon and cycling, in which highly fancied Australians Michellie Jones and Michelle Ferris took silver medals, and triumphs in the men's events with swimmer Ian Thorpe, the Australian men's swimming relay team each winning gold medals. Despite this, *The Sunday Times* maintained their 38% average on this day due to their well-rounded reportage of women's sports, including archery, basketball, volleyball and soccer, regardless of Australian participation, results or stages in progress. Allowed only three editions in which to cover Olympic action, *The Sunday Times* therefore found value in diversity and this contributed greatly to its consistency in text allocation.

Analysis of Pictorial Allocation in the Sydney Olympic Coverage

Female athletes at the Sydney Games also received a high portion of pictorial coverage in the selected newspapers (Appendix D), with the highest being in *The Sunday Times* at an average of 41.5% (125 of the total 301 pictures). Allocating similar portions of pictorial space to women were *The Australian*, which featured 419 pictures of female athletes out of its total of 1,064 (39.4%) and *The West Australian*, which had 239 pictures of women out of its total of 632 (37.8%). Again, *Sydney Morning Herald* allocated the least amount of pictorial space to women (33.3%), with 403 of 1,211 photographs published in this newspaper being of female athletes.

Turning to daily analysis (Figure 2.; Appendix D), only one of the four newspapers' highest allocation of pictorial space coincided with the day it allocated the most textual space to women, and this was *The Sunday Times*. Again on September 24, *The Sunday Times* allocated its greatest amount of pictorial coverage to women, but at 51% (46 out of 90) this was a higher percentage than its textual allocation. It should be remembered that the pages of this newspaper, like its western counterpart *The West Australian*, measure smaller than the national and eastern broadsheets and this usually only allows for either text or image to be emphasised.

Both Australian and international women featured prominently in images printed in *The Sunday Times* on September 24. As in the featuring articles on the Australian women's water polo gold, US sprinter Marion Jones' first gold and swimming reviews, many of the photographs in this newspaper signified success. However, a different type of image was used twice, firstly showing exceptional victories in which a Belarussian rower won her gold medal race by 0.01 of a second, and secondly of a Russian synchronised diving team who scored perfect tens in their winning performance. This highlights the news value of extraordinary circumstance which sometimes defines crucial moments in sport.

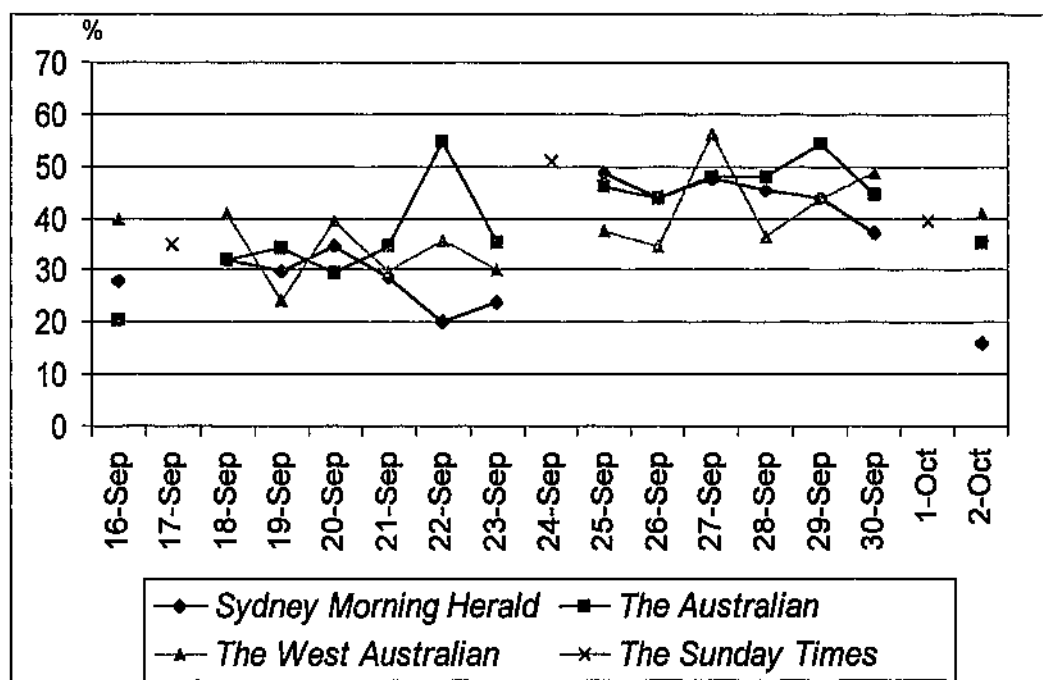


Figure 2. Daily percentages of female athletes' pictorial coverage

On Wednesday September 27, *The West Australian* printed 23 photographs of women out of its total of 41, giving it the highest single-day percentage at 56.1%. The pictorial emphasis given to women on this day by *The West* was due to similar reasons as *Sydney Morning Herald's* textual emphasis of female athletes on the 27th, being the imminence of Cathy Freeman versus Marion Jones in the 200m. *The West Australian* laid out most of its images of Freeman and Jones in pairs, emphasising the significance of this high-profile rivalry in accompaniment to the textual build-up to their event.

Sydney Morning Herald's pictorial coverage of women was never over 50% of its total coverage. It did reach 48.8% on Monday September 25, the day Cathy Freeman prepared to race in the 400m, as did the beach volleyballers for their gold medal match, and the Australian women's water polo team celebrated their own victory. This edition of *Sydney Morning Herald* also recalled Japanese athlete Naoko Takahashi's record-breaking marathon in a pictorial montage which accentuated both the difficult course Takahashi conquered in her victory and the picturesque Sydney skyline in front of which the marathon took place. This emphasis of these images again underlined *Sydney Morning Herald's* proximity to the Olympic city.

Unlike the textual allocation of space, the days of greatest pictorial coverage of female athletes did not all occur in the second week of competition. *The Australian* featured its highest total of women's sport pictures on Friday September 22. On this day its percentage was 54.8% (34 out of 62 pictures). This can be explained by the sudden departure of Cathy Freeman's 400m rival, Frenchwoman Marie-Jose Perec, the day before, which incited a flurry of photographic illustrations of Perec's actions and Freeman's reactions in *The Australian*. In striking contrast, *Sydney Morning Herald's* lowest percentage (20.2%) also occurred on Friday September 22 when it published only 16 pictures of women out of a total 79 photographs. While *The Australian* chose to play out the melodramatic unfolding of Perec's departure pictorially, *Sydney Morning Herald* instead chose to emphasise significant (male athletes') events taking place in competition, with the success of Australian men in cycling and the rivalry between 1500m swimmers Grant Hackett and Kieren Perkins.

The Australian's least amount of pictorial coverage of women (24.9%) was consistent with its lowest allocation of textual coverage to women, as both occurred on Wednesday September 20. With the exceptions of Susie O'Neill's swimming gold, women's events did not command as much textual or pictorial space on this day as the men's events. *The Sunday Times* also published its fewest pictures of women (35.1%) on the same day it published its least amount of paragraphs about women, September 17. In this issue, a great portion of pictorial space was allocated to successful Australian male swimmers and the opening ceremony. Pictures of women were mostly of Australian athletes, in many cases showing them being

defeated by international women (i.e. the triathlon). This observation simply demonstrates that the success generally overrides defeat in news allocation.

Unlike the other selected newspapers, *The West Australian's* ultimately lowest women's pictorial percentage did not occur in a ceremony-related edition of its newspaper, but on a day of competition. On Tuesday September 19 it published only 13 pictures of women out of a total 54 photographs (24.1%). This was the day after Ian Thorpe had been upset by Dutch swimmer Pieter van den Hoogenband for gold and breaststroker Leisel Jones won a silver medal in the women's event. The pictorial emphasis in this newspaper was noticeably on depictions of the Olympic occasion, illustrating the Games atmosphere both in Sydney and, away from the action, in Perth – where spectators could watch events on a large screen in Forrest Place.

As outlined in the methodology section of this thesis, the pictures were also divided into three types, or categories, for analysis (Appendix E). These categories were small, medium and large. In *The West Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the most frequently published photographs of female athletes were of a medium size, or approximately one to three columns by two to three paragraphs. *The Australian* and *The Sunday Times*, on the other hand, printed more small photographs of female athletes than of the other individual categories. However, when the percentages of pictures were calculated by size, women were found to have been allocated a more even portion of large photographs in relevance to other photographs than any other size category. *The Sunday Times* allocated 48% (36 out of 74) of its large photographs to women's sporting images. The share of large photographs was also substantial in *The West Australian* at 44.5% (53 out of 119) and *The Australian* (49 out of 119) at 41.2%, and slightly less in *Sydney Morning Herald* at 35.7% (110 out of 308). These findings suggest that the newspapers gave good pictorial exposure to female Olympians because they believed images of women in sport would be appealing to readers. This evidence reinforces the argument that if female athletes' images – and stories, as shown by the textual analysis – are considered by the press to be newsworthy then there is little reason why this should not carry through to non-Olympic coverage of women's sports.

As the results of these research findings have shown, each of the four newspapers approached their allocation of women's coverage at the Sydney Olympic

differently, with their high and low days of allocation generally falling on different days. Their approaches were also found to have been based on the type of public these newspapers had to serve. Having been produced in the host city of the 2000 Olympic Games, *Sydney Morning Herald* was expected to have published the least proportion of women's textual and pictorial space due to its duty to present both sporting and local information to the Sydney public. This prediction proved to be correct. *The Australian's* role was as a national informant of general issues, but its coverage was primarily based on competition, and therefore it published a higher percentage of articles and pictures of female athletes.

Both *The Sunday Times* and *The West Australian* were the most distant news publications from the Olympic city in Australia, and this required them to determine which stories, competition or non-competition, were most relevant to their readership. As these two newspapers contained the most coverage on female athletes out of the four selected papers, it could be surmised that they found that a high portion of women's Olympic events were quite relevant – and even sellable – to their particular audience.

The most noticeable conclusion to be made from this quantitative analysis of four Australian newspapers is that women were allocated more press coverage during the second week of competition than the first. During the second week of competition female athletes drew attention to their events through success, controversy, drama, rivalry and exceptional performances. As exemplified in the textual analysis, Australian women, including the water polo, beach volleyball and hockey teams, Cathy Freeman, Tatiana Grigorieva, and the sailing duo, led the high level of women's coverage through their success. Controversy and drama drew the press' attention to international athletes Marion Jones and Andreea Raducan through drug scandals, and to Australian walker Jane Saville due to disqualification. Week two of competition also featured the rivalry of high-profile female sprinters Freeman and Jones, and the exceptional performance of Naoko Takahashi in the women's marathon. This was therefore a decorated week for female Olympians and, as a result, their coverage peaked to over 50% textually in two of the newspapers, and pictorially in three of the newspapers during this week.

The opposite situation had occurred in the first week of competition. Australian female gold medal favourites triathlete Michellie Jones and cyclist

Michelle Ferris were upset in their events. Although high-profile swimmer Susie O'Neill won one gold medal, she was also upset in her other favoured event. Other women's events had only just commenced and there were generally fewer Australian female medal chances in the first week than in male events. While other Australian female athletes Annemarie Forder and Leisel Jones won medals and Dutch swimmer Inge de Bruijn stunned the Olympics with exceptional performances, female athletes generally did not impact on the press' coverage as much as the male athletes did during this week. The one outstanding incident involving female athletes in week one was the dramatic withdrawal of Cathy Freeman's rival, Marie-Jose Percec, from the Olympic competition.

Male athletes were, on the other hand, covered very well by the press in week one. Shooter Michael Diamond, archer Simon Fairweather, and male swimmers, cyclists and equestrian representatives all achieved gold medals for Australia during this week. Dutchman Pieter van den Hoogenband emerged in the swimming competition similarly to de Bruijn and also captured many headlines. Drama and debate was prevalent in general Olympic coverage during week one as well, with drugs scandals, ticket scalping and political discussion surrounding cultural messages conveyed in the opening ceremony drawing much press attention – especially in *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*.

Turning from qualitative to quantitative conclusions, this research has shown that female athletes as a whole were allocated a sizable share of press coverage during the Sydney Olympics. They received, on average, almost a third or more textual and pictorial space in all of the selected newspapers. On certain occasions they even represented more than half of three of the newspapers' entire Olympic coverage. This gives a positive indication that women's Olympic events were covered well at Sydney. Although the methodologies employed here and by Mikosza, from Womensport Australia, are different, these results are quite similar to the results found at the time of the Atlanta Games. Neither a significant increase nor drop in coverage could be observed in the reporting of these two games. In the following sections the Sydney Olympic press exposure of female athletes will be assessed qualitatively.

Section Two: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Female Athletes

When approaching the study of press representations of Australia's female Olympians at the Sydney Games, the primary objective is to examine the press coverage from the point of view that is most visible to the public – the newspaper copy itself. This is one way to discover how the press shapes the ways in which we, the public, perceive the female Olympians and how we interpret the copy referring to women's sport that is presented to us in the newspapers. In this sense, the newspapers offer us an interpretation of an event or a 'characterisation' of an athlete that we can comprehend without witnessing the Olympic competition first-hand.

It should be noted, however, that the published copy does not always fully reflect the events which took place, their unfolding, or the athletes competing in the events. This is why this study looked to the athletes themselves to complement newspaper reports written during the Sydney Olympics. Their own impressions of this coverage, and their feelings about the press portrayals of themselves and other female Olympians are as equally important in this study as the surface analysis of newspaper reports.

In order to discover how female athletes perceived the Olympic coverage of women, five Australian female Olympians who competed at Sydney, Rechelle Hawkes, Kerri Pottharst, Jennifer Reilly, Belinda Stowell and Danielle Woodhouse, were interviewed for this study. The interviews allowed the athletes to comment on the press reports printed in Australian newspapers during the Sydney Games drawing on their own experiences and observations. The athletes were also asked to comment on the role of female Olympians in the opening ceremony, and to compare the coverage of women's sport during an Olympic Games to coverage allocated to women at non-Olympic times.

Each of the interviewees chosen for this study celebrated notable achievements during the Sydney Games which would typically be assumed to have made headlines in the respective newspapers' Olympic coverage. Rechelle Hawkes, a member of the Australian women's hockey team since 1988, ended her Olympic

career in 2000 captaining the 'Hockeyroos' to their third Olympic gold medal. A dual Olympian, having won the bronze medal at the 1996 Games in Atlanta where beach volleyball was introduced at the Olympics, Kerri Pottharst partnered Natalie Cook to win the pair's second medal, a gold medal, at Sydney in 2000. While other Australian swimmers, like Susie O'Neill and Leisel Jones, enjoyed greater success at Sydney, Jennifer Reilly, in her first Olympic Games, took almost three seconds off her personal best time to earn a start in the final race of the 400m individual medley (Saltau, 2000). Belinda Stowell teamed with Jenny Armstrong to win the first gold medal for Australia in sailing since 1972 when they won the 470 class for women (Crowden, 2000). Danielle Woodhouse was part of the Australian women's team that won gold in water polo, a sport which was not made available to women at the Olympics until 2000, after numerous players, including members of the Australian team, fought for its inclusion (Niall, 2000).

These brief profiles of the interviewees show that these women accomplished similar feats at the Sydney Olympics, but they also ranged in Olympic experience and participated in new or established sports which varied in popularity with the media and the public. In this sense, it was predicted the athletes' responses to the nine questions asked might differ accordingly. This can be exemplified by the first two interview questions, which inquired about the affect of the acknowledgement of the centenary of women's participation at the Olympic Games at Sydney's opening ceremony on the interviewees' feelings and performances.

Two of the respondents, Jennifer Reilly and Danielle Woodhouse, did not attend the opening ceremony because they were to compete the following day. Even with this consideration in mind it was still important to ask these questions about this significant moment in women's sport without making assumptions. To avoid being presumptive in such interview situations is a technique McCracken calls "manufacturing distance" (1988, p.23). As it eventuated, Woodhouse and the women's water polo team had watched the event on television and Woodhouse was able to convey her mediated point-of-view about its meaning to them:

From a television perspective it was pretty good. It was good to see the women really coming up front and centre for that We knew it was special because it was the centenary of women's participation, and it was really special for us because it was the first time we'd been

there [at an Olympic Games]. (D. Woodhouse, personal communication, February 26, 2002).

We can tell from Woodhouse's recollection that the women's water polo team had been aware of the sportswomen's milestone, and this awareness may have even been enhanced by its representation on television.

Whether the interviewed athlete was directly involved in the opening ceremony or not, there was a shared sense of pride amongst all of the interviewees in the way female Olympians had been honoured at the ceremony. Reading the athletes' oath at the opening ceremony was undoubtedly the most cherished personal moment for Rechelle Hawkes. She said the tribute to sportswomen was held in considerable regard by women collectively:

[It was] a real fantastic achievement that women's sport had been recognised and it was just a great feeling to have so many high achievers in sport, and being women, involved I think it just contributed to the success we've had in terms of just saying, well, we are important, we do make a difference It complimented what we had already been achieving in sport (R. Hawkes, personal communication, March 1, 2002).

While each of the athletes appreciated the recognition given to female Olympians at the opening ceremony, none believed this directly inspired them in their achievements. Though the torch relay of female Olympians has specific implications for women in sport, the athletes preferred to associate it with the spectacle signifying the beginning of the Sydney Olympics than the competition itself. In this respect, the athletes found the opening ceremony to be more of a festive than empowering experience.

Belinda Stowell summed up the opening ceremony's role as helping the athletes to appreciate the momentousness of the Olympic occasion, but not as having an influence on the athletes' performances. "In a way I see it as something separate from my job [as a competitor] and my goals," she explained. "The opening ceremony was more like a celebration of being at the Olympics. Then once I was at the Olympics I still had to perform while at the Olympics and that's why I hold it slightly separate" (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

As the media has enormous implications for the way women's sport and individual sportswomen competing at an Olympic Games are presented to the world, it must be remembered that the athletes *do* read what is published. The reports present to the athlete, as well as the public, how they are expected to perform, how they did perform and why, and which other athletes were outstanding. There is little opportunity for the athletes to agree or disagree with the way they, and other female athletes, are portrayed by the press. This is why the athletes were asked three questions regarding their thoughts about the press coverage of Australian female athletes in general, their personal coverage, and whether they felt their experiences had been reflected adequately in the press reports.

During Olympic competition at Sydney Australia's female athletes were treated well by the press, according to all of the respondents. Kerri Pottharst said she believed the press coverage allocated to Australian women at Sydney was equal to that of their male counterparts and this reflected the good performances of the female athletes at the Games:

We did a lot better than the guys overall and, in terms of press coverage, I mean, everyday there was fantastic press coverage from all over the Games. I certainly didn't notice anything where girls got a small paragraph and guys got half a page or a full page (K. Pottharst, personal communication, March 5, 2002).

Stowell agreed the Australian press was complimentary of the feats accomplished by female members of the Australian Olympic team:

As far as newspaper coverage for female athletes in general, I think it was pretty good. There was a lot of recognition for new sports where females did perform exceptionally well and I think they gained a lot from it (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

The athletes' answers to this question revealed a shared opinion that female Olympians in general received favourable reportage. However, when asked whether the athlete was satisfied with their personal coverage two of the respondents, Woodhouse and Stowell, strongly disagreed. Woodhouse argued that while the quantity of the coverage for the Australian women's water polo team was good, their matches were sometimes poorly reflected in reports and noticeable bias existed towards higher profile members of the team:

You read an article and you go, 'What game were you at?' And then they say so and so played really well, and this person got this many goals, and this is what happened in the game, and then you just go, 'That's nothing like what happened in the game and there's no way she was the best player on the day.' We had certain players who had a lot of media attention for other reasons like the jobs they had or modelling ... and no matter what they did in the game they'd still get a mention in the article (D. Woodhouse, personal communication, February 26, 2002).

Stowell's dissatisfaction with the press was not particular to the lack of coverage of women, but to the entire sport of sailing. Stowell recalled the unfair ultimatum given to Australian sailing crews by the media in general before their Olympic competition began:

We weren't given equal standing, and especially since the media came and said there was no way in hell they were going to televise us unless we were guaranteed a gold medal, and that's something pretty tough. They don't do that in other sports (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

Even though she and her teammate Jenny Armstrong fulfilled the media's request to win gold, Stowell claimed the press coverage they had earned was overshadowed by Australian walker Jane Saville's concurrent misfortune. "She got front page," Stowell recollected, "so our achievement was being diminished by somebody else being disqualified" (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

From these cases, it could be surmised that athletes competing in sports perceived to be more popular at an Olympic level, such as swimming, hockey and beach volleyball, were more likely to receive fairer coverage than less familiar sports, like water polo, or less popular sports, like sailing.

Swimmer Reilly and beach volleyballer Pottharst maintained reports written about themselves were always positive and adequately reflected their own experiences – though Pottharst did point out that one incident involving an injury of hers had been exaggerated by a reporter. Hockey player Hawkes, on the other hand, said reporters did not always reflect the team dynamics of the Hockeyroos, as Woodhouse had also suggested above regarding the coverage of Australia's women's water polo team. "[The sport journalists] didn't really know what went on behind the scenes in terms of our selection; who's playing one day, who's playing the next,

who's sitting on the bench," Hawkes said. "And if they knew, probably, more about how the team operated then the articles would perhaps be a little different" (personal communication, March 1, 2002).

According to Stowell, sport journalists found it difficult to adequately represent the Olympic sailing events, which were lengthy and demanded competitors to be patient. "Because sailing's such a long event there's a lot more involved in trying to maintain your composure and maintain your positive attitude ... and if something bad happens you've just got to get over it," she explained. "[The journalists] wanted to hear of drama and that we were upset after our first couple of days when we'd sailed two bad races. They wanted to hear how terrible it was, but it wasn't terrible because it's all part of the attitude the athlete has to hold" (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

The responses given to the three questions above imply that the athletes reacted differently to the press coverage of female Olympians in general than to reports written about themselves. In evaluating their own press representations, the athletes suggested that there were particular elements, or factors, which determined how individual athletes and events were reported. For example, while Woodhouse and Stowell thought that the overall coverage of female Olympics was good, they found that certain factors relating to other female athletes, such as profile and drama, had taken the press' focus away from their own performances and achievements.

The next three questions aimed to identify key factors the athletes' believed were influential in the prioritisation of articles about Australian female Olympians. The athletes were asked whether they felt the centenary of women's Olympic participation influenced the reporting, indicate which types of athletes may have been given more press exposure than others at Sydney, and mention other factors they believed were important in the reporting of female athletes.

Three of the five athletes said they did not believe the centenary of women's Olympic participation had any influence on the reporting of female Olympians at Sydney. Reilly said that because she had not been made aware of the milestone until after the Sydney Games it had not been a noticeable focus of the press reports: "It wasn't sort of a dominant thing. It didn't jump out and get you" (personal communication, February 28, 2002). While Pottharst and Stowell knew of its

significance, they thought other factors were more prevalent in the reporting of female athletes.

Woodhouse and Hawkes, on the other hand, said they had noticed journalists use the centenary of women's Olympic participation as a recurrent theme in the reporting of female athletes in general. As Woodhouse illustrated:

There was obviously that focus at the beginning and then because overall the women performed a lot better than the men, the Australian women, I think they used to always tie that in. They'd say, 'Wow, it's the centenary of women's participation and the women have got this many gold medals against the men.' (D. Woodhouse, personal communication, February 26, 2002).

All of the respondents, however, said they had not seen this theme appear in the reporting of women's individual Olympic events.

Each of the interviewees stressed that certain athletes undoubtedly received more press attention than others at the Sydney Olympics. Pottharst, Reilly and Stowell argued, using popular Australian athletes Rechelle Hawkes, Susie O'Neill and Cathy Freeman as examples, that an athlete's profile was a great determinant of the amount of press coverage they received. To Reilly, established athletes, like Hawkes, had earned greater media recognition due to their previous sporting accomplishments: "[Hawkes has] done a lot in her sporting career so I think that's only deserved that she gets more coverage than your first little rookie on the team" (personal communication, February 28, 2002).

Similarly, Stowell observed at the Olympics the public's interest in established athletes was fuelled largely by their success and by media exposure given to those athletes before and during the Games. Renowned athletes were more likely to be promoted by the press than lesser known competitors, according to Stowell, because the public had become familiar with their personalities and achievements and wished to continue to follow their progress. "Even I was more interested in watching Cathy's race and watching Susie's races because, you know, they're interesting people to me and because the media portrays them very often," she illustrated. "You think you know them better than someone you've never seen before, anyway" (personal communication, March 6, 2002).

Woodhouse and Hawkes argued factors other than success and profile encouraged the press to cover some athletes more than others. Woodhouse said she had noticed New South Wales' local athletes received considerable attention in Sydney newspapers, as did Western Australia's athletes in Perth newspapers. Hawkes observed the Australian press' emphasis on athletes in individual pursuits:

I think that it's always been the case in Australia that any individual sport is rated much higher than a team sport because you're doing it on your own. It's something that you, and only you, can do and if you're successful then you've basically done it off your own back – obviously with the help of a coach (R. Hawkes, personal communication, March 1, 2002).

However, as members of Olympic teams, Woodhouse and Hawkes admitted it is difficult to emphasise specific personalities within team sports without disturbing team comradeship.

When asked to identify certain factors they believed existed in the reporting of female athletes, they did not provide specific examples as clearly as they had in previous answers. Rather, they focused more on factors they believed *should* be considered when reports about women's sports and female athletes are written.

The responses revealed a correlation between Woodhouse, Hawkes and Pottharst's views. Only one existing factor was highlighted by each of these respondents and this, correspondingly, was the physical appearance of female athletes. The athletes used this as an example of an aspect of women's sport reporting that is often over-emphasised, and stressed that other aspects of women's sports should be given higher priority. "You don't need to report on how [female athletes] look or, you know, what their hairdos are like or anything like that," Pottharst urged. "Just simply report on them and their sport and the journey that they've taken to get there, and the battles they've had, and their results" (personal communication, March 5, 2002).

Stowell also listed factors she believed should be prevalent in women's sport reports, such as talent, effort and personality, but she did not give any examples of existing factors.

Drawing on her own experiences as a swimmer, Reilly said reporters generally maintained a consistent focus on sport-related and positive attributes of

both male and female swimmers, including their preparation, performances and personalities. Reilly added that human interest articles are just as important as reports about athletes' performances, as they allow the public to forge a closer association with their sporting representatives.

Despite their comments about the high incidence of appearance-related women's sport reports, Hawkes and Pottharst had mentioned in previous answers that athletes' performances and results do influence the reporting. The athlete's – or sport's – profile, dramatic incidents, proximity and expectation were other influential factors specified in the respondents' previous answers.

The final question of this interview tested another important hypothesis, which was touched on in previous answers by Hawkes, Pottharst and Woodhouse, that the Olympic occasion makes a considerable difference to the coverage of women's sport. The assumption, which was agreed upon by each of the respondents, is that female athletes receive much greater media coverage during the Olympics than they do in their regular, day-to-day competition:

At the Olympics I think the coverage [of women] was fantastic, and I guess that's where the problem lies. Because at the Olympics ... women's sport was so successful that, hence, we gained that coverage. But when you're not at an Olympic Games the levels drop right off and that's the disappointing aspect (R. Hawkes, personal communication, March 1, 2002).

While Hawkes believed that other significant women's tournaments were largely ignored by the media, Woodhouse said she had noticed press exposure increase when other international events occurred, though perhaps not as greatly as during an Olympic Games. Stowell said she had observed a positive difference in reporting since the Sydney Olympics, particularly for female athletes who had been successful at the Games. "I think after the Games there's been a little more of a surge of interest in different sports and different sportspeople," she explained. "Now if [journalists] talk about sailing they will always mention the Olympics, you know, 'the Olympic gold medallists Belinda and Jenny'" (personal communication, March 6, 2002). Reilly also said she had noticed a similar lift in the coverage of female swimmers both before and after the Sydney Olympics.

Only two of the respondents, Hawkes and Stowell, wished to comment further when presented the opportunity at the end of their interviews. Their concluding words emphasised their desire for all women's sports to receive fair media treatment at the Olympic Games, and their belief that if the positive aspects of the Olympic reportage of female athletes was extended to non-Olympic events, then women's status in sport culture would essentially be enhanced. Hawkes' call for a better coverage of women's sports extended to sports promoters and women participating in sport:

The key factor is that ... women's sport is getting better. But there really needs to be more promotion and more females playing sport and improving their standard so that, hopefully, you'll have that flow-on effect from the Olympics – not just being an Olympic year, but in a World Cup year, or in a particular tournament there is that coverage (R. Hawkes, personal communication, March 1, 2002).

In conclusion, the results of these interviews show that women's sports and female athletes generally received more public acknowledgement for their achievements at the Sydney Olympics than they do at non-Olympic times. However, there remain some inadequacies in the reporting of female athletes competing in sports perceived to be less popular. Each of the athletes interviewed felt the press representation of female athletes in general had been good, but when recalling their personal reportage, four of the respondents revealed they had been misrepresented by reporters on at least one occasion during the Sydney Games. While the athletes appreciated the acknowledgement given to female Olympians at the opening ceremony, they believed this had only a slight influence on the way female athletes were reported in the press. Instead, the athletes suggested a variety of factors they saw as being influential to this coverage, such as profile, performance, proximity, drama and physical appearance. These factors will now be compared with news values identified by selected sports journalists as being influential in their own prioritisation of articles about female Olympians.

Section Three: Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Sports Journalists

In this study, two ways of approaching the analysis of the press reporting of female Olympians have so far been identified, one being what the public was offered and the other exploring the female athletes' perspectives. However, there is a third approach, which is not often used in the analysis of media texts, and that is understanding the reports from the journalists' points of view.

One academic author who has used this technique is Rowe who, in analysing the status of sports reporters within the field of journalism, spoke to both print and broadcast sports journalists about their experiences, their concerns and their "self-perceptions" (1999, p.62). A recurring displeasure for sports journalists, according to Rowe, is receiving accusations that their occupation lacks professionalism and expertise: "The reluctance to take sports journalism seriously produces the paradoxical outcome that sports newspaper writers are much read but little admired" (1999, p.36). Thus, it is common for a sportswriter's work to be criticised rather than commended, but critics must be reminded that the construction of sports articles is not done haphazardly. There are processes and considerations involved in creating the sports news story, and these are indeed observed by the sports journalists themselves.

According to Schudson (1996), many journalists do not wish to consider themselves as being 'creators' or 'makers' of news, as they are sometimes described by media analysts. Schudson explains: "Such language propels journalists into a fierce defence of their work, on the familiar ground that they just report the world as they see it, the facts" (1996, p.141). To journalists, the words 'creator' and 'maker' may imply that the role of the journalist is to construct fictitious, or semi-fictitious, narratives based on reality and present them as news stories. However, this usually is not the media analyst's intended connotation of these descriptors. Rather, the media analyst sees the journalist's role as being an organisational one, in that the journalist presents news events by selecting and arranging particular details in order of relevance.

The role of the sports journalist should also be seen in this way, and this is why local sports journalists were asked to be directly involved in this study through personal interviews. The intention for this part of the qualitative research was to allow the sports journalists to explain how they distinguished the factors they believed were most relevant when reporting on Olympic events including women at Sydney. This process will also be referred to here as 'prioritisation'. Four sports journalists from *The West Australian* who covered the Sydney Olympic Games were interviewed for this study: Bevan Eakins (swimming), Steve Lague (sailing), David Marsh (cycling), and Gené Stephan (hockey).

The journalists were asked how they constructed their reports about female athletes, and were also prompted to identify some of the factors that did or did not influence them in their reporting. They were asked to assess whether the centenary of women's Olympic participation affected their approaches to women's sport reports, to highlight differences between the coverage of male and female athletes at an Olympic Games, and to compare Olympic and non-Olympic coverage of women's sports.

Although the selected journalists specialised in the coverage of particular sports at Sydney, they were assumed to have made observations regarding the coverage of sports or athletes they did not report on themselves. As it eventuated the journalists commented on a variety sports other than the ones they had covered, including athletics, water polo, beach volleyball and gymnastics; and other sportswomen, including Cathy Freeman and Tatiana Grigorieva.

Messages conveyed at an Olympic opening ceremony, be they cultural, political or social, are significant to the way a host country presents its identity to the global public and to the global media. The social significance of the recognition of the centenary of women's Olympic participation at Sydney's opening ceremony was predicted to have had an impact on the way press reporters portrayed the status of women's sports at the Games. But when asked whether this had influenced them in their reporting each of the respondents – excluding Eakins, who had not seen the opening ceremony – stressed that it had not. Lague directly stated he did not associate the milestone with the way he chose to represent female Olympians: "It wasn't, 'Well, you're a woman and this is the year of woman athletes.' No, not at all" (S. Lague, personal communication, February 12, 2002). Instead Lague, in

agreement with Marsh, argued that reporters were more inclined to give recognition to female athletes due to their achievements in competition rather than through symbolic events relating to women in sport.

In comparing the answers given to this initial question by the sports journalists who had seen the opening ceremony, it was apparent that the journalists' responses were affected by their own interpretations of the centenary of women's Olympic participation. Marsh, Stephan and Lague suggested they saw the centenary as a signifier for specific gender issues, which they insisted did not have any influence on sports journalists' depictions of female or male athletes. Stephan claimed that news stories in general are rarely gender-driven, which is why journalists would not tend to emphasise a gender-related event such as the centenary of women's Olympic participation:

I don't think in any instance reporters are influenced by gender, unless that's their specific role in the office. I think journalists by nature are egocentric and they'll take stories, whatever they can get – women, men, dogs, cats, kittens, anything. So it certainly didn't influence mine (G. Stephan, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

Although the respondents dismissed the possible influence of the centenary on their reporting based on notions of gender bias, they did not discuss how the event may have been considered newsworthy for historical reasons. There were no references made to the journalists' impressions of the role past and present Australian female Olympic champions played in revealing who would light the Olympic flame, and how this may have affected the way the opening ceremony was reported by the press.

Yet, notably, when the journalists were next asked to name the female athlete(s) they believed had received more press attention than others at the Sydney Olympics they each responded with Cathy Freeman – the female athlete who ultimately did ignite the Olympic flame. However, this was not the reason why Freeman was listed as a primary example of this category. Each of the respondents said that Freeman received more press attention than other female athletes due to her existing profile in Australian sport. Marsh and Lague added that Freeman's Aboriginality was another key element that was focused upon in news reports. Lague

demonstrated how profile, success and background were combined in contributing to the extensive media exposure given to Cathy Freeman at Sydney:

I think that Cathy Freeman got a lot of publicity and I have no doubt that being a female Aboriginal again just made it a lot nicer. But she also got it because she was our best athlete. She was Australia's biggest chance of winning a gold medal on the track and deserved it, and showed that she deserved it. I'm not sure that she got the publicity because she was an Aboriginal woman, she got the publicity because she was a great athlete who happened to be an Aboriginal (S. Lague, personal communication, February 12, 2002.)

In reference to the sports with which they were associated at the Sydney Games, Eakins and Stephan named swimmer Susie O'Neill and the Australian women's hockey team, the Hockeyroos, as other female athletes who, due to profile and public expectation, received more press attention than others. "But it's like any sport," Eakins explained, "the higher the athlete is profiled, whether it be a male or female, the more coverage they'll get" (personal communication, February 7, 2002). Stephan also illustrated that the established athletes who were expected to perform well generated public interest and this often demanded the sports journalists to cover these athletes more extensively than others:

[Freeman and the Hockeyroos] were two teams in Australia, or two groups that went into the Olympics with an established reputation, and therefore you would not be doing your job if you did not inform public of their specific progress (G. Stephan, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

This statement suggests that the coverage allocated to certain Olympic athletes and teams in the press was determined by a specific audience which was perceived by those involved in news production. The athletes who were predicted to sell more newspapers to that presumed audience would thus be allocated more textual and/or pictorial space than those who were not.

Russian-born Australian pole vaulter Tatiana Grigorieva was another female athlete identified by two of the respondents, Marsh and Lague, as having received a substantial portion of press coverage at Sydney. While they admitted Grigorieva had proved to be successful at the Games by winning a silver medal, these journalists noted that her appearance was emphasised more so than her sporting achievements, as implied by Marsh: "[Grigorieva] won a silver medal, which was a great

performance, but I believe she was possibly over-exposed and I put that down to her photogenic qualities" (personal communication, February 7, 2002). Stephan also suggested that attractive athletes indeed proved to be popular with the media and the public at Sydney, using the beach volleyball athletes as an example. In this case, the emergent success of the Australian women's team, comprising Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook, coupled with the sexy image promoted at the beach volleyball events attracted widespread interest:

A lot of people went to the beach volleyball because of the success of that team, they also went because the ticket for the sport was cheap, and I think there was also a very significant group that went because the girls looked good. And, while a lot of women athletes and sporting officials or female codes might not like it, the reality is that when women look attractive they are more likely to attract attention than if they don't (G. Stephan, personal communication, February 7, 2002.)

Although Stephan said she believed appearance was influential in the allocation of coverage to female athletes at Sydney, neither she nor Marsh, Lague and Eakins said it was a factor they considered when constructing their women's sport reports. The key news value most predominantly mentioned in the journalists' responses to this question was success. As also illustrated by swimmer Jennifer Reilly in the athletes' interviews, swimming reporter Eakins said sports journalists not only sought to cover the athletes who performed well, but those who could provide appealing human interest angles. Eakins described his prioritisation of key factors:

The first priority is success. It's gold medals, because that's what the public wants to know. So the more successful the swimmer is the more they can reach their own personal goals – which obviously a gold medal is the priority – then that's our main aim as well. It's the story we want to cover. Then you go further down the track and you're looking for a good story, which may not be someone who's won gold but someone who's gone through a lot of hardship to get where they've got in the team. And down the next priority is the colour stories that surround it. But the priority all the time is success (B. Eakins, personal communication, February 7, 2002.)

In general, the sports journalists' descriptions of how they prioritised factors were not gender-specific. As we can see from Eakins' response, while he used the sport of swimming as an example, the factors he has highlighted here could apply to

any Olympic sport, and any Olympic athlete, be they female or male. Essentially, this indicates that sports journalists who covered the Sydney Games were in tune with the fundamental notions of the Olympic spirit – personal accomplishment and the ‘celebration of humanity’ (IOC, 2002b).

Marsh said that proximity, in addition to success, influenced his own selection of news content as he initially looked to follow Australian cyclists’ progress at Sydney. He recalled how Victorian cyclist Michelle Ferris drew media attention to her event as she edged towards success:

I covered her event and there was a lot of coverage on her performance, winning the bronze medal, because she was the Australian local girl. If she had not won a medal it wouldn’t have been there, the coverage on her (D. Marsh, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

Stephan and Lague had also noticed Australian athletes and teams who had been successful at previous Olympics, or appeared to be nearing success at the Sydney Games, attracted a large portion of media coverage. In particular, Stephan considered national expectation, based on previous Olympic successes, to be an important news value when reporting on the Australian women’s hockey team. “We knew before the Games they were going to be very successful and they were,” she explained. “The women performed to expectations, therefore they got better coverage because of their results” (personal communication, February 7, 2002).

Proximity and expectation were also important factors in the selection of sailing coverage. The press space allocated to sailing teams was limited compared with other Olympic sports that editors had deemed to be more popular. Therefore, Lague and his sailing co-writer Alan Kennedy, of *Sydney Morning Herald*, chose to prioritise proximity and expectation in order to determine how their reportage of various sailing classes would be regulated:

We had nine classes competing and we had to try and give them all a fair coverage. I worked with Alan Kennedy exclusively on it and we did it purely on medal chance, so that if we believed Australia had a medal chance in a particular class or was at a crucial stage at their regatta on a particular day then that was what we concentrated on (S. Lague, personal communication, February 12, 2002).

However, Lague pointed out that the newspapers' preference of walker Jane Saville's disqualification over the women's and men's 470-class sailing gold medal wins highlighted the value of drama in the selection of Olympic news. In this case, as similarly noted by Belinda Stowell in her interview, sports editors had prioritised misfortune and drama over success.

Other factors suggested by the journalists in questions previously discussed were profile, background, and public interest.

The fourth question, which prompted the journalists to make comparisons between the press coverage of female and male Olympians, drew more gender-specific responses than the previous question about prioritisation. Initially the journalists said they did not believe there was any difference at the Olympic level, but all, except Eakins, then proceeded to identify elements they had seen to be more prevalent in the reporting of female than male athletes.

Marsh and Lague again said that appearance was emphasised more in the press coverage of female Olympians. This, however, was more noticeable in the selection of images accompanying women's sport articles than the articles themselves, according to Lague: "We might go for the sexier look or the sexier shot or the nicest shot of the female. [But] in the writing of it, I don't think so" (personal communication, February 12, 2002). Lague suggested the pictorial emphasis of female athletes' appearances usually occurred for aesthetic, rather than discriminative reasons.

Stephan said she thought a difference did exist, not directly in the reporting of female and male athletes, but in the press' rapport with the female and male athletes. At Sydney, the Australian female Olympians had a more positive demeanour and co-operative relationship with the sports journalists than some male athletes and this, according to Stephan, benefit their press representations:

[The female athletes'] social behaviour made it a bit easier to report on them. In rowing, for instance, we had female athletes who were successful and male athletes who were successful, but the women are generally more appreciative of coverage because they're not used to having it. Therefore, they were more obliging with the media, whereas male athletes are generally more used to it and therefore are fairly blasé. So I think in general the women probably came out of the Olympic Games better than what they do in everyday life, or everyday sport in Australia (personal communication, February 7, 2002).

While these two variants were identified, the overriding theme presented in the sports journalists' answers was that all Australian Olympic successes, regardless of whether they were accomplished by female or male representatives, were celebrated in the press. Eakins maintained his argument that at a significant international event such as the Olympic Games, both female and male athletes are given an equal opportunity for press exposure based on their performances: "The Olympics is that sports festival and, again if anyone succeeds, if they're Australian, from an Australian press point it tends to get good coverage. I mean, we love winners. Everyone does" (B. Eakins, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

The prestigious and unpredictable nature of Olympic competition compels the media to follow each national triumph. "From an Australian point of view, our successes at the Olympics are few and far between and the media is unlikely to discriminate because they can't be that picky," Stephan explained. The responses to this question of differing representations of female and male athletes show that the Olympic occasion does influence the media allocation and treatment of female athletes. This unanimous response from the journalists pre-empted the following question, which asked the journalists to compare the reporting of Olympic and non-Olympic events. To this the journalists clearly agreed that successful Australian female and male athletes are equally revered at Olympic Games, but this is not the case in day-to-day press coverage of sport.

Each of the journalists offered different explanations for this shift in press attention to female athletes from adequacy at the Olympics to inadequacy during non-Olympic periods. Although Eakins declined to comment on the 2000 Games opening ceremony's acknowledgement of women athletes, he did say that the legacy carried forward by former Australian female Olympic champions encouraged the national press to promote women's sports more enthusiastically in an Olympic context. He named Dawn Fraser, Betty Cuthbert, and Shirley Strickland, who all were torch bearers in the female champions' final leg of Sydney's torch relay, as examples of sportswomen who have influenced the treatment of female Olympians in the press because of their stature in Australia's Olympic history.

An absence of all football codes, bar soccer, in Olympic competition has led to a parity of press coverage which is not seen on a day-to-day basis, as Stephan observed:

Rugby union, rugby league, Aussie Rules [and] soccer are not that prominent at Olympic level. They're either not there or not particularly prominent, and therefore we see a more balanced coverage of sport. So in everyday society it's highly biased towards the football codes. If you take that out of the equation at Olympic level you get a more balanced approach in providing the news (G. Stephan, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

This is a valid assumption in the context of Olympic coverage, however recent studies have demonstrated that even if press coverage of football codes was subtracted from the total space allocated to women's sports at non-Olympic times, there would still be an obvious imbalance to the detriment of women's sports (Stoddart, 1994; Phillips, 1997; Mikosza, 1997).

Marsh and Lague said they believed the hypothesis that women's sport coverage is always greater at an Olympic Games should not be applied to all sports and all sportswomen. They said that particular sports and sporting teams, like gymnastics and the women's hockey and water polo teams, consistently have cyclical media exposure. Others, such as athletics - and sailing, according to Lague - have constant exposure throughout their sporting calendars:

There are sports that become far more popular important to the community before the Olympics because they are Olympic sports. So that increases their publicity at the time But I think the athletics ... if Cathy Freeman does something or if any of the other girls do something during the year they get the publicity they deserve. I know that the sailing girls - we've got some young West Australian girls who have been doing really well on the world circuit - every time they're doing something it's getting publicised (S. Lague, personal communication, February 7, 2002).

This returns us to the topic of news values. What can be gathered from this, and other question outcomes, is that at an Olympic Games sports journalists generally apply the same news values to both men and women. Away from the Olympic 'festival' in everyday sport, however, the situation would predictably be different. As these interviews focused on the sports journalists prioritisation of *Olympic* articles about women's sports and female athletes, the key factors, or news values, mentioned here by the journalists can therefore only be applied to Olympic press reports.

When allowed the opportunity to comment further as his interview concluded, Marsh likened the public rivalry between 400m sprint athletes Cathy Freeman and Frenchwoman Marie-Jose Perec to the rivalry between male Olympians Herb Elliot and Michel Jazy at the 1960 Rome Games. The publicity each pair received, Marsh noted, was of similar emphasis in their respective eras, regardless of gender. Although Freeman and Perec ultimately did not race due to Perec's premature departure from Sydney, their rivalry dominated the Olympic media coverage, and this will be discussed later through further analysis.

Marsh's concluding comments added another factor, rivalry – or conflict – which again is not gender-specific, to the journalists' 'criteria' used when constructing Olympic reports. Overall, the sports journalists' responses highlighted performance and personality (incorporating profile, background and human interest) as the predominant news values influencing their prioritisation of information when writing sports reports. Subsidiary news values, such as proximity, drama, appearance and expectation were also important and in some cases, as shown by the sailing example, could override primary factors in the final placement of articles. The factors identified in the journalists' interviews are similar to those mentioned by the athletes in their interviews, and neither the journalists nor the athletes believed they were directly influenced by the marking of the women's centenary of Olympic participation at the opening ceremony. This correlation will be examined further in Chapter Five, the Discussion of Findings.

Section Four: Qualitative Textual Analysis of Women's Olympic Reports

A frequent complaint made by Australian and international authors throughout the years has been that the press consistently portrays women's sport and female athletes as significantly inferior to men's sport and male athletes. This argument is based upon comparative quantitative and qualitative analyses of women's and men's sport coverage. In many cases, authors have found qualitative representations of female athletes to be unsatisfactory, some even questioning whether publishing dubious portrayals of sportswomen in the press is more problematic than not mentioning them at all (Toohey & Veal, 2000, p.169). While authors of early works express their wholehearted dissatisfaction with press representations of women's sports (Dyer, 1982; Australian Sports Commission and the Office of the Status of Women, 1985), more recent works acknowledge that the quality of women's sport reporting is improving to a varying extent (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Mikosza, 1997; Stoddart, 1994).

Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson (1997) draw on one particular American study of televised sport coverage to demonstrate specific qualitative differences between men's and women's sport coverage by categorising the language commonly used in news reports and commentary. The first category of their findings appears to draw a line between the style of language used to depict male and female athletes, indicating that males are generally described positively, while females are portrayed negatively: sportsmen are "strong" and sportswomen are "weak" (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.175; Wilson, 1997, p.44); sportsmen's successes are attributed to their sporting prowess and sportswomen's successes are said to be fuelled by the crowd, their coach or family's support (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.177); sportsmen's failures are excused and sportswomen's failures are belittled (pp.177-9). The second category highlights the frequent use of "gender marking" in labelling "women's" events, "infantilisation" in referring to women as "girls", and using first names to identify female athletes (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.180-1; Wilson, 1997, p.44). The final category notes that reporting of sportswomen often

accentuates their appearance, sexuality and sex-role stereotypes – usually in a demeaning way (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.182-3; Wilson, 1997, p.45).

These categories of language use can also be applied to the analysis of press reports. They will be tested here against examples of articles written about female athletes at the Sydney Olympics for *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sunday Times* and *The West Australian*.

“Strong” descriptors can often be found in all newspapers’ reporting of the Australian women’s basketball and hockey teams, synonymously known as the Opals and the Hockeyroos. *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Stephen Howell likened the Opals to “warriors” (2000, p.13), denoting their fighting characteristics in overcoming their Brazilian opposition. Grantley Bernard, in *The Sunday Times*, similarly emphasised the Opals’ strengths in competition, attributing their opening victory over Canada to their “offensive firepower and the cornerstone they pride themselves on – incessant and tough defence” (Bernard, 2000, p.13). Both of these journalists’ depictions convey to the reader that this team conducts itself in a warlike manner, possessing the relentlessness of an Australian troop engaging in battles with foreign enemies. Far from presenting this female team as weak, the imagery used in these reports might alternatively be seen as a masculinisation of sportswomen glorifying aggressive behaviour. However, it could also be interpreted in a positive manner, as a promotion of the excitement of Opals’ games, and the team’s desire to succeed for its country.

The word “great” and “dominant” directly relate to the words “big” and “powerful” and, according to Duncan and Messner (1998, p.174) the use of these descriptors is most commonly associated with depictions of sportsmen and male power. Press representations of Australia’s Hockeyroos at the Sydney Olympics challenge this assumption, as they were heralded as being “the game’s greatest women’s hockey team” by *The Australian* (Rucci, 2000, p.8), and “the most dominant team in world hockey” by *The West Australian* (Stephan, 2000a, p.XVI). Throughout the Olympics, Stephan consistently referred to the Hockeyroos as being the world’s best hockey side, regardless of gender, and included more strength-related descriptors in her article reviewing the team’s gold-medal match:

The Hockeyroos dealt with the expectation [to succeed] the same way they have done with pressure on the field – head on. They started

strongly and finished strongly, clearly the best team, mentally and physically, in the world. An awesome attacking machine, the Hockeyroos were at their very best last night from start to finish. (Stephan, 2000b, p.III)

The choice of “machine” as a metaphor for the Hockeyroos is unusual, but it implies that this team had a collective force on the field that was extraordinary in comparison with other teams. Individual players were also singled out by journalists due to their physical strength. Using language which may have, in the past, been more familiarly associated with an American football player, *Sydney Morning Herald*’s Liz Hannan described Hockeyroo Jenny Morris as a “powerfully built fullback” (2000, p.15). In this case, Hannan was acknowledging the physical authority Morris typically had over her opponents, which she had not utilised to her full advantage in the previous match. These examples of press representations of the Hockeyroos provide evidence that in contemporary sport, dominance, power and physical strength are considered to be attributes commonly linked with success rather than masculinity.

Other Australian female athletes were also complimented in reports for the strong physical, and mental, traits they possess. Instead of simply stating the beach volleyball pair of Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook had won their semi-final match, *The Sunday Times*’ Michael Westlake (2000, p.23) declared the women had “blasted their way to within one game of a gold medal at Bondi”, highlighting that their strength contributed to their achievement. This use of language also offers a textual dramatisation of the action that took place at this beach volleyball match. Javelin thrower Louise Currey is one particular athlete who was widely commended in the press for endeavouring to overcome the pain of a torn ligament in her knee to compete at Sydney. A feature article written by Len Johnson (2000a, p.21) was published in *Sydney Morning Herald* under the heading “Louise the Lionheart”, and Louise Evans (2000a, p.IX) similarly focused on Currey’s bravery in *The West Australian*: “[Currey] waged a brave battle just to get back inside the Olympic stadium yesterday.... Faced with the choice of more pain or giving up Currey made the only choice.” These sentences imply that the javelin thrower’s strength of character drove her to persevere despite an adversity that would be expected to sideline most other athletes. Courage is also symbolic of the Olympic spirit.

While Duncan and Messner recognise that strength descriptors are sometimes attributed to female athletes, they notice that these are “often neutralised by their

pairing with weakness descriptors” (1998, p.175). This contradicting use of language does not stand out in many reports written about Australian female athletes at Sydney, however it is evident. In one particular case, the reporting of high-profile athlete Cathy Freeman in *The Australian* and *The West Australian* couples several references to strong and weak physical and mental attributions. Early in the Sydney Games, Caroline Wilson, in *The West Australian*, contrasted “big” and “small” images of Freeman, when her initially positive perception of the track athlete’s stature was suddenly overridden by this observation:

Freeman stood so tall when she held up the Olympic flame last Friday night, but yesterday as she sat alongside sprinter Matt Shirvington, long jumper Peter Burge and javelin thrower Louise Currey she looked like a tiny young woman to be carrying such a big load. (Wilson, 2000, p.III)

This apprehension expressed by Wilson was not related directly to Freeman’s physical strength, but to her assumed ability to cope mentally with the national expectations placed upon her, or the figurative load she was meant to carry. Wilson recognised the concerning situation which often arises when an athlete is relied on to ensure a nation’s success, as author Phillips explains:

While it may be an honour to represent your country, it can also be a terrific burden. If things go well on the day, a competitor may become an instant national hero; if things go poorly, he or she may be made to feel like a failure who has let down an entire nation. (Phillips, 1996, p.138)

Obviously, as it eventuated, Freeman triumphed, yet press reporters still offset Freeman’s strength in accomplishing her victory with her mental exhaustion brought about by extreme public demand. Jenny McAsey from *The Australian*, praised Freeman’s “commanding performance” in fulfilling such expectations, and also detailed a weakness the national hero uncovered when her race was over: “She fell to the track, spent, emotionally and physically, then rose to her feet to walk a victory lap carrying both the Australian and Aboriginal flags” (McAsey, 2000, p.4).

Malcom Knox from *Sydney Morning Herald* depicted two female athletes, who had achieved good results in two different sports, referring to their size and age before mentioning their strong performances in competition. He described Maria Pekli, who won a bronze medal for Australia in judo – a physical sport based on

strength and skill – as “diminutive”, and similarly reduced swimmer Leisel Jones’ stature by likening her to a “tadpole” who had, nonetheless, “stormed home” to win a silver medal in her breaststroke event (Knox, 2000, p.1).

Nothing reveals an athlete’s weakness more visibly than a devastating loss. Had Australian walker Jane Saville completed her race as Olympic champion it is very doubtful that her emotional frailty would have been the main focus of press reports the following day. However, less than a kilometre before the finish line, she was disqualified on a technical flaw and her dramatic reaction was emphasised by each of the newspapers, particularly *The West Australian*:

Saville staggered, threw her hands in the air and began to shake and sob A groan shattered the morning air as 89,254 people primed for gold shared the pain of the little Australian bent over in agony. (Evans, 2000b, p.III)

Creedon terms this type of reporting, which evokes pathos in the reader by accentuating the emotional distress of a defeated female athlete in both textual and photographic illustrations, as “sob-sister reporting” (Creedon, 1994, pp.74-5). We should also remember that these kinds of traumatic sporting incidents will always be depicted in a dramatic way because of their news and entertainment value.

The use of strength- and weakness-related words are often supplemented with other descriptors to suggest the level of ability and control an athlete has over their own performances (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.177). Duncan and Messner found that male athletes’ successes were generally more likely to be reported with regard to their sporting expertise, yet female athletes’ accomplishments were largely attributed to the encouragement they received from supporters (1998, p.177). The Sydney Olympic reports generally recognised the skill and effort successful female athletes, but in some cases it was suggested that the athletes were also fuelled by external support.

At Sydney, the Hockeyroos were complimented on both their athletic and technical prowess on the field. Nicole Jeffery, of *The Australian*, wrote that the team’s players “displayed control and poise in the scoring circle” and described one of their goals as “a masterpiece of skill, timing, vision and teamwork, which showed the Hockeyroos at their breathtaking best” (2000, p.8). The Hockeyroos were

therefore portrayed to the public as a team that had an active role in achieving their success due to their own proficiency.

Sydney Morning Herald journalist Len Johnson focused on Cathy Freeman's mastery, rather than the immense pressure she had overcome, in winning her 400m race. Johnson analysed the technical aspects of Freeman's race, concluding that her success was the ultimate result of "a neat plan, executed brilliantly by a champion" (Johnson, 2000b, p.4).

When Australian female athletes won tight contests at the Sydney Olympics their victories were occasionally associated with crowd support. The crowd, of course, was seen to be a significant factor in lifting the intensity of all Australian athletes because it consisted mostly of local supporters. Again, the reporting of the Hockeyroos provides us with an example of the way journalists referred to the influence of local spectators on the outcome of a close match: "[The Hockeyroos] were positively buoyed by raucous hometown support in a 2-1 victory against Britain" (Harari & Harvey, 2000, p.8). This statement appeared in *The Australian* newspaper, as did a similar reference to crowd support in an article about the Australian women's eight rowing team. Jim Tucker (2000, p.4) declared the women's eight had "fought out the most exciting finish of the rowing regatta", but the crowd had "put a motor" on the team, carrying them over the line. Although Tucker commended the women on their thrilling victory, he placed doubt into the readers' minds as to whether the team would have achieved the same feat away from their home venue.

In a reverse instance, one report showed how an Australian female gymnast incited support from spectators due to her performance. The association between athlete and crowd was made by Cameron Stewart from *The Australian*:

Queenslander Lisa Skinner last night sent the Super Dome into a frenzy when she blitzed the world's best gymnasts ... to come within a whisker of winning Australia's first gymnastics medal. (Stewart, 2000, p.3)

This example also shows that athletes who performed well, but did not necessarily 'succeed' by winning a medal, were still represented positively by reporters. Duncan and Messner (1998, p.177) observed that negative terms, which implied the incompetence of an athlete, were often applied to sportswomen who had

'failed' to succeed. But overall, the reporting of women's Sydney Olympic events did not diminish unsuccessful Australian athletes' efforts. Rather, their opponents were praised for their superior performances. For instance, when favourite Australian Michellie Jones was defeated in the women's triathlon in a battle with Swiss victor Brigitte McMahon, it was described as a "great sporting contest" by *Sunday Times* reporter Mike Gibson, in which Jones had been "outkicked and outlasted" by her opponent (2000, p.22). Another report written for the same edition of *The Sunday Times* similarly heralded the Frenchwoman who beat Australian cyclist Michelle Ferris to take gold in the 500m time trial event, and at the same time it complimented Ferris' performance: "With a silver medal around [Ferris'] neck, second was an occasion for celebration after a champion ride was beaten by a champion rider" (Schlink, 2000, p.14). The athletes' disappointment in missing out on the gold medals was mentioned, but not stressed, by these reporters.

Each of the newspapers treated unexpected defeats of high-profile athletes, of both sexes, in a positive manner. When swimmer Susie O'Neill was beaten in a butterfly race she was highly favoured to win, journalists did not report that the standard of her swimming had lapsed, but that it had been bettered on the day by America's Misty Hyman. This can be exemplified by Patrick Smith, of *The Australian*:

Susie O'Neill was second in the 200m butterfly final, the race all of Australia wanted her to win. But her final Olympics were no failure She may have finished second behind the American Misty Hyman, but she did her best. No one had counted on the aggressive and fast swim from Hyman. (Smith, 2000, p.1)

The copy of female athletes or teams who were not predicted to be in contention for an Olympic medal, and were subsequently unsuccessful in their events, was generally not as favourable as that of athletes who came closer to success. The Australian Olympic debutante women's volleyball team won only one match in their competition, and were consoled by a heading, printed in *Sydney Morning Herald*, which read: 'Defeat but not disgrace for Australians'. However, the accompanying article was a mixture of patronising and commending phrases:

The dream might have been unrealistic, but it was nice while it lasted for Australia's women volleyballers. World No.4 China crushed the Australians 3-0 The Australians thought they had a chance after

beating Kenya in the preliminary rounds and seeing China's indifferent form in their first three matches. Coach Brad Saindon was disappointed with Australia's "anti-climactic" disappearing act against the Chinese, but he expected his team's international ranking to improve to the high teens after their first Olympic appearance. (Keeble & Button, 2000, p.13)

The opening sentences of this article dismissed the volleyball team's belief in itself, suggesting that Australia – and Kenya, for that matter – had been like a fish out of water amongst opponents of much higher standard. Yet, the journalists acknowledged in following sentences that the Australian team had actually performed well enough at the Games to place itself in the world's top 20 volleyball nations.

Turning to the next category of language use, which focuses on "gender marking", "infantilisation" and the use of first names to label female athletes (Duncan & Messner, 1998, pp.180-1; Wilson, 1997, p.44), the selected newspapers provide evidence to show that these types of markers were present in the reporting of both female and male athletes at Sydney. Australian teams, who had not already been associated with specific titles, such as the Hockeyroos, the Opals, or the Boomers (men's basketball team), were equally referred to as women's or men's sporting teams, national or world champions. Sportswomen were more frequently called "girls" than sportsmen "boys". This usually occurred in the context of youth, such as teenage swimmer Leisel Jones, or a cliché like "the golden girls", or in a tongue-in-cheek feature story. A sailing article written for *The West Australian* by Steve Lague and Alan Kennedy demonstrates that infantilisation is not always applied to women – in fact, it sometimes occurs the other way around: "To secure a gold medal the *women* must finish eighth or better in their final race. The *boys* must finish fifth or better to collect gold [my emphasis]" (2000, p.XX).

First names of female and male athletes were commonly used in the headings of articles, especially in the form of alliteration, such as 'Lethal Leisel', 'King Kieren [Perkins]' and 'Jumping Jai/Ji [Taurima and Wallace]'. High profile female athletes, like Cathy Freeman, Susie O'Neill and Tatiana Grigorieva, were also frequently referred to in articles by their first names, because their first names can be instantly recognised by the sporting public. As these types of markers are evident in the reporting of both female and male athletes at the Sydney Olympics, and are widely

accepted – even cliché – uses of language, they should not always be considered to be demeaning to sportswomen – or sportsmen – unless they are used in a derogatory manner.

Duncan and Messner's (1998, pp.181-4) final language category examines how female athletes are "sexualised" by the press through the repetitive emphasis of appearance, sexuality and sex-role stereotypes. They believe this type of reporting "epitomises the sport media's treatment of female athletes" (p.181). However, Wilson in his similar comparative analysis, recognises that in contemporary reporting "overt stereotyping and sexual 'objectification' of women seems to be the exception rather than the rule" and "women's events usually are presented as serious athletic contests" (1997, p.45). Journalist Sue Williams complained during the Sydney Olympics that female athletes' appearances were being prioritised over their performances by both the media and the athletes themselves. She argued that this Olympics was in turn "being dubbed 'The Glamour Games'" (2000, p.21).

While Tatiana Grigorieva and female beach volleyball players did draw numerous comments about their sex appeal from the Australian press, the Olympic reports generally did not concentrate on female athletes' appearances as much as their athletic prowess and skill. Grigorieva, as reported by Greg Baum (2000, p.9), prefers to describe herself as an "athlete/model", and was thus depicted this way by the press following her silver medal performance. Most journalists who wrote about Grigorieva did not diminish her accomplishment in favour of her looks, and tended to pay equal attention to both aspects. Baum's article did not refer to Grigorieva's appearance until the tenth paragraph, after he had detailed her contest with the eventual winner, America's Stacey Draglia, when he stated that she "brings to Australian pole vaulting both talent and glamour" (Baum, 2000, p.9).

Female beach volleyballers were collectively characterised by the press according to the sexy image their costumes and their event's atmosphere conveyed. One writer and cartoonist, Bill Leak, stressed, in his playful depiction of the beach volleyball competition, that the only value of this event was indeed based on the contestants' appearances:

I have always suspected beach volleyball is not really a sport but rather a form of relaxation beloved of nudists To my great delight these girls aren't wearing much more My vantage point wasn't

exactly optimal for perving, but I could see well enough to confirm that all four contestants were, for the information of visitors to our shores, what we in Australia describe as “bloody good sorts” (Leak, 2000, p.17).

While this article was intended to be presented in jest, its theme was reflected in textual and pictorial portrayals of women’s beach volleyball throughout the Olympics – including reviews of Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook’s gold medal triumph. In this sense beach volleyball was trivialised as an Olympic sport as a negative result of repetitive sexualisation.

Appearance was accentuated in the reporting of the Australian women’s water polo team in the context of indecency, when, in early matches, players’ swimming costumes were being torn frequently by their opposition. Initial articles written about women’s water polo focused more on the rippage rate of players’ costumes than the matches they were contesting:

In a sport that sometimes boasts more costume changes than a Hollywood movie set, there was good news, and bad, for the Australian women’s water polo team yesterday. The rippage rate for damages suits was down. Unfortunately for the Australians, they also lost the game, defeated 5-4 by the Netherlands (Harari, 2000, p.6).

Fiona Harari, from *The Australian*, dedicated this match report almost entirely to torn Speedos, as did this similar news brief, which appeared in *Sydney Morning Herald*:

Women water polo players are showing more than planned as the sport makes its debut. Their thin costumes are being torn by the dozen, requiring players to swim to the edge of the pool and change. It seems European players are more willing to play on topless. The Americans and the Australians are more prudish, changing almost immediately (“Polo skin”, 2000, p.22).

While scantily-clad female beach volleyball players were exhibited by the press as being assets to their event, water polo players, who had the undergarments worn beneath their torn swimming costumes exposed, were subjected to mockery. These contrasting examples suggest why the issue of appropriateness and women’s sport is still actively debated in the press and sporting texts.

Sexualisation based on appearance was, however, was not purely accorded to female athletes at Sydney. For instance, Sally Jackson referred to male gymnast Alexei Nemov as “Sexy Lexy” (2000, p.9) and Susan Kurosawa noted the sexual appeal of male rowers: “the sisterhood has always been transfixed by the men’s coxless pairs and fours – and they’re not, you know” (2000, p.17).

Female athletes’ sexuality, or sexual orientation, were rarely mentioned in the reports, but there were occasional references made to motherhood and sex-role stereotypes. In their analysis of Olympic reports written in 1988 and 1992, Kane and Greendorfer argued that the content of the articles “attempt[ed] to reinforce traditional stereotyped images of femininity and female sexuality” by focusing on “normal” female behaviour (1994, p.28). Very few Olympic reports written in 2000 followed this trend. The ones that did seemed ridiculously out of place, including this extreme example, written by *Sydney Morning Herald’s* Darren Prendergast:

Rina Bjarnson, a full-time mother from Melbourne, had her hands full last night, and she wasn’t even at home minding the kids. Instead, the 36-year-old was keeping goal for Australia’s women’s handball team. (Prendergast, 2000, p.10)

This opening paragraph relegates Bjarnson’s sporting ability, even though it is of a high enough standard for her to represent Australia at an elite level, behind her traditional mothering duties. To spend an evening playing handball, Prendergast suggests, deviates from what is perceived to be normal conduct for a 36-year-old mother.

Champion swimmer Susie O’Neill was subjected to sex-role stereotyping by Matt Price, from *The Australian*, on the eve of her retirement. Price contrasts his, and what he believes to be the public’s, perceptions of O’Neill’s persona with the rest of her Australian teammates:

Most of the Australian men are huge, intimidating figures who, when their swimming careers end, can look forward to steady work travelling the world posing for sculptors and painters. Stumble on the women’s team and you would expect they had just left a Human Nature concert en route to a pyjama party. But Susie’s, well, normal Who cannot imagine Susie, circa 2005, reunited with husband Cliff, perhaps a couple of kids, occasionally wandering around the local pool and generally being the most popular person in Australia. (Price, 2000, p.4)

This article appeared odd amongst other congratulatory pieces, which emphasise O'Neill's outstanding career and the high standard she had maintained in her sport through to her retirement. It must be noted that "Susie", has not retreated to this idealised post-swimming lifestyle. In fact, *she* is now "travelling the world" as part of the International Olympic Committee – and is still one of the most popular sporting figures in this country. While Price's sexualisation of O'Neill can be seen as merely inappropriate, his portrayal of the Australian women's swimming team as "pyjama partying" adolescents is extremely condescending. This, however, is the exception to other journalists' representations of Australia's female swimmers at Sydney, which do not focus on demeaning female stereotypes.

As these analyses show, a correlation cannot be found between contemporary Australian reporting of women's Olympic events, and Duncan and Messner (1998) and Wilson's (1997) findings that sportswomen are constantly portrayed in a negative manner. In the depictions of women's sports and Australian female athletes at the Sydney Olympics, belittling or demeaning language is not commonly used, and sportswomen are not represented as inferior athletes to sportsmen. In fact, there is sufficient evidence to prove that many of the positive descriptors, which are said to be more readily accorded to male athletes, are often present in the reporting of female athletes at Sydney. The occasional excessively negative portrayal of female athletes is not indicative of the overall reporting of women's Olympic events.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The key outcome of this thesis is that the Olympic occasion has a significant effect on the quantity of coverage allocated to women's sports. Results of this study's quantitative analysis, in addition to past research and the athletes' and journalists' interview responses, support the assumption that female athletes receive a considerably higher portion of coverage in the press during an Olympic Games than they do at non-Olympic times.

Percentages of the press coverage allocated to women's events at the Sydney Olympics fluctuated from day to day, and this was largely determined by news values. But over the 17-day period analysed female athletes received, on average, between 32.2% and 39.6% of the total space allocated to all Olympic-related stories by the four selected Australian newspapers. These figures have remained the same in comparison with Mikosza's (1997) study of Australia's press coverage of the Atlanta Olympics, indicating that there has been no recent quantitative improvement in the Olympic coverage of female athletes. The press coverage allocated to women at the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games, however, is exceptional in contrast with the everyday figures calculated by the Australian Sports Commission and the Office of the Status of Women (1985), Stoddart (1994), Phillips (1997), and Mikosza (1997). Of the four research reports, only Phillips' 1996 analysis of everyday coverage (Womensport Australia, 2002, para.7) presented a finding that exceeded 10%. Mikosza's (1997, p.17) study, which compares Olympic and non-Olympic coverage, reveals that no significant flow-on effect of women's sport coverage occurs after an Olympic Games has taken place.

The qualitative study of article content conducted for this thesis brings to light positive results. It shows that the standard of reports written by Australian journalists about the nation's female Olympic athletes is generally quite high, on the

contrary to Dyer's early assertion that women's sport reporting in Australia is "appalling":

It frequently concentrates on the women involved as either freaks or sex objects; and it often trivialises women's activities, reducing the serious sporting content and emphasising the clothes worn, the 'social' and sexual nature of the game and so on. (Dyer, 1982, p.105)

Recently published authors, such as Duncan and Messner (1998) and Toohey and Veal (2000), have attested to Dyer's argument without fully considering the genuine improvements sports journalists have made to their treatment of women's sport reports, particularly when they cover the Olympic Games. Focusing on differing terms used to describe women's and men's sporting matches, Duncan and Messner (1998, pp.184-5) arrive at the conclusion that female athletes are poorly depicted in the media in comparison with male athletes. They draw on specific language categories to support their argument that sportswomen are consistently portrayed as weak or incompetent athletes, are given demeaning labels, and are often belittled based on their appearance and traditional notions of gender. However, the findings of this study differ.

Articles written about female athletes by Australian sports journalists during the Sydney Olympics were not, on the whole, demeaning. In fact, they concentrated more on female athletes' strengths than their weaknesses, with teams such as the Hockeyroos and the Opals basketball team, as well as beach volleyball gold medallists Kerri Pottharst and Natalie Cook, receiving many compliments from the press for their powerful and persistent styles of play. Weakness descriptors were occasionally used, and this was most evident in the reporting of female athletes competing in individual sports, or athletes who suffered agonising defeats. Unlike Duncan and Messner's (1998, pp.177-9) findings, successful female athletes at Sydney were usually commended on their athletic ability and skill, rather than being carried by their supporters, and when the athletes were unsuccessful in their efforts, the strength of their opponents would generally be acknowledged.

The outcome of this analysis, using Duncan and Messner's first category of language to assess the content of the Sydney Olympic articles, shows that female athletes are accorded a different standing in today's press compared to that in the past. At the Olympics, sportswomen are not treated as inferior to sportsmen, as has

been suggested by the Australian Sports Commission and the Office of the Status of Women (1985, p.33), Creedon (1994, p.14) and Stell (1991, p.229), and journalists, by stating that some athletes and teams are the world's greatest, now recognise that their athletic abilities meet very high standards.

Gender marking, infantilisation and the use first names to label female athletes was done infrequently by Olympic reporters at Sydney and is therefore not a great concern, although some inadequacies can still be found in the occasional portrayal of female athletes based on appearance and sex-role stereotypes. While this type of language was not commonly used, it was sometimes found to tarnish representations of certain sports like beach volleyball, handball and water polo. Danielle Woodhouse said that the Australian water polo team had not been happy with reports which emphasised their torn swimming costumes or players' appearances, but they tried to utilise this publicity to their advantage:

If you use that, you can't then turn around and cry foul about it down the track and go, 'Oh, it's not fair', you know. 'Why are these people getting all the publicity?' or 'why do they only ever write about the fact that we get our bathers ripped?' and stuff, when you know we got into the Olympics because the girls put their bathers on ... and went to the airport and disrupted media conferences. Of course, that was a brave employ to use their sexuality to get publicity so you can't turn around and then go, 'That's all we ever get covered for is our sexuality'. (D. Woodhouse, personal communication, February 26, 2002)

Sports journalists from *The West Australian*, Steve Lague and Gené Stephan, also pointed out that female athletes who use their image to promote their sports, especially if they are elite athletes, will usually attract press attention as a result. With this in mind, it must still be stressed that sexualisation becomes problematic when it is used repeatedly or negatively by the press. It is hoped that journalists strike a balance when reporting on sportswomen, making sure that if they choose to place emphasis on appearances they must in turn give adequate recognition to the athletes' performances and achievements. Most journalists who reported on attractive pole vaulter Tatiana Grigorieva after she won her silver medal actually did achieve this balance, despite counter arguments.

Sex-role stereotypes, used to suggest that mothers or female athletes competing in contact sports are displaced from their traditional feminine roles, were

avoided by the Sydney Olympic reporters. But examples of this, such as the women's handball report, were still found. These types of reports, while starkly out of place when compared to most others, cause the greatest concern when authors study the reporting of sportswomen. However, authors such as Mikosza (1997, p.16), Stoddart (1994, p.6) and Wilson (1997, p.45) are beginning to recognise that women's sport reporting has substantially improved in a qualitative sense, and there are now far fewer noticeable differences between articles written about female and male athletes.

Sydney's opening ceremony, which honoured the centenary of women's Olympic participation with a concluding torch relay of Australian female champions, was found to have little influence on the reporting of women's Olympic events. Reviews written about the ceremony did acknowledge this important gesture, but more emphasis was paid to the role of indigenous peoples in conveying messages relating to Australianness and reconciliation. The only regular reference made to the final torch relay of women in the reports occurred in articles written about Cathy Freeman, who was involved in arguably the two most defining moments of the Sydney Games for Australia when she lit the Olympic cauldron at the opening ceremony and won this country's most anticipated gold medal.

In the early 1990s, Australian author Stell (1991) expressed her disappointment and concern that the prominence of national female champions of the past had no bearing upon press representations of today's female athletes:

How had women, brought up on the deeds of the Stricklands, Frasers, Cuthberts and Courts, come to be so cut off from information and how had their sports been relegated to such an inferior position? (Stell, 1991, p.229)

Although the opening ceremony's acknowledgement of the centenary of women's Olympic participation, which involved three of the four athletes mentioned by Stell, did not directly influence the reporting of female athletes at Sydney, sports journalists do consider the legacy of early champion sportswomen when they report on Australian women's Olympic events. *The West Australian's* Bevan Eakins, who did not comment on the opening ceremony because he had not seen it, still recognised these athletes' accomplishments in Australian sporting history as having a considerable influence on the way national sportswomen are perceived by local journalists at contemporary Olympic Games:

Come Olympics [the coverage] really evens out. Part of that is because of our history of involvement in the Olympic movement. We've had some incredibly successful women, like Betty Cuthbert, Dawn Fraser, and it's often in the past that they've stolen the limelight more than the men in many cases. (B. Eakins, personal communication, February 7, 2002.)

The greatest impact the opening ceremony, and its celebration of female Olympians, was found in its evocation of pride amongst the Australian people and the athletes themselves. This outcome is consistent with post-Olympic analyses by Greenfield and Williams (2000), Powell (2000), and Sinclair and Wilson (2000). The opening ceremony inspired the Australian community's Olympic mood to shift from dubious to unashamedly patriotic, and the generations of "our very own women Olympians" (Powell, 2000, p.86), who ran the concluding leg of the torch relay, contributed to this. It also left a lasting impression on female athletes such as Rechelle Hawkes, Kerri Pottharst, Belinda Stowell and Danielle Woodhouse, who said it made them feel proud to be female Olympians. However, these athletes believed this did not directly inspire them in their achievements at Sydney.

While the Australian Olympic Committee chose to emphasise the role of women in the Olympic movement in the opening ceremony, those involved in press production decided they would not carry this theme further in their reporting of female athletes, besides with Freeman. Instead, Australian sports journalists were guided by similar news values to those which determine the general selection of news stories. In other words, their reporting was based on a hierarchical prioritisation of information.

Specific news values repeatedly surfaced in both the quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative analysis of the Sydney Olympic press coverage indicates that news values influenced the placing of stories written about particular athletes and incidents. The athletes complement these findings by suggesting throughout their interviews that similar factors had determined which female athletes received more press attention than others, including themselves, during the Sydney Olympics. They also, indirectly, used news values to surmise why sports journalists reported on their own performances the way they did. The sports journalists interviewed said, factors they considered most when reporting on Olympic events corresponded remarkably with those identified in the quantitative analysis and the

athletes' answers. A criteria of eight news values accorded to sports journalism, particularly at an Olympic Games, was therefore developed as this study progressed:

- Success/Performance
- Profile
- Expectation/Surprise
- Proximity
- Drama
- Rivalry/Conflict
- Appearance
- Human Interest

References made to each of these news values are present in both the athletes' and journalists' responses, and are sustained in the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the Sydney Olympic press coverage. The most important news value overall which, in most cases, specifically applies to sport reporting, was found to be success or, more generally, the athletes' performances. Essentially, the sports journalists said they would initially seek to cover gold medal winners, or athletes who had performed exceptionally well in their events. The following three news values, profile, expectation/surprise and proximity, then determined how much emphasis would be paid to these athletes, and where the stories would be placed in the newspaper. Cathy Freeman and the Australian women's hockey team, the Hockeyroos, are examples of athletes and teams who drew considerable press attention in Australia through a combination these factors; being established, high-profile members of the national Olympic team who achieved success at the Sydney Games. Athletes who produced unexpected or extraordinary performances, such as pole vaulter Tatiana Grigorieva, or upset athletes who were expected to succeed, like American swimmer Misty Hyman's triumph over Australia's Susie O'Neill, were given prominent coverage due to their surprise value.

In contrast, dramatic incidents of misfortune, such as Australian walker Jane Saville's reaction to her disqualification, and rivalry – or conflict – between high-profiled athletes, such as Cathy Freeman and Marie-Jose Perec/Marion Jones, also

commanded a supreme level of press reportage as they provided sensational angles to the Olympic coverage. News of Saville's trauma was, in fact, given higher priority in the press than the Australian women's and men's gold medal wins in the 470 sailing class, indicating an exception to the rule that success takes precedence over other news values. The news value of drama, conflict and profile reminds us of the sports media's function of entertaining its audience. High-profiled athletes are referred to as 'stars', and journalists, like narrators, document their sporting journeys giving particular detail to the battles in which they engage, and the rivals – or circumstances – which play a part in deciding athlete's destiny. For example, the media's build-up of the Freeman/Perec rivalry was jolted by a melodramatic twist, which effectively shifted the media's attention to Frenchwoman Perec's escape from the Olympic city and placed Freeman as the overwhelming favourite to win the 400m sprint.

To an extent, articles focusing on female athletes' appearances and human interest stories were presented as light entertaining pieces, some being more tabloid-like than others, with glamour and background also contributing to the dramatisation of women's Olympic contests. Women's beach volleyball was treated as a spectacle of flesh and excitement, and this enhanced its press exposure and placement, albeit trivialising the serious competition taking place.

Authors of texts on women's sport in the media generally do not discuss the role of news values in shaping the content and placement of articles written about female athletes. The Australian Sports Commission and the Office of the Status of Women (1985) and Creedon (1994) are the exceptions, and Greenfield and Williams (2000) do analyse the media's dramatisation of women's Olympic events drawing on a case study of the Freeman/Perec rivalry.

A criteria of only three news values is identified by the Australian Sports Commission and the Office of the Status of Women (1985), and these are not accorded to print sports journalism, but to television. Nevertheless, this thesis shows that they do apply to print as well: "Television has had a major impact on the definition and interpretation of news values when it [comes] to sport – it has especially emphasised the dramatic, the glamorous and the cult of personality" (p.34). "Cult of personality" is presumed to be synonymous with profile, in that athletes with a vast public following are likely to receive more media attention than those who are less known. This criteria of news values, however, omits success – the

factor deemed in this study to be the most influential in the prioritisation of sports news – and proximity, which must be considered when assessing the press' inclination to publish more stories about national and local athletes.

Creedon (1994) does not list a criteria of specific news values, but does include news value in her "five principal journalistic norms", which also comprise objectivity, sourcing, work routines and structural constraints (p.6). She believes that these five principals guide sports journalists the same way as they do journalists reporting for other fields.

Other media academics, such as Jones and Jones (1999), Masterton (1998), van Dijk (1988), and White (1998), developed criteria of news values to represent what they believe makes a general report newsworthy. While these authors vary, and use different wording in listing their criteria, there are four elements which remain constant throughout their works: proximity, prominence, conflict and the (un)expected. These factors notably correspond with four of the criteria that this thesis associates with Sydney Olympic reports.

One the whole, the five female athletes interviewed for this thesis were happy with the press coverage Australian sportswomen received during the Sydney Olympics, but three of the respondents, Rechelle Hawkes, Belinda Stowell and Danielle Woodhouse, were less pleased with the reports written about themselves or the teams in which they competed. Their concern was not about the press' portrayal of their personalities, which was the main worry track athlete Raelene Boyle expressed in the chapter she wrote for Mitchell and Dyer's book, *Winning Women* in 1985 (p.43). Instead, Hawkes and Woodhouse criticised journalists' misinterpretations of their teams' selection processes and performances, and Stowell objected to the press' unfair treatment of less popular women's sports, like sailing. While Stowell felt her and 470 class partner, Jenny Armstrong's, accomplishments in the sailing competition had warranted good press exposure, she found it to be relegated behind stories written about popular sports and sensational incidents. This supports Stoddart's *Invisible Games* finding that many "women's 'minor' sports are still marginalised" in the press (1994, p.6). Woodhouse extended her argument about the Australian water polo team's misrepresentation by explaining how she had noticed a bias towards higher profiled and attractive members of her team, which distorted the reporting of players' individual performances.

Swimmer Jennifer Reilly was altogether satisfied with the way she was represented by the press. She acknowledged that swimming is one of the more celebrated sports in Australia, and that the national Olympic team was consistently given extensive and prominently placed coverage. Kerri Pottharst was generally happy with reporting of herself and Natalie Cook, and was not bothered about an incident in which the condition of her existing knee injury was exaggerated in some articles. Overall, the outcome of the qualitative interviews with these athletes suggests that women who compete in team or less popular sports are more critical of the press reporting than individual female athletes competing in popular sports. Considering this assumption in the context of sports journalism, it appears that sports journalists find it easier to report on popular sports and individual sportspeople, particularly at an Olympic Games, and the quality of these reports is more superior as a result. It must also be remembered that articles are subjected to editing processes which ultimately affect how reports are presented, and where they are placed in the newspapers.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the Sydney Olympic Games reporting in this thesis demonstrate that the coverage of Australian female athletes at this Olympics was commendable. It provides textual and pictorial evidence that women's sports are newsworthy and are a valuable part of sport culture in this country. However, everyday reporting does not maintain the same parity of coverage that is calculated during an Olympic period, and there is little flow on of women's sport coverage after an Olympic Games takes place. As Gené Stephan pointed out in her interview, male football codes, such as Australian Rules, rugby league, rugby union and soccer, dominate the sports pages in winter months and cricket consumes much press space in the summer months. This leaves little space for other sports, including many women's tournaments, which take place during the year.

Men's team sports are often seen as on-field representations of war, where teams from opposing nations battle one another to claim the ultimate prize. At the Olympics, we have seen this type of warlike imagery being applied to both men's and women's team events where nations clash in quests for gold medals. Since battle and war metaphors or images are not so readily available for women, the press does not seem to dramatise women's team events in such a way in everyday reporting.

This may be a contributing factor as to why women's sports are seen to be less exciting, or less newsworthy, than men's sports.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Elite international sports spectacles such as the Olympic Games, and presumably the Commonwealth Games and Goodwill Games, alter the way media represents women's sports. During the periods of time in which these events take place we see a marked improvement in the quantitative and qualitative representations of female athletes in the Australian press. Ang and Hermes (1996) make an interesting consideration about sport audiences, which does apply to major events like the Olympic Games:

We might ask whether the pleasure of watching sports is really in all its aspects that different for men and women; we might consider that discourses of nation and nationalism may play a more significant role in sports viewing than discourses of gender. (Ang & Hermes, 1996, pp.338-9)

At major international sporting events, also including Grand Slam tennis tournaments, swimming and athletics championships, the public and the media's support is not discriminatory and any national representative who succeeds, be they male or female, is granted hero status. This underlines the importance the Australian public places on international competition, and the role of our sportspeople in fostering the Australian identity and national pride. The Sydney Olympics opening ceremony's honour of Australian female champions, in its concluding leg of the torch relay, exemplifies this.

At non-Olympic times, or times when major shared events are not taking place, sport coverage in the press is not balanced, as less popular individual women's sports and most women's team sports fall from the sports pages in favour of dominant male sporting codes. Space allocated to sport in contemporary daily newspapers is no longer confined to the back or centre pages. Readers are now presented with match preview and review inserts, specialising in particular sports – usually men's Australian Rules Football, cricket or soccer. In *The West Australian*,

these inserts are positioned in between the entertainment pages and, in many ways, fit into the entertainment genre themselves. In pre-match inserts fans are provided with detailed accounts of who is included in the team, who is injured or omitted, as well as other background information about the personalities involved, and post-match reports allow fans to relive, and scrutinise, the action and drama which took place on the field or pitch. Female athletes are generally not given this kind of dramatic build-up or analysis unless they competing in elite, highly promoted events, and very rarely do they feature in sporting inserts.

As long as Australian newspapers' sports coverage is dominated by Australian Rules Football, rugby union, rugby league and soccer in winter, and cricket in summer, this hegemony is not likely to be overcome in the near future. As a result, an even representation of everyday sports is not foreseeable. However, this does not suggest that everyday coverage of women's sport cannot be improved. The positive examples provided by the Olympic reports written during the Sydney Games suggest that women's sport is seen to have news value, and that journalists do acknowledge the quality of competition offered by female athletes.

Female athletes are now more actively promoting themselves in various media, and through public speaking and junior sport programmes. In turn, they are attracting more media attention and encouraging the public's awareness of women's sport. Australian taekwondo gold medallist, Lauren Burns, for instance, joined Winter Olympian Jacqui Cooper in the *Athletes as Role Models* tour of the Northern Territory in 2002, a programme which aims to inspire indigenous children through female and male sporting representatives. Burns has also made regular appearances on Australian television networks since her Olympic success. Tatiana Grigorieva had already made herself known to the Australian public before achieving her silver medal at Sydney. Grigorieva established her own website, with assistance from former current affairs presenter Derryn Hinch, prior to the Sydney Olympics which was listed as one of the most popular athlete "fansites" as the Games progressed:

Tatiana.com.au recorded a 700 percent leap in traffic yesterday as Australians looked online to find out more about the blonde sailing through the air to win silver. (Needham & Pritchard, 2000, p.3)

With mixed response, Grigorieva continues to promote herself through her appearance and her modelling pursuits, as well as her athleticism. The female athlete

body has been a subject of spirited debate throughout history but, in contemporary sport, more female athletes, like Grigorieva, are using this to their advantage. In the past, a major concern for sportswomen was having to maintain a feminine image whilst competing in sport, particularly team sports, and this image did not allow for noticeable physical strength (Darlinson, 1989, p.19). Now, female athletes are being recognised for their athletic physiques, as exemplified by the articles written about the Hockeyroos, and strength and power are attributes commonly linked with successful women in sport. This signifies a shift in the public's perceptions from seeing the female athlete as being sexual, or a compliant – yet skilful – figure of femininity, to perceiving her as being physical, or a worthy competitor.

The public is becoming more aware of female athletes' sporting performances and personalities and this is being assisted, in part, by a forward progression in their press representations. This progress has accelerated only recently – most noticeably since the Atlanta Olympic Games – with the greatest improvements being evident in the coverage of elite events. The quantity of everyday press coverage, however, is developing very gradually and is still minimal when considered in the broader context of sport in the media. However, the assertiveness demonstrated by sportswomen on and off the field, and a media language that takes account of this, nourish the hope that the status of women's sport in the media and society will advance significantly in the future.

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APPENDIX A

Athletes' Interview Questions

1. What did the Sydney Games opening ceremony and its celebration of the centenary of women's involvement in the Olympics mean to you?
2. Did this acknowledgement of women at the opening ceremony inspire you in your achievements?
3. Were you happy with the press coverage given to Australia's female athletes at the Sydney Games?
4. Were you happy with the press reports written about you personally?
5. Do you think the press reports adequately reflected your own experiences?
6. Did you get the impression the press reports were influenced by the centenary of women's participation in the Olympics?
7. Do you feel some female athletes received more press attention than others during the Sydney Games?
8. What do you think are the important factors in the reporting of women athletes?
9. How do you feel the press coverage of women's sport during the Olympics compares with coverage at non-Olympic times?

Concluding Question: Is there anything else you'd like to add, or that I've missed?

APPENDIX B

Journalists' Interview Questions

1. Did the emphasis on the centenary of women's involvement in the Olympic Games at Sydney's opening ceremony influence your reporting of women at the Games?
2. Do you believe some female athletes received more press attention than others during the Sydney Games?
3. How did you prioritise and construct articles referring to women's Olympic events?
4. Do you see a difference between the reporting of male and female Olympians?
5. What difference does the Olympic occasion make to the allocation and content of women's sport coverage in the press?

Concluding Question: Do you have any further comments?

APPENDIX C

Quantitative Research Statistics: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related paragraphs

	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>			<i>The Australian</i>			<i>The West Australian</i>			<i>The Sunday Times</i>		
Date (2000)	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%
Saturday September 16	292	1144	20.3	158	726	17.9	55	262	17.4			
Sunday September 17										392	639	38
Monday September 18	367	1250	22.7	170	497	25.5	110	304	26.6			
Tuesday September 19	482	1106	30.4	178	452	28.3	163	244	40			
Wednesday September 20	520	1016	33.9	197	688	22.3	173	229	43			
Thursday September 21	331	1213	21.4	223	497	31	119	262	31.2			
Friday September 22	490	905	35.1	405	424	48.9	150	264	36.2			
Saturday September 23	481	1114	30.2	301	484	38.3	172	213	44.7			
Sunday September 24										338	542	38.4
Monday September 25	621	880	41.4	314	440	41.6	170	215	44.2			
Tuesday September 26	710	826	46.2	401	284	58.5	227	210	51.9			
Wednesday September 27	569	659	46.3	397	502	44.2	201	264	43.2			
Thursday September 28	547	889	38.1	395	298	57	215	264	44.9			
Friday September 29	526	972	35.1	449	331	57.6	201	170	54.2			
Saturday September 30	504	1169	30.1	206	570	26.5	174	255	40.6			
Sunday October 1										301	485	38.3
Monday October 2	239	936	20.3	141	681	17.2	68	197	25.7			
Total Paragraphs	6679	14079	32.2	3935	6874	36.4	2198	3353	39.6	1031	1666	38.2

* % column denotes percentage of total Olympic-related paragraphs allocated to female athletes

APPENDIX D

Quantitative Research Statistics: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related photographs

	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>			<i>The Australian</i>			<i>The West Australian</i>			<i>The Sunday Times</i>		
Date (2000)	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%	Women	Other	%
Saturday September 16	25	64	28.1	20	77	20.6	16	24	40			
Sunday September 17										33	61	35.1
Monday September 18	24	51	32	18	38	32.1	18	26	40.9			
Tuesday September 19	26	61	29.9	21	40	34.4	13	41	24.1			
Wednesday September 20	25	47	34.7	25	60	29.4	22	34	39.3			
Thursday September 21	22	55	28.6	19	36	34.5	14	33	29.8			
Friday September 22	16	63	20.2	34	28	54.8	14	25	35.9			
Saturday September 23	24	76	24	24	44	35.3	15	35	30			
Sunday September 24										46	44	51
Monday September 25	42	44	48.8	36	42	46.2	20	33	37.7			
Tuesday September 26	39	50	43.8	26	33	44.1	19	36	34.5			
Wednesday September 27	29	32	47.5	37	40	48.1	23	18	56.1			
Thursday September 28	35	42	45.5	37	40	48.1	16	29	36.5			
Friday September 29	36	46	43.9	42	35	54.5	18	23	43.9			
Saturday September 30	39	66	37.1	41	51	44.6	22	23	48.8			
Sunday October 1										46	71	39.3
Monday October 2	21	111	15.9	39	71	35.5	9	13	40.9			
Total Photographs	403	808	33.3	419	645	39.4	239	393	37.8	125	176	41.5

* % column denotes percentage of total Olympic-related photographs allocated to female athletes

APPENDIX E

Quantitative Research Statistics: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related photographs by size (Large, Medium and Small)

<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>						
Date (2000)	Women			Other		
	Lge	Med	Sm	Lge	Med	Sm
Saturday September 16	5	11	9	20	30	14
Sunday September 17						
Monday September 18	8	11	5	15	23	13
Tuesday September 19	7	7	12	14	23	24
Wednesday September 20	7	10	8	14	12	21
Thursday September 21	6	7	9	17	23	15
Friday September 22	7	5	4	11	14	38
Saturday September 23	7	10	7	22	29	25
Sunday September 24						
Monday September 25	8	21	13	12	16	16
Tuesday September 26	17	11	11	13	17	20
Wednesday September 27	9	6	14	7	10	15
Thursday September 28	11	14	10	6	19	17
Friday September 29	9	15	12	10	23	13
Saturday September 30	6	25	8	11	40	15
Sunday October 1						
Monday October 2	3	11	7	26	42	43
Total Photographs	110	164	129	198	321	289

<i>The Australian</i>						
Date (2000)	Women			Other		
	Lge	Med	Sm	Lge	Med	Sm
Saturday September 16	4	9	7	5	34	9
Sunday September 17						
Monday September 18	1	7	10	2	15	21
Tuesday September 19	1	5	15	3	14	23
Wednesday September 20	1	8	16	7	27	26
Thursday September 21	2	5	12	5	15	16
Friday September 22	3	16	15	3	8	17
Saturday September 23	3	12	9	3	14	27
Sunday September 24						
Monday September 25	5	13	18	5	14	23
Tuesday September 26	5	11	10	2	15	16
Wednesday September 27	6	17	14	4	14	22
Thursday September 28	5	12	20	1	12	27
Friday September 29	4	17	21	3	16	16
Saturday September 30	6	26	9	7	30	14
Sunday October 1						
Monday October 2	3	18	18	10	38	23
Total Photographs	49	176	194	70	266	309

APPENDIX E

Quantitative Research Statistics: Newspaper allocation of Sydney Olympic-related photographs by size (Large, Medium and Small)

<i>The West Australian</i>						
Date (2000)	Women			Other		
	Lge	Med	Sm	Lge	Med	Sm
Saturday September 16	3	6	7	6	11	7
Sunday September 17						
Monday September 18	1	9	8	3	12	11
Tuesday September 19	1	7	5	5	14	22
Wednesday September 20	3	8	11	6	17	11
Thursday September 21	4	5	5	6	11	16
Friday September 22	4	6	4	5	10	10
Saturday September 23	4	6	5	8	17	10
Sunday September 24						
Monday September 25	6	5	9	3	14	16
Tuesday September 26	7	4	8	7	19	10
Wednesday September 27	3	14	6	2	14	2
Thursday September 28	6	5	5	2	17	10
Friday September 29	4	10	4	5	13	5
Saturday September 30	6	9	7	3	17	3
Sunday October 1						
Monday October 2	1	3	5	5	7	1
Total Photographs	53	97	89	66	193	134

<i>The Sunday Times</i>						
Date (2000)	Women			Other		
	Lge	Med	Sm	Lge	Med	Sm
Saturday September 16						
Sunday September 17	11	9	13	15	22	24
Monday September 18						
Tuesday September 19						
Wednesday September 20						
Thursday September 21						
Friday September 22						
Saturday September 23						
Sunday September 24	15	14	17	11	15	18
Monday September 25						
Tuesday September 26						
Wednesday September 27						
Thursday September 28						
Friday September 29						
Saturday September 30						
Sunday October 1	10	13	23	12	21	38
Monday October 2						
Total Photographs	36	36	53	38	58	80