**Assessment Cover Sheet**

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| **SUBMISSION DETAILS**  **To be completed by Module Leader Only** | | | | | | | | | |
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| **Module Code** | CK3D01 | |  | **Module Title** | | | Dissertation in Media and Cultural Studies | | |
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| **ASSESSMENT INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS**  **To be completed by Module Leader** |
| **Details of Assessment:** The submission of one 10,000-word Dissertation. |
| **Learning Outcomes:**  **(As specified in the validated module descriptor**  [**https://modsandprogs.glam.ac.uk/**](https://modsandprogs.glam.ac.uk/) **)**  On completion of this module the student will have developed:  1. An ability to conceive, construct and execute a self-organised research project in media-culture.   2. An ability to critically understand and reflect on the  processes involved in conducting research in media-culture. |
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**How are British athletes portrayed in British newspapers after the 2012 Olympic Games?**

**By Daniel Lewis**

**10023321**

**Supervisor: Dr Philip Mitchell**

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**Supervisor: Dr Philip Mitchell**

**Course: BA Journalism**

**Date of submission: 19/04/2013**

**Word count: 11,000**

**Declaration**

I Daniel Lewis confirm the following:

* That this dissertation is entirely my own work.
* That all secondary sources consulted are properly referenced in the text and included in the bibliography.
* That I have satisfactorily completed the Research Proposal which is a requirement of this module.
* That this dissertation is properly formatted and presented as per the Module Handbook.
* That I have regularly attended supervision sessions with my Supervisor in completing this work.
* That I have attended the following Workshops:
* 1 Date/time – 31st October 2012, 11 – 12.30 **YES** / NO
* 2 Date/time – 20th November 2012, 5 – 6.30 YES / **NO**
* 3 Date/time – 23rd January 2013, 11 – 12.30 **YES** / NO
* 4 Date/time – 12th February 2013, 5 – 6.30 **YES** / NO
* That I attended the Symposium (Date/time – 14th December 2012, 5 – 7) **YES** / NO

Signature . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

**Abstract**

*The Olympic Games are considered as being the biggest sporting event in the world, where athletes from across the globe come together to compete in the 16 day event. With the ‘biggest show on earth’ having been held in Britain this summer, media attention was – and still is – at an all time high for sport in general across the country. This study looks at how British athletes were portrayed in a selection of British newspapers both before and after the 2012 Olympic Games, aiming to discover if there was any form of bias, whether certain athletes received preferable treatment from newspapers, and also an overall look at the coverage of the Olympic Games in terms of press coverage. A content analysis and textual analysis was carried out on 350 newspapers across a total of ten weeks – including a five week sample from 2012 and a sample from 2013 using the same time frame, to compare findings. After breaking down the newspapers, my research found that although there have been improvements in terms of eradicating any bias that has been present in the past in the British press (George et al: 1996), there was still bias present in terms of shunning athletes from certain nationalities. The findings also suggest that although tabloids and broadsheet newspapers may use particular athletes who are in the spotlight to help sell newspapers, they do not necessarily favour male or female athletes to achieve this.*

**Acknowledgements**

Though this dissertation is entirely my own work, I would like to thank my supervisor, Phillip Mitchell, whose guidance has helped me through this study.

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**Introduction**

For decades, newspapers have been accused of favouring certain athletes in terms of sports coverage (Bernstein 2002). On the face of it, the 2012 Olympics Games – held in Britain for the first time since 1948 – seemed to use athletes such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis to sell newspapers, with the inclusion of these stars regularly on back of newspapers. It was my intention to see if this view of relative bias towards certain British athletes was in fact true, and if so, to what extent and why?

As a student journalist, it was my objective to select a question and method that would allow me to break down news stories to see how it is newspapers work. Looking at the Olympic Games would allow me to look more specifically at how reporting on British athletes – and sport in general – has changed in British newspapers as a result of London 2012. Combining my passion for sport and journalism, this research question presented me with the opportunity to get a better understanding of how the British press operate, with a particular focus on sports stars.

It was important to break my initial research question down in order to see exactly what it was I would be answering, and how I would go about doing it. By looking into a range of existing academic research on similar topics to my own research question, I could take inspiration to find gaps of unanswered research and potential follow-up findings to add to existing academic research. By carefully selecting my research method, I would be able to look at how coverage of British athletes had changed over the course of two samples, from six months before the Olympic Games and compare this to findings from the same time frame six months after the Games.

Looking at a mixture of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers of different political backgrounds and news agendas, as well as local and national newspapers to give some valuable context, I was able to answer the question I had set out in a fair and reliable manner. This research question touched on the wider issues outside of sport, such as how the angle of stories can change over a period of time and how the press can use particular people and events - depending on the target audience - to sell newspapers in a time of declining sales. At the same time, my research would also focus on how the press construct the nation as a homogeneous collective, through the use of conflict and separation in articles (Bishop and Jaworski: 2003) – something which can be of interest to anyone, not just those interested in sport.

My dissertation would also look in-depth at bias in the British press – or the lack of it - as well as possible deeper underlying themes of tradition and identity, which again would help build up a collective spirit through the portrayal of British athletes. As well as this, the study would help break down newspapers using both content analysis and textual analysis to see to how other nations have been portrayed in newspapers, before finally looking at the lasting effects the London Olympics has had on the British press in terms of both the portrayal of British athletes and the coverage of various sporting events.

This study will begin with some research I have conducted on a range of existing academic literature on the media as a whole, before moving towards a more Olympic-based level which helps to build a better context as to what research is already available. With this in mind, I then decided to break my method down further with the aid of a pilot study, to leave me in a position where I could conduct my own research in order to answer the question I set out at the start.

**Chapter 1**

**Literature review**

Due to the fact that the Olympic Games are the most watched sporting event on the planet, it is an area of study that has led to a wide range of past research topics. Whether it is looking at the representation of athletes as a whole, a focus on bias towards particular athletes, or just a general look at how coverage of specific sports has changed, it’s a subject that has proved hugely popular to look into over the years. By focusing on a range of past research that has been conducted, it has allowed me to see what patterns tend to emerge in terms of themes, and how some academic studies may differ when reaching a conclusion. This in turn has helped me with my own study, and it was my intention to then enhance these past studies – whether updating old findings or filling gaps which have yet to be answered.

My literature review has been split into sections, looking at studies which focus on general representation in the media as a whole, before moving towards representation of specific sports stars and the sports they represent, before finally narrowing down my research to looking at how Olympic athletes are portrayed.

**1. General representation**

As part of my main research question, I would be looking at how Olympic athletes have been portrayed in British newspapers, bringing in wider areas of research, such as how the press adapt depending on their target audience and to what extent bias is present in national newspapers. It is important to first get an understanding of what previous academic studies have concluded regarding representation of people as a whole in the media. This can be broken down into the themes that I have taken away from my findings, such as the sense of identity given to Brits and how this in turn helps the media to construct an image regarding the portrayal of British athletes.

**1.1. Tradition and identity**

Previous research into representation conducted by O’Sullivan, Dutton and Rayner concluded that: “At the heart of the sense of being British is the idea of tradition... a shared sense of belonging and identity is certainly a real sentiment for many people living in Britain” (2003: 71). This research is backed by Morley who concludes that “the British press encourages commonsense identification with the nation as the dominant form of identity” (1995: 261). This is in relation to research carried out on a range of British newspapers and how they reported the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) crisis. Morley believed that newspapers created a sense of British identity through the use of words to help build a family spirit, meaning the story was more hard-hitting. Morley believes that the way the media builds up this collective image of tradition and identity is “through the evocation of the ‘natural’ boundaries of the national community. The press can be effective in reinforcing national identity in a context in which its naturalness might otherwise be challenged.”

This point made of the press “reinforcing national identity” is present in a lot of academic studies and gives a feel of the way the media can help construct a sense of tradition in articles when referring to Olympic athletes. As mentioned in one of the above studies I have looked into, by creating this unique British sense of identity, it allows newspapers to keep filling papers with stories on the Olympic Games, with the hope that readers will continue to purchase them. We as Brits are a big family, and the Olympic Games have helped us feel proud to be a part of this collective group, it is therefore expected that newspapers will make the most of this feel good factor on the back of the Games to help shift as many papers as possible.

**1.2 Constructing an image**

The study carried out by O’Sullivan, Dutton and Rayner also raises an interesting point regarding the way the media can construct meaning about different places and certain people. O’Sullivan *et al* suggest that:

The media construct meanings about the world – they represent it, and in doing so, help audiences make sense of it... For representation to be meaningful to audiences there needs to be a shared recognition of people situations, ideas and meanings produced by those representations (2003: 71).

This makes the point of the media - or in my case, the British press - having the ability to shape the way the public see a particular person, place, or a sport, for example. This links in with my own question of looking at how it is British athletes are portrayed now, compared to 12 months ago to give the sample some context. This argument of media perception that is put forward can be linked in with other academic studies, whilst also touching on this theory of a “shared recognition” helping to construct representations.

Williams points out that “Media representations are not reality, even though some audiences judge them as if they are” (2003: 18). This is an interesting point which highlights the way the media represents certain people - whether that be celebrities, politicians or Olympic athletes - is not necessarily the reality that the reader constructs. Later in the *Media Theory* study, Williams focuses on the content of the media, looking closely at the portrayal of certain people and the attention given to them with regards to page layout and wording used. Though he concludes that the media are “committed to the goal of objectivity through the professional ideology of journalism and the legal obligations under which they work,” believing that as a journalist it is key to remain as objective as possible.

**2. Sports based representation**

Moving onto a more sport based level; previous research shows that different athletes can be portrayed in different ways depending on wide ranging factors, such as: Target audience of the newspaper, the sport the athlete represents and also the level of sporting achievement. My own research would take inspiration from this particular area of research, where I would look into how wide ranging factors, such as those stated above, can have an effect on athlete portrayal.

**2.1 Equal treatment**

This point made regarding the sport an athlete represents having an effect on the portrayal of the athlete themselves is something that is highlighted by McRee, who concludes in his own research: “Female boxing in general still suffers from a lack of legitimacy, sexism, and male domination consistent with global pattern” (2011: 327). These findings regard the representation of a specific female boxer, whom McRee believed was typical in a sense that upon her death she received little coverage from the press because female boxing “suffers from a lack of legitimacy.” This previous study is relevant to my own research in a way that McRee conducts research to see if certain athletes or particular sports receive more coverage than others, concluding that “athletes or sports have been either excluded or marginalized from constructions of nationalism.” This implies that certain Olympic sporting events, in this case boxing, do not fit into the construction of nationalism for Trinidad and Tobago – the birthplace of the female boxer he built his research around. This touches on my own research question, where I analysed newspapers to see if certain sports which “do not fit into the construction of nationalism” for Britain, i.e. judo, handball, water polo, etc, are in fact shunned for the more traditional British sports. This also links into another area of my research where I have looked at which athletes regularly appear in newspapers, seeing if there are any links between the two.

Following on from this, in another study Rowe touches on how sportsmen and women are represented in the media, stating: “It can be suggested that there are persistent differences in representation of sportsmen and sportswomen that carry over even into areas of apparently equal treatment” (2004: 155). Rowe follows this up by saying that “The sports media are shown to be caught between a ‘neutralist’ entertainment stance...and the Olympian ideology.” By the ‘Olympian ideology’, Rowe is referring to the equality of all those taking part and how they are represented, no matter who they are, or what their event. Though as he concludes, there are “persistent differences in representation” between different athletes – again touching on this overriding theme of bias which would be a big focus in my own research.

**2.2 – Minimising accomplishments**

As my research topic is looking at representation as a whole - including bias possibly shown towards certain athletes - it is important to look at some existing academic literature that explores the deeper meanings of why it is female athletes are supposedly portrayed differently in the press. As Kian, Vincent and Mondello state: “The coverage of women’s sports by media often trivializes and minimizes the accomplishments of female athletes through portrayals, images, descriptors, and narratives, regardless of the medium examined” (2012, p.478). This to me suggests that when a female athlete achieves something, such as winning a gold medal, the victory is often played down - instead the story is altered in order to fulfil the wants of the papers target audience.

It’s not until the research has been built up to a substantial level that I will be able to come to my own conclusion regarding my findings, in the same was that Bernstein has in her study that looks into sports coverage and representation. Unlike in the previous pieces of research I have looked at, Bernstein believes that there has certainly been an improvement in the coverage of particular athletes and sports portrayal in the press, including the coverage women receive, stating: “Although women have gained some ground as far as media visibility is concerned, especially in major sporting events, it is far too early for a ‘victory lap’”. Bernstein goes on to say in her research that “the type of coverage female athletes receive has still got a long way to go.”

This study highlights that though certain athletes and women in general now receive more coverage in newspapers, there is still a long way to go for a level of equal footing to be achieved. I wanted to add to this research by looking at the balance in terms of fair and equal representation of male and female athletes in the year 2013 – an age where both genders are seemingly treated the same, which coincides with the ‘Olympian Ideology’ (Rowe, 2004) which helps to truly define to the Olympic Games.

**3. Olympic representation**

Now that I have looked at some existing academic literature in the area of general representation and research at a more sport-based level, I will begin moving towards looking at how existing studies have focused specifically on Olympic athletes. I have paid particular attention to the theme of bias which seems to appear throughout similar research to mine, as it is clearly a big factor in how athletes are portrayed in the press. Before concluding on my overall findings, I have also looked at a previous piece of research which links back into the theme of ideology and tradition that I touched on at the start of this literature review – another big factor in media portrayal.

**3.1 Bias: Gender**

One of the most read pieces of research regarding the Olympics was conducted during the 1996 Games in Atlanta, USA. The research in question, which is entitled *Gender Bias in Newspaper Profiles of 1996 Olympic Athletes*, was conducted using content analysis and focused solely on how athletes were perceived in leading U.S newspapers. As well as looking at the words and terms used to describe athletes, the piece of well written research also looked closely at the use of photographs, concluding that gender bias was in fact largely present in the majority of national newspapers in America, with some athletes being included in articles less than others for various reasons. Kinnick stated that gender bias in the 1996 Olympic Games appeared to be “less prevalent than that found in coverage of previous sporting events reported by other scholars” (1997: 189). She also focused on the layout of stories and came to the conclusion that: “In some cases, such as page layout and article prominence, female athletes received favourable treatment, suggesting that editors sought to capitalize on reader interest in female athletes.”

This research carried out 17 years ago is the closest piece which can be linked to mine from a bias point of view – one of the areas I will be focusing on in regards to the portrayal of athletes. The research focuses solely on five different newspapers within the country which was hosting the Olympic Games that year, in the same way that I am doing. Despite this well constructed research offering some interesting findings on gender bias, it does not look into wider issues, such as comparing the findings from after the Olympics to before, giving the reader a better understanding of how things have changed. Though what it does suggest is that certain newspapers will use female athletes to help sell stories so to speak, with the layout of pages differing between male and female athletes.

Kinnick concluded in full in her findings that “female athletes received similar or more favourable treatment than male athletes” (1997: 191). Though the research went on to conclude that “these findings suggest improvement – revealing less egregious bias than has been noted by previous studies of media coverage of female athletes.” This is an interesting note to end on, and opens up the study for other academics to continue, just as Higgs *et al* proved when looking into the same subject area and reaching different findings, concluding: “There was a lack of overtly sexist commentary in track and field as compared with the 1992 Olympic Games; however, some gender differentials in presentation of the narrative was still evident” (2003,:61). This research again uses content analysis to answer the original question, but this time, instead of using newspapers, Higgs *et al* opted to look at TV coverage over a set amount of time. The findings are interesting in a sense that, compared to the 1992 Olympic Games, there was a “lack of overtly sexist commentary.” This goes to show that by comparing the findings between two set points, in this case between two Olympic Games, it can help give a better context for the findings. These results also goes to show that, like with newspapers, TV news stories also alter the “presentation of narrative” - suggesting some gender bias undertones of the difference between the coverage male and female athletes receive.

On the contrary to Kinnick’s findings which highlighted that female athletes received more favourable treatment than male athletes, George *et al* concluded in their own research that “the British media give preference in their coverage to male athletes, often ignoring female athletic achievements” (1996: 94). This particular study looked into a mixture of textual and visual media, before revealing that female achievements are often overlooked. This intriguing research offered me the chance to look into this area in some more depth as part of my own full-scale research, looking solely at British newspapers between the years 2012 – 2013.

**3.2 Bias: Age & Nationality**

As highlighted already, my piece of research will combine various factors together to help see if bias is present in British newspapers when it comes to the portrayal of athletes. I will not just be looking at how gender can have an effect on how often an athlete is included in articles, but also how age and nationality (Welsh, English, Scottish and Irish) can have an effect. This allows me to find a fresh perspective to look at for my research topic in terms of London 2012 research, in a similar way to Chia Chen during the 2008 Olympic Games. In her research looking into the news coverage of Asian female Olympic athletes, Chia Chen decided to look solely at female athletes, taking away the gender bias – instead looking at how age and nationality could also have an effect on the representation.

The research – which was conducted during the Olympic Games in Beijing - found that “sports writers emphasise feminine characteristics in news coverage when reporting on Asian female Olympic athletes” (2008: 80). Though the report also concluded that “characteristics of athletes were frequently included in news stories,” this depending on the appearance of the athlete in question, which in turn comes down to their age. Chia Chen went on to say that “stereotypes and expectations of feminine characteristics towards female athletes may still exist.”

This is a similar set of findings to Wright *et al* who focused on ‘home athletes’ in general, noting that “Social and cultural stereotypes associated with race, ethnicity and gender, reproduce dominant social ideals about what good citizens of particular societies should be like” (2010: 6) This is in reference to the content analysis carried on a range of newspaper articles, which they believed stereotyped athletes depending on their nationality – Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English. This is an area of research which has led to numerous studies over the years (Wright *et al*, 2010; Billings and Eastman, 2002; McRee, 2011) with many academics choosing to use the Olympic Games to highlight their findings.

The majority of these studies, as emphasised by the two pieces of research above, show that while bias and stereotyping appears to be present in newspapers across the globe, it all comes down to the media organisation producing “social ideals about what good citizens of particular societies should be like” (Wright *et al*, 2010: 6). This is an interesting point that has been raised, which has been explored further in my own research by looking at certain patterns with regards to which athletes regularly appear in news articles and what sport it is they are representing – this would help me conclude if this idea of the media offering readers an image of what they believe ‘good citizens’ of particular societies should be like, was in fact true.

**3.3 Olympic content analysis**

As touched on already, due to the worldwide appeal of the Olympic Games, it is an area of research which has been looked at from different angles in a wide range of academic studies. One of these studies is *Key Research in Media Sport* which looks at a similar area to my own research question, where there is a focus on certain ideologies and how different athletes have been presented by the media. One interesting point raised is regarding the way an athlete’s background can have an impact of portrayal, where it is suggested: “Portrayals of international relations in Olympic media texts have often appeared as divisive clashes between nations or ideologies. The texts contrast the print journalist’s styles, nationalities, and other characteristics” (Wenner, 2000: 112). Wenner highlights this point by touching on research he conducted on the Olympic Games prior to the year 1992, which showed that American media coverage contextualised the Games in terms of the conflict between Western bloc and Eastern bloc powers using the image of “cold war ideology.” This links perfectly into the point raised at the start of this literature review (Morley, 2003: 71) regarding the way the British press encourage identification with the nation as the dominant form of identity – something I have looked at in my detail in my own study.

Wenner interestingly went on to conclude that the British press reporting on the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, portrayed Britain’s opponents “using blatant racist/ ethnic stereotypes” (2000: 36). To back up this research, the academic used some key words that he had picked out of his content analysis - something which I again took inspiration from in order to help see in what way British athletes are portrayed in the British press.

Billings and Eastman also concluded in their research on the 2000 Sydney Games that “men athletes, whites, and Americans continued to be the most-mentioned and most positively-portrayed in coverage” (2002: 370). Billing and Eastman also used the method of content analysis to break apart newspapers – as well as certain television reports - in order to find key words used to describe individual athletes, as well as American athletes as a whole. Both academics agree that not only is bias present in the selected newspapers used, but also stereotypes can be used against certain athletes. Both studies also highlight that ‘home athletes’ usually fit into certain ideologies in order to be portrayed in the way the newspapers wish - this can be achieved by using particular words to give build a sense of identity.

**Literature review: Conclusion**

Gender bias is something that has been looked at in-depth in previous academic studies, not just the Olympic Games, but sport in general. So with this in mind, I have adapted my own research to allow me to take samples from newspapers prior to the 2012 Olympic Games and then comparing these to my findings from after the 2012 Olympics. This in turn will allow me to build up a bigger picture, bringing in some wider context. As well as this, I decided I would also look at the representation of athletes as a whole in my own research, seeing if this sense of a collective British family spirit is present, as touched on in this literature review.

One major factor I took away from looking into existing research, is the fact that many studies disagree on the extent to which bias is present in the media. Some studies suggest that the achievements of women are played down, whereas others suggest that news articles tend to include more stories on female athletes – It was my intention to add to build on these findings in order to see if the role of female athletes is in fact played down in the British press a few years on from this original research.

An interesting point was raised in the research conducted by McRee, where he concluded that certain sports are shunned in the national press due to the fact that they are ‘non-traditional sports’ (2011: 327). As touched on, I would use previous studies such as this to aid my own research to see if in fact the same sports seem to receive newspaper coverage to the extent that some of the other Olympic sports and Olympic athletes are shunned. This in turn could then be compared to data from the research collected before the Games, to see any changes in the portrayal of certain event coverage.

One theme that seemed to appear regularly throughout my literature review regards ideology and tradition – with some academics suggesting that the press can use certain words in order to build up this collective spirit. In some research, such as that carried out by Billings and Eastman, newspapers have been broken down and looked at in depth in order to find the key words which regularly appear – this in turn helping to build up a bigger picture to give some much needed context to the findings.

Certain studies that I have looked at just focus on the sports section of newspapers; my research however would go one step further and look at newspapers as a whole, which I believe would help when it came to breaking down the findings in detail. This, along with other inspiration and ideas I took away from my literature review, would help me when it came to studying my methodology in more detail.

**Chapter 2**

**Methodology**

Following the research I conducted into previous academic studies, I moved towards looking at my desired research method in some more detail. A large proportion of the previous studies I focused on used the method of content analysis, which helped give the research the ability to break-down texts – perfect for a research question such as mine.

As well as looking at my method in more detail, I also looked at how I went about conducting my own pilot study, which would help to make further changes to my method of choice in order to provide me with the best results possible to answer the question that I set out at the start when it came to the full-scale research

**My research methods**

I decided that the best way to approach my piece of research was to use content analysis, which would allow me to strip newspaper texts apart to systematically analyse them and help detect the existence of any bias (Kassarjian, 1977). As well as this, content analysis works better than any other research method to help identify the intentions, focus or agenda of an individual, or, in my case, a media organisation.

As Riffe *et al* argue, this method of research allows room to analyse the chosen texts to “describe what the typical patterns or characteristics are” and also “identify important relationships among the content qualities examined” (2008: 3). This method of research has allowed me to look at not just how athletes have been presented in the British press, but also allowed me to find any important relationships in terms of why it is certain athletes appear more than others, and how their gender, nationality and what Olympic event it is they take part in, can have an effect on portrayal.

By using content analysis to answer my question, it has also allowed me to capture multiple variables over a large dataset. Because I’m not just looking at how gender may affect how an athlete is portrayed in the media, but also nationality and other factors, it can help me link certain patterns together in order to answer the original question I set out. Over time, using this method has allowed me to break apart newspaper texts to give me a complete set of data to work with and build up my research in the fairest and most reliable way possible.

With the aid of textual analysis, I could also break down newspaper texts to look at which key words had been repeated and what phrases appear regularly - again helping to spot any patterns that emerge in terms of how athletes have been portrayed. Though I had to be careful to avoid any inferences, such as personal opinions on particular athletes - this however didn’t turn out to be an issue, as I carried out the research in full in a professional manner. I ensured that I carried out an ethical piece of research which fairly provided an answer to the question I set out to answer.

In order to achieve this fair research I split the sample into two parts – ‘now’ and ‘then’ - which would cover articles from the same one month time frame, over the course of two separate years (2013 and 2012 respectively). To maintain this reliable research I set out to achieve, I searched articles for the key words: “Olympic(s)”, “Olympian” and “London 2012” over both time frames – the three words and terms which, during my initial research carried out alongside my pilot study, appeared to be the most prominent in articles regarding the Olympic Games. This, in turn, meant that only articles that referred specifically to the Olympic Games would form part of my research. Of course, some articles may not use any of these words, but I was happy that the key terms I have chosen provided me with a fair sample to work with, as long as I kept this the same across both samples.

This breaking down of the text to pick out certain semantics falls under textual analysis, which works in a similar way to content analysis, in the sense that it helps make meaning of texts. As explained by McKee:

Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology – a data-gathering process – for those researches who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are (2003: 1).

As mentioned, this research method – along with content analysis – has allowed me to fully break down newspapers to look in-depth at how British athletes are portrayed in the press, looking at how journalists and the news industry as a whole “make sense” of athletes.

Again, I would record certain key words in articles made specifically by the journalist - excluding any words from quotations – which has allowed me to break down texts to get a sense of the mood from both before and after the Olympic Games to help see how the athletes have been portrayed in the British press.

On the subject of ethics, the method of research I decided to use meant that I would not be directly questioning anybody and certainly not causing any harm. I had to ensure that I was using my resources as beneficially as possible, using valid methodology and striving to achieve well grounded findings, which would be vital to maintaining a piece of research which was ethically fine – which is of course very important to take into consideration when conducting research of any manner.

**Conducting the research**

Before beginning my research, it was important that I looked into the four main elements of content analysis: Unit of analysis, categories, sampling of content and coding. The unit of analysis is what I would be looking at, for example certain words, phrases and the regularity of athletes appearing in articles. By looking at these units of analysis, I was able to determine key themes which began to appear, and could also compare how the reporting of certain athletes and particular sports changed over time – in my case, before and after the Olympic Games. I was looking for specific mentions of the Olympics in news articles – excluding any columnists sections - by journalists throughout my selected newspapers, noting whether they focused on a particular athlete/ event, or if in fact it was a more general article focusing on the Olympics, such as budgets and policing, for example. This would help when it came to breaking down my research at a later date to analyse the findings in terms of the shift between various sections of newspapers.

The data from my sample would then be stored in a tally chart, before being transferred into a series of graphs – a time consuming process, but the best way to conduct this research in a manner to ensure I was given the best possible results. The graphs allowed me to showcase my findings, though it was important not to use too many – finding the right balance between words and graphics to help highlight key points.

The categories, much like the units, had to be clearly defined before the conducting of research. They were mutually exclusive and exhaustive, meaning that I knew exactly what it was I would be looking at. Categories are essentially groups of words, phrases or themes that have a similar meaning. Over time, by recording my findings it allowed me to build up my research with the aid of these different categories. An important aspect of my research would involve me looking at the particular use of pre-modifiers, such as “*brilliant* athletes” or “*poor* effort”, for example. This again would help me to build up a collection of data to see how athletes had been portrayed in the British press on both a small and large scale – using the research conducted prior to the Olympics to help add some context.

Another element of my research method included the sample itself – newspapers. I set a time in which my research would be carried out, bearing in mind that newspapers very often change staff on weekends, meaning an alteration in style. I found that weekend newspapers often included a lot of profiles and interviews on sports stars, which offered the perfect chance for me to continue conducting my research. I chose a set of particular newspapers before beginning my research, which changed over time with the aid of my pilot study which can be seen further into this methodology section.

Finally, the coding part of my methodology is made up of a range of potential variables - one of these being the weight of the story itself. It was important I made note in my research findings of the weight and prominence of the news stories in terms of its positioning in the newspaper, what type of story it was, and also the use of photographs. This all links back into my question of seeing how it is the athletes have been portrayed on a wider scale, something which I took away from my study into previous research topics for my literature review.

**Pilot Study**

I decided that it would be best to first conduct a pilot study before carrying out my research in full (See Appendix N). A pilot study would allow me to use my planned methods, but instead of conducting a full scale research, I could instead focus on a smaller sample. The pilot also allowed me to test the approach I was going to take to answer my research question, helping to identify certain details that needed to be addressed before I could conduct the main data collection at a later stage.

Once the pilot study had been conducted I could break down the findings to see what patterns had emerged, though it is important to take into consideration that not much should be read into the study, as the real value is to see what it tells me about my chosen methods, and if there are any issues that needed rectifying.

**Lessons learned**

The research findings from my pilot study - which can be seen in full in the appendices section - used a sample for ‘now’ (W/B 05/11/12) compared to a sample which I had obtained for the ‘then’ part of my findings which have been taken from the same week exactly 12 months prior (05/11/11). I decided after carrying out this pilot study that by conducting my full-scale research for a longer amount of time, it would help balance certain issued out that I encountered. I selected a period of time carefully on the back of this pilot so that my sample was not ‘contaminated’ by major sporting events going on at the same time, making the results fairer and more accurate for the question I am looking to answer. I had originally planned to conduct the research for a four week period – a whole month – but following the outcome of my pilot study I instead opted to extend this by another week. Meaning certain patterns and themes that had been emerging could now be backed up by solid evidence.

After conducting my pilot study, one major improvement I decided to make was to pay more attention to the use of images and key words in terms of description of athletes, to help see if bias is present in the British press, as was the case in many previous studies highlighted in my literature review. As mentioned, my pilot study was made up predominantly by tabloid newspapers, with some additional newspapers included through the week to see if it aided my research. Going forward, I believed it would be wise to use a selection of both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, which in turn would give me a basis to compare and contrast the different styles - depending on the newspaper audience - as well as looking to see to what extent tabloidization is present in the press. For this, I decided to drop one tabloid newspaper - *The Mirror* - and replace it with two broadsheet papers – *The Guardian* and *The Times*. This meant that I would now have one regional newspaper (*South Wales Echo*) two broadsheet newspapers (*The Times* & *The Guardian*), one tabloid newspaper (*The Sun*) and finally *The Daily Mail*, which for the purpose of my research I have listed as a tabloid newspaper, though in truth it likes to find the balance between both tabloid and broadsheet in its style. As previously mentioned, I also conducted my research over weekends, meaning the newspapers ‘sister papers’ would be included in the research such as *The Observer* and *The Mail on Sunday*, for example.

One issue that I came across during my full-scale research was the fact that for the period of time I had selected for the ‘then’ segment of my research (04/02/2012 – 09/03/2012) *The Sun on Sunday* had yet to be released, with *The Sun’s* former sister paper - *The News of the World* - no longer in publication. This meant that, following on from me experimenting with various newspapers during this pilot study, I would use *The Sunday Mirror* as part of my research for Sunday’s during the ‘then’ segment of the research. This newspaper brought up similar results to *The News of the World* during my pilot study, so I was therefore happy to include it as part of my final research.

Another slight issue which became apparent when conducting my research was the fact that the year 2012 was a leap year, meaning an extra day for the ‘then’ segment of research. This was overcome by me ending the research a day early, which would make the research fairer. Following on from this, I also ensured to cover weekend newspapers the same number of times over the two monthly time-scales; again, this would ensure the fairest and most reliable end results possible, which was key to a well thought-out and fair piece of research.

I also decided with the aid of this study that I would drop the “athletics” tally, and instead break this down into the specific events – short distance (100m, 200m & 400m) and middle/ long distance races (800m, 1,500m, 5,000m & 10,000m), as well as the heptathlon events and various relays. This would ultimately make my results more reliable, as I’m accounting for specific events, rather than a big group of events.

One final point I managed to take away from my worthwhile pilot study was the fact that I could use tables and graphs to my advantage, using them to put across my results in a way that could be easily read and understood at a glance by those looking at it. I’ve used a simple bar graph for my pilot study sample above, and it seemed to work well, though it was a case of experimenting with different graphs depending on the sample and what it is I was looking at as part of my main research.

The pilot study itself – much like my main research – was very time consuming, but rewarding when the results came together. Ultimately there was certain areas of my research that I would tweak as a result of this pilot, such as the way I recorded the findings from my sample, but on the whole I was happy with my pilot study which would help with the large-scale research.

**Methodology: Conclusion**

As stated by Kassarjian: “This methodology does open new avenues for research, ranging from studies on themes and appeals found in mass media... allowing for the reliable, valid and quantitative answers to questions” (1977: 16). This point raised by Kassarjian may date back 30 years, but these avenues for research still exist, and by taking a sample of a range of different newspapers over a set period of time, it has allowed me to build up a reliable and valid set of data to help answer my research question in the best possible manner.

In many ways, content analysis is a method that can’t be argued with - the findings are solid, meaning it is quite literally in black & white for all to see. This method of research offered me something that alternative methods such as questionnaires and focus groups couldn’t, in a way that I was able to break down the findings from newspapers and build up my research from scratch, whereas with alternative methods such as questionnaires and interviews, I would get more of an opinion, rather than solid facts. Despite the method being very time consuming, it was cheap to an extent thanks to online resources, and it provided me with what I believe was the best possible results to answer my question, with my pilot study backing this up.

**Chapter 3**

**Findings**

Whilst conducting my research I could instantly begin to see certain patterns emerging, which, over the course of the five week time frame, became clearer as the days went by. I have split my findings into four sections: Tradition and Identity, equal treatment, bias and finally the expectations and lasting effects of the 2012 Olympic Games. Combined, my findings will help me reach a conclusion to the question I set out to answer of how British athletes have been portrayed in the British press.

I will begin by looking at the theme of tradition and identity which appeared regularly throughout my literature review. This is an area which provided some interesting findings, such as the collective spirit created by newspapers both before and after the Olympics, as well as the portrayal of some of the ‘plastic Brits’ competing for the host nation.

**Tradition and identity**

There is no question that the year 2012 is one that will be etched into the proud history of Great Britain as one of the finest in the nation’s history. It was a year that not only saw Britain host the Olympic Games, but also celebrate the Queens Diamond Jubilee – a duo of events which combined received a lot of column inches in the British press. It was clear to see that British newspapers were regularly using lexical sets in order to showcase Britain’s collective spirit in what was an historical year for the nation; capitalising on a special time for Britain and using events to help sell newspapers. Words such as “inspiration”, “battling”, “brave”, “courageous” and “proud” were regularly repeated both before and after the Games (see Appendix K), which helps to build up this strong identity that perfectly encapsulates Britain. This fits in with the research conducted as part of my literature review, where there is a suggestion that the British press encourage identification in order to create a “shared sense of belonging and identity” (O’Sullivan *et al,* 2003: 71), which is certainly present in my own research on the 2012 Olympic Games, much like it was 18 years prior during the 1994 Olympic Games.

It was a time to be proud of being British, though it was interesting to see the way other nations were portrayed in articles in relation to the Olympic Games. Although my research focused predominantly on British athletes, I also made a note of articles which referred to other competing countries, and on the whole, as was expected, journalists remained objective when looking at athletes from other nations - this is in agreement with a previous study I looked at in my literature review (Williams, 2003).

In fact, Australia – who overall appeared in British newspapers more than any other country outside of Britain – was described as being “vibrant” (*Daily Telegraph*, 26 February 2013: 68) and “superb” (*Daily Telegraph*, 21 February 2012: 65) by the same newspaper to perfectly emphasise this point of journalists not shunning other competing nations.

Though despite this, it was clear to see that athletes from Argentina were often treated differently. To link this back into the theme of tradition and identity, Britain has a lot of history with Argentina - in both a sporting an historical sense - with the Falkland Islands debate still appearing regularly throughout British newspapers. In one article, the “Argies” were described as being Britain’s “main rivals” (*The Sun*, 29 February 2012: 52), with athlete Juan Lopez being labelled as a “bad boy” of his event in the same article. Journalists remained objective on the whole when focusing on athletes from outside of Britain, but as this above example with Argentina shows, a collective spirit was still formed in order to make readers feel a part of a family, which is not uncommon (Bishop and Jaworski: 2003) – this is ‘our country’, we must support our athletes, whereas those competing for the likes of Argentina are seen as the enemy. Much like with the research conducted by Wenner in my literature review, the British press have used previous historical events in order to create this sense of a collective spirit, which goes through the core of the British identity.

This is again clear to see with the use of the phrases “our girls” (*The Sun*, 29 February 2012: 52) to help build this collective spirit further and get readers on one side. This could be achieved by making other nations the enemy so to speak, which helps identity Britain from the rest. Rather interestingly newspapers on the whole decided to take this a step further and create some fighting spirit among British competitors. For example in one article it was stated that the event in question would be “the battle of the Scots”, with the same article also claiming “rivalries will be intense” and that “tensions have boiled over” between the Scottish and the English athletes (*Daily Telegraph*, 6 March 2012: 57). This was a regular occurrence in the build-up to the Games, which helped to hype-up certain events, with the highest profile of which being the above example of Badminton. This was thanks to Imogen Bankier (who herself seen a decline in press coverage after the Games) and her ‘Twitter war’ with fellow athletes in which she asked the question: “Why can English people not serve?!” (*Daily Mail*, 13 February: 7). In fact the sport was mentioned in 11 separate articles six months before the Olympics, where as in the same sample six months after the Games, it wasn’t mentioned once in any article across the five newspapers from an Olympic viewpoint. In events where there was a lot of competition for places, certain events received more coverage thanks to the British rivalry which was present.

I was interested to see how the so called “plastic Brits” – a phrase coined by Martin Samuel of the Daily Mail - such as Mo Farah, Shara Proctor and Tiffany Porter, were treated in the British press. The term is used to question which of Britain’s athletes really deserve to be considered British – with Mo Farah being the highest profile after representing Britain, despite being born in Somalia. It’s fair to say that Farah was treated as ‘one of us’, with the gold medallist appearing in a large amount of articles both before and after the Olympics. Though sometimes mention was made to the athletes past, with the Daily Mail bringing up an athlete’s background on a couple of occasions, such as: “[Farah arrived] in London from Somalia with no grasp of the English language” (*Daily Mail*, 15 February 2012: 70). An athletes’ past in many ways helps fit into this theme of identity - they are who they are, but what matters is that they have chosen to represent Britain and on the whole the British press have accepted this and made them feel a part of this proud nation.

**Equal treatment: A breakdown of athlete and event coverage**

In order to see how athletes had been portrayed in the British press, I recorded each time a particular athlete appeared in an article, as well as making a note of which sporting event they represent, and also mentioning certain words and phrases used in each article. After breaking my findings down into a series of tables and graphs, it was clear to see various patterns form; such as the way particular athletes are shunned in the British press. This can be seen perfectly with the representation of divers Tom Daley and Pete Waterfield, who would compete together in the synchronised diving events, as well as individually.

It is clear to see in my findings that articles relating to Daley far outweighed those featuring Waterfield (See Appendix C). In fact, after the Olympic Games – and both divers failure to pick up a medal together in the synchronised event – Waterfield would only actually feature in one article (*The Guardian*, 11 February 2013: 67) after the Olympic Games. Even this would make numerous mentions to “synchro partner Tom Daley”, to perfectly emphasise that the 2004 silver medallist had been shunned to a large extent by the British press in favour of the younger Daley – an insight into how newspapers use particular sports stars in order to appeal to their target audience.

Waterfield can actually lay claim to being Britain’s most successful ever diver having competed in four separate Olympic Games, though as the Guardian article mentions, the future for Waterfield is “barren and uncertain”. For Daley however – who featured in *only* 10 articles prior to the Olympics, despite his proclaimed “posterboy” image – he was mentioned in 26 articles after a Games which saw him pick up a medal in the individual event to live up to the hype. This example goes to show that athletes are not necessarily treated the same, and the same is true in terms of event coverage also.

As touched on in my literature review, academic Roy McRee found in his research that “athletes or sports have been either excluded or marginalized from constructions of nationalism” (2011: 327). McRee pointed to the example of female boxing; a sport which provided me with some interesting findings of my own. One of the big success stories of the Olympic Games was that of athlete Nicola Adams, who picked up the first ever women’s boxing gold medal at the Olympics following its introduction to the Games. My findings show that Adams featured an additional three times in articles after the Olympic Games, though this actually still turns out to be the same percentage of articles – 25% - before and after the Olympics (See Appendix D and E). Now this could suggest that female boxing is “marginalized” to an extent, as Adams has featured in the same percentage of articles both before and after the Olympics despite her success, but on a relatively small scale such as this, my findings have shown simply that Adams has appeared in three additional articles after her success compared to before across the five newspapers used in my sample. This in turn dispels the research of McRee, in terms of my own personal research on the 2012 Olympic Games. Success at London 2012 has helped increase Nicola Adams’ profile, as well as the sport of boxing.

It’s not just boxing that provided me with interesting findings however, as other sports which don’t necessarily fit into the “constructions of nationalism” such as handball, shooting, table tennis and wrestling, for example, did in fact prove the point that certain sports and events are not portrayed in a fair manner in the British press. These events were mentioned minimal times over the two samples, especially when compared to the likes of the 100m sprint which didn’t even have any British athletes taking part at all. This again comes down to individual athletes who help to ‘sell’ events - much like Daley with diving. In this case, Usain Bolt of Jamaica has raised to profile of the 100m sprint to such an extent that the British press featured the event in 29 different articles - many of which in the general news section - across the two samples.

Whereas handball, shooting and table tennis didn’t see any major improvement in portrayal in the press, certain events such as high jump, boxing and, surprisingly, dressage, have benefited massively on the back of the Olympic Games (See Appendix F), and this is all down to the success of certain individual athletes. Andy Murray (tennis) perfectly helps to sum this up with articles referring to the Scot in an Olympic sense jumping from two times before the Games to six times after, as well as Robbie Grabbarz and Holly Bleasdale who were mentioned a further 15 times on the back of their relative success at the Games. This suggests to me that, although certain events may receive minimal coverage in the British press, if athletes become successful in their sporting events - much like with the examples of the high jump and boxing - then they will slowly receive more coverage and will be portrayed in a better light – this cycle is nothing new, it just seems to be highlighted thanks research of this kind.

Perhaps the most interesting findings to come out of the event research is the fact that cycling – or more specifically, Olympic cyclists - despite seeing its coverage reduce minimally across the two samples, received a large amount of coverage in the British press both before and after the Olympic Games. Stories relating to the sport of cycling in an Olympic sense featured an incredible 69 times before the games – higher than any other event. Despite a minimal decline in stories after the Olympic Games (54 articles), it still helps to show that cycling is certainly heavily covered in the British press – a diverse range of sports coverage which newspapers perhaps don’t get credit for.

To break these findings down further, high-profile Olympic cyclists Chris Hoy (30 articles), Mark Cavendish (22 articles), Bradley Wiggins (24 articles), Geraint Thomas (23 articles), Jason Kenny (30 articles) and Victoria Pendleton (39 articles) helped to promote the event - making a sport you wouldn’t necessarily associate Britain with heavily, into what is now arguably a national sport (See Appendix G). The findings also show that articles referring to the above athletes combined fell from 100 articles to 65, leading to the conclusion that due to the success of all cyclists together at the Olympic Games, the profile of the sport itself has now grown as a result. The press no longer need to rely on these athletes as the main focus of cycling articles; instead cycling alone is now the main angle for a lot of news stories.

These findings are in stark contrast to football, which seen a heavy decline in articles across the two samples. As noted in my methodology, the articles I’m interested in for the purpose of my research were those relating specifically to the Olympics, rather than sports stories in general. This means that Olympic football articles fell from 22 before the Games to just seven after (See Appendix A). I believe that this is down to the poor performance of the combined British football team at the Olympic Games, which, despite the clear hype in the build-up, failed to live up to the billing. Unlike many other Olympic events however, football doesn’t need the ‘biggest show on earth’ to help promote the sport, it is already Britain’s most popular sport, and heavily features in the British press every day of the week.

**Bias in the British Press: Gender and nationality**

The theme of bias is something that I was intrigued to find out more about in terms of reporting in the British press, following on from my own initial research into the topic. I decided to break my findings down to see if bias was present from both a gender and nationality perspective, which provided me with some interesting data to work with.

Interestingly, my findings show that male and female athletes appear almost exactly the same amount of times in both the 2012 and 2013 sample – with articles relating to male athletes narrowly appearing more often (See appendix H and I). This to me dispels any suggestion of gender bias, as across the combined 10 weeks I conducted my two samples, the difference was marginal – certainly too small to suggest any sort of bias in favour of one gender over the other.

This is again the case when looking at the inclusion of photographs in articles, where it was suggested in a previous study on press coverage on the Olympic Games that gender bias was largely present in newspapers – with the conclusion that “editors sought to capitalize on reader interest in female athletes” (Kinnick, 1997: 189). My research on the 2012 Olympics shows that bias from a gender perspective is non-existent in terms of article prominence and also with the use of photographs (See Appendix J). Certain athletes were more prominent in articles than others both before and after the Games, such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis, though the articles appeared to balance out over time, which shows to me that the British press don’t necessarily need to use photographs of athletes of a certain gender to help sell newspapers.

Research conducted on a similar subject to mine also found that “the British media give preference in their coverage to male athletes, often ignoring female athletic achievements” (George, Hartley and Paris, 1996: 94). Linking this in with my own research, it appeared that both male and female athletes were treated fairly when it came to describing achievements (See appendix K), with male athletes Mark Cavendish and Peter Wilson being described with the terms “cycle king” and “hero” respectively. On the other hand, female athlete Rebecca Adlington was described in *The Sun* as being in “outstanding shape” and a “poster girl” for Britain, whereas Victoria Pendleton was described as being the nations “golden girl” and a “world-class athlete”. This, combined with the fact that the words “champ” and “champion” were the most repeated across the 2013 sample to describe the success of both male and female athletes, suggests to me that there is equal treatment in terms of athlete portrayal in terms of gender.

When looking at bias from a nationality point of view, there were similar themes developing which can be broken down with the aid of my two samples. I decided to look at one regional newspaper – *The South Wales Echo –* in order to compare Olympic coverage between local and national press. I was surprised to see that the local newspaper actually featured more athletes from outside of Wales, though this is a little deceiving as these articles were often news in brief, where as the articles which featured Welsh athletes such as Geraint Thomas, Fred Evans and Andrew Selby would go much more in-depth.

The local newspaper would also state where it is the athlete was from (“Barry boxer”, “Cardiff born swimmer”, “Flint champion”, etc) – something which the national newspapers tended to do less. This links back in to the theme of tradition and identity, where perhaps the more local you go, the more you want to emphasise where this athlete is from. If I was to go a step further and look at hyper-local newspapers from the various towns from across South Wales, then they may even state the specific area or street that the athlete is from, for example.

Looking at the four national newspapers – which provided me with a wider perspective – it’s unfair to say that bias from a nationality viewpoint is present. English athletes appear more often than Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh athletes on the whole, but this could simply be because there are more successful English athletes who were either favourite to pick up a medal or did in fact go on to pick up a medal in their specific event. Though English athletes such as Farah, Daley, Pendleton and Ennis tended to dominate press coverage, the likes of Michael Jamieson and Chris Hoy (Scottish) plus Geraint Thomas and Jade Jones (Welsh) received a fair amount of coverage – certainly enough to dispel suggestions of large bias towards English athletes in the British press. However, it appears from my research that athletes competing for Northern Ireland have perhaps been shunned to an extent – with rowing medal winner Alan Campbell, plus brothers Richard and Peter Chambers, as well as boxing medallists Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan, appearing just three times in the British press between them. Compare this to English boxer Luke Campbell – who appeared in eight articles after his success at the Games – and you can certainly argue that Northern Irish athletes receive less favourable treatment. This could be because certain newspapers have location-specific editions (*The Scottish Sun*, *The* *Irish Mail*, etc), but this hasn’t stopped the likes of Thomas, Jones, Hoy and Jamieson being mentioned in various articles.

**Expectations and lasting effects of London 2012**

Despite the excitement surrounding the Olympic Games, many news articles questioned whether or not Olympic venues would be complete, or if it was really worth all the money to stage. It appeared on the whole that articles regarding Olympic athletes followed the same negative pattern coming into the Olympic Games, with questions being asked of certain athletes’ ability. This can be seen with the use of words and phrases (See Appendix K) such as “disappointing”, “dreams hanging in the balance”, “let down”, “heartbreak”, “frustration, “under-par” and “dejection”. However, contrary to this, some of the most commonly used words used by the British press in the build-up to London 2012 included: “sacrifice”, “hard working”, “battling”, “upbeat” and “prospect” – suggesting that, despite questions being asked of athletes, the press were also largely positive and trying to play their part in spurring on the nation. Compare this to the most commonly used key words after the Games - “star”, “success”, “champ”, “glory”, “superstar”, “legend”, “inspiration”, “relief”, “joy” - and it becomes clear that overall the British press held a positive outlook on the Games with regards to athletes, portraying them in a positive fashion.

This research on the 2012 Olympic Games also shows that certain athletes can have a big effect on a sporting event - as previously touched on with the likes of Usain Bolt and Tom Daley in their respective sports. Jessica Ennis and Mo Farah provide the best example with this in terms of coverage by the British press (See Appendix L). In the six months leading up to the Olympic Games, the 5,000m event which Farah was favourite to win, was mentioned in 16 separate articles compared to the seven articles for the 10,000m – an event Farah would be competing in, but was not under pressure to win. However, compare these findings with press coverage six months after the Games, and we get a different outcome – with the 10,000m event now receiving more mentions in articles than the 5,000m due to Farah’s success in this event. This is again the case when looking at Jessica Ennis who helped the coverage of the pentathlon event increase drastically after the Games, compared to the heptathlon which slightly decreased. The significance of this is that Ennis had previously picked up a medal in an heptathlon event prior to the games, so there was a lot of additional focus given to this, however, with her gold medal success in the pentathlon at London 2012, focus now switched to this event, showing the effect a particular athlete can have on press coverage of a particular sport.

Other athletes such as Greg Rutherford, Holly Bleasdale and Rebecca Adlington also emphasise this point of helping to increase the coverage of certain sporting events in British newspapers, though perhaps the most damning finding was provided by a non-British athlete – Oscar Pistorius. Whilst conducting my research Pistorius was dominating the front pages, though despite the negative stories, it still meant that the 400m event which he had competed in at the Olympics had seen its coverage double in British newspapers – albeit for all the wrong reasons.

Using the example above, it’s clear to see in my findings the shift in articles regarding Olympic athletes from sport to general news and various other sections. Not only have the sports sections themselves adapted from “Olympic Update” and “Olympic Watch” to “Sports Update” and “World of Sport”, for example, but it’s no longer uncommon to see certain British athletes such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis now appear in general news stories, as well as sport – this is a tribute to the overall success of London 2012. Whereas before the Olympics the likes of Peter Wilson and Geraint Thomas would receive coverage in the sports section, after the Games they were closer to the front pages with articles regarding a charity cycling race (*South Wales Echo*, 4 February 2013: 11) and a celebrity relationship (*The Sun*, 4 February 2013: 3) now being pushed to the main news. This can be taken a step further with the likes of Nicole Cooke and Victoria Pendleton now featuring in fitness and beauty sections of newspapers. This goes to show that after a successful Olympic Games which saw Britain pick up a record medal haul, athletes are now not only portrayed in a different manner, but they are also used to sell newspapers as they are in the public spotlight - for the time being at least.

To round-off my findings, I decided I would count the amount of times the Olympic Games was mentioned in both samples – 2012 and 2013. This includes articles on Olympic events, athletes and general Olympic news stories such as money, security, etc. The results were interesting in a sense that they were almost identical in my time frame of conducting the research– 395 articles before the Games, compared to 400 after. This suggests to me that although the coverage of The Olympic Games looks to have remained constant on the face of it, the portrayal of athletes has certainly altered. Whether it’s the change of section in a newspaper, the words used to describe the athletes, or even the number of times an event is covered, these findings show that London 2012 has certainly had an effect on the overall portrayal of British athletes in the British press.

**Chapter 4**

**Conclusion**

This dissertation has explored the effect that London 2012 has had on the portrayal of British athletes in British newspapers, whilst at the same time answering certain questions with regard to bias and identity. I set out to determine to what extent the portrayal of British athletes and sporting events had changed across two samples from before and after the Olympic Games, finding that bias from a nationality viewpoint, to an extent, was in fact present in the press. My research helped dispel any suggestions that gender has an impact on the portrayal of athletes, with articles referring to male and female competitors almost identical – which helped to add to existing academic research on similar topics on past Olympic Games.

One of the more interesting findings to take away from my study is the effect an athlete can have on a particular sport, such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis for example, who helped to put their respective events in the spotlight both before and after the Olympics. My findings also showed that the mood of the British press shifted slightly from an arguably dejected tone coming into the Games, which changed into a far more positive outlook after a very successful Olympics in Britain.

The results of my findings also suggest that although newspapers “have the power to maximize both men’s and women’s athletic participation, athletic abilities and athletic achievements” (Higgs *et al* 1997: 12), they don’t necessarily use athletes of a certain gender to help generate sales through both the use of article mentions and use of photographs. Both male and female athletes are treated equally with the athletic abilities of both genders portrayed the same.

Interestingly, large parts of my literature review provided mixed conclusions in terms of to what extent gender bias was present in the media when it came to representation of athletes. By conducting a thorough piece of research across a five week time-frame – which would help to balance out any issues and erase any ‘contamination’ – I have provided my own answer to this question: Bias was not present in British newspapers when looking at the 2012 Olympic Games, which I believe is also a fair reflection of society as a whole, not just newspapers.

Though I believe this method of research was the best available to me to reach my findings, I could have perhaps conducted further research into textual analysis prior to conducting the full-scale research. A lot of focus was put on the content analysis, though textual analysis – which helps to break down certain words and phrases used in texts – has also played a big role in helping me answer the question I set out at the start.

Looking at these findings from a wider perspective, it is not uncommon for newspapers to use past events to provoke a true ‘us’ and ‘them’ feel. By using Argentina to provoke powerful images of team spirit through the use of a smart lexis, this group identity is then formed to help fill newspapers with articles on, in this case, Olympic sports stories. This fits into research conducted by Bishop and Jaworski who found that the British press use three main strategies to create a national spirit, which includes “separation, conflict and typification” (2002: 267). To link this back into my own research, the separation is predominantly created through the rhetoric of the ‘us’ and ‘them’, while the conflict and typification is largely the use of words used in British newspapers.

In terms of future work on a similar topic, following on from this study I believe it would be interesting to look at if the portrayal of athletes has shifted further 12 months on from the 2013 sample, and again in 2014. The more samples collected the better in terms of comparisons that can be made – will athletes such as Mo Farah and Jessica Ennis still be in the public spotlight, for example? It was also make for a good research study to look at the theme of tradition and identity as its own separate topic of research altogether. My own research provided me with some interesting findings in this area, so a more in-depth look at how this homogeneous construction is built would again provide some fascinating results.

In all, my research has helped add to existing research on similar topics regarding previous Olympic Games, as well as updating certain findings on areas of research which had concluded differing outcomes. By conducting this research I have built-up a better understanding of how it is the British press works in terms of adapting to the news agenda and using key sporting figures to help fill pages. The shift between the sports section and general news, as well as the change of mood overall through the use of words, shows just how the portrayal of sports athletes has changed – this is all down to the 2012 Olympic Games.

**Chapter 5**

**Appendices**

**Appendix A – Event coverage in the British press:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Event** | **2012 sample** | **2013 sample** |
| **Football** | **22** | **7** |
| **Swimming** | **56** | **20** |
| **Cycling** | **69** | **54** |
| **Gymnastics** | **21** | **7** |
| **Basketball** | **7** | **7** |
| **Judo** | **1** | **0** |
| **800m** | **8** | **4** |
| **400m relay** | **3** | **0** |
| **Hockey** | **7** | **5** |
| **Rowing** | **11** | **5** |
| **Triathlon** | **5** | **6** |
| **Table Tennis** | **3** | **1** |
| **400m** | **8** | **20** |
| **1,500m** | **2** | **2** |
| **Badminton** | **11** | **0** |
| **5,000m** | **16** | **10** |
| **10,000m** | **7** | **14** |
| **Heptathlon** | **13** | **20** |
| **Pole Vault** | **14** | **15** |
| **Diving** | **39** | **7** |
| **High Jump** | **3** | **11** |
| **Tennis** | **2** | **7** |
| **Marathon** | **8** | **3** |
| **110m hurdles** | **2** | **1** |
| **BMX Cycling** | **1** | **0** |
| **Taekwondo** | **7** | **7** |
| **Archery** | **3** | **0** |
| **Sailing** | **6** | **6** |
| **200m** | **3** | **4** |
| **Pentathlon** | **9** | **5** |
| **Hammer Throw** | **4** | **0** |
| **100m** | **19** | **11** |
| **Volleyball** | **2** | **1** |
| **Equestrian** | **7** | **3** |
| **Shooting** | **1** | **1** |
| **Weightlifting** | **3** | **2** |
| **Discuss** | **1** | **0** |
| **Canoeing** | **1** | **0** |
| **Triple Jump** | **1** | **1** |
| **Long Jump** | **4** | **1** |
| **Boxing** | **8** | **20** |
| **400m** | **3** | **15** |
| **400m Hurdles** | **3** | **4** |
| **Handball** | **2** | **1** |
| **Decathlon** | **1** | **0** |
| **Fencing** | **1** | **0** |
| **Wrestling** | **1** | **4** |
| **Dressage** | **0** | **7** |

**Appendix B – Athlete coverage in the British press:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Athlete** | **2012 sample** | **2013 sample** |
| **Chris Hoy** | **23** | **7** |
| **Mark Cavendish** | **14** | **3** |
| **Bradley Wiggins** | **11** | **13** |
| **Chris Froome** | **2** | **7** |
| **Geraint Thomas** | **15** | **8** |
| **Mo Farah** | **22** | **37** |
| **Jessica Ennis** | **33** | **28** |
| **Dwain Chambers** | **12** | **5** |
| **Rebecca Adlington** | **17** | **13** |
| **Laura Trott** | **14** | **23** |
| **Victoria Pendleton** | **23** | **18** |
| **Tom Daley** | **36** | **10** |
| **Pete Waterfield** | **17** | **1** |
| **Robbie Grabbarz** | **5** | **17** |
| **Holly Bleasdale** | **16** | **21** |
| **Andy Murray** | **2** | **6** |
| **Imogen Bankier** | **7** | **0** |
| **Alistair Brownlee** | **5** | **5** |
| **Jonathan Brownlee** | **3** | **2** |
| **Zara Phillips** | **4** | **0** |
| **Jason Kenny** | **14** | **16** |
| **Adam Matthews** | **1** | **0** |
| **Luol Deng** | **2** | **1** |
| **Marilyn Okoro** | **1** | **0** |
| **Faye Hope** | **1** | **0** |
| **Chris Bartley** | **2** | **0** |
| **Helen Jenkins** | **1** | **2** |
| **Hannah England** | **2** | **0** |
| **Kate Walsh** | **1** | **1** |
| **Shanaze Reade** | **1** | **0** |
| **Chris Adcock** | **3** | **0** |
| **Sarah Stevenson** | **7** | **0** |
| **Keri-Anne Payne** | **5** | **1** |
| **Ben Ainslie** | **4** | **2** |
| **Sophie Hitchon** | **4** | **0** |
| **Naomi Falkard** | **1** | **0** |
| **Tina Cook** | **1** | **0** |
| **Zoe Smith** | **2** | **0** |
| **Hannah Mills** | **2** | **1** |
| **Saskia Clarke** | **2** | **0** |
| **Joanna Rowsell** | **10** | **7** |
| **Jess Varnish** | **8** | **4** |
| **Danni King** | **5** | **12** |
| **Chris Tomlinson** | **2** | **0** |
| **Martyn Rooney** | **1** | **0** |
| **Richard Kruse** | **1** | **0** |
| **Amy Smith** | **1** | **0** |
| **James Goddard** | **1** | **0** |
| **Fran Halsall** | **2** | **0** |
| **Dai Greene** | **3** | **1** |
| **Nicola Wilson** | **1** | **0** |
| **Hannah Starling** | **2** | **0** |
| **Tina Fletcher** | **1** | **0** |
| **Ellen Gandy** | **9** | **0** |
| **Robert Pavoni** | **1** | **0** |
| **Gregg Rutherford** | **3** | **4** |
| **Georgia Davies** | **3** | **0** |
| **Aimee Willmott** | **1** | **0** |
| **Michael Jamieson** | **4** | **4** |
| **Andrew Willis** | **1** | **1** |
| **Ed Clancy** | **7** | **7** |
| **Stephen Burke** | **6** | **5** |
| **Andrew Selby** | **3** | **4** |
| **Fred Evans** | **3** | **4** |
| **Jemma Lowe** | **5** | **1** |
| **Perri Shakes-Drayton** | **2** | **8** |
| **Yamile Aldama** | **1** | **0** |
| **Shara Proctor** | **3** | **0** |
| **Monique Gladding** | **5** | **0** |
| **Tonia Couch** | **4** | **0** |
| **Sarah Barrow** | **3** | **0** |
| **Chris Mears** | **2** | **0** |
| **Christine Ohuruogu** | **3** | **5** |
| **Alex Gregory** | **1** | **0** |
| **Pete Reed** | **1** | **0** |
| **Andy Triggs-Hodge** | **1** | **0** |
| **Tom James** | **1** | **2** |
| **Matt Langridge** | **1** | **0** |
| **Jack Laugher** | **2** | **0** |
| **Kate Haywood** | **1** | **0** |
| **Kelly Smith** | **1** | **0** |
| **Brett Morse** | **2** | **0** |
| **Hannah Miley** | **6** | **1** |
| **Laura Belchtosheimer** | **1** | **7** |
| **Ieuan Lloyd** | **7** | **1** |
| **Gemma Spofforth** | **5** | **0** |
| **Jo Jackson** | **4** | **0** |
| **Nathan French** | **1** | **0** |
| **Jade Jones** | **1** | **5** |
| **Liam Tancock** | **6** | **0** |
| **Tom Cleverley** | **1** | **0** |
| **Liam Pitchford** | **1** | **0** |
| **Phillip Hindes** | **1** | **1** |
| **Beth Tweddle** | **3** | **10** |
| **Louis Smith** | **2** | **3** |
| **Katherine Grainger** | **1** | **2** |
| **Nicola Adams** | **2** | **5** |
| **Francesca Jones** | **1** | **0** |
| **Peter Wilson** | **0** | **2** |
| **Nicole Cooke** | **0** | **1** |
| **Vicky Thornley** | **0** | **1** |
| **Helen Glover** | **0** | **1** |
| **Alan Campbell** | **0** | **2** |
| **Jack Butland** | **0** | **1** |
| **Richard Chambers** | **0** | **1** |
| **Luke Campbell** | **0** | **8** |
| **Aaron Ramsey** | **0** | **1** |
| **Sarah Thomas** | **0** | **1** |
| **Anthony Joshua** | **0** | **2** |
| **David Price** | **0** | **1** |
| **Jack Cork** | **0** | **1** |
| **Laura Robson** | **0** | **1** |
| **Anthony Agogo** | **0** | **2** |
| **Jo Leedham** | **0** | **1** |
| **Hannah McLeod** | **0** | **1** |
| **Charlotte Dujardin** | **0** | **1** |
| **Alex Partridge** | **0** | **1** |
| **Nick Dempsey** | **0** | **1** |
| **Lizzie Armistead** | **0** | **1** |
| **Jo Pavey** | **0** | **1** |
| **Gareth Evans** | **0** | **1** |
| **Natasha Purdue** | **0** | **1** |
| **William Fox-Pitt** | **0** | **1** |
| **Craig Benson** | **0** | **1** |
| **Phillips Idowu** | **0** | **1** |

**Appendix C:**

**Appendix D:**

**Appendix E:**

**Appendix F:**

**Appendix G:**

**Appendix H:**

**Appendix I:**

**Appendix J:**

**Appendix K – Key words and phrases:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word/ phrase** | **Reference** |
| “courageous”, “brave” | *Daily Telegraph,* 2 March 2013: 70 |
| “inspiration”, “legend” | *The Sun*, 1 March 2013: 38-39 |
| “battling” | *The Sun,* 5 March 2012: 48 |
| “proud” | *Daily Mail,* 3 March 2013: 24 |
| “dreams hanging in the balance” | *Sunday Telegraph,* 4 March 2012: 74 |
| “under-par”, “frustration”, “let down” | *The Guardian,* 26 February 2012: 72 |
| “dejection”, “disappointment” | *South Wales Echo,* 5 March 2012: 51 |
| “sacrifice”, “hard working” | *The Guardian,* 6 March 2012: 72 |
| “upbeat” | *The Sun*, 2 March 2012: 73 |
| “prospect” | *The Observer,* 4 March 2012: 73 |
| “success”, “star”, “hero” | *The Guardian,* 6 February 2013: 71 |
| “champ”, “glory”, “relief”, “joy” | *Sun on Sunday,* 17 February: 65 |
| “superstar”, “triumph” | *Daily Telegraph,* 27 February 2013: 71 |
| “heartbreak”, “tears” | *Daily Telegraph,* 6 March 2012: 69 |

*(Full references available in bibliography section)*

**Appendix L:**

**Appendix M:**

**Appendix N (Pilot Study):**

I made the decision to conduct my pilot for a full week – including weekend newspapers – using papers that had been pre-selected. These newspapers included: *The Sun/ The Sun on Sunday, The Daily Mail/ The Mail on Sunday, The South Wales Echo/ Wales on Sunday* and *The Daily Mirror/ Sunday Mirror* – though I also decided that I would add in some additional newspapers (*The Times, The Guardian* and *The Observer*) through the week in order to see how different papers can produce a different range of stories regarding my subject area, which could potentially aid my full-scale research. It should also be noted that I would only be looking at the first edition of each of these newspapers, and not looking at duplicate articles from further editions – something I would also repeat in my full research.

I believe that seven days was enough time for me to start seeing certain patterns emerge, and, more importantly, also spot any issues with my research method which could in turn be altered before conducting the full-scale research. By selecting a mixture of national newspapers and also including a regional newspaper, it would allow me to see not just how the athletes are portrayed in the British press as a whole, but also at the different levels, depending on the newspapers target audience.

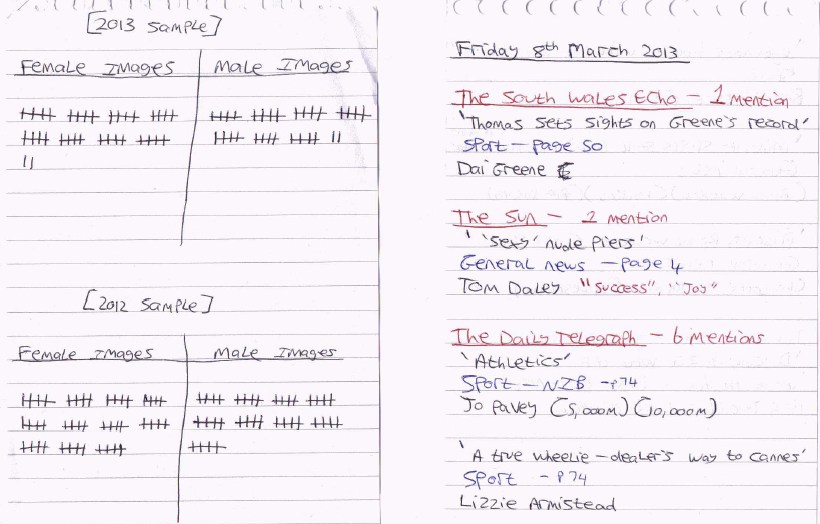
(Note: Athletes mentioned on just the single occasion across two samples excluded for the purpose of this pilot study)

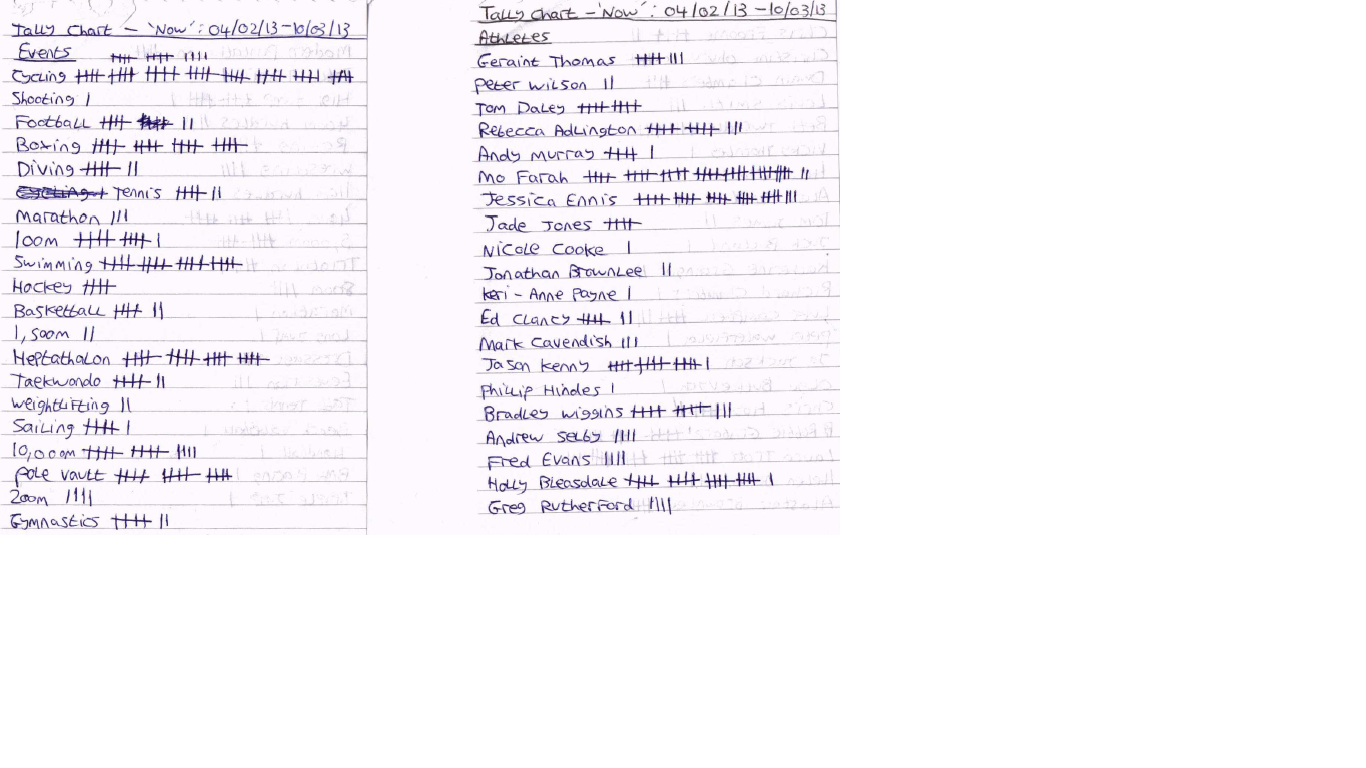
The whole idea behind carrying out a pilot study is to help spot any potential errors in the method of research, but it can also bring up some interesting findings. As the above bar graph shows, each and every athlete received more recognition after the Olympics than before. In particular, Jessica Ennis, Bradley Wiggins and Andy Murray each received a lot of coverage after the Olympic Games - certainly in the week I used for my sample, at least.

As well as looking specifically at the athletes, I also looked at the sporting event which they represent. Again, by comparing a sample from after the Olympic Games to a sample from before, it can help form patterns such as which sports have increased in popularity, and which sports perhaps now receive less coverage, giving my results some needed context in order to see how British athletes are truly portrayed in British newspaper after the 2012 Olympic Games.

I decided to use a bar graph which allowed me to put across my findings in a manner in which the overall difference can clearly be seen. The sample raised some interesting themes, such as certain sports coverage improved dramatically - like tennis for example. Now in this instance it could be argued that this was down to the success of athlete Andy Murray who won gold for Team GB, though in matter of fact it could simply be because there was a tennis major going on at the time, coverage simply increased and reference to the Olympics was inevitable.

**Appendix O – Sample sheets:**





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