



Leisure Sciences

An Interdisciplinary Journal



ISSN: 0149-0400 (Print) 1521-0588 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ulsc20

Media Coverage of Emergent Women's Leagues Within Mainstream Sports: Exploring Intersecting Hegemonies

Hunter Fujak, Joshua McLeod & Sarah Wymer

To cite this article: Hunter Fujak, Joshua McLeod & Sarah Wymer (25 Oct 2025): Media Coverage of Emergent Women's Leagues Within Mainstream Sports: Exploring Intersecting Hegemonies, Leisure Sciences, DOI: [10.1080/01490400.2025.2577198](https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2025.2577198)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2025.2577198>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC



Published online: 25 Oct 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2595



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Media Coverage of Emergent Women's Leagues Within Mainstream Sports: Exploring Intersecting Hegemonies

Hunter Fajak^a , Joshua McLeod^a  and Sarah Wymer^b 

^aDeakin University, Burwood, Australia; ^bAuckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This study adopts agenda-setting theory to examine how emergent Australian women's professional sports leagues have impacted the distribution of media coverage between genders and sports. In doing so, it assesses how these leagues have simultaneously challenged and reinforced hegemonic cultural structures that shape leisure choice. Quantitative newspaper content analysis from 2019 to 2023 produced 21,129 entries, equating to 8,690 pages of content. Logistic regression revealed a modest rise in overall women's sport coverage, driven by high-profile international events. In contrast, domestic women's leagues exhibited limited coverage growth. However, coverage is redistributing between women's professional leagues, with those aligned to culturally dominant and historically male-oriented sports growing their visibility. This shift exhibits leisure implications, as media hierarchies shape societal perceptions of which sports are valued. The emergence of new women's sport leagues thus presents a paradox: their growth has created opportunities for women but done so by marginalizing historically female-oriented sports.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 November 2024
Accepted 8 July 2025

KEYWORDS

Agenda Setting Theory; cultural oligarchies; hegemonic masculinity; media representation; women's professional sport leagues

1. Introduction

Coinciding with broader global movements toward gender equality, women's sport has experienced considerable growth over the past decade, marked by significant increases in participation and commercial investment (Doyle et al., 2024). Australia has been at the forefront of this development, inaugurating semiprofessional women's sports leagues in cricket, netball, Australian rules football, rugby league, and rugby union (2018) in the past decade (Taylor et al., 2022). The establishment of these leagues has acted to legitimize sport as a valued leisure pursuit for women, fostering increased community and recreational participation within such sports amongst women and girls. The rapid expansion of Australia's women's sport landscape, however, raises questions about how such growth impacts existing power structures and the overall sports hierarchy, particularly as most are situated within historically mainstream men's sports (Richardson et al., 2025).

Media coverage is an area where this impact is particularly salient (Thomson et al., 2023). These new leagues have provided women with newfound playing and exposure

CONTACT Hunter Fajak  H.fujak@deakin.edu.au  Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, 3125 Australia

© 2025 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

opportunities that previously did not exist (Taylor et al., 2023), and also the potential to redress deficiencies in media representation. This is particularly so given Cooky et al. (2021) thirty-year longitudinal analysis of American media, which concluded coverage of women's sport to have "consistently remained dismally low" to 2019 (p. 366). A possible unintended consequence of these emergent leagues, however, may be that historically male-oriented sports leverage the creation of women's leagues to further entrench their cultural and commercial dominance. That is, sports like Australian rules football, rugby league, or cricket, which enjoy entrenched cultural dominance in Australia (Fujak, 2021), could expand their position of influence and further marginalize historically smaller women's participatory sports who particularly struggle for media coverage.

Thus, nascent professional women's sport leagues such as the Australian Football League Women's (AFLW), National Rugby League Women's (NRLW) and Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) intersect two discrete hegemonies from a sport media perspective. First, their emergence is counter-hegemonic concerning the historically masculine orientation of their sports (Taylor et al., 2022). Yet, these mainstream sports benefit from media dominance in ways that reinforce their cultural hegemony, affording myriad commercial advantages and influencing leisure choice over marginalized non-mainstream sports. This is firstly so *via a demonstration effect*, which proposes that exposure to elite sport, whether through live attendance or media consumption, may increase individuals' motivation to participate themselves (De Bosscher et al., 2013; Potwarka & Leatherdale, 2016). Media plays a broader formative role in the development of leisure identities by influencing the set of sports individuals perceive as culturally valued and personally attainable (Beaton et al., 2009). The rise of these semiprofessional competitions underpinned by athlete remuneration, also reshapes the incentive structures that may influence girls' early sport participation preferences. This is of particular concern for non-mainstream female-oriented sports who "risk becoming a pipeline... for rival codes [sports] such as AFLW" (Elliott et al., 2023, p. 937).

The purpose of this study is to examine how coverage of new women's leagues in dominant sports challenges and reinforces sports media hegemonies. The central empirical research question is: Has the advent and growth of new women's sports leagues impacted the distribution of media coverage between genders and across sports? This study adopts agenda-setting as its theoretical framework, one of the most foundational frameworks in communication studies (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). In the sport context, the dominant application of agenda-setting has been to explore demographic representation within media coverage (Arth et al., 2022). This study's objective of exploring the intersection of demographic and sport coverage represents an important advancement in this area of research. To do so, the study performs a content analysis of digitized newspaper material from 2019 to 2023 published by Australia's two dominant media organizations. A review of relevant literature is now provided.

2. Literature review

2.1. Agenda Setting Theory

The central premise of Agenda Setting Theory (AST) is that media organizations have the power to shape the public agenda by influencing which topics receive attention

(McCombs et al., 2014). The theory is well-established, with a wide array of studies showing media prominence shapes public perceptions (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2006). This commenced from McCombs and Shaw (1972) seminal study of the 1968 U.S. presidential election, which highlighted how media emphasis on certain issues shaped voters' perceptions of their importance. In health communication, AST has been used to explain how the media influences public awareness of diseases and health policies, and consequently shapes behavior and health decisions (Ogata Jones et al., 2006). It has also been applied to explain how different types of organizations such as corporations, non-governmental bodies and public organizations are positioned differently in the media, thus affecting their reputation and legitimacy (Wonneberger & Jacobs, 2017). Within sport, agenda setting also has the potential to have profound implications, with the potential to reinforce gender and cultural hierarchies in sport (Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2023).

2.2. Hegemonic masculinity in sport media

Researchers have long documented the media's prioritization of men's sport and the limited exposure of women's sport (Bruce, 2015). Hegemonic masculinity, defined as a societal pattern that idealizes stereotypically male traits as the masculine cultural ideal, is a long-standing feature of the sport industry's culture and social structures (McGinnis et al., 2008). Hegemonic masculinity is evident in the disproportionate media attention given to men's sports leagues and events (Kian et al., 2008; Pavlidis, 2020). This reinforcement through media coverage serves to normalize the notion that sports are inherently for men (Cooky et al., 2013). Within a leisure constraints framework, such coverage patterns can be understood as a structural barrier to women's participation, whereby the absence or marginalization of women's sport in media limits public awareness and reduces its perceived accessibility (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Jackson, 2005). Such framing not only determines which sports are granted legitimacy (O'Brien et al., 2025) but also influences how potential participants construct their leisure identities, shaping feelings of self-expression, belonging, and alignment with dominant cultural narratives (Kim et al., 2025).

Although the majority of scholarship on gender representation in sport media has been situated within broadcast media, analogous patterns are evident in print journalism (English et al., 2019). In the Australian context, North's (2012) analysis of major mastheads found that women's sport comprised only 9% of total sports coverage as of 2010, underscoring the persistence of gendered hierarchies in news selection. Similarly, English et al.'s (2019) content analysis of Super Netball coverage during its inaugural season (2017) revealed that, despite the league's elite status, reporting often reinforced traditional gender norms and occupied a markedly smaller proportion of newspaper sport sections compared to men's competitions. International evidence reflects a comparable imbalance, with men's sport frequently exceeding 80–90% of total print coverage (Godoy-Pressland, 2014). As enduring agenda-setting institutions that influence both public discourse and the priorities of other media formats, newspapers thus provide a critical site for examining whether the advent of women's competitions in historically male-oriented sports has altered long-standing representational patterns.

Despite historical patterns of gendered coverage, research suggests that the sport media landscape has been shifting in some contexts. Studies indicate that women received more coverage than men on the USA's NBC network during the 2018 Winter Olympics (Billings & Angelini, 2019). Similarly, during NBC's 62 h of prime-time coverage of the 2020 Summer Olympic Games, women accounted for 57.95% of on-screen time (Arth et al., 2022). This increase in visibility marked the culmination of nearly two decades of gradual progress in NBC's coverage of women at Olympic competition (Billings & Angelini, 2019). In Australia, Seven Network devoted nearly equal clock-time to male and female athletes at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games (Xu et al., 2019), while its coverage of the 2018 Commonwealth Games was also well-balanced at 51.7% for men and 48.3% for women (Scott et al., 2023). Major events like the FIFA Women's World Cup have similarly attracted unprecedented media attention, breaking viewership records and prompting expanded coverage from media outlets in England (Pope et al., 2024).

However, these surges in coverage are often temporary, with interest in women's sports tending to recede once high-profile quadrennial events conclude (Petty & Pope, 2019). Moreover, this growth has not been universal, with research reporting persistent male-dominated coverage of the 2020 Olympic Games in Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia (Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2023). There are also fluctuations between tournaments. For instance, despite Australia's Seven Network providing near-equal coverage at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games and 2018 Commonwealth Games, its coverage of the 2018 Winter Olympics skewed 68.81% toward men in terms of clock time (Scott et al., 2022). Hence, the journey toward equitable media coverage does not appear wholly linear, and is dependent on the success of female athletes at any given tournament (Billings & Angelini, 2019). Moreover, it has been argued that mega-events such as the Olympics constitute distinct global rituals that warrant separate analytic treatment because, they re-order usual hierarchies (including gender) through policy mechanisms (Choi et al., 2020).

Whereas the Olympic movement may reflect a unique case in advancing women's sport visibility, historically male-oriented sports have in recent years undergone a marked shift toward gender equality, propelled by global gender equity movements and strategic investment in female competitions. Internationally, sports such as women's football have achieved unprecedented visibility; for instance, the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup attracted over two billion global viewers nearly doubling the previous edition (1.12 billion) (Euromonitor International, 2023). Meanwhile, England's Women's Super League secured a landmark broadcast deal in 2024 valued at approximately £65 million over five years (Garry, 2024). In North America, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) reported its highest average attendance in 13 years in the 2023 season, alongside record television viewership and a 21% rise in social media engagement (WNBA, 2023).

Australian sport was an early responder to this broader shift, establishing the Women's Big Bash League (2015), AFL Women's (2017), the NRL Women's Premiership (2018), and Super W rugby union (2018) as semiprofessional competitions over the past decade (Taylor et al., 2022). These competitions have since achieved various commercial and participatory milestones. The AFLW achieved a domestic record attendance of 53,034 at their 2019 Grand Final, as did the NRLW in 2025 (26,022)

and the WBBL in 2021 (15,511). Meanwhile the WBBL grew its television viewership 46% year over year in the 2022–23 season, whilst the NRLW achieved a milestone 1 million viewers for several telecasts in 2024 that exceeds the typical television audience of most male Australian sport leagues (Snape, 2024). Moreover, the establishment of the AFLW has coincided with a near doubling of women’s and girls’ participation in Australian football, rising from approximately 318,000 in 2017 to over 600,000 by 2021 (AFL, 2022). Over the same period, women and girls have been the fastest-growing segment in rugby league participation since the NRLW’s establishment, most recently increasing by 15% nationwide in 2024 (National Rugby League [NRL], 2025).

Collectively, these leagues have created visible pathways that have broadened the cultural presence of women’s sport within mainstream sporting hierarchies. Their footprint has also expanded markedly, with the combined number of AFLW, WBBL, and NRLW fixtures nearly doubling from 104 in 2019 to 206 by 2023 (see Table 1). Given that newspapers remain an enduring agenda-setting platform and mirror many of the gendered patterns found in broadcast sport media, they offer a critical context for assessing whether the rise and growth women’s competitions has translated into shifts in coverage (English et al., 2023). Therefore, considering these societal and media shifts, alongside the empirical growth observed within Australia, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Women’s sport will achieve growth in its proportion of coverage within Australian printed newspaper media over the period 2019 to 2023.

The growth and professionalization of women’s sports leagues may also be contributing to deconstructing entrenched hegemonic masculinity in Australian sports media. Over the past decade, Australia has witnessed the introduction and expansion of women’s leagues across various sports, as concisely summarized in Table 1 (Taylor et al., 2022). While this study henceforth refers to *professional women’s leagues*, it is vital to acknowledge that each such women’s league is uniquely placed along the professionalization and commercialization continuum, reflecting divergent resourcing and starting points (O’Brien et al., 2025; Thomson et al., 2023). These leagues have not

Table 1. Overview of Australian women’s professional leagues and their growth.

League name and abbreviation	Sport	First season	In ‘Oli’ variable	Teams Year 1	Teams 2023	Games Year 1	Games 2023
Women’s National Basketball League (WNBL)	Basketball	1981	No	9	8	61	92
Super Netball ^a	Netball	1997	No	8	8	59	60
A-League Women’s	Soccer	2008	No	8	12	41	139
Women’s Big Bash League (WBBL)	Cricket	2015	Yes	8	8	59	59
Australian Football League Women’s (AFLW)	Australian Rules Football	2017	No	8	19	29	99
Super Rugby Women’s	Rugby Union	2018	No	5	6	11	18
National Rugby League Women’s (NRLW)	Rugby League	2018	Yes	4	12	7	48

Note: ^aWhile the Super Netball tournament commenced in 2017, netball has had a recurring semiprofessional competition since 1997. Three of eight Super Netball teams have existed in a consistent form since 1997.

only provided platforms for female athletes to showcase their talents but have also attracted substantial fan engagement and commercial investment (Taylor et al., 2023). These developments have led to more scheduled events, higher levels of competition, and increased marketability (Doyle et al., 2024). Consequently, the introduction and success of these leagues have potentially contributed to an increase in media coverage devoted to professional women's sports in Australia, with the second proposed hypothesis:

H2: Professional women's sport leagues will account for a growing proportion of total women's sport coverage within Australian printed newspaper media over the period 2019–2023.

2.3. Cultural oligarchies in sport media

In addition to reinforcing a structure of hegemonic masculinity, previous research demonstrates that agenda setting in sports media can lead to favoritism in coverage toward certain sports, leagues and teams (Fortunato, 2008). Studies show that media coverage of international events such as the Olympics skews toward sports aligned with historical achievement and national pride, leading to a self-fulfilling cycle of dominance (Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2023). Even on digital media platforms such as X, where there is theoretically more space for diverse representation, established dominant sports continue to capture the vast majority of attention (Frederick et al., 2015). This observation mirrors broader observations that early optimism that digitalization would democratize culture through long tail effects have not materialized (Pilati et al., 2025). In the music industry/genre for instance, whereas the top 1% of musicians generated 71% of industry revenue in 2000, this was estimated to have reached 90% of streaming revenue by 2020 (Hesmondhalgh, 2021).

Empirical literature indicates that the media's prioritization of particular sports reinforces a narrow view of which sports hold value (Rowe, 2003). This form of agenda setting contributes to perpetuating "cultural oligarchies" in sport, explaining how a select few sports achieve cultural and media dominance while drastically overshadowing others (Dwyer et al., 2016). Notable examples of cultural oligarchies include the "big four" professional sports in the USA of American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey (Jang et al., 2020). Soccer represents a dominant cultural oligarchy in Europe (Parrish & Nauright, 2014). Rugby league, cricket and Australian rules football constitute cultural oligarchies in Australia, although distinct between the north-east (rugby league and cricket) and south-west of Australia (Australian rules football and cricket) (Fujak, 2021; Phillips & Hutchins, 1998).

From an agenda-setting perspective, the media's reinforcement of cultural oligarchies is both commercially-driven and ideologically-loaded. Media organizations tend to focus on sports that generate higher revenues and align with prevailing cultural narratives (Dwyer et al., 2016). Commercially, some sports, such as American football in the USA, attract larger audiences and more advertising revenue, making them financially lucrative for media outlets to showcase in primetime slots (Fortunato, 2008). Cultural oligarchies may also emerge because some media organizations directly invest in sports media, creating vested interests to co-promote particular content over others

(Saks & Yanity, 2016). Ideologically, sports that occupy the cultural oligarchy typically embody notions of nationalism, masculinity and competitive excellence, resonating with societal values and expectations (Mauro, 2020). The media's selective emphasis upon cultural oligarchy sports reflects its role as a gatekeeper (English et al., 2023), which limits diversity in athletic representation and narrows the public's perception of which sports hold cultural and societal value (Antunovic & Bartoluci, 2023).

Thus the advent and growth of women's professional leagues situated within historically male-oriented sports, may risk further embedding entrenched cultural hegemones (Phillips & Hutchins, 1998). Whilst such growth has generally been lauded, Elliott et al. (2023) note the consequence to concentrating oligarchic power: "many girls and young females are being influenced by new media narratives and increasing opportunities to play male-dominated sports, which are becoming the preferred choice for some females who previously played other, typically female-dominated sports" (2023, p. 921). Netball is the primary example of a traditionally female-oriented sport that has been popular in Australia (Booth & Leeds, 2013; Litchfield & Elliott, 2021). Given the growth in women's leagues aligned to culturally oligarchic sports, the third proposed hypotheses is as follows:

H3: Sports situated within the existing cultural oligarchy will have increased their relative share of total Australian printed newspaper coverage between 2019 and 2023.

3. Method

3.1. Research design and data collection

The study employs a quantitative content analysis to investigate structural trends in newspaper media coverage. Content analysis is a systematic method for coding and interpreting textual and visual data, allowing for an objective quantification of media content (Krippendorff, 2018). This research design is appropriate for addressing the research question as it enables the identification of patterns and shifts in media representation over time, providing empirical data to test the proposed hypotheses (English et al., 2023; Riffe et al., 2023). Examining these newspapers therefore provides a lens not only on sport coverage itself, but also on the broader processes of agenda-setting that operates within Australia's most influential newsrooms (North, 2012).

Acknowledging that "media" is increasingly fragmented, the content analysis is performed upon print media. Whilst print media is in structural decline, a majority (51%) of the Australian population aged 14+ were still reached on a monthly basis by Australian newspapers in 2024 (Roy Morgan, 2025). This proportion grows to 56% amongst those aged 34+, whilst both Australian men (53%) and women (50%) are similarly inclined to consume print media. A feature of the Australian media landscape is strong media concentration, with News Corporation and Nine Entertainment collectively holding an 82% readership share and 89% revenue share of the print media market in 2020 (GetUp, 2021). This concentration extends to other media platforms, with these two conglomerates holding a 61% and 35% share of revenue within the television and commercial radio sectors respectively. Such market power spanning multiple platforms affords these organizations immense agenda-setting powers (McCombs

& Shaw, 1972). Thus, whilst acknowledging the analysis to be delimited to newspaper coverage of two media organizations, given the presence of both intense market concentration and strong cross-media ownership, we submit our analysis to be a reliable proxy for Australian media.

The content analysis is specifically performed on these two organization's flagship newspapers, The Daily Telegraph (News Corporation) and the Sydney Morning Herald (Nine Entertainment), which held a daily readership of 575,000 and 477,00 respectively in 2024 (Roy Morgan, 2025). This study period spanned January 2019 to December 2023 and analyzed digitized replicas of physical newspaper print editions, through archives "SMH Library Edition" and "Newsbank." Physical newspapers feature inherent spatial constraints that distinguishes the medium from the ubiquity of digital content (English et al., 2023). Such constraint necessitates editorial decision making that results in the prioritization of coverage, which influences public perceptions of content salience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Purposive sampling was employed (Thomas, 2022), resulting in the analysis of 560 Saturday editions across the two newspapers. The Saturday edition was selected as it includes extended sport sections that cover both upcoming weekend fixtures and retrospectives of the week's activities. Data collection included all sports articles related to professional, elite or community sport from all sections of the newspapers, producing a comprehensive dataset of 21,129 data entries, equating to nearly 8,690 pages of total sport content. It is pertinent to acknowledge, however, that despite the significant volume of data captured, delimiting the analysis to Saturday editions may limit the generalizability of the findings.

3.2. Data coding and analysis

Each newspaper page was manually reviewed by the researchers to identify sports-related articles, then coded within Microsoft Excel. Coded details included the newspaper name, date of publication, page number, the type of sport covered (e.g. rugby league, cricket, soccer), focus area (on-field performance, sports business [financial aspects, sponsorships], athlete biographies, athlete controversies [scandals, disciplinary actions] among others). The primary gender focus of the article was determined based on the main subject, classified as male, female, both, or not applicable. We quantified the size of each article by measuring its column width and depth.

Whilst data from 2020 was coded and included in initial analysis, as will be further detailed within the results section, it was determined to exclude 2020 data from the final analysis due to the anomalous impact of Covid-19 upon sport competitions and its media coverage. This resulted in a main final sample of 17,343 entries equating to 7,216 pages of content. Coding was performed by two members of the research team. To ensure reliability and validity, the code frame was co-developed using sample data, with precise operational definitions established for each category designed to limit ambiguity and prevent subjective interpretation.

The study's raw data was inputted to SPSS 29, with code frames established for categorical variables. Further data transformations were performed in aid of testing the proposed hypotheses. First, the grouping of Australia's seven professional women's sport leagues (see Table 1) under the computed variable "WSL." Second, the grouping

of rugby league and cricket as a cultural oligarchy (“Oli”) encompassing total coverage of all genders. This oligarchy cluster reflects that the coded newspapers are circulated within Sydney, part of the north-eastern Australia where rugby league and cricket are dominant sports (Fujak, 2021).

Logistic regression was selected as the primary analytical method due to the binary nature of the dependent variables across all three hypotheses. The method is well-suited for examining change over time and across newspapers, as it allows for the estimation of odds ratios that quantify the direction and magnitude of associations between predictor variables and the likelihood of coverage (Hosmer et al., 2013). While categorical data can present challenges in statistical modeling, logistic regression offers a “blend of two very different statistical traditions” that is particularly adept at handling such data through dummy coding (Menard, 2010, p. 1). Furthermore, logistic regression offers a more robust analytical framework than alternative methods such as chi-square tests, not only identifying associations but accounting for multiple predictors simultaneously, controlling for potential confounders, and evaluation of interaction effects (Hosmer et al., 2013). Notably whilst logistic regression can be sensitive to imbalanced datasets as is the case here, the large overall sample size ($n=21,129$) ensures robust estimation of coefficients across all levels. For each hypothesis, a main effects and interaction effect model was fitted.

4. Results

4.1. Macro trends in women’s sport coverage

A descriptive analysis was first performed to probe the data, revealing that the proportion of coverage dedicated to women’s sport grew discernibly over the period. Relative to men’s coverage (excluding non-gendered), women’s sport exhibited proportional growth from 10.3% in 2019 to 15.3% in 2023. The onset of Covid-19 proved anomalous, with the Daily Telegraph’s and Sydney Morning Herald’s cumulative annual sport coverage declining 16% and 37% respectively in 2020 relative to 2019 levels. Coverage of women’s sport also declined in 2020 (9.5%), disrupting an otherwise steady upward trajectory. Thus, given the anomalous nature of 2020, it is excluded from analysis for the remainder of the results. An overview of the variables and their descriptive statistics is provided in Table 2.

To formally test Hypothesis 1, two binary logistic regression models were fitted to predict the likelihood of coverage being dedicated to women’s sports. The first a main effects model with predictors *Year* and *Paper*, and the second including an interaction term (see Table 3). The main effects model showed a significant improvement over the null model (Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients, $\chi^2 = 49.377$, $p < .001$), though the pseudo R-squared values indicate modest explanatory power (Cox & Snell $R^2 = 0.003$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.006$), not uncommon in such models. In the main effects model, the coefficient for *Year* ($B=0.083$, $SE = 0.017$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.087$, 95% CI [1.051, 1.124]) suggests that each successive year is associated with an 8.7% increase in the odds of coverage being dedicated to women’s sports. The coefficient for *Paper* ($B=0.299$, $SE = 0.053$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.348$, 95% CI [1.215, 1.496]) indicates a 34.8% higher likelihood of coverage in the Sydney Morning Herald compared to the

Table 2. Overview and measurements of the variables and descriptive statistics (excluding 2020).

Variable	Description and measurement	Mean	Std.
Paper	Daily Telegraph (62.77%), Sydney Morning Herald (37.23%) (range 0–1)	0.37	0.48
Year	2019 (30.62%), 2021 (22.74%), 2022 (22.79%), 2023 (23.84%) (range 0–4).	1.40	1.16
Gender	Female (9.31%), male (61.71%) mixed (1.68%), non-gendered (27.30%) (range 0–1, with Female = 1)	0.09	0.29
WSL	Content devoted to women's professional sport leagues	0.02	0.14
Oli	Content inside or outside the cultural oligarchy; inside the oligarchy (cricket or rugby league) (36.01%), outside the oligarchy (all else) (63.99%) (range 0–1).	0.36	0.48

Table 3. Logistic regression output for Hypothesis 1.

Model	Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p-Value	Exp(B)	95% CI Exp(B)
Main	Year	0.083	0.017	23.4	<.001	1.087	[1.051, 1.124]
Main	Paper	0.299	0.053	31.6	<.001	1.348	[1.215, 1.496]
Interaction	Year	0.172	0.053	10.4	.001	1.187	[1.069, 1.318]
Interaction	Paper	123.572	70.235	3.1	.079	–	–
Interaction	Y * P	–0.061	0.035	3.1	.079	0.941	[0.879, 1.007]

Daily Telegraph. The interaction model slightly improved model fit ($\chi^2 = 52.463$, $p < .001$), although its overall explanatory power remained limited. The interaction between *Year* and *Paper* ($B = -0.061$, $SE = 0.035$, $p = .079$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.941$, 95% CI [0.879, 1.007]) was not statistically significant, nor was the main effect of *Paper* ($B = 123.572$, $SE = 70.235$, $p = .079$). Thus, the main effects model provides the most stable interpretation, supporting Hypothesis 1 by indicating a consistent increase in women's sports coverage over time.

4.2. Coverage of professional women's sport leagues

To address Hypothesis 2, binary logistic regression was applied to the subset of women's coverage ($n = 1,623$) to predict WSL classification. The main effects model was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 19.061$, $p < .001$), indicating that the predictors as a whole contributed meaningfully to distinguishing WSL classifications (see Table 4). However, only *Paper* emerged as a significant predictor ($B = -0.553$, $SE = 0.129$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.575$, 95% CI [0.446, 0.741]), indicating that articles in the Sydney Morning Herald (coded as 2) were 42.5% less likely to be classified as WSL compared to articles in the Daily Telegraph. *Year* was not a significant predictor ($B = -0.012$, $SE = 0.041$, $p = .775$).

In the second model, an interaction term was introduced to test whether the effect of *Year* on WSL classification was moderated by *Paper*. This model was statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 33.895$, $p < .001$) and demonstrated an adequate fit, as indicated by a non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow test ($\chi^2(6) = 11.904$, $p = .064$). In this interaction model, all predictors, including the interaction term, were significant. *Year* positively predicted WSL classification ($B = 0.443$, $SE = 0.127$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.557$, 95% CI [1.215, 1.996]), suggesting that each successive year was associated with a 55.7% increase in the odds of WSL classification. The effect of *Paper* was also significant ($B = 662.059$, $SE = 173.906$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) \approx 3.38e287$), indicating a substantial

Table 4. Logistic regression output for Hypothesis 2.

Model	Predictor	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	<i>p</i> -Value	Exp(<i>B</i>)	95% CI Exp(<i>B</i>)
Main	Year	−0.012	0.041	0.082	.775	0.988	[0.912, 1.071]
Main	Paper	−0.553	0.129	18.286	<.001	0.575	[0.446, 0.741]
Interaction	Year	0.443	0.127	12.198	<.001	1.557	[1.215, 1.996]
Interaction	Paper	662.059	173.906	14.493	<.001	>1000	–
Interaction	Y * P	−0.328	0.086	14.516	<.001	0.72	[0.609, 0.853]

Table 5. Top 20 women's sport sub-themes (pages of coverage).

Sports category	2019	2021	2022	2023	Total	Share (%)
Soccer-Int/WC	22.8	5.0	3.4	75.3	106.5	16.81
Tennis-Match	23.9	30.2	33.5	12.4	100.0	15.77
Netball-Super Netball	8.2	9.2	8.5	10.5	36.4	5.75
League-NRLW	4.2	1.4	15.5	13.9	35.0	5.52
Cricket-WBBL	8.3	4.5	5.1	3.1	21.1	3.33
Cricket-Int/WC	4.7	2.5	9.4	4.5	21.1	3.32
Netball-Int/WC	7.8	1.4	4.3	3.7	17.2	2.72
AFL-AFLW	4.3	3.4	4.6	4.6	16.9	2.66
Swimming-Biography	–	12.2	1.4	2.6	16.2	2.56
Soccer-Biography	2.9	3.5	4.0	5.8	16.2	2.55
League-State of Origin	6.6	2.3	1.9	2.2	13.0	2.05
Swimming-Match	5.3	0.1	1.1	3.9	10.4	1.64
Netball-Sport Business	0.2	1.8	3.8	2.0	7.7	1.22
Surfing- Match	0.9	1.6	3.6	1.6	7.6	1.20
Athletics-Olympics	–	7.5	–	–	7.0	1.11
Soccer-Wleague	4.0	0.7	–	1.9	6.6	1.04
Soccer-Controversy	2.4	0.7	–	3.1	6.1	0.96
Golf- Match	1.6	0.1	2.5	1.7	5.9	0.93
Swimming-AC	4.5	0.3	–	0.6	5.4	0.85
Rugby Union-Sevens	1.8	–	1.9	1.6	5.3	0.83
Total	142.5	150.3	156.2	184.8	633.9	72.82

Notes: "Int/WC" = International or World Cup coverage. "AC" = Athlete Controversy

difference in classification likelihood between publications. Importantly, the interaction term for *Year* × *Paper* was significant ($B = -0.328$, $SE = 0.086$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.720$, 95% CI [0.609, 0.853]), suggesting that the influence of *Year* on WSL classification varied by publication.

These results indicate that *Year* alone does not significantly predict WSL classification, given the proportion of coverage toward WSL has increased in one publication (the Daily Telegraph), but decreased in the other (Sydney Morning Herald). Thus Hypothesis 2 cannot be accepted, as the impact of new leagues on women's sports coverage varies by publication.

Table 5 provides a descriptive summary of the top 20 sport themes within women's coverage over the analysis period, providing practical insights into the distribution of women's sport coverage across both sports and dimensions. The impact of Australia co-hosting the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup is apparent, with coverage of women's international soccer 230% larger in 2023 than the corresponding 2019 World Cup year. Hosting the FIFA Women's World Cup was a singular driver of overall growth in women's sport coverage in 2023. Had coverage of women's international soccer in 2023 been equivalent to 2019, aggregate coverage of women's sport in 2023 would have in fact declined 15.3% from 2022 levels. While WSL coverage grew little in aggregate over the period, the relative intragroup shifts in coverage are revealing. Whereas Super

Netball received nearly twice (+93%) the coverage of the NRLW in 2019, by 2023, Super Netball had received 25% less coverage than the NRLW.

4.3. Oligarchies and women's sport

An examination of the longitudinal concentration of “oligarchy” sports coverage, defined here as coverage of rugby league and cricket, replicated the methodology of prior sections. The main effects model demonstrated limited explanatory power, as indicated by a low pseudo R-squared, a log-likelihood of -11392 , and an Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) of 22790.61 . These metrics suggest that the model had minimal ability to predict oligarchy sports coverage based on *Year* and *Paper* alone. Parameter estimates from the main effects model revealed no statistically significant effects for either *Year* (estimate = 0.0004 , $p = .966$) or *Paper* (estimate = -0.0291 , $p = .377$) on the likelihood of oligarchy sports coverage, suggesting that changes in year or newspaper type did not affect coverage of these sports. Additionally, the intercept was non-significant (estimate = -1.41 , $p = .946$), further indicating the model's limited predictive strength. The interaction model showed minimal improvement, with the same log-likelihood value (-11392). In this model, the interaction term for $Year \times Paper$ was not statistically significant (estimate = 0.0231 , $p = .274$), nor the main effects for *Year* (estimate = -0.0315 , $p = .309$) and *Paper* (estimate = -46.651 , $p = .274$), or model intercept (estimate = 63.03 , $p = .313$). Overall, both the main effects and interaction models provide no evidence of significant trends in oligarchy sports coverage over time or by newspaper type. Hypothesis 3 is thus rejected, and for conciseness, the model is not presented in table form here. This suggests that newspaper coverage of oligarchy sports has remained stable across the study period, despite the growth in women's sports coverage confirmed by Hypothesis 1.

5. Discussion

The past decade has witnessed transformational change within the professional sport industry such that women's sport appears to have commenced a seemingly accelerated emergence into the sporting mainstream in both global and localized contexts (Thomson et al., 2023). Where the corpus of literature has widely observed historically slow progress in the development and coverage of women's sport (Bruce, 2015; Cooky et al., 2013, 2021), there has been more recent causes for optimism (O'Brien et al., 2025; Pope et al., 2024). Given recent developments, the study's purpose has been to examine whether they have translated into structural change in the composition of newspaper print coverage across both gender and sport hegemonies. In doing so, the study responds to the call of Thomson et al. (2023) to methodologically diversify the exploration of women's sport beyond qualitative underpinnings.

In validating Hypothesis 1, the study offers empirical evidence that women's sport coverage has achieved significant print media growth during a culturally seminal period for women's equality (Pope et al., 2024). The nature and degree of this growth in our selected newspapers was nuanced however, given proportional growth to 15.3% in 2023 could be interpreted as moderate given the broader cultural context during the

time period. Australia's leading sport associations have celebrated and publicized their respective achievements in developing women's sport over the period (Richardson et al., 2025), with this study bridging the measurement gap between perceptions of progress and empirical reality in media representation in Australia (Scott et al., 2022, 2023). Bridging this gap is vital, firstly given societal expectations of progress in gendered representation and secondly to hold media accountable in their influential capacity as agenda setters (Arth et al., 2022).

The rejection of Hypothesis 2 confirmed that the overall growth in women's sport coverage was derived from non-recurring sport events rather than emergent professional women's sport leagues. While this finding is consistent with prior works (e.g. Petty & Pope, 2019), it was anticipated that the more recent and rapid establishment of many professional women's leagues could produce a meaningful shift in coverage distribution. However, gendered structural inequality remains, whereby women's sport continues to rely on major events for increased coverage. Table 5 illustrates that without the likely anomalous 2023 "Matilda effect" (i.e. the surge in coverage driven by Australia's national football team success), coverage of women's sports would have otherwise declined from 2022 levels.

The "Matilda Effect" might be expected to create structural change or a short-term halo (O'Brien et al., 2025), yet WBBL and NRLW coverage showed no such boost post-World Cup (Table 5). Hence preliminary evidence suggests the Matildas' media effect may be short-lived, echoing English coverage of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, where interest surged during the tournament but fell sharply afterwards (Petty & Pope, 2019). By contrast, the incapacity of emergent women's professional sport leagues to grow their coverage demonstrates continued structurally embedded agenda setting constraints. The NRLW represents somewhat of an exception, achieving coverage growth of 231% from 2019 to 2023, the competition's fixtures expanded by 586% over this time-period.

Rejection of Hypothesis 3 confirmed that the NRLW and WBBL had not contributed to further embedding the cultural oligarchies that rugby league and cricket have long held over sport news coverage in north-eastern Australia (Phillips & Hutchins, 1998). However, in the NRLW's case, which most singularly sits at the intersection of a historically male-oriented team sport and a cultural oligarchy, nuance is required. While NRLW coverage was not of sufficient volume to meaningfully advance rugby league's overall cultural oligarchy, its share of coverage amongst the seven professional women's leagues ascended from 14.0% in 2019 to 40.5% in 2023. Thus, although the NRLW's growth is only beginning to impact the dominant masculine hegemony within rugby league, in doing so, the NRLW displaced the incumbent female-oriented Super Netball as coverage leader in only its fifth year of existence (Elliott et al., 2023).

The NRLW's identified (and since continued) growth reveals rich theoretically intersectional implications not apparent from singular examinations of masculine hegemony (Kian et al., 2008) and cultural oligarchies (Dwyer et al., 2016) in isolation. Novel here is that the intersecting hegemonies exhibit inverse polarizations, in that leagues such as the NRLW and AFLW are simultaneously reinforcing a cultural hegemony whilst deconstructing a gender hegemony. Viewed through an intersectional lens, such leagues may therefore be capable of exhibiting negative dimensions that belies the celebratory narratives that often underpin women's sport (Elliott et al., 2023). This

critical insight aligns to a growing concern that scholarship of women's sport has not been sufficiently critical or complex, best articulated by Richardson et al. (2025, p. 2): "We need to move beyond celebratory discourses of gain, achievement, and progress to critically consider the current state of girls' and women's sport as a "complicated, non-linear, non-universal success story."

One such manifestation of a lack of complexity pertains to the expression "women's sports" itself, which has become a synecdoche within scholarship (and society at large) whereby all women's sport has been bundled into a collective (Taylor et al., 2023). In practice, the continued commercialization and professionalization of women's sport properties not only challenges male hegemonies (Pope et al., 2024) but also produces competition for the spoils of such hegemonic deconstruction (Elliott et al., 2023). This will inevitably produce winners and losers in the commercial and cultural domains, reflecting Richardson et al. (2025) observation that success will be non-universal. This study has begun to demonstrate this effect with reference to the NRLW, which achieved the leading print coverage amongst women's leagues in its fifth year of existence.

Such intragender competition between professional women's sport leagues has practical implications for leisure choices, given that the agenda-setting function of editorial decision-making determines the visibility of women's sports and, consequently, influences participation at the community level (De Bosscher et al., 2013; Potwarka & Leatherdale, 2016). Media exposure can operate as both a catalyst and constraint to leisure, by shaping the perceived set of viable activities from which individuals select their leisure engagements and repertoires (Lee et al., 2020; Crawford & Godbey, 1987). The shifting distribution of coverage observed in this study suggests that some women's sports are more likely to benefit from such catalytic effects, while others face deepening structural media invisibility that limits their capacity to attract participants (English et al., 2019). Critically, those positioned to benefit are aligned with traditionally mainstream, male-oriented sports.

This asymmetric distribution of media attention contributes to reshaping the cultural place of women's sport as a leisure identity, which is shaped by the ways individuals see themselves in relation to valued leisure activities (Beaton et al., 2009). Increased coverage of women participating in traditionally masculine sports expands the symbolic boundaries of what is considered culturally appropriate or aspirational for women and girls (Richardson et al., 2025; Taylor et al., 2022). Such shifts may disrupt entrenched gender norms in leisure behavior, recalibrating notions of legitimacy in women's sport toward activities that align with historically masculinized sport models (O'Brien et al., 2025), and offering new avenues for self-expression and belonging (Kim et al., 2025). Notably, empirical evidence has already emerged of a participation boom among women and girls within such sports (AFL, 2022; NRL, 2024).

For historically female-oriented sports such as netball or gymnastics, reallocated and reduced media visibility deepens a preexisting structural constraint that impacts leisure participation *via* a diminished capacity to attract and retain participants (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Jackson, 2005). This is particularly significant for youth, whose early sport socialization often shapes lifelong participation trajectories (Elliott et al., 2023). As women's leagues in historically male-oriented sports such as the NRLW and AFLW expand in profile and resources, they increasingly compete with

these sports for players, volunteers, sponsorship, and public attention. The result is a leisure landscape in which the benefits of increased professionalization and media exposure are disproportionately concentrated among a subset of sports with the cultural and commercial capital to convert visibility into sustained participation growth (Beaton et al., 2009; Elliott et al., 2023). Thus, while the advent of women's professional leagues in traditionally male-orientated sports has been institutionally framed as creating new opportunities for women and girls (Taylor et al., 2022), it simultaneously risks eroding historically female-oriented sports spaces within the leisure landscape (Elliott et al., 2023).

Addressing these dynamics requires recognizing that media coverage is not simply a meritocratic outcome of sport popularity, but a structuring force that actively shapes the composition of leisure opportunities available to the public (Beaton et al., 2009; Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Without targeted strategies, such as deliberate promotion of underrepresented sports, cross-sport collaboration, and linking major event exposure to participation initiatives across multiple sports, the expansion of women's professional leagues risks reinforcing a leisure hierarchy dominated by a narrow set of culturally privileged sports (Elliott et al., 2023; Richardson et al., 2025). Ensuring diversity in leisure provision will be critical to preserving an inclusive and pluralistic sporting culture, capable of meeting the varied needs, preferences, and identities of women and girls (Jackson, 2005; Taylor et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

This study sought to examine Australian sport media coverage *via* an analysis of Australia's two largest newspapers, in response to the hosting of several major women's sporting events and the establishment of professional women's leagues within historically male-oriented sports. Utilizing agenda-setting as a theoretical framework (McCombs et al., 2014), the analysis highlights that while women's sports have gained modest increases in print media attention, this growth remains primarily event-driven, as seen in the impact of major events like the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup (Pope et al., 2024). Regular coverage for domestic professional women's leagues, however, has not kept pace with their expansion, indicating structural biases in sports media coverage remains.

Moreover, the findings reveal an emerging dynamic of competition between women's leagues, with certain leagues such as the NRLW beginning to dominate coverage over historically established women's leagues like Super Netball (Elliott et al., 2023; Taylor et al., 2022). This intragender competition, coupled with the lack of a consistent "halo effect" from successful events like the World Cup, suggests that women's leagues are not uniformly benefiting from increases in media exposure (Taylor et al., 2023). Instead, select leagues may be displacing others in terms of visibility and public engagement. The study underscores the implications of these trends on leisure choices, given the media's role in shaping public perceptions and, consequently, the sports people follow and participate in (De Bosscher et al., 2013; Elliott et al., 2023). While much optimism surrounds women's sports, the findings suggest that challenges remain in translating on-field growth into enduring media coverage as is necessary for the longer term success of women's sports.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Hunter Fujak  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6850-4294>

Joshua McLeod  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3911-397X>

Sarah Wymer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3946-5361>

References

- Antunovic, D., & Bartoluci, S. (2023). Sport, gender, and national interest during the Olympics: A comparative analysis of media representations in Central and Eastern Europe. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 58(1), 167–187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902221095686>
- Arth, Z. W., Pike, M. P., & Angelini, J. R. (2022). From medals to minutes: Time on camera for men and women during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics on NBC television. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 15(3), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2022-0063>
- Australian Football League. (2022, February 21). AFL sets out plan to drive women and girls participation. *AFL.com.au*. Retrieved August 10, 2025, from <https://www.afl.com.au/aflw/news/1000992/afl-sets-out-plan-to-drive-women-and-girls-participation>
- Beaton, A. A., Funk, D. C., & Alexandris, K. (2009). Operationalizing a theory of participation in physically active leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 41(2), 175–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2009.11950165>
- Billings, A., & Angelini, J. (2019). Equity achieved? A longitudinal examination of biological sex representation in the NBC Olympic telecast (2000–2018). *Communication & Sport*, 7(5), 551–564. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519863652>
- Booth, R., & Leeds, M. A. (2013). Participation in women's sport in Australia. In E. M. Leeds & M. A. Leeds (Eds.), *Handbook on the economics of women in sports* (pp. 40–55). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bruce, T. (2015). Assessing the sociology of sport: On media and representations of sportswomen. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(4–5), 380–384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690214539483>
- Cooky, C., Council, L. D., Mears, M. A., & Messner, M. A. (2021). One and done: The long eclipse of women's televised sports, 1989–2019. *Communication & Sport*, 9(3), 347–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211003524>
- Cooky, C., Messner, M. A., & Hextrum, R. H. (2013). Women play sport, but not on TV: A longitudinal study of televised news media. *Communication & Sport*, 1(3), 203–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479513476947>
- Choi, K. H., Chepyator-Thomson, J. R., & Leopkey, B. (2020). *Gender-related media coverage and the Olympic Games: An integrated literature review*. FairPlay, Revista de Filosofía, Ética y Derecho Del Deporte 17.
- Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1987). Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure. *Leisure Sciences*, 9(2), 119–127.
- De Bosscher, V., Sotiriadou, P., & Van Bottenburg, M. (2013). Scrutinizing the sport pyramid metaphor: An examination of the relationship between elite success and mass participation in Flanders. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5(3), 319–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2013.806340>
- Doyle, J. P., Kunkel, T., Kelly, S. J., Filo, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2024). Seeing the same things differently: Exploring the unique brand associations linked to women's professional sport teams. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(6), 729–743.

- Dwyer, B., Greenhalgh, G., & LeCrom, C. (2016). Niche- versus mainstream-sport spectators: An analysis of need for uniqueness and sport eFANgelism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 9(3), 364–383. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2016-0045>
- Elliott, S., Drummond, M., Prichard, I., Lewis, L., Drummond, C., Litchfield, C., Mysko, E., O'Donnell, K., & Truskewycz, H. (2023). The promotion of sporting opportunities for girls and young females and the implications for traditional female sports: A qualitative descriptive study. *Sport in Society*, 26(5), 920–941. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2080059>
- English, P., Calder, A., Pearce, S., & Kirby, K. (2019). A new sporting horizon: A content analysis of Super Netball newspaper coverage. *Media International Australia*, 171(1), 110–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18798696>
- English, P., Horky, T., Nieland, J.-U., & Seeger, C. (2023). Organizational gatekeeping in Australian sports journalism: A longitudinal study of three newspapers. *Australian Journalism Review*, 45(2), 181–199. https://doi.org/10.1386/ajr_00131_1
- Euromonitor International. (2023, July 20). Women's World Cup 2023 viewership to cross 2 billion, double from 2019: Euromonitor International. *Euromonitor.com*. Retrieved July 29, 2025, from <https://www.euromonitor.com/press/press-releases/july-20232/womens-world-cup-2023-viewership-to-cross-2-billion-double-from-2019-euromonitor-international>
- Fortunato, J. A. (2008). NFL agenda-setting: The NFL programming schedule: A study of agenda-setting. *Journal of Sports Media*, 3(1), 27–49. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsm.2008.0005>
- Frederick, E. L., Burch, L. M., & Blaszkka, M. (2015). A shift in set: Examining the presence of agenda setting on Twitter during the 2012 London Olympics. *Communication & Sport*, 3(3), 312–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479513508393>
- Fujak, H. (2021). Revisiting the divergent sporting cultures of Sydney and Melbourne. *Sporting Traditions*, 38(2), 199–222.
- Garry, T. (2024, October 30). WSL agrees record £65m domestic five-year TV deal with Sky Sports and BBC. *The Guardian*. Retrieved August 12, 2025, from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/oct/30/wsl-agrees-record-65m-domestic-five-year-tv-deal-with-sky-sports-and-bbc>
- GetUp. (2021). *Who controls our media? The new report commissioned by GetUp*. GetUp Australia. <https://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/abc-media-campaigns/share-the-media-diversity-report/who-controls-our-media-the-new-report-commissioned-by-getup>
- Godoy-Pressland, A. (2014). 'Nothing to report': A semi-longitudinal investigation of the print media coverage of sportswomen in British Sunday newspapers. *Media, Culture & Society*, 36(5), 595–609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714532977>
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2021). Is music streaming bad for musicians? Problems of evidence and argument. *New Media & Society*, 23(12), 3593–3615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820953541>
- Hosmer, D. W., Jr, Lemeshow, S., & Sturdivant, R. X. (2013). *Applied logistic regression* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Jackson, E. (Ed.). (2005). *Constraints on leisure*. State College PA: Venture Publishing.
- Jang, W., Byon, K. K., & Yim, B. H. (2020). Sportscape, emotion, and behavioral intention: A case of the big four US-based major sport leagues. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 20(3), 321–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1607521>
- Kian, E. M., Vincent, J., & Mondello, M. (2008). Masculine hegemonic hoops: An analysis of media coverage of March Madness. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(2), 223–242. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.25.2.223>
- Kim, J., Im, S., & Heo, J. (2025). Redefining gender norms through serious leisure: Identity of female rugby players in South Korea. *Leisure Studies*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2025.2490558>
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Lee, K. J., Cho, S., Kim, E. K., & Hwang, S. (2020). Do more leisure time and leisure repertoire make us happier? An investigation of the curvilinear relationships. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21(5), 1727–1747. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00153-3>
- Litchfield, C., & Elliott, S. (2021). Maximising enjoyment to sustain girls' sport participation: A unique case study of netball in Australia. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(5), 781–799.

- Mauro, M. (2020). Media discourse, sport and the nation: Narratives and counter-narratives in the digital age. *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(6), 932–951. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720902910>
- Menard, S. W. (2010). *Logistic regression: From introductory to advanced concepts and applications*. Sage.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L., & Weaver, D. H. (2014). New directions in agenda-setting theory and research. *Mass Communication and Society*, 17(6), 781–802. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.964871>
- McGinnis, L. P., Gentry, J. W., & McQuillan, J. (2008). Ritual-based behavior that reinforces hegemonic masculinity in golf: Variations in women golfers' responses. *Leisure Sciences*, 31(1), 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400802557915>
- National Rugby League. (2025, February 21). Record participation reinforces foundations for future success. *NRL.com*. Retrieved 7 August 2025, from <https://www.nrl.com/news/2025/02/21/record-participation-reinforces-foundations-for-future-success>
- North, L. (2012). The gendered world of sports reporting in the Australian print media. *JOMEC Journal of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies*, 2, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2012.10224>
- O'Brien, W., Thomson, A., Toohey, K., Taylor, T., & Hanlon, C. (2025). Exploring legitimacy of women's professional team sport. *Sport Management Review*. Advance online publication.
- Ogata Jones, K., Denham, B. E., & Springston, J. K. (2006). Effects of mass and interpersonal communication on breast cancer screening: Advancing agenda-setting theory in health contexts. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 34(1), 94–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880500420242>
- Parrish, C., & Nauright, J. (2014). *Soccer around the world: A cultural guide to the world's favorite sport*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Pavlidis, A. (2020). Being grateful: Maternalising 'success' in women's contact sport. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 35, 100673. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2020.100673>
- Petty, K., & Pope, S. (2019). A new age for media coverage of women's sport? An analysis of English media coverage of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup. *Sociology*, 53(3), 486–502. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038518797505>
- Phillips, M. G., & Hutchins, B. (1998). From independence to a reconstituted hegemony: Rugby league and television in Australia. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 22(58), 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14443059809387410>
- Pilati, F., Houssard, A., & Sacco, P. L. (2025). Mirroring the inequalities of mainstream music platforms: Popularity, revenue, and monetization strategies on Bandcamp. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 31(3), 338–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2024.2356169>
- Pope, S., Allison, R., & Petty, K. (2024). Gender equality in the “next stage” of the “new age?” Content and fan perceptions of English media coverage of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 41(1), 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2022-0195>
- Potwarka, L. R., & Leatherdale, S. T. (2016). The Vancouver 2010 Olympics and leisure-time physical activity rates among youth in Canada: any evidence of a trickle-down effect? *Leisure Studies*, 35(2), 241–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2015.1040826>
- Richardson, A., McLachlan, F., & McDonald, B. (2025). Has it never been a better time to play? Opportunity, empowerment and contested terrains of women's grassroots football in Australia. *Social Sciences*, 14(2), 87. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14020087>
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Watson, B. R., & Lovejoy, J. (2023). *Analyzing media messages: Using quantitative content analysis in research* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Rowe, D. (2003). *Sport, culture and media: The unruly trinity*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Roy Morgan. (2025). *Total news publishing fact pack* (February 2025 Update for December 2024). <https://roymorgan-cms-prod.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/24235922/9828-ThinkNewsBrands-FactPack-February-2025-Update-for-December-2024.pdf>
- Saks, J., & Yanity, M. (2016). The not-so-neutral zone?: ESPN, agenda setting, and the National Hockey League. *Journal of Sports Media*, 11(1), 81–100. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsm.2016.0007>

- Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2006). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication*, 56(4), 864–866.
- Scott, O., Li, B., & Bingaman, J. (2023). Still battling for equity: Examining biological sex portrayals through the lens of the gold coast during Australian prime time coverage of the 2018 Commonwealth Games. *Communication & Sport*, 11(6), 1058–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795231153343>
- Scott, O. K., Li, B. N., & Mighton, S. (2022). Gender representation at the 2018 Winter Olympic Games from an Australian broadcast perspective. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 15(1), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.2021-0099>
- Snape, J. (2024, December 29). From AFL to the Olympics: What the 2024 sport TV ratings reveal about Australian viewing habits. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/dec/29/australia-sport-tv-ratings-2024-afl-nrl-olympics>
- Taylor, C. S., Naraine, M. L., Rowe, K., Robertson, J., & Karg, A. (2023). The impact of a new women's professional sport league on pre-existing sport organisations: A modified, integrative approach to examining change. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 13(4), 470–488. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SBM-01-2023-0002>
- Taylor, T., Fujak, H., Hanlon, C., & O'Connor, D. (2022). A balancing act: Women players in a new semi-professional team sport league. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(4), 527–547. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1815821>
- Thomas, F. B. (2022). The role of purposive sampling technique as a tool for informal choices in social sciences research methods. *Just Agriculture*, 2(5), 1–8.
- Thomson, A., Hayes, M., Hanlon, C., Toohey, K., & Taylor, T. (2023). Women's professional sport leagues: A systematic review and future directions for research. *Sport Management Review*, 26(1), 48–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2022.2066391>
- Wonneberger, A., & Jacobs, S. (2017). Media positioning: Comparing organizations' standing in the news. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 22(3), 354–368. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-11-2016-0075>
- WNBA. (2023, September 13). WNBA 2023 season delivers with record-breaking viewership, attendance and digital engagement. *WNBA.com*. Retrieved July 27, 2025, from <https://www.wnba.com/news/2023-season-record-breaking-success-recap>
- Xu, Q., Billings, A. C., Scott, O. K., Lewis, M., & Sharpe, S. (2019). Gender differences through the lens of Rio: Australian Olympic primetime coverage of the 2016 Rio Summer Olympic Games. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 54(5), 517–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690217710690>