

Women and sport. A teaching and research experience related to university students' perception of gender stereotypes in the media

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Abstract

One of the main ways in which gender stereotypes are reproduced is through the media. This research focuses on the treatment of female sportspeople in the press in the first World Cup played by the Spanish women's national football team (2015) and in the last one, which they won (2023). The aim of this study was to analyze the influence of media communication on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes by university students, as well as to encourage students to engage in critical reflection on the role of the media in the inequalities affecting female athletes. The methodology employed was an exploratory study adopting a mixed approach through participant and direct observation, as well as a semi-structured survey of a sample of 48 participants. The results show that students express themselves, participate and interact, creating a collaborative work space and a collective construction of knowledge, and that 93.8% of the students surveyed stated that the space and attention devoted by the media to sportswomen is not proportional. Likewise, 95.8% also perceive a correlation between the space allocated in the media and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Only 39.6% considered, before undertaking the project, that the quantitative imbalance in representation was similar to what they found in the newspaper analysis, compared to 56.3% who asserted that it was not. The findings suggest that the denialist tendency of the youth can be successfully combated by putting students at the center, through discovery and meaningful learning. Furthermore, the university students were able to transmit the knowledge constructed from their own learning to the educational community of secondary education centers.

Keywords

Media; Gender stereotypes; Women; Sport; Meaningful learning; University students; Feminism; Discrimination; Sexism; Agenda-setting; Critical thinking; Participation; Equity.

1. Introduction

The media, along with family and school, are the primary agents of socialization. The complexity and vastness of reality turn the media into the window through which we look out at the rest of the world. However, the media narrative constitutes a partial and vicarious, secondhand representation, which audiences predominantly perceive as a faithful reflection of reality, despite the fact that the very process of news creation involves a biased selection of elements or characteristics of that reality (**Welbers et al.**, 2018; **Gómez-Nieto**, 2017). This, returning to the window simile, means that audiences overlook that it is impossible to perceive everything through an opening in a wall. For this reason, media literacy, understood as the result of an educational process in the consumption and use of mass media, aims for students to develop "a reasoned and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques they use, and the effects these techniques produce." (**Ávila-Meléndez; Cortes-Montalvo**, 2018: 126)

In a general and simplistic way, it is stated that the mass media fulfill three basic functions: to inform, to educate, and to entertain. However, this assertion overlooks the relevance they possess in establishing behavioral norms, social standards, and in

reinforcing or rejecting behaviors. Theories such as agenda-setting or framing have addressed the transfer of relevance from the events or occurrences covered by the media to the mental images of audiences (**McCombs**, 2006). Three levels of agenda-setting by the media have been described: the level that indicates that the media tell people what to think about, or first-level; that which addresses the contingent conditions that reduce or reinforce the effects of agenda-setting on the public, or second-level; and the agenda-setting of attributes, or third-level (**Weaver**, 2007: 142). These attributes, defined as the “properties and traits that characterize an object” (**McCombs**, 2006: 139), are responsible for reinforcing certain stereotypes or gender roles in audiences.

However, nowadays young people primarily get their information through social media (**Del-Moral; Burriel**, 2024), which has given rise to phenomena such as polarization and misogyny –among them, the manosphere, which is “confined to a virtual space where there is a systematic insistence that female empowerment will bring about the end of traditional masculinity.” (**Franco; Bernárdez**, 2023)

Likewise, the frames that the media promote “encourage a particular definition of the problem, a certain causal interpretation, and even a moral evaluation for the situation at hand”, in the same way that they “define problems, diagnose their causes, make moral judgments, and suggest solutions.” (**Terán; Aguilar**, 2018: 188)

Within the moral judgments that these frames entail, gender stereotypes may have a place, understood as “a set of beliefs shared by the population (both men and women), about the characteristics, roles, and behaviors that are typical of men and women” (**Molero**, 2009: 16). These stereotypes constitute an extreme simplification of human diversity and rely on a gender division that is a social construct. In this regard, Bengoechea explains:

“Gender is a normative system (it dictates the rules of conduct for women and men) and a coercive one (it represses behaviors that do not conform to the rules). It assigns differentiated roles and functions to men and women, as well as distinct spaces, activities, identities, rights, and duties. In this way, gender constructs social difference as social inequality: by reason of the roles and characteristics assigned to each sex, the gender system attributes a subordinate position to women and a position of power over the main resources to men.” (**Bengoechea**, 2015: 10)

In the case of women's sports, and taking as a starting point this social inequality based on gender, the social conditions that discourage women's participation in high-level competitive sports or in certain disciplines have been studied (**Torradeñot; Solanellas**, 2022; **Mérida et al.**, 2022; **Becerro; Ruiz-Tendero**, 2021; **Martínez et al.**, 2021; **Leruite; Martos; Zabala**, 2015; **Ruiz-Patiño**, 2011), as well as the space that the media dedicate to women's sports in different countries or regions and the treatment they give it (**Bernal; Benítez**, 2022; **Roca-Marín; Navarro-García**, 2022; **Galván**, 2021; **Sanz**, 2020; **Dias**, 2018; **Calvo-Ortega; Gutiérrez-San-Miguel**, 2017; **Ibáñez**, 2001; **Sainz-de-Baranda; Barbero; Fernández-Fernández**, 2019). The different investigations coincide in similar conclusions: different societies find it difficult to accept that there are elite women sportspeople or that they dedicate themselves to disciplines

considered masculine, such as football, so the practice of sports is discouraged from childhood and youth through mockery and contempt, and the media do not dedicate sufficient attention or space to women sportspeople and, when they do, in many cases, they reinforce stereotypes, which makes it more difficult for social standards and roles to change.

The existing theoretical corpus includes countless references and testimonies about the humiliating or mocking treatment received by women sportspeople in different countries and disciplines. And to this are added statements from active sportspeople who, whenever they are asked in an interview, do not forget the toll they had to pay in their beginnings, as Golden Ball winner Aitana Bonmatí did: "My childhood was not easy because I was the only girl in a world of men, and the fights, the insults I received, I think I kept them to myself, I was not able to get them out and I simply put on a shield." (De Llano, 2023)

It must be taken into account that the implicit (through social mandates) or explicit (through the relevance given in the media and the treatment they receive) undervaluation influences aspects as relevant as the remuneration that women sportspeople receive. Although there are public voices that justify the salary difference on the grounds that women "do not move" as much money as men in sports, the context and the correlation that exist between the systematic and structural disregard of the media and this supposed inability of women sportspeople to attract sponsorship and audiences are overlooked. In fact, one of the recognized voices in defense of pay equity, Billie Jean King, the first female tennis player to achieve pay equality, reflected:

"[...] men have the money, and they always want more. We come back to egos. In tennis, people ask why the WTA doesn't have as much money as the ATP, and it turns out we only get 5% of the media coverage. Seriously? If you watch a sports program, how much time do they dedicate to men and how much to us?" (Ciriza, 2023: 35)

When this salary discrimination is publicly addressed, male sportspeople tend to remain silent in the face of their female peers' demands, although some have even gone so far as to justify the salary inequality on grounds of sex, ignoring the entire historical and sociocultural context that influences this fact. This was the case of former footballer Alfonso Pérez, who asserted in an interview:

"I think it's great that women have their space and their rights, as they have had for quite a few years, but I don't think women's and men's football can be compared at all, because everything depends on the income you generate and the media impact. And there's no comparison there. I'm sure other female sportspeople would like to earn what the national team footballers do, and they can't. I'd like to earn what Cristiano Ronaldo does, but I'm not that good. That's just how it is. Everyone has to know where they stand. They can't complain. Women's football has evolved, but they

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must keep their feet on the ground and know that they can't be compared in any way with a male footballer." (Díaz-Guerra, 2023: 11)

Faced with such contradictory messages through the media, university students in courses not directly related to Communication often do not know how to unravel what is socially or medially constructed through the window that the mass media opens to a reality that, as we have already said, is extensive and complex.

Given the increased media presence resulting from the Spanish national team's victory in the Football World Cup and the controversies over unequal treatment (and even an alleged sexual assault) that occupied a large space in the media, we considered it was the opportune moment to put into practice a teaching experience that would help students, through direct experience and discovery, to understand the powerful effect of social prescription of the media. The non-consensual kiss by the president of the Spanish Football Federation to Jenni Hermoso marked a turning point in the perception of inequality and sexism in sports—one that extended beyond this particular discipline—.

The "Only Yes Is Yes" Law, officially *Organic Law 10/2022* of September 6, on the Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom, establishes that sexual consent must be free, informed, conscious, and explicit. This means that the mere absence of resistance is not enough; consent must be expressed clearly and voluntarily. The law reforms sexual offenses in the Criminal Code, eliminating the distinction between sexual abuse and sexual assault, and instead focuses on consent as the central element.

2. Research Objectives and Questions

The overall objective is to analyze the influence of media communication on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes by university students, in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which proposed two strategic objectives in its point J on "Women and the Media":

Strategic Objective J1. Increase women's access to and participation in the expression of their ideas and decision-making in and through the media and new communication technologies.

Strategic Objective J2. To promote a balanced and non-stereotyped image of women in the media (UN, 1995: 172-175).

Specifically, the Beijing Platform also includes as one of the measures to be adopted "to promote the idea that sexist stereotypes presented in the media are discriminatory to women, degrading and offensive" (UN, 1975: 175).

The specific objectives of this research are:

SO1. To foster meaningful learning through the discovery of the structural elements of gender-based discrimination against women sportspeople in the media.

S02. To promote students to make a critical reflection on the role of the media in the inequalities that affect women sportspeople.

S03. To evaluate the students' learning outcomes regarding the functioning of the media and their assessment of the progress or setbacks in the coverage of women sportspeople.

Moreover, the motivations for this research are based on several research questions:

- Are university students aware of the representation of female athletes in the media?
- Do they understand the relationship between the lack of visibility and the social and labor conditions of female athletes?
- Are they capable of transmitting the knowledge acquired to their peers?

3. Materials and Methods

The methodology employed in this research is mixed (qualitative and quantitative). It consists of an exploratory investigation that prioritizes collaboration between the areas of Journalism and Social Education, with the intention of consolidating a practical experience in the classroom that complements student learning through interdisciplinarity.

Exploratory research, according to **Morales** (2015), is a search for information with the purpose of formulating problems and hypotheses for a more in-depth investigation of an explanatory nature. Its objective is the formulation of a problem to enable more precise research or the development of a hypothesis. This level of research serves, among other things, for the students to become familiar with bibliographic, periodical, and documentary literature. This research was conducted in three phases: the first and second phases were qualitative, and the third was quantitative. The integration of the qualitative and quantitative phases clarifies how meaningful learning theory underpins the research.

In the first phase of the research, a two-hour training session on gender stereotypes and public opinion (using participant observation) was offered to the students. During this session, they were informed about the structural elements of the different media's treatment of women, within the framework of the "Education for Gender Equality" subject in the second year of the Social Education degree at the *University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC)*.

In the second phase, content analysis was carried out, a research technique that systematically analyzes and interprets the content of messages, texts or dialogue to identify patterns, themes and hidden meanings, through focus groups.

A newspaper-based project was designed and carried out collaboratively by the students (using direct observation). For reasons of accessibility and proximity to the student body, the four general-interest newspapers of the Canary Islands were chosen as the sample: *La Provincia*, *El Día*, *Diario de Avisos*, and *Canarias7*, copies of which are

freely available in the Jable database. In total, the students analyzed 240 issues from the corresponding editions of the previously mentioned newspapers.

La Provincia and *El Día* belong to *Prensa Ibérica*, a national multimedia group that owns 27 newspapers, four magazines, three television channels, 55 corporate publications, and 71 local news bulletins. *Diario de Avisos* is owned by *Plató del Atlántico S.L.*, a limited company that also operates other businesses dedicated to audiovisual production. *Canarias 7* is owned by the company *Inforcasa*, which is also involved in audiovisual and real estate business. None of the newspapers analyzed include innovations or training in gender perspective like those described in other studies (Parrat-Fernández et al., 2023).

We selected two periods for the analysis: the first between 7th June and 6th July 2015, and the second from 24th July to 21st August 2023. Both periods coincide with the dates of the first *Women's World Cup* in which the Spanish national team participated and the most recent one, in which they were victorious, so we consider them relevant for checking if there has been any change in the media coverage of female sportspeople. We broadened the selection criteria, however, to include all female sportspeople, for two reasons. The first was because we understood that the sample could be very unrepresentative, given the limited space dedicated to female sportspeople in the media. This representation has been described as "minimal," highlighting the almost "total media absence of female sportspeople in championships, games, events, and any act in which they are involved" (Roca-Marín; Navarro-García, 2022: 303). The second reason is the study of the possible specificity of these newspapers in an outermost region like the Canary Islands, with a historical, media, and cultural tradition distinct from the mainland press (Yanes, 2020).

Table 1. Worksheet on the presence of women in the Sports section of Canarian newspapers

Name of newspaper	
Date of analyzed newspaper	
Does anything related to women's sport appear on the front page?	Yes/No (If anything appears, take a screenshot)
Number of articles dedicated to women's sport	
Number of photographs of female sportspeople	
Number of photographs in which female players are sexualized	(Take a screenshot)
On which pages do they appear?	(Write the page number as it appears in the PDF)
Headlines where they are the protagonists (nº and examples)	(Take screenshots or write them down)
Headlines where they are NOT the protagonists (nº and examples)	(Take screenshots or write them down)
Use of sexist language	They are referred to as "girls" instead of "women" (They are infantilized) They are negatively compared to male sportspeople They are sexualized

To help the students systematize the extracted information, they were provided with a form that they had to complete for each consulted newspaper issue (Table 1).

Based on the results of this newspaper-based project, the students had to produce a written assignment including the results, conclusions, and proposals for improvement, and deliver a 10-minute presentation to present in class and, subsequently, convey this knowledge to non-university audiences.

The third phase consisted of assessing learning outcomes through an individual questionnaire in which students expressed their opinions about the process. It was administered in the classroom, following a verbal consent statement that informed participants of the voluntary nature of their involvement and the anonymous use of the results solely for educational and research purposes. The instrument explored the knowledge acquired regarding the role of the media in reinforcing gender stereotypes identified during the project (SO1), the personal reflections and evaluations that emerged during and after the learning process (SO2), and the objective and evaluative conclusions concerning progress in the coverage of female athletes (SO3). The set of questions can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Learning evaluation questions for Social Education students.

Question	Answer
Sex	Woman
	Man
	I'd rather not say
Have you worked with the topic of "Women and Sport" before?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Have you worked with the media before?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Have you carried out a hemerographic review (of newspapers) before?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Before doing the work on "Women and sport", did you have a different opinion than you do now regarding the space or treatment that newspapers dedicate to female sportspeople?	Yes
	No
	I don't know

Briefly summarize your current opinion on the topic.

Do you think the space and attention that the media dedicate to female sportspeople is proportionate, considering criteria such as the news value of the stories? (For example, if they have won, if they are competing, if they have progressed to the next stage... etc.)	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Prior to undertaking the 'Women and sport' project, did you imagine that the space occupied by female sportspeople in the media was similar to what you found in your research?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
What did you imagine the space dedicated to female sportspeople in newspapers was like?	Greater
	Less
	I don't know
Do you think the space that female sportspeople occupy in newspapers influences the discrimination they experience in their working conditions?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Why?	
Do you think the space that female sportspeople occupy in newspapers influences the perpetuation of gender stereotypes?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
Why?	
Do you consider that positive progress has been made between 2015 and 2023 in the space and treatment of female sportspeople in the newspapers studied?	Yes
	No
	I don't know
If you answered yes to the previous question, summarize the positive developments here.	
Do you consider that there have been setbacks between 2015 and 2023 in the space and treatment of female sportspeople in the newspapers studied	Yes
	No
	I don't know
If you answered yes to the previous question, summarize the setbacks here	
Briefly explain here what surprised and/or pleased you most about the work carried out	

The open-ended responses were coded by considering common concepts or ideas that emerged from a detailed reading of the texts, such that "through successive comparisons of the data, more abstract levels of theoretical connection arise" (**Trinidad; Carrero; Soriano**, 2006: 32). The *Atlas.ti* software was used for this purpose, which allows for the creation of codes and the counting of citations or the grounding of those codes.

The responses to the six open-ended questions were subjected to open coding, which involved breaking down the data to gain insight into the direction of the study. During this phase, 34 codes emerged, which were then subjected to selective coding, synthesizing them into core variables for the research. Finally, theoretical coding was conducted, allowing us to formulate hypotheses regarding the relationships among the codes. Table 3 summarizes the most deeply rooted codes and their definitions: Criticism (25); Discovery (20); Quantitative imbalance (46); Undervaluation (46); Invisibility (51); Machismo (20), and Sexism (26).

Table 3. Codes and Descriptions Related to Gender Representation in Sports Media

Code	Description
Criticism	Includes all mentions expressing indignation about the situation of women in the Sports sections of the analyzed media outlets.
Quantitative imbalance	Indexes the references to the imbalance between male and female representation in the analyzed Sports sections.
Discovery	Indexes responses in which participants reported uncovering a reality (regarding the media and their coverage of female athletes) that they were previously unaware of.
Undervaluation	Indexes mentions of the devaluation of women in various fields.
Invisibility	References to the disregard or omission of female athletes in the media.
Machismo	Explicit reference to macho behaviors or attitudes. The word must be explicitly mentioned.
Sexism	Indexes mentions of sexism across a broad spectrum. "Sexism is also a position which has some institutional support (albeit to different degrees) in a contemporary societies. It is not a view of women that the speaker or writer has invented, but rather just a body of ideas and phrases which others have expressed and which are presented as 'common sense'. Sexism has an agentless feel to it, and because of this, it achieves authority unless it is challenged." (Mills; Mullany , 2011: 145)

The aim of this methodology is not only to explore the reality of the space that female sportspeople occupy in the media but also to foster meaningful learning on the part of the students, in which they relate new concepts to their existing knowledge and their own experience (Miranda-Núñez, 2022).

4. Results

4.1. Presentation of Projects and VII Meeting of Solidarity Dialogues among Young People

Following the students' completion of the newspaper-based project, a sharing of the results was carried out by each group that had worked on a specific newspaper and year.

Through this sharing session, the students expressed themselves, participated, and interacted, creating a collaborative workspace and a collective construction of knowledge. In this regard, as the results of each working group were presented, a comparative analysis and continuous debate were established between the different newspapers of the same year and between the same newspapers across the years analyzed (2015 and 2023). This exercise provided the opportunity to continue the analysis and further strengthen the conclusions among all the students.

Through a sharing session, the students expressed themselves, participated, and interacted, creating a collaborative workspace and a collective construction of knowledge

Once this exercise was completed in the classroom, the collective work was presented at the *VII Meeting of Solidarity Dialogues among Young People*, organized by the *Canarian League for Education and Interculturality*, belonging to the *Area of Cooperation for Development and Solidarity* of the *Department of Education* of the *Government of the Canary Islands*.

A representation of the 2nd-year Social Education students presented the results of the newspaper-based project in a round table discussion entitled "Women and Sport: a feminist perspective on the press", and shared them with students and teachers from secondary education centers on the island of Gran Canaria, the students being between the ages of 12 and 16. This presentation, which transcended the boundaries of the university classroom, provided an opportunity to create a debate and exchange among the new generations regarding the role of the media and the construction of discourse and social values in relation to gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the High School administration requested that the material and results of the project be provided so that they could work on them with students at this educational stage.

Furthermore, the attendees at the aforementioned Meeting suggested to the university students that they convey the findings of this research to the Canarian press with the aim of raising awareness and offering constructive criticism that would have a direct effect on transforming the treatment of female sportspeople in the media.

4.2. Survey

The survey was completed by a total of 48 people, the majority of whom (47) were women. A large proportion of these students acknowledged never having worked on the topic of women and sport before (77.1%), although 58.3% had carried out activities related to the media, compared to 39.6% who had not worked with it previously.

However, this engagement or work with the media was not carried out, in the vast majority of cases, through a newspaper-based search, as acknowledged by 89.6% (43 people) of the respondents.

When asked if, prior to undertaking the in-class work, they had a different opinion about the treatment of female sportspeople in the media, over half of the respondents (56.3%) stated that they did, compared to 41.7% who said that they didn't and 2.1% who didn't know.

Regarding their current opinion on the topic, we coded the open-ended responses to try to systematize the qualitative measurement. Of the 46 comments recorded, 20 showed a critical attitude, emphasizing that there was still work to be done for equality or calling for action; 17 mentioned the quantitative imbalances in the space dedicated to women in the media; 15 highlighted the invisibility and 10 spoke about sexism. Furthermore, seven mentioned sexism or the sexualization of the protagonists, and the same number expressed their surprise at the findings of the work. Six spoke about the undervaluation of women, and five argued that there should be more news stories where they are the protagonists:

The lack of representation of women in sport is an issue that warrants attention and action. Throughout history, women have faced significant challenges in participating and excelling in the sporting world. This underrepresentation manifests itself in various forms, such as the disparity in access to resources, the gender pay gap, limited media coverage, and a scarcity of opportunities for professional development compared to their male counterparts.

In line with these opinions, the majority of the female students surveyed (93.8%) asserted that the space and attention that the media dedicate to female sportspeople is not proportionate, considering criteria such as the news value of the stories, compared to 4.2% who stated that they didn't know.

However, only 39.6% considered, before undertaking the project, that the quantitative imbalance in representation was similar to what they found in the newspaper analysis, compared to 56.3% who asserted that it was not and could be counted among the people who were "surprised" by the data from the detailed analysis of the Sports sections of the newspapers analyzed. In fact, 68.8% stated that before undertaking the project, they thought the space dedicated to female sportspeople was "greater", compared to 25% who imagined it was "less".

Regarding the possible influence of the space dedicated in the media on the working conditions of Canarian female sportspeople, 97.9% considered that there was a correlation between the two issues, and only one person stated that they did not know.

From the coding of the 48 open-ended responses provided when asked why, it was concluded that 12 people mentioned the social impact of the media and the recognition it entails; seven mentioned the invisibility of women, six spoke about the undervaluation of female sportspeople, five reflected on how the imbalance produced inequality, and another five on the relationship between visibility and sponsorships:

The space and media coverage given to female sportspeople can influence the discrimination they face in their working conditions and in the sports industry in general. Gender discrimination in sport is not only reflected in the pay gap, but also in aspects such as funding, promotion, sponsorship opportunities, and access to quality training facilities and resources. The lack of visibility and media recognition can perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices, which contributes to maintaining these inequalities.

Similarly, 95.8% also saw a correlation between the space dedicated in the media and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. From the analysis of the 46 open-ended responses, it emerged that 24 alluded to the existing relationship between the lack of space and the undervaluation of female sportspeople, 12 spoke of invisibility, and 10 again emphasized the quantitative imbalance of the space occupied by women and men in the Sports sections analyzed. Furthermore, five alluded to sexualization or sexism, another five to doubts about women's abilities, and four to existing sexism:

They occupy very little space, which means they are not seen in the same way as men, and that's what this patriarchal society wants, for women in sport to be seen as lesser than men because supposedly football, and sports in general, are masculine. And, if women play any sport, they are considered "masculine" or "tomboys", hence the gender stereotypes.

When asked if they considered that positive progress had been made between 2015 and 2023, the majority felt that it had not been made (60.4%), compared to 33.3% who asserted that it had and 6.3% who said they didn't know. Among the 17 open-ended responses regarding progress, those who considered that they had observed more space being dedicated to female sportspeople (6) and that improvements had been made in the language used when naming or referring to them (6) stood out. There were also three responses that considered that there had been hardly any changes:

Yes, because we are increasingly finding more news about female sportspeople, and it's more focused on the sport they play and how they do it, rather than so much on their private lives or who their superior is.

Similarly, they were asked if there had been setbacks between the two analysis dates, and 47.9% answered yes, 43.8% no, and 8.3% said they didn't know. The 27 responses regarding setbacks were summarized into 8 who considered that the language had worsened; 7 who asserted that there was more sexism or sexualization of female sportspeople; and 6 who spoke of a greater quantitative imbalance in the newspapers. Furthermore, 5 mentioned the undervaluation and 5 the infantilization of women, and 4 considered that there had been hardly any changes in the period analyzed:

"Not setbacks, but rather a lack of progress. It is true that they appear more now, but they are also sexualized more. In 2015, no women were sexualized in the newspaper *El Día*, whereas in 2023, it was not uncommon to see the sexualization of women in sport. Things remain the same, and something radical needs to be done to change this."

Finally, when asked to explain what surprised or pleased them most about the project, 18 responses mentioned the discovery of a reality they were unaware of, 15 alluded to the newspaper-based research process and 15 to the invisibility of women, and 9 mentioned the quantitative imbalance between the news about women and men. Among the codes with less grounding, 6 alluded to the sexism and sexualization of women, and 5 citations each mentioned the critical attitude that arose from undertaking the project, and the infantilization and undervaluation of women respectively:

"I liked the project because it opened my eyes to the reality of the sporting world, something I wasn't aware of as I don't follow it. And at the same time, it makes me very sad. It makes me very sad because it's such a sexist world that, no matter how much women strive, work hard, and achieve victories, they will always be minimized and their work will never be valued or they won't be given a voice (unless they

"I liked the project because it opened my eyes to the reality of the sporting world, something I wasn't aware of as I don't follow it. And at the same time, it makes me very sad"

are the girlfriend of "x" or there are controversies surrounding them), and it makes me realize the journey we still have ahead of us."

5. Discussion

The university students studying Social Education at the *University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC)* have, through a newspaper-based analysis exercise, advanced their understanding of social reality and how the narrative of the media affects our perception of it. With the appropriate tools, tutoring, and support, half of the sample (58.3%) worked with the media again, and the majority of them (89.6%) carried out a systematic analysis of newspaper pages for the first time. Furthermore, the university students were able to transmit the knowledge constructed from their own learning to the educational community of secondary education centers on the island of Gran Canaria, thus achieving not only meaningful learning but also attributing to the university its role of commitment to society, in the idea of knowledge transfer to other areas with the aim of awakening a critical and reflective attitude in different sectors of the young and the Canarian society in general.

Another element to highlight in the meaningful learning of the university students is their transformation throughout the teaching-learning process. They moved from an initial position of doubt and skepticism regarding the project to the ability to produce output and develop communication and transmission skills for a specific audience, as well as knowing how to lead an academic and dialogue space such as the format of a round table within the framework of a Meeting between secondary education teachers and students. This achievement coincides with the results of the survey provided to the university students, in which the code with the most grounding in the open-ended responses was related to critical reflection (51 citations), followed by undervaluation (46) or responses that mentioned the quantitative imbalance observed in the news of the newspapers analyzed (46). In fact, several comments combined the observation of this quantitative imbalance with the concepts of undervaluation, thus demonstrating the students' ability to detect correlations (Table 4).

They moved from an initial position of doubt and skepticism regarding the project to the ability to produce output and develop communication and transmission skills for a specific audience

Table 4. Code Co-occurrence

Codes and grounding	Quantitative imbalance Gr=46
Undervaluation Gr=46	11
Invisibility Gr=51	10

Source: Elaborated using *Atlas.ti*.

The doubts about the legitimacy of female sportspeople demanding more space or salary, which some students verbally expressed when the seminar on stereotypes in the media was given, dissipated when they themselves observed how much, how, and in what way women were represented in the newspapers they were analyzing. Hence, 41.7% of the sample stated that before undertaking the project, they had a different opinion regarding the space and treatment of female sportspeople in the media. This data is also relevant to the learning outcomes given the increasing polarization fueled by social media, whose algorithms constantly show us messages we agree with, atrophying the critical thinking of the general public using these platforms, many of whom are young people. Furthermore, the students' work has corroborated historical trends of invisibility of female sportspeople in Canarian newspapers already investigated (Castro-Hernández; Rodríguez-Wangüemert; Calzadilla-Medina, 2019; Castro-Hernández; Delponti; Rodríguez-Wangüemert, 2022), as well as the scarce presence of women and the rejection of them participating in certain sports identified with masculinity, such as football.

In this way, we can affirm that meaningful learning has been fostered regarding the functioning of the media and gender stereotypes, while also promoting critical reflection among the students based on their own experience in this type of research, helping them to differentiate shared beliefs from realities and to advance in their media literacy.

On the other hand, the students were able to transfer knowledge, based on this newspaper-based study, through the participation and communication of the results of their work at the VII Meeting of "Solidarity and Citizenship" Dialogues among Young People, in which feedback was exchanged with students and teachers from all secondary education centers on the island of Gran Canaria, and from which proposals for work and joint commitment to minimize gender stereotypes through the press and any other field arose.

6. Conclusions

We consider that the tendency towards denial regarding gender discrimination among young people can be effectively combated when students themselves are placed at the center of the teaching-learning process, providing them with the tools to deconstruct the discourse of the media. In this regard, some research has indicated a regression in the feminist consciousness of the younger population, through anti-feminist discourses that "permeate society as a whole largely thanks to multiple pollination strategies, such as the creation of videos, live broadcasts, social media posts or memetic warfare" (**García-Mingo; Díaz-Hernández, 2022:**

We consider that the tendency towards denial regarding gender discrimination among young people can be effectively combated when students themselves are placed at the center of the teaching-learning process, providing them with the tools to deconstruct the discourse of the media

76). A pedagogical action of collaborative and meaningful learning with students offers the possibility of building a critical consciousness and combating those "multiple pollination strategies", as in Plato's allegory of the cave, in which only those who managed to leave were able to see reality as it is.

Similarly, this collaborative learning work also builds peer networks that mutually reinforce each other through dialogue, debate, and listening, until reaching qualitatively and quantitatively different and greater levels of awareness and critical attitude, while also contributing to student satisfaction with their university education, understood as that which goes beyond the learning of knowledge oriented towards professional practice. In this sense, the participating students developed their media literacy by being able to interact critically with the messages produced in the media analyzed and, subsequently, to create and communicate their own messages (**Ferrés; Piscitelli, 2012**).

Another conclusion that arises from this work is that, once the students have constructed their teaching-learning process, there is a qualitative leap in their ability to communicate and defend their findings in the academic space and beyond. They are capable of explaining to those still inside the cave that what they see are the deformed shadows of reality, with the aim of "bringing them out" into the open. Thus, the main theoretical contribution of this article lies in the construction of a pedagogical model that enables the integration of feminist and equality-oriented content through students' self-learning.

Once the students have constructed their teaching-learning process, there is a qualitative leap in their ability to communicate and defend their findings in the academic space and beyond

The limitations of this research are mainly marked by the sample, which is limited in number and almost exclusively female. This is due to a fundamental factor and a gender bias: the feminization of degree programs in the field of Education Sciences. For future research, it would be advisable to develop a pretest that explores university students' perceptions of gender stereotypes in the sports press. In this regard, it would be advisable to extend this practice to other contexts and social groups beyond the formal education system.

Therefore, in future research, we propose exporting this practice or a similar one to degrees or courses that are more masculinized or in which the presence of different genders is more balanced. This is particularly important given the increasing polarization regarding equality and feminism, corroborated by studies that indicate that "at the same time as boys approach post-macho positions, girls continue to defend feminist stances," which generates "confrontations in the classroom and more polarization" (Boneta-Sádaba; Tomás-Forte; García-Mingo, 2023: 26).

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