

CSW60

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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



The complex relationship between media representation & empowerment: Possibilities and challenges



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**WomenSport
International**

Outline

Current situation

3 disempowering effects of limited visibility

The visibility \leftrightarrow empowerment relationship

4 suggestions for building visibility

4 suggestions for activating media role models

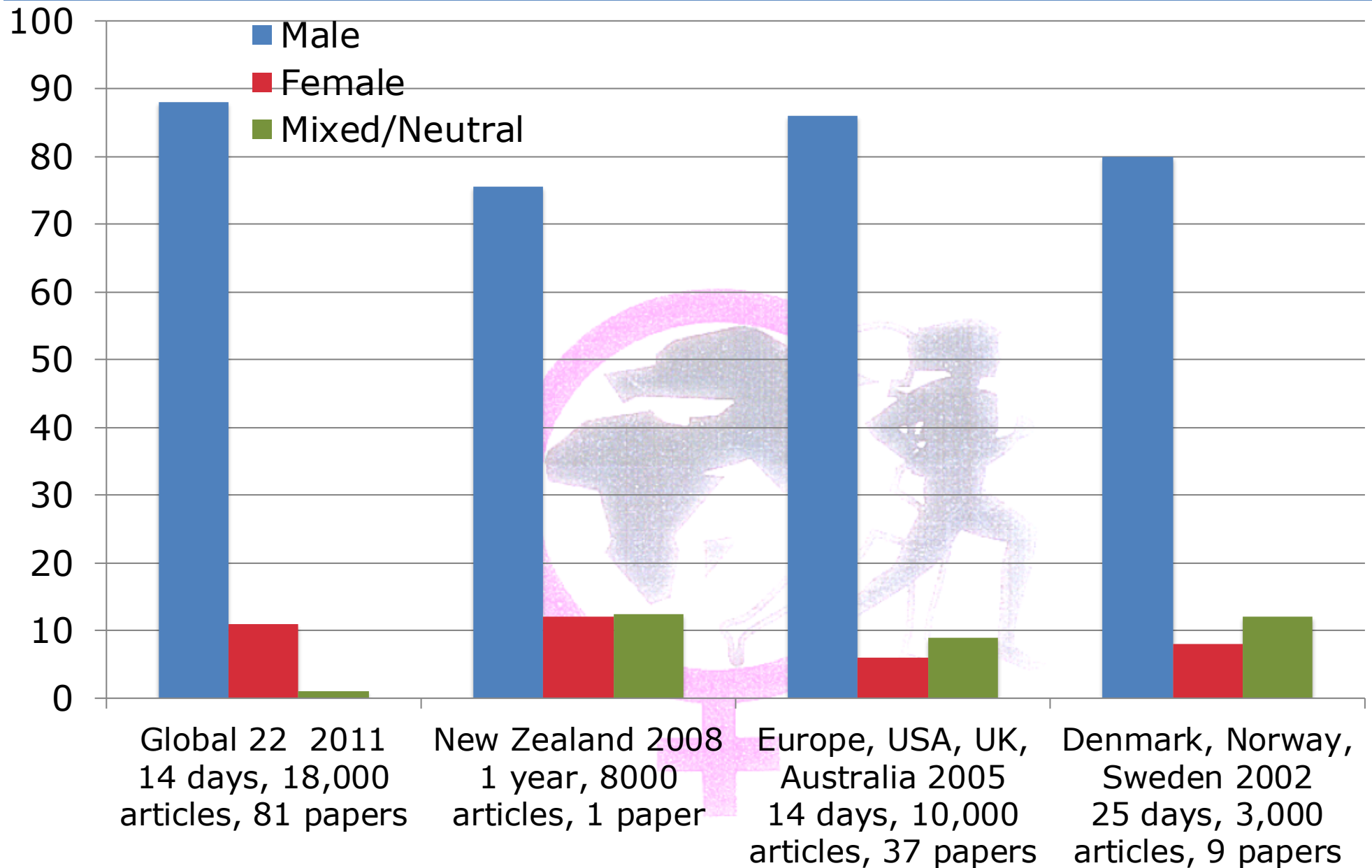
Sustainable Development Goal 5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

“We recognize ... the contributions [sport] makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities, as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.” (UN Sustainable Development Goals)

"Symbolic annihilation" in sports media

By men, for men, about men



Sportswomen face “symbolic annihilation” in New Zealand sports media

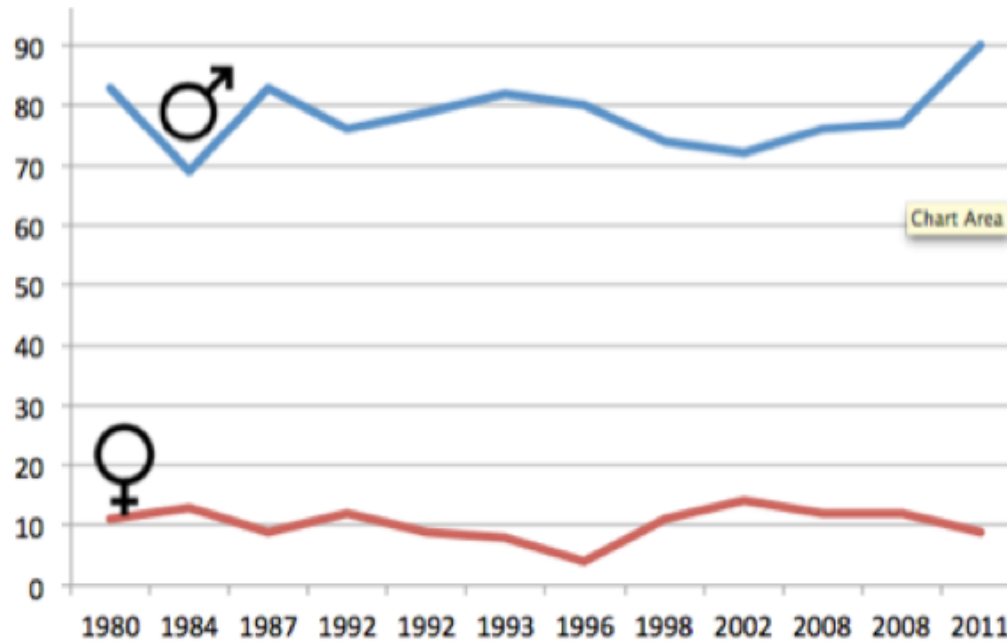


Fig. 1: 30 years of research on print media coverage in New Zealand

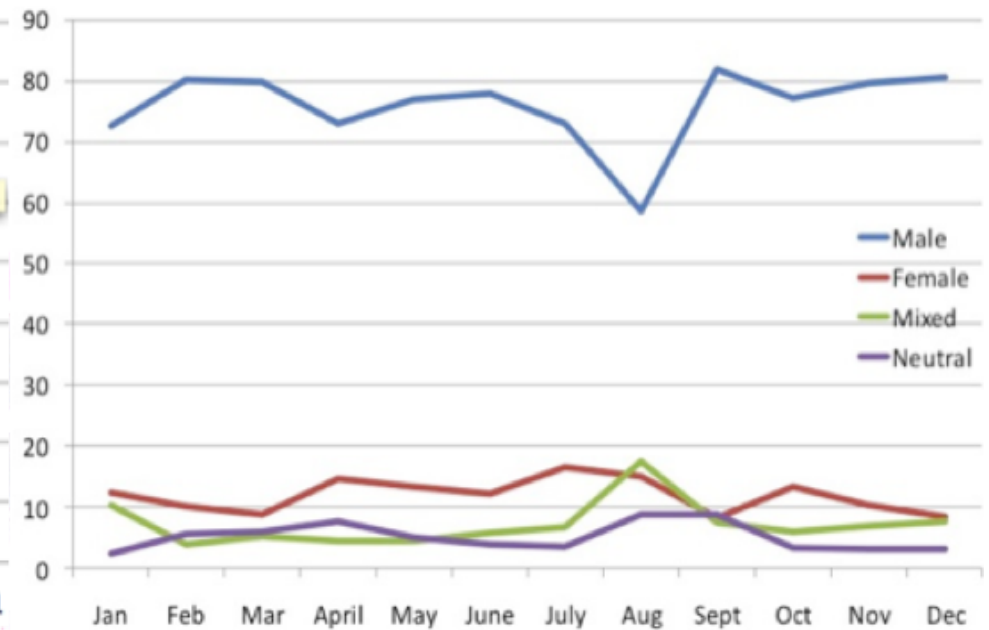


Fig. 2: A full year of 2008 media coverage in one New Zealand newspaper

Geena Davis on Hollywood

Very similar to sport

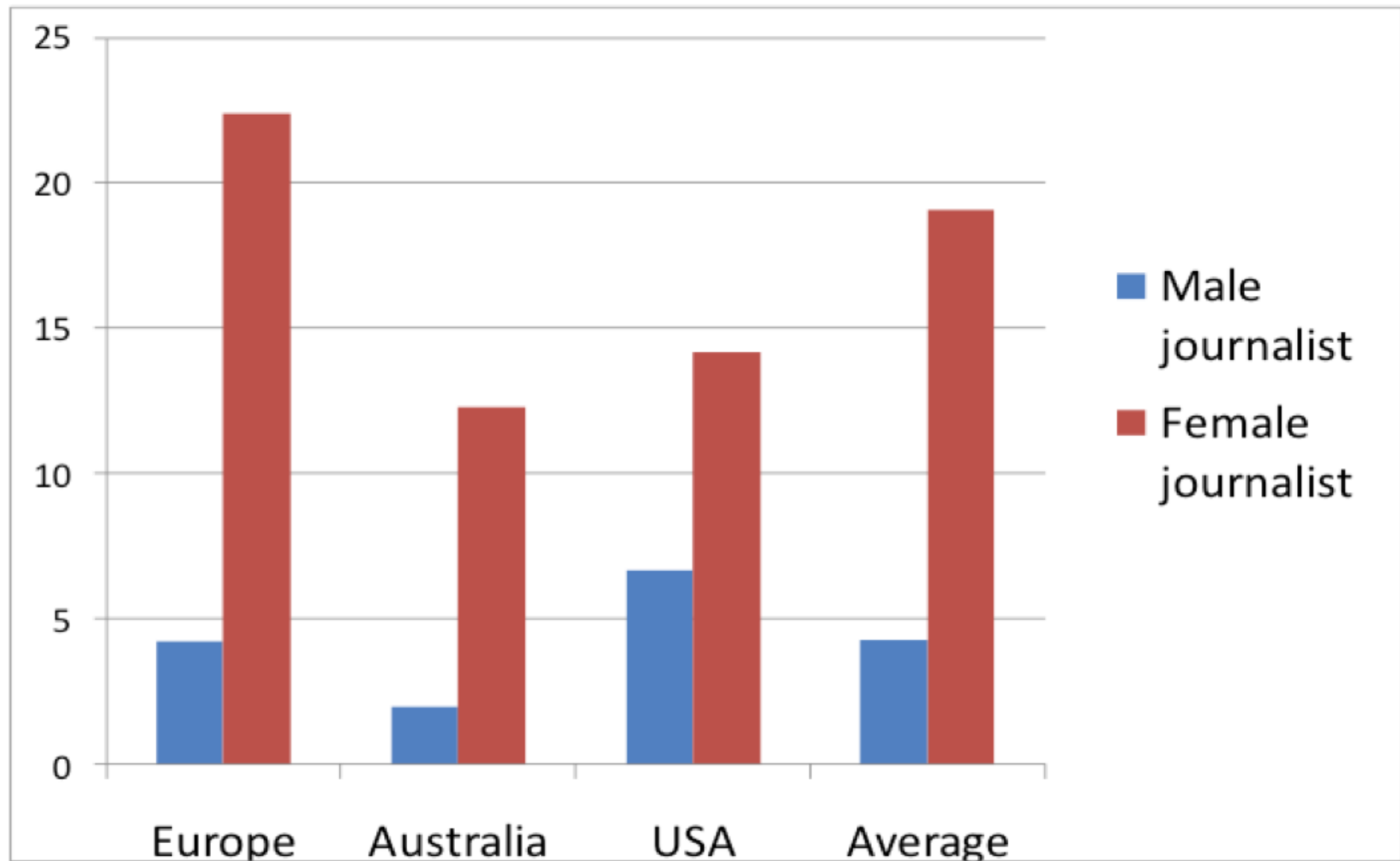
“We are teaching girls to be happy about watching boys... [and] boys that they don't have to watch stories about girls”

(Geena Davis, in Ryan, 2010)

Sports media create a story that what sportswomen do is not culturally important

“Go ahead and play, but don't expect us to pay attention”

Females write more stories about women



Stories about sportswomen written by male and female sports journalists

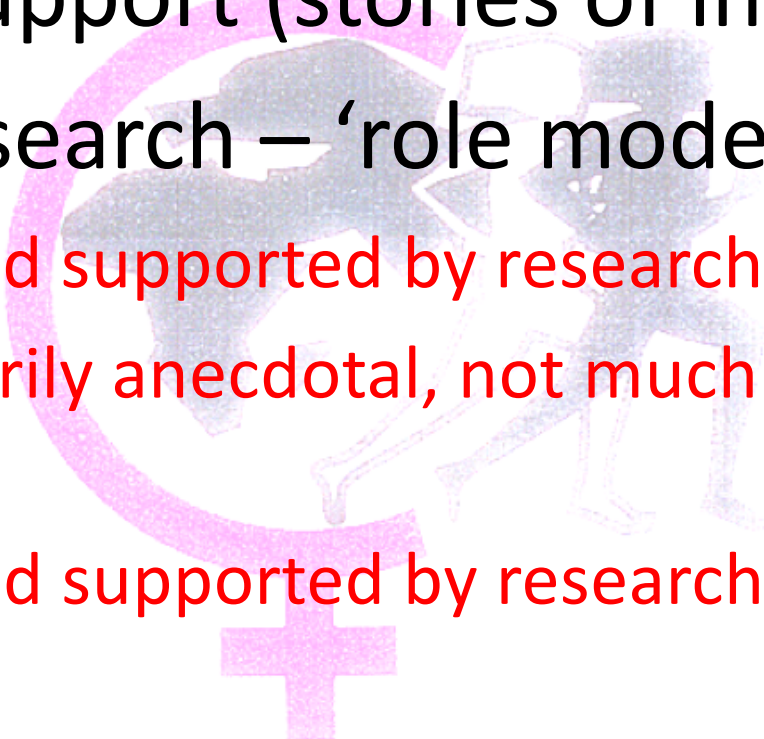
Media visibility & empowerment

- Widespread *belief* a connection exists
- *Theoretical* support
- *Anecdotal* support (stories of individuals)
- *Empirical* research – ‘role models’

✗ is negative and supported by research

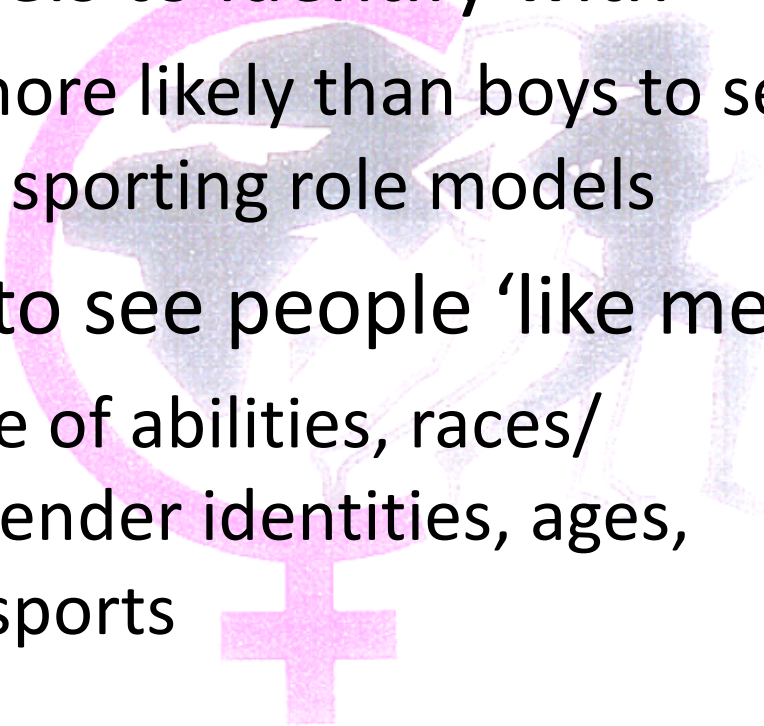
? reflects primarily anecdotal, not much evidence to support

✓ is positive and supported by research



3 disempowering effects of (in)visibility

- ✗ Females (and males) learn that women's sport doesn't matter
- ✗ Fewer role models to identify with
 - Girls much more likely than boys to select opposite sex sporting role models
- ✗ Fewer chances to see people 'like me'
 - Narrow range of abilities, races/ethnicities, gender identities, ages, body types, sports



Beliefs / Anecdotal

? Assumes more media coverage means women's sport will be seen as culturally important

? Assumes visibility will affect behaviour

➤ Role models open up possibilities

"I do hope we can...maintain ...some of the tremendous media momentum...so that young girls across the country can continue to see, and aspire to be, women of real achievement"
(girls' school headmistress, in Dunn, 2015, p. 1)

➤ Increased elite and grassroots participation with additional benefits to self-esteem, etc.

Elite footballers felt *"in a position of power that can encourage young people to participate in sport...to enjoy physical activity and promote good health"* (Dunn, 2015, p. 4)

Theory and Research

- ✓ Media is a major resource for youth identities
- ✓ Girls looking for same-sex role models
 - “Females are more like us” (Adriaanse & Crosswhite, 2008, p. 388)
 - But girls *and* elite sportswomen much more likely to have male role models
- ✓ Females more likely to view events with sportswomen
 - and female audience higher for these events
 - general sports coverage (TV, newspaper) attracts men
- ✓ Female fans frustrated at poor coverage
- ✓ Females often prefer performance-based images
- ✓ Can serve as coaching tool
 - “Elite women handballers provided models for technical and tactical practice, as well as interactional cues and clues” (Broch, 2015, p. 167).

Ways to build higher visibility

Seek relationships with local/national media

- Talk to journalists in person
- Find out and deliver what they want/need
- Congratulate on good coverage
- Implement best women's sport story awards

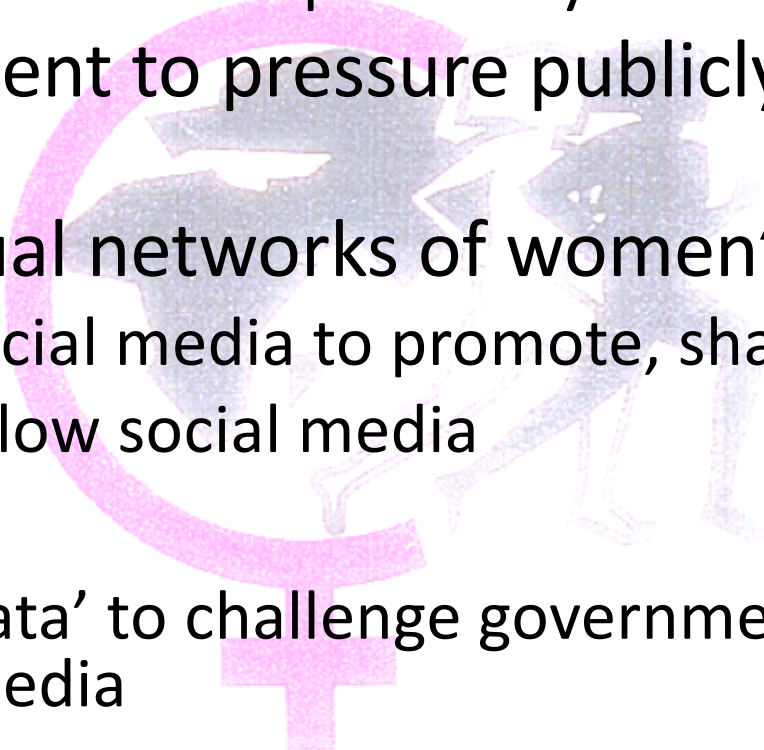
Influence government to pressure publicly owned media

Create online/virtual networks of women's sports

- Use Internet/social media to promote, share the load
- News media follow social media

Use researchers

- Produce hard 'data' to challenge governments, sports organisations, media



Activating role models for change

Face to face as well as high-profile

- “authenticity, direct expression, personal contact, and involvement” (Brace-Govan, 2013, p. 121)

Similarity

- gender, sport, race/ethnicity, dis/ability, age, body type

Reflect qualities associated with femininity and masculinity

- “She is strong, powerful and never say die” (Adriaanse & Crosswhite, 2008, p. 387)
- “She is nice, pretty, fast and a good sports woman” (p. 386)

Encourage coaches to use media role models



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