# Analysis of the representation of female athletes in sports media: a systematic literature review
## Análisis de la representación de las mujeres deportistas en los medios deportivos: una revisión sistemática de la literatura

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## Abstract

Introduction: The focus of coverage on female athletes is starting to shift, with more recognition of the achievements and dedication to Sports. Despite improvements in representation, there is still a gap in public recognition of female athletes compared to males, specifically in sports awards or promotional platforms.
Objective: This study aimed to explore the representation of female athletes in sports media with a focus on achievement emphasis, gender stereotypes, and coverage orientation.
Methodology: Systematic literature review (SLR) was used to investigate the form in which female athletes were represented in the media during different periods.
Results: The results showed inequality between female and male athletes, as females were often offered less recognition and attention commensurate with the achievements. Additionally, gender stereotypes influenced the representation of female athletes in sports coverage due to more concentration on the physical or aesthetic aspects than achievements in sports. During the review, significant changes in the approach of media to female athletes were detected over time.
Conclusions: Changes in the representation of female athletes in sports media are essential to creating a more equitable and inclusive narrative of the achievements. The results signified a need for changes in the media coverage of female sports, emphasizing the achievements and dedication as well as minimizing existing gender stereotypes.

## Keywords

Representation, Female Athletes, Sports Media, Gender Stereotypes

## Resumen

Introducción: El enfoque de la cobertura sobre las mujeres atletas está empezando a cambiar, con un mayor reconocimiento de los logros y la dedicación al Deporte. A pesar de las mejoras en la representación, todavía existe una brecha en el reconocimiento público de las mujeres deportistas en comparación con los hombres, específicamente en los premios deportivos o plataformas de promoción.
Objetivo: Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar la representación de las mujeres deportistas en los medios de comunicación deportivos, centrándose en el énfasis en los logros, los estereotipos de género y la orientación de la cobertura.
Metodología: Se utilizó la revisión sistemática de la literatura (SLR) para investigar la forma en que las mujeres atletas fueron representadas en los medios de comunicación durante diferentes períodos.
Resultados: Los resultados mostraron desigualdad entre los atletas femeninos y masculinos, ya que a menudo se ofrecía a las mujeres menos reconocimiento y atención proporcional a los logros. Además, los estereotipos de género influyeron en la representación de las atletas femeninas en la cobertura deportiva debido a una mayor concentración en los aspectos físicos o estéticos que en los logros deportivos. Durante la revisión, se detectaron cambios significativos en el enfoque de los medios de comunicación hacia las deportistas a lo largo del tiempo.
Conclusiones: Los cambios en la representación de las mujeres atletas en los medios deportivos son esenciales para crear una narrativa más equitativa e inclusiva de los logros. Los resultados indicaron la necesidad de cambios en la cobertura mediática del deporte femenino, haciendo hincapié en los logros y la dedicación, así como minimizando los estereotipos de género existentes.

## Palabras clave

Representación, mujeres deportistas, medios de comunicación deportivos, estereotipos de género.

## Introduction

The traditional role of sports media to female athletes is often influenced by gender stereotypes rooted in society. These stereotypes generate boundaries and a narrow view of the roles considered "suitable" for female athletes in the world of Sports (Thabrani, 2022). The media commonly use different terminology or even provide sub-categories for sports regarded as "appropriate" for female athletes. For example, there is a tendency to use words such as "light sports" or "feminine sports" to refer to types that are considered suitable for female athletes (Schmidt, 2018). The images selected by the media in sports coverage of female athletes often reinforce gender stereotypes (Rowe & Silva, 2023). These images show more of physical aspects or beauty than sporting achievements (Sitorus et al., 2022). The narrative built by the media coverage often leads to a disproportionate emphasis on certain aspects, such as the provision of excessive attention to the physical appearance or personal lives (Muliawan, 2021).

Treatment differences associated with the achievements of female and male athletes reported by the media have become an essential concern in gender analysis in the world of Sports (Vann, 2014) (Iragraha et al., 2019). Female achievements are assessed or compared to standards distinct from those of male athletes. There is a trend where male athletes often dominate in presenting major awards even when the achievements of female athletes are comparable or more extraordinary (Desviyanti et al., 2023). Another factor that influences treatment differences is the commercial focus of the media (Lebel et al., 2019). Editorial decisions are based on popularity, market appeal, and audience preferences, which can lead to different coverage choices between female and male athletes (Rowe & Silva, 2023).

Gender stereotypes are essential in the representation of female athletes in sports media (Desviyanti et al., 2023). There is often a pattern prioritizing existing gender stereotypes, such as beauty, femininity, or traditional roles as mother or partner (Martínez-rosales et al., 2021)(Litchfield & Kavanagh, 2018). Moreover, the influence comes in the form of reducing appreciation for the skills, success, and dedication in sports as well as influencing the form in which the public views the role and contribution of female athletes (Trolan, 2013). Representation that is not very attentive to female achievements and dedication provide the impression of being less competent or relevant in a sports context (Lameiras & Rodríguez-castro, 2020). Societal perception will change when the media provide more fair and equal attention to skills and achievements. This tends to promote the feeling of recognition, appreciation, and motivation, which facilitate continual development among female athletes in sport (Organista & Mazur, 2020). Additionally, positive representation can influence the identity of female athletes by strengthening self-confidence, belief in individual skills, and awareness of the value of sporting achievements as an crucial part of identity (Petty & Pope, 2019a).

In recent decades, there have been gradual but significant changes regarding how the media reports and represents female athletes in sports (Petty & Pope, 2019a). Previously, representation of females was often associated with gender stereotypes limited to and focused on physical aspects, beauty, or traditional roles such as sexual objects or companions for male athletes (Knott-fayle et al., 2023). This trend is changing as the media are becoming more attentive to female sporting achievements and skills (Nopembri, 2013). Many efforts have been implemented to change existing stereotypes, such as sports organizations, journalists, and gender equality advocates playing an essential role in identifying unfair or stereotypical treatment related to media coverage. Concerns are raised regarding issues of unequal coverage, use of gender-biased language, and misplaced emphasis in coverage (Dermawan et al., 2019). Additionally, the increasingly strong gender awareness movement has driven changes in female representation. Public campaigns, gender equality initiatives, and support from a society that is more aware of the need to correct the type of media treatment previously experienced contribute to changing societal perspectives about female representation in the world of Sports (Mclachlan, 2019).

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) needs to be conducted to provide a robust theoretical foundation by comprehensively and systematically analyzing previous studies. Therefore, this study aimed to represent female athletes in various aspects by prioritizing achievements, as well as addressing gender stereotypes and media coverage. The periodical representation and significant changes in the approach of the media to female athletes were reviewed. The gap in recognition and awards offered to female athletes by sports organizations or promotional platforms would be identified through comparison with male athletes.
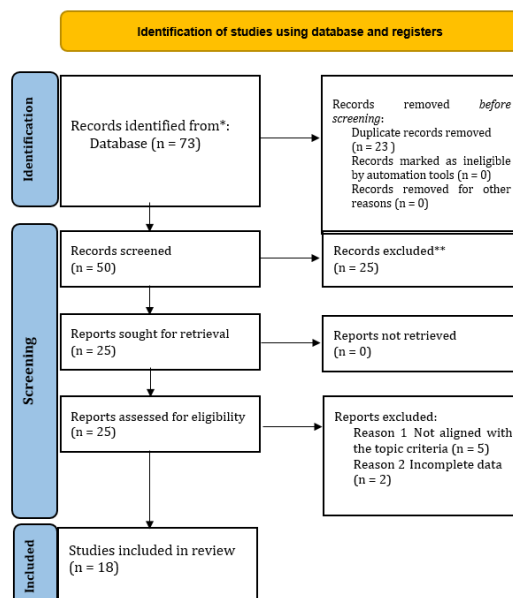
## Method

An SLR was used to identify, evaluate, and interpret all results on the study topic (Barak et al., 2018: D'Heer et al., 2019). This aimed to observe and explore by searching for articles or previous results describing the representation of female athletes in sports media. Additionally, evaluation was conducted with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist adapted to the study purpose (Rethlefsen & Page, 2022). A literature search was performed on Taylor and Francis database covering publications from 2013 to 2023 using the keywords "sports media" and "representation of females in sports media." Thousands of articles were obtained at the start of the search, leading to the formulation of inclusion and exclusion criteria to select those corresponding with the discussed topic, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criteria | Inclusion | Exclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Document Type | Article | News, proceedings, and books |
| Text Availability | Abstract and full-text | Text without abstract and incomplete text |
| Topic Appropriateness | In accordance | It is not following |
| Language | English and Indonesian | Apart from English and Indonesian |

Based on the results of literature searches through publications in database, 73 articles were obtained. The obtained search results were then screened by adjusting the quality and suitability of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, generating 18 articles that could be used in the literature review. The selection was carried out through (a) Identification stage- By entering keywords in the Taylor and Francis Search database to obtain 73 articles, and (b) Screening stage- Filtering based on document type to ensure the total number of documents added in the inclusion category was 50 articles. A filter was also conducted based on the completeness of the abstract and text to ensure a total of 25 documents were included in the inclusion category. (c) Eligibility stage- A total of 20 articles were obtained by removing those different from the focus of analysis and irrelevant to the concept based on the full text matching the theme criteria, but unable to meet the eligibility criteria, and (d) Inclusion stage- Two low-quality articles were excluded, leading to the addition of 18 into a further review stage (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Identification of Studies Using Database and Registers



## Results

Figure 1 presents the stages of article completion, while the data on the study name, year of publication, methods, and results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Article Review

| Author Name and Year | Study Methods | Study Results |
|---|---|---|
| Katie Sullivan Barak, Vikki Krane, Sally R. Ross, Mallory E. Mann & Chelsea A. Kaunert (2018) | Qualitative | The results showed that the representation of female athletes in sports was influenced by various factors such as the media, social stereotypes, and the expectations encountered in creating self-image. The self-representation reflects the intersection of identities and social discourses. The female athletes rejected stereotypes associating appearance with sexuality or masculinity while still demonstrating athletic and feminine identities. In addition, an attempt was made to show that the females were more than just athletes and possessed complex identities outside of sport (Barak et al., 2018a). |
| Kate Petty & Stacey Pope (2019) | Qualitative content analysis and quantitative analysis | The results showed that female football teams were considered equal to male football teams, signifying a positive change in media representation. In addition, increasing momentum in media coverage was found, such as more coverage of various sports events and campaigns designed to promote female participation. This signifies a shift towards more positive media coverage of female sports in general, not limited to football (Petty & Pope, 2019). |
| Joke D'Heer, Justine Vergotte, Sara De Vuyst & Sarah Van Leuven (2019) | Content Analysis | This study found that women were still disproportionately represented as producers and figures in the news. Although more female journalists report news for Vice, there is no horizontal segregation in the reporting. A significant relationship was observed between the gender of journalists, the news topics reported, and the representation of actors in the news. Females tend to report on social and legal topics, while males may report on political and government topics. Male actors were also overrepresented in the news, while females were more often represented in "soft" news and private spaces (D'Heer et al., 2019). |
| Fiona McLachlan (2019) | Critical Analysis and Historical Analysis | This showed that narratives of change in female sports in Australia have been essential to media coverage over the last 130 years. Narratives celebrating the progress of female Sports and questions regarding unprecedented growth were reported (Mclachlan, 2019). |
| Yu-Hsien Tseng (2020) | Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis | The results showed that in Taiwan basketball, females were represented as individuals with extraordinary athletic skills, resilience, self-motivation, and strong determination to face pressure and obstacles in sports. The representation was also in the form of individuals challenging gender stereotypes and striving to fight for equality in sports. This aimed to show the athletic skills and optimistic character of female athletes and emphasize the importance of respecting individual choices and breaking down gender stereotypes (Tseng, 2020). |
| Dunja Antunovic (2016) | Qualitative | Based on the article, it could be concluded that although in the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increase in sports participation and funding in the United States, the media continued to ignore or represent female athletes with gender stereotypes. The 'points of change' framework from sports historian Jaime Schultz was used to identify moments comprising an ideological shift in the process of covering female sports. Through oral history interviews, it was found that journalists experienced and addressed the shifting gender ideologies, and negotiated meanings about femininity and athleticism in response to events challenging deeply rooted assumptions regarding gender and the intersections with ethnicity, race, and sexuality. |
| Amy Godoy-Pressland & Gerald Griggs (2014) | Content analysis | The results from this article showed that although the 2012 London Olympics were declared the "Women's Olympics", the photographic representation of female athletes in the British print media still lagged behind male representation. There were signs of increased gender equality in the location, page prominence, and camera angle of photos of female athletes compared to previous studies. Despite the widening opportunities for women to participate in sports, the dominant narratives depicted in both textual and visual form persist in preserving male hegemony in sport more comprehensively than any other social institution. |
| Ladan Rahbari (2019) | Qualitative method | This article examined how female weightlifters in Iran used the Instagram platform to represent and promote athletic practice, which was considered a masculine pursuit. The manner in which traditional conceptions of femininity and masculinity were negotiated by the athletes was identified through analysis of the visual and textual content, as well as user responses, on two relevant Instagram accounts. The results were interpreted through a feminist theoretical framework on the body, physicality, and weightlifting, and contextualized in the broader socio-cultural, political, and religious discourses in Iran related to the female body, sports, as well as morally and politically-charged forms of femininity. These showed how female weightlifters in Iran leveraged digital media to challenge socially determined gender boundaries in the country and investigate the perceptions and discourses of Iranian society on the issue. |
| Alba Adá-Lameiras & Yolanda Rodríguez-Castro (2021) | Qualitative | This study detected that although social media platforms such as Twitter had the potential to increase the representation of female athletes, in practice the media coverage during the Rio 2016 Olympics was still dominated by gender stereotypes. An analysis of 6,856 tweets from four Spanish media accounts found that only 1,343 tweets discussed female athletes, with 47.46% containing positive information about achievements, while a third of the tweets contained negative content describing the |

Table 2. Results of Article Review

| Author Name and Year | Study Methods | Study Results |
|---|---|---|
| | | failures committed. Furthermore, 9% of the photos of female athletes still revealed a clear sexual connotation, reinforcing gender stereotypes. These results showed that despite the presence of new media platforms facilitating more extensive reporting, the marginalization of female athletes in media coverage during major sporting events remained difficult to eliminate. |
| Suman Mishra (2014) | Semiotic analysis | The results showed both reinforcement and contradictions in the representation of gender and national identities. Female skaters were offered more prominence but sexualized and feminized, while an interesting interplay of masculinity and femininity was observed in the imagery of male and female athletes. Although an American bias was found, some contradictions were detected. These results emphasized the changing and fluid nature of the construction of gender and national identities in media representation of sports, which could identify dominant ideologies in the culture. Analysis of sports photography is important to understand how the media shapes attitudes and cultural values regarding what is valued in sports. |
| Toni Bruce (2014) | Cultural studies approach | The results showed that discourses of nationalism had a significant influence on media coverage of the Paralympics. Athletes from "our" country tend to receive more extensive and higher-quality coverage, with minimized disabilities, while international athletes "them" were more often represented in stereotypical ways with an emphasis on the disabilities and differences. This difference is related to how the ideas of elite sports, disability, and nationalism can be combined in various contexts. Understanding the process can help disability sports organizations to more effectively promote the athletes and events. |
| Roxane Coche (2016) | Content analysis | This study analyzed how the US Soccer Federation (USSF) promoted the US Women's National Team (USWNT) through social media, particularly Twitter, before, during, and after the 2011 Women's World Cup. The results of the content analysis of two USSF Twitter accounts showed that although the differences in the quantity and quality of coverage between male and female soccer were not comparable to the coverage detected in traditional media, signifying a gender gap persistence. The USSF tended to frame female teams as less important than male teams, even though the study was conducted at a time when female soccer should have received greater attention due to the international schedule. These results show that while social media opens up opportunities for females to receive wider attention, sports federations still tend to prioritize males. |
| Rens Peeters, Agnes Elling & Jacco Van Sterkenburg (2019) | Qualitative narrative case study approach | The results showed that despite the increased popularity and media attention towards female football in the Netherlands after the Dutch national female team's victory at WEURO 2017, the media coverage still followed the normative framework in describing this sport, prioritizing emphasized femininity, and positioning male football as the normative. This implies the increased popularity of female football in the Netherlands is still accompanied by the reproduction of hegemonic gender discourses. |
| Niamh Kitching, Ali Bowes & Meghan Maclaren (2020) | Postfeminist and collaborative approach | This article identified the complexity and tensions faced by a professional female athlete, Meghan MacLaren, in constructing identity and self-representation through personal blog. A postfeminist and collaborative method was adopted to analyze how MacLaren, a professional golfer on the Ladies' European Tour, must fulfill contradictory identities - as a confident yet doubtful golfer and a athlete activist who is present online. The article shows that these conflicting identities are influenced by the patriarchal and capitalist cultural environment that still dominates the sport of golf, forcing MacLaren to navigate the realities of life as a professional female athlete in online self-representation. |
| Kim Toffoletti & Catherine Palmer (2019) | Literature review | The results showed that there have been exciting developments in Australia in recent years, specifically regarding the launch of elite competitions in various sports and the outstanding achievements of Australian female athletes at the international level. Progress is visible regarding female representation in the Australian sports sector, both in leadership positions and as sports commentators. However, there are still challenges related to gender discrimination, pay inequality, harassment, and the dismissive attitude towards female sports that need to be addressed. Further explorations should be conducted on the transformations in Australian female sports and the implications for daily experiences and physical activities encountered. |
| Arief Muliawan (2021) | Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) Sara Mills | The results showed that female representation in the news about the 2018 Asian Games sporting event has been reduced to only include the discussion and construction of the image of the athletes as beautiful aesthetic objects. The biased representation in the news is a reflection of the persisting strong power of a patriarchal culture that marginalizes and discriminates against females. The representation of sexist bias in the news is a consequence of the development of media controlled by capitalist forces. Sexist bias in the news is built as a commodification effort, presenting females as selling points by reproducing popular tastes that contain market values and not public interest values (Muliawan, 2021a)(Muliawan, 2021a). |

Table 2. Results of Article Review

| Author Name and Year | Study Methods | Study Results |
|---|---|---|
| Aulli Reza Atmam (2021) | Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) Sara Mills | The results showed that the two video interviews represented female footballers as figures upholding gender equality and professionalism. This representation process cannot be separated from the positioning of the interviewed female footballers, as both object and subject. Therefore, in the videos, female footballers have an excellent opportunity for self-representation. This representation process occurs with the dominant spotlight on the source in both videos and the use of cultural codes inviting the audience to delve into thoughts and observe the challenges discussed from the source's point of view (Atmam, 2021). |
| Chrisintya Mauli Sitorus, Wiwid Noor Rakhmad, Nurul Hasfi (2022) | Critical Constructivism Paradigm | The results showed that Okezone.com media framed female athletes as attractive-looking figures from the clothing style, glamorous life, and appearance on the field. Meanwhile, the news presented by Kompas.com shows struggles and career paths. The five representations by Kompas.com described female athletes as (1) Tough, (2) Achievement makers, (3) Possessors of high fighting power, (4) Responsible, (5) Able to break gender barriers in sports, and (6) Sportsmanship (Sitorus et al., 2022). |

(Vai, A., et.al., 2024)

Based on Table 2, the number of articles analyzed and reviewed as study data was 18. This included (a) two articles published in 2013 (b) three articles published in 2014, (b) two articles published in 2016, (c) one article published in 2018, (d) six articles published in 2019, (e) two articles published in 2020, (f) three article published in 2021, (g) one article published in 2022, and (g) three articles published in 2023.

In addition to the distribution of articles according to the year of publication, the data were classified based on the methods used (Figure 2). These consisted of qualitative study (3; 16.6%), qualitative content and quantitative analysis (1; 5.5%), content analysis (3; 16.6%), critical and historical analysis (1; 5.5%), discourse and content analysis (1; 5.5%), Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) study method Sara Mills (2; 11.11%), critical constructivism paradigm (1; 5.5%), qualitative method (1; 5.5%), semiotic analysis (1; 5.5%), cultural studies (1; 5.5%), qualitative narrative case study (1; 5.5%), postfeminist and collaborative method (1; 5.5%), as well as literature review (1; 5.5%).

## Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the representation of female athletes in both print and digital media, as well as understand the influence of gender stereotypes and media narratives on public perceptions. Additionally, a comprehensive overview was provided regarding the progress and challenges in achieving gender equality in the world of Sports. Barak et al. (2018) reported that the representation of female athletes was influenced by factors such as social media, social stereotypes, and expectations encountered in shaping self-image. Female athletes often strive to reject stereotypes associating the appearance with sexuality or masculinity while maintaining athletic and feminine identities. In Iran, Rahbari (2019) showed how female weightlifters used Instagram to promote athletic practices and challenge traditional gender boundaries. This shows the potential application of social media as a powerful tool for self-representation and resistance against gender stereotypes.

Some studies showed positive changes in the representation of female athletes in print media. Petty & Pope (2019) found that female football teams were increasingly observed as equal to male teams, signifying positive changes in media representation. Godoy-Pressland & Griggs (2014) detected that despite the 2012 Olympics being dubbed the "Women's Olympics," the representation of female athletes in British print media photography still lagged behind male athletes. Even though there are signs of gender equality progress, dominant narratives still uphold male hegemony in sports. According to Antunovic (2016) and Mclachlan (2019), despite increased participation and funding for female sports, media often neglects or portrays female athletes through gender stereotypes. Lameiras & Rodríguez-castro (2020) showed that during the 2016 Rio Olympics, coverage of female athletes on newer platforms such as Twitter was dominated by gender stereotypes. D'Heer et al. (2019) stated that females were underrepresented in news, both as news producers and subjects. There is a significant relationship between the gender of journalists, news topics, and the representation of subjects in the news, where

female journalists tend to report social and legal topics while males more often report political and governmental topics.

The study by Tseng (2020) in Taiwan showed that female basketball athletes were represented as individuals with exceptional athletic skills, resilience, self-motivation, and strong determination due to challenging gender stereotypes and striving for equality in sports. In India, Mishra (2014) found that despite strengthening and contradictions in gender representation and national identity, female athletes were commonly shown in ways emphasizing sexuality and femininity. Kitching et al. (2021) explored the face complexity and tension faced by female athletes, such as professional golfer Meghan MacLaren, in constructing identities and self-representations through personal blogs. Collaborative and postfeminist methods suggest that females need to navigate contradictory identities, both as confident athletes and activists, in a cultural environment still dominated by patriarchy and capitalism.

Muliawan (2021) reported that female athletes were represented as aesthetic objects in news about the 2018 Asian Games. Sexist bias in the news reflected the strong patriarchal culture that still discriminated against females. Meanwhile, Atmam (2021) found that video interviews showed female soccer players as figures upholding gender equality and professionalism, providing opportunities for self-representation.

Coche (2016) and Peeters et al. (2019) detected that while social media opened up opportunities for broader female coverage, sports federations still tended to prioritize male sports. Differences in the quantity and quality of coverage between male and female football teams persist, despite social media being expected to offer more egalitarian platforms. Sitorus et al. (2022) reported that the media framed female athletes on Okezone.com as attractive figures in terms of fashion, glamorous lifestyle, and on-field appearance. Meanwhile, Kompas.com shows the struggles and career paths of female athletes with a focus on resilience, achievements, and the ability to overcome gender barriers in sports.

Bruce (2014) detected that nationalist discourse significantly influenced media coverage of the Paralympics. Athletes from a particular country tend to receive wider and higher-quality coverage, with minimized disabilities, while international athletes are more often represented stereotypically. This shows how ideas about elite sports, disabilities, and nationalism can be combined in various contexts to promote athletes and events more effectively. Toffoletti & Palmer (2019) found that in Australia, despite significant developments in feminine sports such as the launch of elite competitions and achievements by female athletes at international levels, challenges related to gender discrimination, wage inequality, harassment, and dismissive attitudes persisted. This study emphasizes the need to continue exploring transformations in female sports and the implications for everyday experiences in sports and physical activities.

This study has several limitations, firstly, the analysis only includes articles available in English and Indonesian, potentially introducing linguistic bias. Secondly, there is more focus on media representation than other factors influencing the participation and performance of female athletes, such as sports policies or physical education. Finally, the data analyzed were majorly obtained from media and digital platforms, which might not fully reflect the direct experiences. Future studies need to expand the linguistic and geographical scope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of global representations of female athletes. Additionally, the influence of sports policies as well as educational programs on participation and performance can be explored. A longitudinal study tracking changes in the representation and perceptions of female athletes over time will be valuable for understanding the progress and challenges associated with achieving gender equality in the world of Sports. Female representation in sports that rarely receive media attention, such as chess, weightlifting, boxing, and marching should be considered, specifically in Latin America. The media tends to focus more on female athletes from North America and Europe, while the achievements of female athletes in other regions are often ignored. Therefore, the media needs to provide more attention to female athletes in various underrepresented sports to promote gender equality and enrich the global sports narrative.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study identified significant variations in the representation of female athletes in sports media, strongly influenced by social and cultural contexts. Media representation differed based

on local cultural norms, with some countries, including Iran, using social media to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, while others, such as India, often emphasized aspects of sexuality and femininity. In Taiwan, female athletes were more frequently depicted based on athletic skills and resilience. These forms of representation influenced public perception and the self-identity of female athletes, who often needed to balance identities as athletes with the imposed expectations of femininity by the media. Digital platforms became crucial tools for female athletes to counter negative representation in traditional media, providing the opportunity to advocate for a positive image and independently build identities. Additionally, media representation varied based on sport type and geographical context, with few athletes receiving more recognition than others in certain sports. This study showed the need for a more contextual approach to understanding media representation and found persistent significant challenges despite some observed progress. Gender stereotypes and differences in representation across traditional and digital media would continue to influence public perceptions and the self-identities of female athletes, suggesting the importance of further investigations as well as the development of sports policies supporting gender equality.

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