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Sports media decision-making in France: How they choose what we get to see and read

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ABSTRACT

Research to date on women in the sports-media has predominantly concentrated on comparisons of the type and amount of media coverage afforded to sportsmen and women. This substantial body of literature has consistently revealed that sports-media continues to be viewed as an exclusively masculine domain, where women remain under- and misrepresented. While content analyses are important in revealing the sexist portrayal of sportswomen in the media, they do little to provide guidance to sociologists on why this continues to occur. Looking behind the scenes into *how* sports-media content is produced has rarely been explored internationally, and not at all in France, yet is integral to understanding the process through which gendered coverage is sustained.

The aim of this exploratory case study was to redress the deficit of sports-media research in France by undertaking a study of those responsible for the production of sports media content. It was guided by the central question: what role do sports-media producers play in perpetuating dominant ideologies in sport? The nine participants were drawn from experienced male and female sports content decision makers (editors and higher) from the major, national television and print media in France. Data was collected through individual semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews and open coded using NVivo 8. The analysis, based around five themes (ideal profile, feedback, sport selection, women's sport, blame), revealed that the patterns of sport media decision-making in France show many similarities and some differences to those observed in other countries, but that the end result is the same: sports media content remains dominated by men's sport. Findings indicate that women's sport is subject to much harsher editorial selection criteria. Conclusions were drawn on what role the makers of sports media content in France have in reproducing this hegemonic masculinity so inherent in sports coverage. The findings will enable stakeholders such as sociologists, journalism academics, sport media management and sports organisations to consider ways through which hierarchical values and accepted patriarchal practices in the sports-media industry can be transformed.

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While I completed this thesis, my daughter, Nathalie, and my partner, Paul, got used to me not being available on weekends. I thank them for their understanding and support and hope they will accept to reintegrate me into their social calendars.

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1. INTRODUCTION

At all levels of sport, the overwhelming doctrine is that sport is a masculine institution (Coakley, 2007; Collins & Jackson, 2007; Craig & Beedie, 2008; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Sports-media is no exception. The past two decades has seen a flurry of research investigating this symbiotic relationship from which three categories of sports-media studies have emerged: analyses of media texts (such as magazine articles, television coverage and advertising), studies of the audiences of those texts; and text content production (Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Plymire, 2005; Wu, 2008). Around 70% of research has been directed at content analysis, 20% at understanding how they are produced and the remainder on audience responses (Plymire, 2005). The preponderance of content studies can be explained by the availability and relative ease of data collection and analysis (Plymire, 2005; Wenner, 1998). Unlike production and audience studies, textual analyses require little or no field work so by consequence are less time and resource demanding for researchers (Plymire, 2005; Wenner, 1998). Results can also be easily generalised, whereas ethnographic production and audience reception studies are more site-specific and thus have more narrow applicability (Plymire, 2005).

The profusion of content analyses has overwhelmingly concluded that when it comes to media coverage, the scales remain clearly tipped in favour of men's sport (Bernstein & Galily, 2008; Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Capranica et al., 2005; Coakley, 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Delorme & Raul, 2009; Duncan, 2006; Gumbel, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Messner, Duncan & Wachs, 2001; Nixon II, 2008; Plymire, 2005; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004; Wu, 2008). This wealth of content analysis research is useful in monitoring media coverage of women in sport and raising audience awareness of sexist stereotypes, but there remains a paucity of studies of how sport media content is produced. Few studies have sought to establish why the gender imbalance in sports-media has been systematically rejected, ignored or trivialised by media producers. This is somewhat surprising given that most content analyses stem from the assumption that the producers behind them – consciously or otherwise - replicate society's dominant ideologies (Knoppers & Elling,

2004; Messner et al., 2001; Plymire, 2005; Wu, 2008). Plymire (2005) reminds us of the value of production studies in revealing factors that contribute to, as well as curb, ideological reproductions. Understanding how images and texts are selected for us to see and read cannot be undertaken in isolation from the institutional and social structures in which they take place. Yet only a few studies have examined content production. Most of these have been confined to the United States (USA), with the notable exception of a comprehensive longitudinal study carried out in the Netherlands (Claringbould, Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). All found that sports media makers hide behind a discourse of objectivity, audience interest and the historical significance of certain sports to defend their journalistic choices.

In France, very few published studies of sports media have been undertaken with all but one concentrating on content analyses. The one study that examined content production was limited to a quantitative analysis of the gender of sports article bylines (Delorme & Raul, 2009). To date then, no comprehensive, qualitative investigation of the people producing sports media content in France has been attempted. Are the same patterns that are apparent in international content production studies also preventing change from occurring in France, or are there characteristics distinct to French culture that influence local sports-media production choices? Guided by this question, this research aims to redress this deficit by undertaking an exploratory study of those responsible for the production of sports-media in the televised and written press in France, to ascertain how their content decisions are made.

This study aims to provide a high-quality contribution hitherto absent from French sports-media studies, and elicit findings of relevance to the academic communities of sports management, sociology and journalism, paving the way for understanding how change can occur in the way sports coverage is produced and presented. It will also add to the small body of international research into sports-media content production and hopefully encourage similar investigations elsewhere. Without research into the context in which media content is produced and perpetuated, coverage of women's sports might otherwise remain, as Creedon and Smith (2007) gloomily predict, "about as good as it is going to be for a long time to come unless something changes" (p.156).

This introduction has presented the background and context for the research question, highlighting the paucity of studies of sports media content production both locally and internationally. Narrowing attention to France, the next chapter begins with an overview of how both the sports and media systems of that country are structured, including how women are currently situated in these contexts. It then turns to review international sports media production studies before focusing specifically on the present study. The methodology for this research is presented in Chapter Three, ahead of the results. After discussion of the key findings, Chapter Five concludes with recommendations for future research and practical recommendations for the media industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is organised into four parts. The first section provides a brief historical overview of sport in France, showing how it has become an essential component of French life since 1945 through the active implication of the State. Women's participation in sport and physical activity is also reviewed. Following this, the structure, nature and elements of the French sports media industry are presented. The international literature on sports media content production is then reviewed, detailing the prominent studies undertaken and the trends found. Focus is then narrowed to those sports media studies carried out in France, highlighting the gaps in that research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the theoretical perspectives popular with sports media researchers and presents the theoretical framework for the present study.

THE ORGANISATION OF SPORT IN FRANCE

STRUCTURE

The predominant characteristic of the organisation of sport in France is the extent to which it has always been State controlled. The French sports system was founded at the end of World War II, with the post-Vichy government incorporating sport into its plans for national reconstruction (Mignon, 2005). Through this, sporting *Fédérations*¹ were prescribed the role of providing sport as a public service under the authority of the government (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003; Mignon, 2005). It was not, however, until 1966 and the creation of the first Ministry of Youth and Sport that a dedicated sport policy with adequate funding was aligned to State reform (Mignon, 2005). Sport as an integral part of the welfare state was definitively reinforced by the 1975 Mazeaud Act, which determined that the State should not simply distribute subsidies to sporting federations, but reserves the right to intervene into how those funds are used (Mignon, 2005). Whereas sport until then had been considered secondary to established forms of culture, from this period forward and irrespective of the political leaning of the government in power, it has become a tool for social development and national prestige, firmly entrenched in government policy (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003;

¹ national governing bodies, grass-roots and scholastic sports associations

Mignon, 2005). Amendments to the Act in 1984 and 2000 have reinforced the principle of mutual cooperation between the State and the sports movement to address and achieve the State's objectives (Belloc, 2005).

While the French State exercises control over funding and policy, sports themselves are governed by *Fédérations* under the authority of the National Olympic and Sport Committee (CNOSF) (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003). The CNOSF in turn reports directly to the State Secretary for Sport at the Ministry of Health and Sport. The State nominates and delegates one *Fédération* – amateur or professional - in each discipline to organise competitions from local through to international level (Belloc, 2005). Technical, management-level and coaching personnel are also assigned to *Fédérations* and funded by the Ministry of Health and Sport. While this vertical structure appears simple, the reality is less so, reflecting the complexities of French administration generally. As Mignon (2005) acerbically notes, the result is a paradox of an interventionist system that now lacks the financial means to fulfill its escalating missions, within an increasingly problematic administrative structure.

Nonetheless, no viable alternative to State intervention has been tendered. Indeed, the current government recently reconfirmed its hands-on role and commitment to sport (Les nouveaux défis, 2009). Sport is probably the only area in which the French people still accept such massive State intervention, despite the cost to public funds and its questionable effectiveness at the high profile elite level (Mignon, 2005). In 2007, the State's input of €3.22 billion into the sports system represented 10% of total sport expenditure, a 15% increase on its 2000 outlay (Stat Info, 2009). In comparison, the German and British governments inject less than 1% into their sports structures (Stat Info, 2009). Funds are primarily used to finance the Sports and Education Ministries, whereas local government finances the provision and maintenance of around three quarters of sports and recreational facilities (Stat Info, 2009). Combined local and national government funding sustains 208,000 jobs in the sports sector, with sports equipment manufacturing and sales adding a further 74,200 (Stat Info, 2009).

The State aims to make sport accessible to all, through clubs, schools and universities. However in Dechavanne and Hartmann-Tews' (2003) view,

the system continues to be geared around the Olympic (or more specifically, founder Pierre de Coubertin's) ideals of competition, performance and excellence. Conscious of the under-performance of French athletes on the international stage over the past years, the previous State Secretary for Sport, former national rugby coach Bernard Laporte, presented a Bill in early 2009 to radically reform the elite sport system. Laporte's proposed reforms, to be pursued by his successor, Rama Yade, include directing more resources towards sportspersons with medal-winning potential. To achieve this, a reduction from 15000 to 5000 of the number of athletes classified as elite or hopefuls is proposed (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2008). Currently, fifteen sports are represented at elite level and two thirds of elite athletes are male (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009a). The disproportionate number of high performance female athletes is a reflection of female participation numbers at sports club and competition levels, as the next section highlights.

WOMEN AND SPORT

Women's participation rates in physical activity and sport in France have increased from just 9% in 1968 to 48% in 2009, and continue to grow (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009b). In contrast, those for men have stagnated (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003). Even so, of the 16.77 million membership licenses issued in 2008 by the 167,000 sports clubs in France, two thirds were to males (INSEE, 2009). To participate in sport at club and competition level in France, a license is obligatory. As Figure 1 shows, football² has by far the greatest number of license holders (2.27 million), over double that of tennis (1.1 million), with judo/martial arts (0.6 million), equestrian (0.55 million) and basketball (0.45 million) completing the top five (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009c).

Although football has the highest membership rate, it also has the least number of female license holders at only 2.7%, down from 3% on the previous year (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009c). Figure 2 shows the sports where female participants outnumber male: equestrian (79.4% of license holders), gymnastics (78.9%), hiking (61.2%) and swimming (57.4%) (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009c). Sports where female participation numbers have shown the most dramatic increase

² also known as soccer

since 2001 have been in rugby, boxing and weightlifting (Stat Info, 2007). Whereas women now make up 17.6% and 32.7% respectively of boxing and weightlifting numbers, only 4.2% of the 327,000 rugby players are female (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009c). With one of the lowest participation rates of the 91 single-sports federations, this figure is nonetheless up from 3.8% on the previous year (INSEE, 2009).

Women tend to abandon club-based sports at young adulthood in favour of less organised physical activities, preferring participation for aesthetic reasons over competition (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003). This is reflected in annual statistics which indicate that females over the age of 15 prefer cycling, swimming, walking and gymnastics as physical activity pursuits (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009a). Consequently, the number of females with elite athlete status has remained at 35%, the same percentage as female sports club license holders (Femix' Sports, 2007; INSEE, 2009; Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009a, b). The only sport where there are more women with elite athlete status than men is in gymnastics (54%) (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009a).

The French Ministry of Health and Sport has sought to overcome disparities in the type, nature and intensity of sports participation through its 2004 "Women in Sport" policy action plan (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009b). This initiative provides for dedicated funding to promote women's sport participation in lower socio-economic areas, where particularly low participation rates have been noted among women from immigrant communities (Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009b). Under-representation of women in sport occurs off the field too. Less than 10% of national sports coaches, 4% of national technical directors and 5% of Board directors are women (Dechavanne & Hartmann-Tews, 2003; Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009a, b).

While there appears to be government willingness for this to change, progress has been slow since the Working Party "Women in Sport" was established. This could be attributed in part to historical and social attitudes towards decision-making generally, which Dechavanne and Hartmann-Tews (2003) observe is still viewed by many men and women as a male competency.

Top sports by total membership (2008)

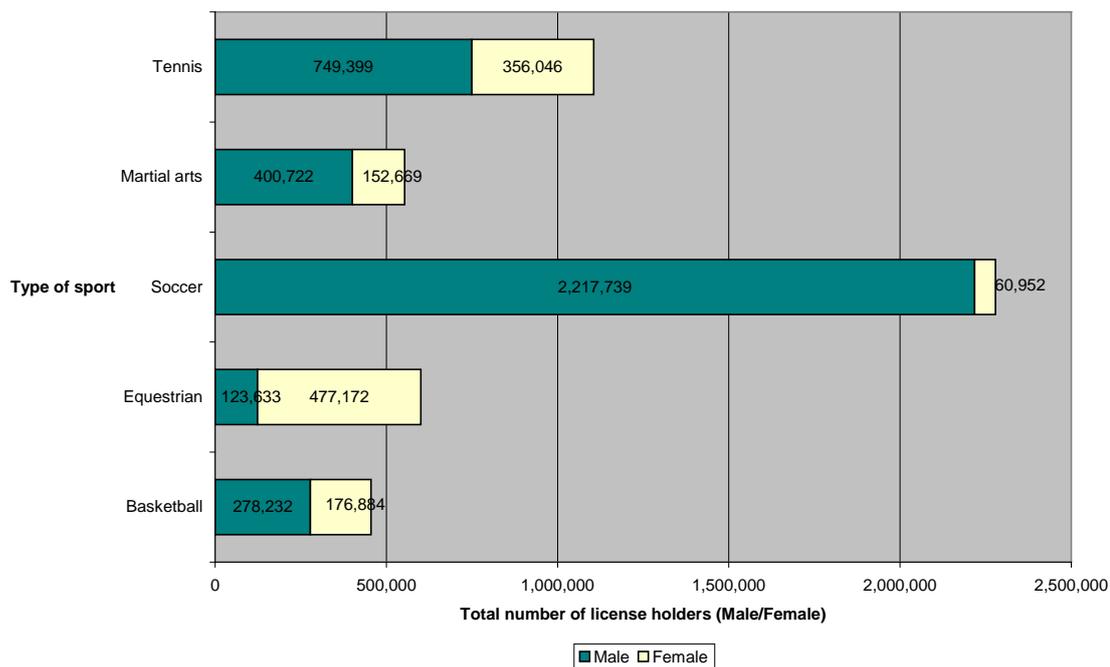


Figure 1: Top sports by total membership (2008).

Source: Stat Info, French Ministry of Sport and Health, June 2009

Sports with highest female membership (2008)

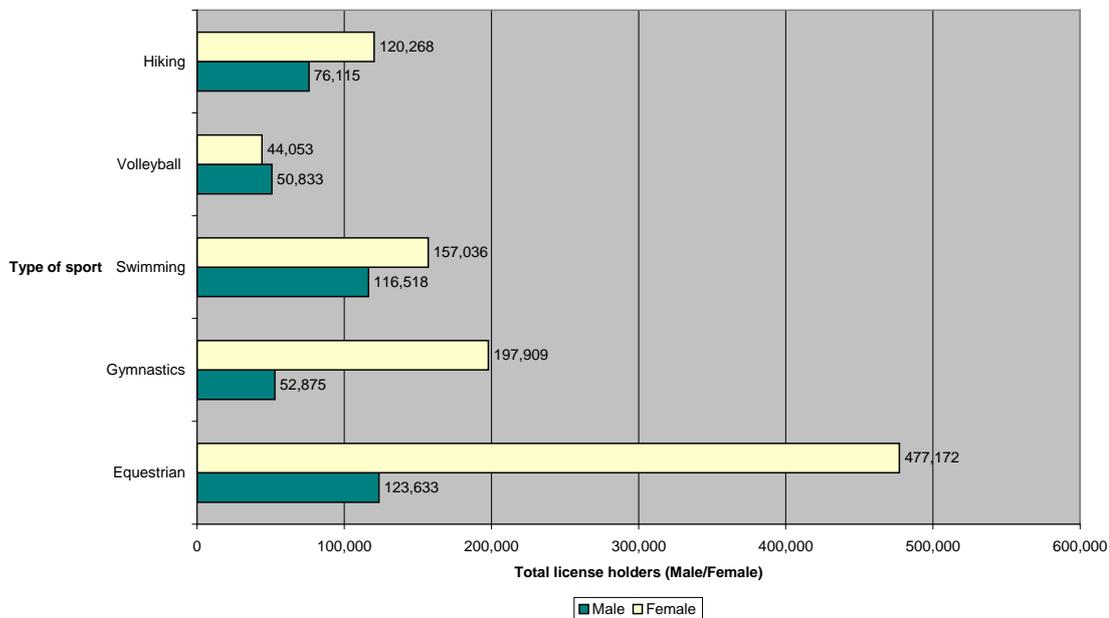


Figure 2: Sports with highest female membership (2008).

Source: Stat Info, French Ministry of Sport and Health, June 2009

Men's attitudinal and interpretive preconceptions about women's managerial abilities have been widely documented as a key barrier to career development, contributing to the "glass ceiling" phenomenon (Robinson, 2008). Dechavanne and Hartmann-Tews (2003) believe that increased media attention of the (few) women holding directorships in sport could help motivate other women and persuade men to collaborate in bringing about participatory democracy. However it is not only sport participation and governance numbers that are susceptible to this gender imbalance, but the composition of the French sports media too, as the next section explicates.

SPORTS MEDIA IN FRANCE

COMPOSITION OF WORKFORCE

Reflecting the situation in other countries, the composition of media producers in France is still largely comprised of men, although quantitatively, the gap is closing. The number of male journalists has remained relatively stable since 2001, hovering around the 20,000 mark, whereas the number of women pursuing journalism careers has steadily increased, from 13,855 in 2001 to 16,362 in 2008 (Delorme & Raul, 2009). Over the past twenty years, more French women have enrolled in journalism courses than men and continue to graduate with higher qualifications than their male counterparts (Eveno, 2003). Eveno (2003) predicts that, statistically, the number of women journalists will outnumber that of men by 2010. In terms of sports journalists, an exact number is difficult to isolate because of the complexity of the national job coding system (Eveno, 2003). However according to the *Union des Journalistes de Sport de France* (UJSF), the largest of the sports journalist trade unions, there are approximately 3000 sports journalists in France. Of this figure, 15% are estimated to be women and this number, like in other media, is constantly rising (UJSF, personal communication, 28 May 2009).

Although the overall feminisation of French media, including that of sport, may be cause for celebration among those who have long sought *égalité*³ in numbers, Delorme and Raul (2009) warn that the profession remains largely "gender blind". Disparities continue to exist in the distribution of

³ equality, parity

roles and responsibilities, with women grossly under-represented at management level and over-represented at junior levels (Delorme & Raul, 2009; Eveno, 2003). This situation highlights the ongoing difficulty women face in progressing through the ranks to overcome the male dominance at the upper echelons of sports media production in France, compounded, as the next section shows, by the structure of the industry.

MEDIA INDUSTRY STRUCTURE

In many aspects of French society, an unwritten hierarchical order determines the perceived importance of an occupation or job in relation to another. This is also clearly evident in the media. Not only is there a pecking order among the different media, but also within and across specialist journalistic areas. Marchetti (2002a, b), following on from work by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, describes this relationship as a system of fields and sub-fields whose relative importance and bearing depend on their position within external and internal hierarchies. Within this logic, the national newspapers *Le Monde* and to a lesser extent *Le Figaro* and *Libération* are considered the benchmarks of the written press in terms of political reporting and breaking news (Delorme & Raul, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a, b). Expanding this, a political journalist at *Le Monde* would therefore occupy a dominant position not only within that newspaper's internal journalistic hierarchy, but also across that of other written press.

On the other hand, sports reporting and by consequence sports journalists are considered low on the professional scale (Delorme & Raul, 2009; Derèze, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a, b). French sports journalists are not alone in this regard. Sports journalism in the USA has been described as the 'toy department' because of the soft-news nature of sports reports in comparison to 'serious' journalistic subjects such as political reporting (Creedon & Smith, 2007; Wanta, 2006). Its lowly peer rating has, however, not deterred the sports media from creating its own hierarchical divisions too. Television sports journalists, for example, are given more credence than their colleagues from the written press (Delorme & Raul, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a, b). In addition, within the sports department of the same media, a pecking order also exists. Journalists who cover sports considered symbolically or historically important to France (such as football and cycling) hold more clout than their colleagues covering 'minor'

sports (Delorme & Raul, 2009). This web of professional perceptions and interactions emphasises Marchetti's (2002a, b) conception of journalism as an intertwining micro cosmos.

Paradoxically though, while sports journalism is taken less seriously within the profession than, for instance, political reporting, the inclusion of sports pages and programmes contributes substantially to media advertising and circulation revenue (Derèze, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a). The place of sport in society has become such today that every (general) newspaper in France contains a sports section (Delorme & Raul, 2009). Private television channels no longer simply telecast sports games, but have diversified and invested to become shareholders in sports events or have major broadcasting deals with sports organisations (Derèze, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a). Since the 1980s, the media has become the main source of revenue for professional sports (Popescu-Jourdy, 2009). Sport has become a bankable item: audience ratings and advertising revenue help guarantee a channel's success. The media today, as has been witnessed in most Western countries, cannot survive without sport (Coakley, 2007). Indifferent to the occupational hierarchy within the profession, sport has become strategically significant to the economic viability of many French media organisations too.

MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

The predictable panoply of television, print, radio and online media diffuse sports programmes and news in France. The mainstream daily national (e.g. *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*) and regional newspapers (e.g. *Sud Ouest*, *La Dépêche du Midi*) include sections covering sports. A multitude of single-sport magazines and journals also exist and compete. The primary print medium for sport, however, undoubtedly remains *L'Equipe*, the national daily all-sports newspaper and its Saturday supplement, *L'Equipe Magazine*, both published in full colour. Readership of national news dailies is predominantly male - on average 62% - and that of *L'Equipe* more so (82%) (Eveno, 2003).

In terms of longevity and despite decreasing annual circulation, *L'Equipe* has no real rival. Limited competition came briefly from *Sport*, a free weekly magazine, but it has floundered in the giveaway press market,

briefly ceasing distribution in June 2009 before reappearing again in September. In the meantime, its editorial team had been snapped up by another daily giveaway, *DirectSoir*, the evening edition of *DirectMatin*, produced in collaboration with major daily newspaper, *Le Monde* and reliant on advertising revenue for survival. *DirectSoir* converted its Friday edition into a double cover issue to include twelve pages of sport, *DirectSport*. With a circulation of 500,000 copies, its impressive success has prompted the publishers to drop the news section in 2010 to make a standalone sports edition of 48 pages (G. Martin, personal communication, 25 November 2009).

Of the audiovisual media, television is replete with free-to-air and cable/satellite sports channels. Both free-to-air public service channels (five under the state-funded *France Télévisions* banner) and commercial channels feature regular single or multi-sports programmes. The most watched free-to-air channel, *TF1*, limits its sporting interest to two sports: football and Formula 1 motor car racing. It holds the much sought after rights to matches involving the French national football team, assuring a regular high market share of television audiences in spite of recent poor performances by the French team. Exceptionally, it also acquired the broadcast rights to the home-hosted 2007 Rugby World Cup, a move which resulted in record audiences for France's semi final match against England (18 million viewers, representing 67% of market share) (Charrier, 2009).

With far lesser budgets and a wider mandate, the main public service channels *France 2* and *France 3* struggle to compete with their mainstream rival but nonetheless are more diverse in their sports offerings. Thanks to both State and European policy, sports events deemed of national interest cannot be aired wholly on pay television channels, but must also be accessible to the public free of charge (Eveno, 2003; Mignon, 2005; Popescu-Jourdy, 2009). As such, public service channels are periodically able to capture a wider audience through broadcasts of signature tournaments such as Six Nations rugby, the Tour de France cycle race and Roland Garros tennis.

In the burgeoning cable/satellite television market, dedicated sports channels can be categorised into three types: live/delayed multi-sport

broadcasters (e.g. *Eurosport*, *Canal+Sport*, *Sport+*), dedicated single sport channels (e.g. *Canal+Foot*, *Yacht & Sail*, *Equidia*) and the CNN-style of 24-hour rolling sports news (e.g. *Infosport*, *L'Equipe TV*). With a foot in more than one of these camps, subscription-based *Canal+* sets itself apart by not only offering mainstream programming, at times free-to-air, but also by holding the major share of broadcasting rights to the French national football and rugby championships. These rights are estimated to be responsible for attracting 40% of its subscriptions (Miller, Lawrence, Mackay & Rowe, 2007) and have enabled it to expand its other pay channel offerings.

Eveno (2003) observes, however, that the deliberate masculinisation of *Canal+* through its heavy sports programming has deterred some advertisers (and by consequence reduced the channel's advertising revenue). Male television audiences are considered less attractive to advertisers in France than the *ménagère de moins de 50 ans*⁴, the outdated generalisation still used to describe the ideal mass market consumer. In 2008, *Orange*, the multimedia subsidiary of telecom's giant France Télécom, aggressively – and successfully – bid for a share of national league football broadcast rights, shaking up *Canal+*'s domination in this market by creating its own sports channels. It has since obtained further rights to other sports and competes by also offering pay-per-view broadcasts.

There are over 1200 public and private radio stations in France, however none are solely sports themed. Sports news is generally incorporated into regular programming. Like the main television channels and written press, radio stations have added online editions via their Internet websites, complementing their traditional programmes and services. Very few totally independent sports websites exist – that is, with no connection to traditional media. Their audience impact varies, with one site (*sport24.com*) rating quite well in terms of monthly hits (4.6M), but well behind those sites with ties to traditional media (e.g. 40M for *LeMonde.fr* and 57M for *L'Equipe.fr*). Sports websites have experienced considerable annual growth. Monthly research undertaken by the *L'Equipe* media stable show that over 50% of males surveyed use the Internet to find sports news (*L'Equipe*, 2008). While *L'Equipe.fr* remains the leader in this field,

⁴ Under 50 year old housewife

there is stiff competition coming from Orangesports.fr and Eurosport.fr, sites tied to France Télécom and TF1, both major players in the French sports media.

It is clear that sport has become an integral element of all forms of media in France. With this in mind, the next section explores studies that have looked into the production of sports media content, firstly addressing the findings of research carried out internationally before narrowing the focus to studies undertaken in France.

THE PRODUCTION OF SPORTS MEDIA

INTERNATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

Globally, very few studies have specifically addressed the production of sports media content, that is, how and why certain subjects or athletes are chosen and others ignored. Instead, the vast majority of research has focused on analysing content post-production. Within the abundance of this content research, the predominant topic of study has been the relationship between media representations and the maintenance of patriarchal ideologies and sexist gender norms, generally arrived at through comparisons of the amount and type of men's and women's sports coverage (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Capranica et al., 2005; Coakley, 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Delorme & Raul, 2009; Gumbel, 2007; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Lemieux, 2000; Nixon II, 2008; Plymire, 2005; Wu, 2008).

These studies have found that even when sportswomen perform well, they receive disproportionate media coverage compared to men (Bernstein & Galily, 2008; Coakley, 2007; Delorme & Raul, 2009; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Lemieux, 2000; Wanta, 2006; Wu, 2008). Coverage of sportswomen has been found to be more predominant when women participate in 'socially acceptable' or 'gender-appropriate' sports (Bernstein & Galily, 2008; Coakley, 2007; Duncan, 2006; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; Wu, 2008). Images and narratives often depict sportsmen as gallant heroes and women as sex objects, reliant on male support (Coakley, 2007; Duncan, 2006; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

Some progress has nonetheless been noted towards parity of coverage during the Olympic Games. A content analysis of media coverage in four European countries, including France, during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney revealed that the quantity, type and placement of coverage of women/women's sports was comparable to that of men (Capranica et al., 2005). However, the authors of that research concluded that contextual forces, and in particular nationalism, render the equitable gender coverage during the Olympics the exception rather than the rule. Discrepancies in non-Olympic coverage persist. Overall, studies of media content consistently confirm the continued underrepresentation, heterosexism, trivialization and general sexist nature of media coverage – irrespective of country of origin (Bernstein & Galily, 2008; Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Capranica et al., 2005; Coakley, 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Delorme & Raul, 2009; Duncan, 2006; Gumbel, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Messner et al., 2001; Nixon II, 2008; Plymire, 2005; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004; Wu, 2008). In doing so, the media overwhelmingly reinforces the commonly held belief that sport is a masculine domain, devaluing the participation and achievements of sportswomen as secondary to those of men.

While eminently useful in tracking and quantifying coverage, content analyses do not explain how such choices were made by sports media decision makers. Studies investigating sports media production have been few. One of the most notable has been that of Knoppers and Elling (2004) and Claringbould et al. (2004), who, as part of their four-year study (1996-99), explored the content, production and audiences of Dutch sports media. They conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen experienced journalists and editors from public and private television and national newspapers in the Netherlands. Ten of the fifteen interview subjects were men. The majority of interviewees were reporters (8) and editors (3); the remainder being editors-in-chief (4). The proportion of women in each job category was not identified, nor was the age of participants.

The researchers analysed their data using several theoretical approaches. In one report, they applied a social constructionist approach using Acker's (1990, 1992, in Claringbould et al., 2004) theory of gendered organisations which demonstrates how the division of labour, images and

discourses, interaction and identity are used simultaneously by members of an organisation to give meaning to gender and ethnicity. Taking this approach, they looked at the ways sports media producers challenge and justify the disproportionate gender (and ethnic) ratios in their profession, and how this impacts on their journalistic practices. In another, the authors specifically addressed the role sports media producers play in producing gendered coverage by exploring the discursive strategies used to legitimise their choices. Their findings showed a consistent journalistic discourse strategy whereby objectivity (top performance/achievement) and interest (a sport's popularity) were the principal criteria used by Dutch media to explain their preeminent coverage of men's sport. Supported by a conservative, predominantly male journalistic workforce, these criteria served to validate sports coverage choices as common sense (Knoppers & Elling, 2004).

Discourse analysis was also the theme of Hardin and Shain's (2006) investigation of women in American sports departments. They used focus groups to interview a total of twenty female sport journalists from the written press about how they viewed their role, value and contribution to sports journalism. The age range of the group was not identified, but described as mixed. Only three of the interviewees held positions as editors or assistant editors; the majority were reporters or copy editors. While not specifically aimed at identifying the process for sports media content choices, this research did expose some of the same themes that the Dutch study revealed, that is that sports media producers - irrespective of their sex - most often hide behind a discourse of objectivity, interest and tradition to justify what sports their audiences get to see and read (Claringbould et al., 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004).

Conclusively, these studies show that greatest coverage is given to those sports or athletes, considered to be top performers, supposedly interest the audience and have historically received preferential attention. Male sports-media producers in particular believe their choices are gender (and ethnic) neutral and that altering the balance and type of coverage (e.g. increasing coverage of women's sports) would compromise their objectivity criterion (Claringbould et al., 2004; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004).

In these studies, those surveyed were convinced of the neutrality of their choices, which were based on their belief that 'newsworthy' sports receiving priority coverage were the ones their viewers/readers wanted. Thus, men's basketball in the USA and men's football in the Netherlands were automatically assumed to meet these criteria. The "what the public wants" argument, however, does not hold up under scrutiny. Studies have shown that sports editors seldom measure audience interests formally (Bruce, Falcous & Thorpe, 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Gumbel, 2007). Rather, they rely on their own assumptions and beliefs about what audiences want (Bruce et al., 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Gumbel, 2007).

The commodification and globalisation of sports have also meant that the choices of media producers have become influenced by commercial interests, such as those of advertisers, sponsors and proprietors (Coakley, 2007; Creedon, 1998; Messner et al., 2001; Nixon II, 2008; Whannel, 2009; Wu, 2008). These stakeholders have a vested commercial interest in accessing and capitalising on sports media audiences (Wu, 2008). Consequently, the primary targets for commercial stakeholder attention are sports perceived as the most lucrative, notably men's professional sports such as football. Women's sports are generally positioned by the media as less important than men's (Coakley, 2007; Wu, 2008) and therefore less commercially viable from a media perspective (Creedon, 1998).

The same body of research shows that women entering sports-media production appear to buy into the dominant ideology (Creedon, 1998; Creedon & Cramer, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). It has been argued that women see this as a means of surviving in a man's world; even though female journalism and media graduates now outnumber male, the majority of print and television media sports departments are (still) essentially comprised of middle-class white men (Bernstein & Galily, 2008; Claringbould et al., 2004; Coakley, 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Len-Ríos, Rodgers, Thorson & Yoon, 2005). Liberal feminists suggest that acceding to sports journalism is considered an achievement in itself and equated to having achieved parity with men (Creedon & Cramer, 2007; Hardin & Shain,

2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). From a radical or transformational feminist perspective, it is *status quo* (Creedon, 1998). As Creedon (1998) points out, being a woman in sports journalism "does not necessarily equate with a desire to change the way women's sports are covered" (p.93).

The consequence of accepting the 'normal' and 'natural' content choices largely imposed by men is the perpetuation of the male hegemony inherent in sports journalism (Bruce et al., 2007; Creedon, 1998; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Sports-media producers are able to shield behind an uncontested ideology to justify their decisions to neglect, under- and misrepresent women's sports (Hardin & Shain, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). As a result, sports continue to be reported using images and narratives that reflect and reproduce society's dominant masculine ideologies (Coakley, 2007; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004), and provide ample subject matter for content analysis researchers.

THE FRENCH EXCEPTION?

France is not the notable exception to this international trend of reproducing dominant male ideologies in sports-media at the expense of women and some men. The limited research undertaken has clearly established that the type and content of women's sport coverage in France remains disproportionate to that accorded to men. For example, failure to win is generally attributed to the emotional or psychological weakness of sportswomen, rather than the explanations often employed for losses by their masculine counterparts, such as the strength of the opposition (Femix' Sports, 2007).

Analyses of gender representations reveal that on average, French sportsmen receive at least four times more coverage than sportswomen (Lemieux, 2000). A restricted number of sports appear to receive the majority of print coverage when it comes to women. Separate studies have shown that this coverage largely centres on four sports - skiing, tennis, athletics and, more recently, swimming (Femix' Sports, 2007; Lemieux, 2000). These sports conform to what Duncan (2006) and Duncan and Messner (1998) describe as media sex-typing: sports considered

'appropriate' because they are aesthetically pleasing and widely considered as conventionally feminine.

Coverage predominantly centres on elite, winning individuals, rather than on teams or participants generally (Femix' Sports, 2007; Lemieux, 2000). It quickly skews towards icon sensationalism when an athlete is considered attractive, such as the coverage afforded to former world champion swimmer, Laure Manaudou (Femix' Sports, 2007). Similar treatment has been documented elsewhere. Baroffio-Bota and Banet-Weiser (2006) point out that the American media frame femininity over athleticism and it is almost always directed at individual athletes in sports such as golf, tennis, ice skating and gymnastics. Feminine attributes of beauty, grace and glamour overshadow physical prowess. Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova, who in spite of losing more singles games than she won, was sensationalised by the media worldwide because of her looks (Craig & Beedie, 2008; Creedon & Smith, 2007). In the USA, media constructions portrayed the former champion American golfer of Hispanic descent, Nancy Lopez, as wholesome, attractive and heterosexual (Jamieson, 2001). On the other hand, French tennis player Amélie Mauresmo was likened to a man by a number of media because of her noticeable muscularity and openness about her lesbianism (Stevenson, 2002). Commentaries that highlight or denigrate attractiveness and femininity serve to draw attention away from physical ability and minimise "the symbolic threat sportswomen pose to male hegemony" (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.182). In other words, positioning athleticism as synonymous with masculinity reinforces the ideology of male superiority "at a time when male hegemony is continually challenged and opposed in everyday life" (Duncan & Messner, 1998, p.170).

Lemieux (2000) concluded that sports coverage choices in the French media were influenced by many male (and female) journalists' typecast views of (biological) sexual differences which prevent them from accepting as 'normal' women's participation in sports that are habitually played by men. Consequently, sports where women step outside the customary understanding of femininity, such as rugby, receive only cursory attention (Femix' Sports, 2007). Lemieux's enquiry also inferred that media producers were afraid of the negative effects on audience numbers of going against the institutionalised hierarchy of sports choices.

Taken as a whole, coverage of female French athletes seems to mirror that revealed by other international studies: femininity, physical appearance, attractiveness and heterosexuality are key to gaining media exposure, gender-marking women's sports participants against the masculine norm (Femix' Sports, 2007; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

WHO'S BEHIND THE CONTENT?

Consistent with international trends (see Gallagher, 1995), a study of reading habits found that French men prefer the sports and politics sections of the press, French women the society and health sections (Eveno, 2003). Like their counterparts in other countries, French women want to read about and see images of other women, yet media coverage is often devoid of women (Eveno, 2003; Gallagher, 1995). The amount of coverage afforded to sportswomen is not increasing, according to recent research. A concentrated content analysis undertaken in November 2007 by Femix' Sports, a pressure group promoting and defending women's place in sport and media, found that only 4.25% of articles and 6.7% of photographs in national newspapers *L'Equipe*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and the capital's daily *Le Parisien*, featured elite women's sport. In a more recent content study of nearly 4000 sports articles from *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *L'Equipe*, Delorme and Raul (2009) found that coverage of women's sports in *L'Equipe* did not exceed 9%, and was even less in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* (8.8% and 6.9% respectively).

In the production of those articles, women journalists were disproportionately assigned to cover women's participation and under-assigned to men's sports (Delorme & Raul, 2009). Sports understood to be the most prestigious were assigned to male journalists. Consequently, article bylines (authors) for the most prevalent sports - football, rugby, tennis and cycling - were virtually all male (Delorme & Raul, 2009). In contrast, irrespective of the gender of the participant, no male byline appeared on articles about gymnastics, figure skating or synchronised swimming - sports widely considered to be feminine (Delorme & Raul, 2009).

While representing less than 15% of the journalistic numbers at their respective papers, female journalists at *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* were nonetheless responsible for nearly 19% of sports articles published (Delorme & Raul, 2009). This seemingly favourable statistic masks the hegemonic character of sports media in France - the sports sections of these 'intellectual' newspapers are not considered strategically significant to their editors (Delorme & Raul, 2009; Marchetti, 2002a). In this light, the fact that more women than men were assigned to cover sports reflects the dominant position of those papers in the overall media hierarchy and, concomitantly, the (lack of) importance sport holds for them. This assertion finds foothold when the statistics from *L'Equipe* - the reference press for sports - are considered. Women represent fewer than 16% of editorial staff at *L'Equipe* and produce only 7.5% of articles, highlighting Marchetti's (2002a, b) contention that the more prestigious the position of a medium within its field or sub-field, the greater the exclusion of women contributors. The over-representation of men at decision-making levels of media production perpetuates a cycle of socially constructed (male) sport preferences primarily intended for a male audience. This symbolic shutting out of women only serves to reproduce the hegemonic norms of a patriarchal society. Not only is sports coverage gendered, but so too, it seems, is the process by which it is produced.

Yet while studies to date have highlighted the pervasiveness of the culture of masculinity in French sports coverage, they have not sought to establish *why* media makers are indifferent to gender issues. Although Delorme and Raul (2009) briefly, but commendably, touched on the production of sports content of three major newspapers, their focus was confined to quantifying gender bylines. It appears then that no studies specific to France have looked beyond the type and quantity of gendered coverage to investigate *why*, in a country where both the national and European political doctrine supposedly encourages egalitarianism (see European Parliament Resolution on Women in Sport, 2003; Ministère de la Santé et des Sports, 2009b), no noticeable changes in sports-media representations of women have occurred. An investigation behind the scenes is sorely missing.

Before strategies for change can be considered, it is necessary to understand what currently drives sports media content decisions. In pursuit of answers and with this void in the literature in mind, an

exploratory study of French sports-media makers' decision making was undertaken to uncover reasons why coverage and content continue to be gendered.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Looking through a critical cultural studies lens, Plymire (2005) identified four theoretical categories that have influenced sports-media studies: hegemony theory, semiotics, post-structuralism and feminism. As the study of signs and how they work, semiotics focuses on the text as the "site where meaning is constructed" (Plymire, 2005, p. 142). Post-structuralism also examines the structure of language in texts but differs to semiotics in that it acknowledges multiple meanings and interpretations (Plymire, 2005). While both semiotics and post-structuralism offer useful means of examining the sports-media relationship, the focus of this exploratory case study (Yin, 2009) is on the *producers* of texts, not the texts themselves. As such, hegemony theory and feminism were considered more relevant to this enquiry.

Sport is undeniably a gendered institution. It has been described as a "male preserve" (Birrell, 2000, p.61) and a "modern bastion of patriarchal power" (Messner, 2005, p.315). Unsurprisingly then, sport has been a fertile terrain for feminist scholars wanting to explore underlying gender relations. Often understood to be simply biological (male/female), gender is a social construct through which the power relations of a culture determine what is masculine or feminine (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Craig & Beedie, 2008; Robinson, 2008). With gender at its core, feminist theorising has, over the past decades, expanded to encompass critical analyses of patriarchy, hegemony and male privilege in and through sport (Birrell, 2000). Where gender is seen by liberal and radical feminists as the main reason for oppression, critical feminists take the role of power into account in the reproduction, resistance and transformation of gender relations through sport (Birrell, 2000). The unequal distribution of power forms the basis of cultural studies and has become a logical paradigm for critical feminist analysis (Birrell, 2000).

Hegemony theory has been popular with sports studies researchers as it is seen to incorporate a number of themes present in other theories (Craig &

Beedie, 2008). It has its origins in the works of one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci, a dedicated Marxist and political activist (Bairner, 2009; Len-Ríos et al., 2005). In the 1980s, Gramsci's work found a surge of favour with scholars who saw in it "more scope for human agency than is permitted by orthodox Marxist theory" (Bairner, 2009, p.197). Hegemony is generally understood to describe a type of control that is persuasive, not coercive (Hargreaves, 2007). However, Bairner (2009) argues that Gramsci referred to persuasion and coercion, essentially in relation to struggles between dominant and subordinate social classes.

Use of hegemony theory today though has effectively detached class from its perspective in preference of a focus on gender and power issues (Bairner, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). More specifically, the term 'hegemonic masculinity' is used to refer to the taken-for-granted ideals and practices that perpetuate men's dominance over women to help dominant groups maintain power (Brookes, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Creedon, 1998). These ideologies and practices provide reference points for the interweaving relationships of men and women, but do not necessarily reflect the actual lives of men (or women). Rather they represent heterosexual masculine "ideals, fantasies and desires" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.838). Along these lines, male sports stars often embody symbols of masculinity and authority, "despite the fact that many boys and men do not live up to them" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.846). Men weave in and out of hegemonic masculinity discourses and practices, adopting its norms when suited, and strategically distancing themselves from it at other times (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Rather than crushingly omnipresent, it is the banality, fluidity and flexibility of hegemonic masculine discourses that help legitimise and reproduce accepted hegemonic practices. The media is a particularly ripe site for perpetuating masculine hegemony (Birrell, 2000; Creedon, 1998). By consequence, society has come to equate sport with masculinity.

Yet hegemony also represents an opportunity for change. It is not set in concrete and must be constantly fought to be maintained (Brookes, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Craig & Beedie, 2008; Hargreaves, 2007; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). Examples of overcoming male

hegemony in sport and sports media are rare, but notable. In 1978, through persistence and judicial action for discrimination, American female journalists gained access to men's baseball locker rooms (Creedon, 1998; Creedon & Smith, 2007). After a thirty year campaign by the Women's Tennis Association, the Wimbledon tennis championship finally conceded to awarding equal prize money to both men's and women's singles winners from 2007, becoming the last grand slam tournament to do so. In a fifteen year period, Duncan and Messner (2005) have noted that the quality of television commentaries of women's sports has improved, although the quantity of coverage remains low.

Despite its continued popularity as a theoretical model, hegemony theory's relevance to sport has nonetheless been seriously criticised. Bairner (2009) points to the irony of sports studies' penchant for Gramscian notions of hegemony even though Gramsci's work was devoid of any reference to sport. Furthermore, the blind eye turned to Gramsci's Marxist leanings is said to blur the economic influences on hegemonic power in favour of a more essentialist interpretation (Bairner, 2009). Plymire (2005) also remarks on the propensity for cultural studies researchers to lean on hegemony theory and suggests it is time to "re-imagine (but not necessarily dispense with) [it]" (p.158). Instead of favouring its deterministic characteristics in sports-media research, she proposes a multilayered and contextual approach within which feminist theory can be of inspiration. Brooks and Hébert (2006) also draw on feminist frameworks within a critical cultural approach, contending these to be the most salient for analysing gender meanings in Western society media.

This research takes heed of these scholars' experience and applies a critical feminist framework to investigate the media's role in the continued production of inequality with regard to women in sport. In having gender and power relations as its object of analysis, a critical feminist perspective fits with the research question while still affording a place for articulating hegemony theory. As Brookes (2002) points out "representations about gender are never solely about gender" (p.144), but are inextricably linked to other social identities such as ethnicity, nationalism and class. Scraton and Flintoff (2002) concur on this point, stressing the influence of social, political and economic change on how gender and sport can be understood and explained. In recognising these connections, this research seeks to

overcome Coakley's (2007) reservation that critical feminist theory is slow to theorise such relationships, and Bairner's (2009) concern that sports studies have expunged social class and economics from their interpretation of hegemony theory.

This chapter has provided a detailed background to the organisation of sport and sports media in France, and has reviewed the local and international literature on sports media content production. It has concluded with an explanation of the theoretical perspective applied to the present research and the next chapter will explore the methodology behind it.

3. METHODOLOGY

Sports media research to date has overwhelmingly focused on analysing the type and amount of coverage afforded to women compared to that of men. Understandably, to arrive at the conclusion that sportsmen receive more exposure than sportswomen, quantitative analyses have been prevalent among this vast body of research. Measurement, and in particular the frequency of occurrences, is a distinctive feature of quantitative analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Denscombe, 2007). However, to be able to understand the reasoning behind sports media producers' choices in what their audiences get to see and read, researchers must necessarily go out into the field to speak to those responsible. For this reason, a qualitative approach to data collection for this study was requisite. Unlike quantitative enquiry, it favours researcher immersion in, and interaction with, the phenomenon under study (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Creswell, 2003). As patterns emerge during data collection, qualitative research allows for the refinement of research questions, whereas evolution of methodology is discouraged in quantitative research to preclude bias in results (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Creswell, 2003). Essentially interpretive, qualitative research seeks to uncover the meaning of data and is therefore more suited to this exploratory case study.

Wu (2008) describes sports-media production as occurring at three levels: the macro level, where the primary focus is on sports industry and media interdependence; the organisational level, where production of mediated sports is analysed; and the individual level, where the habits, relationships, characteristics and actions of those creating the texts are studied. This qualitative study concentrates on the last level, to investigate the role sports-media makers play in the construction of gendered coverage, as it is an area that has received surprisingly little scholarly attention to date.

This study was inspired by the comprehensive content production study undertaken in the Netherlands by Knoppers and Elling (2004) and as such, there are some similarities to that study. This study too has a national focus, with participants being drawn uniquely from the mainstream

national press and television media. In the Dutch study, less than 50% of participants were decision makers.

Limitations

Budget and timing constraints only permitted a one-off study to be undertaken, however ideally this research should be repeated within five years to give a longitudinal comparison of the state of gendered sports-media production in France. Compared to one-off cross-sectional studies, longitudinal research provides the opportunity for more meaningful learning and understanding of the topic under study (Stablein & Frost, 2004). In particular, a longitudinal study would offer useful insight into any changes in the attitude and conduct of new recruits/media graduates who have gained promotion to decision-making levels and have been exposed to workplace culture and ideologies. If and how more experienced sports media producers adapt to environmental change within the sports media sector could also be compared.

Participants

Following receipt of approval from the ethics committee (Appendix I), an initial approach was made by telephone to chief editors. Gaining access to participants was facilitated by the researcher's contacts within the sports and sports media industries. Amis (2005) stresses the usefulness of networking and relationships in getting access to potential informants.

Participants in this study (n=9) were gathered from male and female sports-media decision-makers (editors, editors-in-chief, department directors). In the seven cases involving male respondents, the interview participant was the person initially contacted. A conscious decision was taken to conduct this study with decision-makers only, as the objective was to identify how sports coverage is determined. Furthermore, of the television media, decision-makers were selected only from those with multi-sport programmes to avoid bias towards one particular sport, such as rugby, for example. Consequently, *TF1*, the free-to-air channel with the highest audience numbers, was excluded as their sports coverage is limited to single-sport programmes. Although the participant total was small in number, it was rich in sports media representation: the decision-makers represented two major national free-to-air (*France 2*, *France 3*)

and two subscriber television channels (*Canal+*, *L'Equipe TV*), the only national daily sports newspaper (*L'Equipe*), one of the two major national daily newspapers (*Le Figaro*), and a high-circulation giveaway broadsheet (*DirectSport*). However unlike the Dutch study, decision makers - those who assign sports to subordinates and who decide and prioritise coverage within their media – comprised 88% of the target sample.

After confirming their profile met research criteria (decision makers from national multi-sport media), permission was sought to conduct an interview. Seven of the nine respondents were male. All were of European descent with ages ranging from 33 to 61 years. Because of the decision-making criteria, participants were very experienced, with the number of years in the media profession extending from 13 to 30. In contrast, experience in their current roles was considerably lower. Five participants had started in their current position within the last twelve months; the remainder (n=4) had been incumbent from 2 to 10 years. All but the two female participants had staff management responsibilities that ranged from 10 to 250 journalistic staff. Participant profiles are summarised in Table 1. Names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

The male/female employment ratio within each media was unknown prior to contact being made, but on the basis that women represent approximately 15% of the journalism profession in France, this percentage was the minimum desired for this study. This was achieved but not without some difficulty. Because of the principal selection criteria (decision-makers), it quickly became apparent that there were very few women in the upper echelons of French sports media fitting this description. On the recommendation of their participant-superiors, two women were identified and interviewed from the written press: one deputy editor and one journalist. Although the latter had no decision-making authority, she did have considerable experience as a sports journalist and worked in a small team, hence the decision to include her in this study.

Terms of data collection and research objectives were explained and interview dates and times agreed. An information sheet (Appendix II) was emailed to each participant in advance of the interview along with a 'consent to interview' form (Appendix III) which was completed and signed on site before interviews were conducted.

Table 1: Participant profiles

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Position	Media experience (yrs)	Time in current role (yrs)	Media type
Florent	M	39	Managing editor	20	0.5	Daily national sports newspaper
Sandrine	F	47	Deputy editor	22	0.8	Daily national sports newspaper
Maurice	M	46	Chief editor	23	1	Daily national newspaper
Linda	F	39	Journalist	16	8	Daily national newspaper
Gaston	M	36	Chief editor	13	0.2	Weekly supplement to free (daily) news broadsheet
Baptiste	M	33	Managing editor	13	2	Cable sports TV
Bertrand	M	50	Managing editor	25	9	National subscriber TV inc. pay-per-view Cable sports TV Cable sports news TV
Leon	M	50	Chief editor	28	1	National free-to-air TV
Hugo	M	61	Deputy managing editor	30	10	National free-to-air TV

Data collection

Consideration was given to using a combination of individual and group interviewing techniques, however low participant numbers did not warrant this. Instead, semi-structured individual interviews were the foundation of data collection. This type of interview, comprised primarily of open-ended questions, is the most common undertaken in qualitative data collection (Amis, 2005; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). Bearing in mind that women in sports-media professions feel a certain amount of pressure to adapt to the male majority (Claringbould et al., 2004), the choice of one-on-one interviews also averted a potentially inhibitive atmosphere that might have arisen from mixed, group interviews. A single interview environment meant respondents were free to express their experiences.

Questions were developed and arranged into an interview schedule, starting with straightforward, closed questions to develop rapport with the interview participant, and then working towards open-ended information-seeking questions. General to specific open-ended questioning is thought to encourage reflection (Amis, 2005; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). Care was taken to design questions that were distinct enough to avoid what Gillham (2005) describes as 'overlapping redundancy', which can cause interviewees to feel they have already provided answers. As such, to verify the quality of interview questions, interviewer techniques and data collected, the initial interview schedule was pre-piloted on a sports journalist acquaintance who was not part of the final research group. Some questions were then deleted or modified in their wording or order in an effort to ensure both focus and flow.

The final version comprised questions naturally leading from one to another, prompting descriptions of the work routines and criteria that lead to journalistic/management choices, implicitly providing an insight into the values of participants. This facilitated the maintenance of good conversation rhythm and a certain freedom for information to be discovered and disclosed (Amis, 2005; Gillham, 2005; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). The interview questions were translated from English (Appendix IV) into French and verified by a (native) French language teacher. This in itself proved to be a useful exercise, as the discussion that developed with the French language teacher helped clarify intended meaning and reduce possible misunderstanding.

The final interview schedule was divided into four parts. Firstly, following several introductory 'warm-up' questions about their own sports interests and participation, the participants were asked to describe their current role as well as their recruitment and promotion processes. They were then questioned on the criteria they employed to decide on and prioritise coverage of sports and athletes. If the information had not already been revealed in previous responses, the source and influence of feedback on decision making was then sought. Finally, participants were asked for their opinion on the amount and nature of women's sports coverage.

While the list and order of questions was not adhered to in the strictest sense, the schedule provided a necessary guideline for the general structure of the interview. As recommended by Gillham (2005), prompts were used to elicit responses to relevant issues that were not spontaneously evoked by interviewees. Notably, reactions were sought on the conclusions of prior content analyses research that showed the decisively gendered nature of French sports-media content.

Although Amis (2005) suggests that the interview location be agreed upon with the participant, it was decided that interviews be conducted in participants' offices. The workplace was preferred to minimise inconvenience but also so the researcher could observe participants in their work environment. Interviewees had no objection to this. The interview location had no influence on either the analysis of data or findings.

Every effort was made to maintain an active role as interviewer, to stimulate in-depth responses relevant to the research topic. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) strongly support active interviewer participation and reject claims that this can lead to data contamination. They view all interviewing as unavoidably collaborative and consider interaction as invaluable to constructing meaning, not contaminating it. They suggest interviewers converse with rather than coax respondents, to encourage interpretations and develop responses (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Nonetheless, to draw out interviewees' perceptions of the gendered nature of sport media, it was important not to bias questions with preconceived ideas or create defensiveness that might block experiences or opinions

from emerging (Amis, 2005; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). To avoid this, and heeding advice from Dutch researcher Annelies Knoppers (personal communication, 8 April 2009), questions specifically relating to gender and the skewed media coverage of women's sports were left until last so that participants were more forthcoming about what informs their practices in determining their media's content.

Interviews lasted on average one hour and were audio-recorded. Audio-recording is the widely accepted standard for documenting interviews (Amis, 2005; Maylor & Blackmon, 2005; Silk, 2005). The downside of audio-taping is that non-verbal cues are missed (Gillham, 2005), however significant observations were noted by hand. The researcher's profile (adult female, foreigner, sports background, respected profession) may have contributed to the extent and nature of the information divulged during interviews. Denscombe (1998, in Amis, 2004) suggests that an interviewer's age, class, sex, ethnicity and level of education can affect the level and honesty of information an interviewee will provide. Indeed, initial curiosity and wariness subsided following the uncontroversial introductory questions. Participants then seemed to be quite open and expansive in their responses and did not appear to formulate answers in order to remain politically correct, as Chapter 4 (Findings and Discussion) will illustrate.

Data analysis

As this was the first sports-media study of its kind carried out in France, a content as well as ethnographic approach was taken to data analysis. Wilkinson (2004) explains that content analysis looks for recurrent instances in the data set and often incorporates a quantitative aspect (such as measuring the frequency of recurrences). This was useful in determining common themes and establishing data code sets. Ethnographic analysis addresses the contextual 'how' and 'why' of what takes place between participants in select data bytes, to capture meanings attributed to actions (Wilkinson, 2004). These are often illustrated through the use of quotations (Silk, 2005; Wilkinson, 2004) and have accordingly been employed to this effect in the Findings and Discussion chapter. Silk (2005) is strongly in favour of ethnographic work in sports studies and believes it is useful in developing a critical consciousness of the subject.

Interviews were transcribed with the (paid) assistance of a native French speaker to ensure that nuances and relevant expressions were not overlooked. A confidentiality agreement was signed by the transcriber to protect interviewees and data. Given the researcher's relative inexperience in data analysis, consideration was given to both manual and computerised coding of data transcriptions. Ritchie and Spencer (1994, cited in Silk, 2005) recommend a five step "framework" for hands-on analysis to determine meaning, salience and connections in data. The five steps involve familiarisation with data, identification of a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) suggest however that the depth, detail and rigour of data analysis can be considerably improved with the use of computer-assisted software (CAS). Furthermore CAS can be particularly useful when there are budget and time constraints (Stewart et al., 2007).

Accordingly, several CAS programmes were considered with specific regard to the research question and methodological approach. As this research includes an ethnographical as well as textual analysis to help establish the extent to which sports-media production is gendered, programmes not able to handle multimedia data were ruled out. The ability to accept French language transcriptions was also obligatory and severely reduced the number of CAS programmes that could be considered. Of the qualitative data analysis software fitting these restrictive criteria, NVivo version 8, released in April 2009, was judged the most appropriate as it allows for the coding and analysis of transcribed audio recordings in French, while retaining the ability to interface in English.

The interview transcriptions in French were printed as Word documents and re-read several times for familiarity. Key concepts were noted manually into the margins of transcriptions and then reviewed using Ritchie and Spencer's (1994, cited in Silk, 2005) five steps. The interviews (in French) were then imported into NVivo 8 and coded (in French and English) using the interview questions as guidelines. The use of both manual and computerised analysis helped reach a balanced reflection of the interviews, whilst avoiding interpretive bias as much as possible. Dimensions of codes emerged during this process and were refined into

common categories. As an example, the word “passionné⁵” surfaced frequently when participants spoke of both their own role and their staffing criteria. The raw text was margin-marked accordingly and relevant extracts coded and sorted as “passionné” in NVivo 8. An identical procedure was used to identify other terms and expressions used to describe participants’ roles and staffing strategies. Where crossover of ideas permitted, two similar concepts were merged. This was the case with comments made about being single and the high divorce rate in the profession. Finally, a review of the coded French texts enabled encapsulation of categories into five key themes, which translated into English as: ideal profile, feedback, sports selection, women’s sport and blame. The next chapter discusses the findings in light of these themes.

⁵ passionate

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter draws on the responses from interviews, highlighting and discussing the major issues raised. It is acknowledged that sport media texts are produced in an institutional environment where “structures, practices and ideologies govern the nature of the production process” (Whannel, 2009, p.75). With this in mind, findings have been grouped into five key themes, reflecting responses that emerged from the main areas of questioning and tied back into the research objective of ascertaining how sports media producers make their coverage choices:

(I) Ideal Profile provides insight into the human resource context in which decision makers see they operate;

(II) Feedback highlights how decision makers perceive stakeholder opinions, notably those of their readers or viewers;

(III) Sports Selection details the criteria decision makers purport to use to determine and prioritise sports and athlete coverage;

(IV) Women’s Sport, decision makers explain why they think women’s sport receives less coverage than men’s; and lastly in

(V) Blame, who or what are seen as responsible for this disparity is exposed.

Throughout this chapter, findings are analysed and discussed with respect to previous studies and literature, and links drawn between themes where assertions overlap or are contradicted. Verbatim responses from participants, translated from French into English, have been liberally included to illustrate findings.

(I) IDEAL PROFILE

All but one of the participants graduated from journalism school, with the exception being a business management school graduate. The average age of respondents was 44½ and the average number of years’ experience in media/journalism was 21. Seven participants had staff management

responsibilities, but all were asked for their opinion, based on their vast experience, of the ideal profile for their job. They each shared the view that a journalism degree was requisite nowadays for entering the sports media profession whereas in the past it might not have been so. All expressed a passion for sport and saw this as indispensable in those aspiring to sports journalism or sports media management careers:

To do this job, I think above all you have to be super-passionate about sport. Someone who just simply likes sport will be sick of it after three weeks. [Bertrand]

You have to love sport; you have to be passionate about it. [Maurice]

At the same time as agreeing with the requirement to be enthusiastic about sport, one of the female participants saw this as restrictive to women wanting to become sports journalists:

When I'm asked why there are so few women in sports journalism, I say it's because it has to be a passion. There are very few women in society who are passionate about sport... But when they are passionate, they really are. It's really intense. It's a choice. [Sandrine]

In addition to a passion for sport, the sports media decision-makers judged willingness, openness and a good state of mind important factors in their idea profile. They also saw flexibility as vital to surviving in the profession, a factor that also emerged in Claringbould et al.'s (2004) study of Dutch sports journalists. One participant's comments summed up the general consensus:

You can't count your hours. In this business, the work hours are very flexible. [Gaston]

The need for flexibility appears to lead to constraints of its own. Six participants highlighted the social complications of being in the media, and sports media in particular, and the resultant high divorce rate. All but one of the male participants was divorced. Several commented that "being single would be the ideal" (Gaston) or "being single would help" (Florent).

Sandrine remarked that the ideal profile would be “male, for sure, with regards to family life. It’s easier for a man to say ‘I’ll be home late’ than a woman”, adding that she had ventured into motherhood at the age of 40 because her work commitments had prevented this happening earlier.

Overall, it was acknowledged that the profession of sports journalist was difficult to navigate in respect of work-life balance, but as Sandrine conceded, “you know that up front. It’s not a trap you fall into. As the years go by you realise that it’s complicated to manage. But it’s a choice you make.” From the number of years all participants have been in the sports media profession, it seems apparent that the irregular work schedules are not perceived as a social roadblock, despite the personal toll. This propensity for professional dedication fits with Robinson’s (2005) image of the ideal journalist, one who is always available even at the expense of family demands.

According to research undertaken by Miloch, Pedersen, Smucker and Whisenant (2005) and Hardin and Whiteside (2009), women are more affected by this than men, who are less encumbered by the responsibilities of the domestic quotidian. As Sandrine’s resigned comment confirms, the arduous work schedule is accepted as a necessary sacrifice in the pursuit of a sports media career (Hardin & Whiteside, 2009). This may explain the paltry number of women embarking on or remaining in sports media careers. Sandrine remarked that very few of the (few) women journalists at her paper had family lives. As Robinson (2008) points out, in spite of their increased number in the work force, women still bear the brunt of managing home lives, whereas men’s involvement in family routines has barely changed. Working women still have to juggle their professional and domestic obligations.

Resistance to blithe acceptance of male-dominated standards, norms and work practices may come as the numbers of women in sports media increase. Although far from achieving parity, according to Hardin and Whiteside (2009), any figure above 15% (as is the case in France) moves the minority out of tokenism and into critical mass, “where they may be more likely to create change benefiting them directly” (p.631). However studies have shown that women in sports media tend to accept the inherent culture and structure as a way of fitting in (Claringbould et al.,

2004; Creedon, 1998; Creedon & Cramer, 2007; Hardin & Shain, 2006; Hardin & Whiteside, 2009; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). While positive about the increasing number of female sports journalists joining their ranks, responses from female participants in this study showed a certain resignation that their profession will remain a male domain, especially at the decision making level:

It's not an accident that there isn't a woman in the hierarchy here. I don't think there will ever be... The environment is still extremely misogynist... They (male colleagues) are still a tribe. When a man is part of a group, he's doesn't feel threatened. [Sandrine]

Could I become chief editor one day? I don't know. In the absolute, I don't know. There are always bosses here that think a woman has no place in sport. [Linda]

Any move by (male) management to facilitate the work-life balance for women would compromise male dominance of the profession and challenge the hegemonic masculinity that is so closely associated with sports media (Miloch et al., 2005). There is little evidence to suggest the situation for women is about to change in France, particularly while women remain so under-represented at decision making level and while the principal barrier appears to be the common acceptance that the sports media profession is a male terrain.

(II) FEEDBACK

The importance of audience feedback varied among respondents, despite all saying they undertook audience surveys of some kind. Seven said they saw value in seeking audience opinions. Florent emphasised that formal audience surveys were useful for finding out what interests readers as well as confirming what editors already knew. Those most actively monitoring audience opinions were the subscriber-based media that are reliant on subscriptions for the majority of their revenue. The typical surveys undertaken were described as "seen and read"⁶, referring to the type of questions asked to audiences. Bertrand, the managing editor of the sports arms of a pay television channel, explained:

⁶ in French, « vu/lu »

We are continually looking at surveys of subscriber motivations, audience numbers and satisfaction rates... We are very conscious of the number of subscribers, the audience and how satisfied they are.

His competitor at another pay television station adopts a similar approach to monitoring audience feedback:

We have a database of 700,000 people.... We undertake a monthly survey... We compare the major sports events with previous years. We watch what's happening in the sport business, what the public wants... We adapt as a result of our environment, our audience... It's a continuum. [Baptiste]

However, despite a general discourse that audience feedback was welcome and of some use, subsequent remarks contradicted this somewhat. Florent stated that while he never ignored feedback and replied personally to all letters to the editor, survey results were "complicated. It's about finding the right balance". Bertrand commented that with survey analyses, "you can deduce what you want from them". Linda was of the same mind:

Readership surveys are never very clear. The reader isn't a priority. If it costs too much to add an extra page, management won't do it, even if the readers want it.

These findings on audience feedback show both similarities and differences to previous research. In contrast to studies carried out in other countries (Bruce et al., 2007; Creedon & Smith, 2007; Gumbel, 2007), it appears that French sports media do undertake formal audience surveys. However, as with those same foreign studies, French sports media decision makers also appear to place importance on their personal assumptions and beliefs about what their audiences should see and read. Their claims that they value audience opinions seem exaggerated when their comments are scrutinised:

The audience for us is very important... We never ignore feedback but you have to consider whether comments are representative. We're a public service; we're at the service of everyone and no-one. [Hugo]

We're receptive to letters from readers, people complaining, etc. We take on board their comments but they don't have any influence. [Gaston]

You can't always take surveys at face value. You can learn from them... but you shouldn't overturn things because readers say "I want more of this or that". [Sandrine]

I'm very suspicious of audience surveys... Surveys aren't essential in our editorial choices. They can direct us, help us... Often when the audience speaks out, it's to complain. [Leon]

Feedback and surveys seem to corroborate their own editorial decisions, rather than serve as sources of inspiration or motivators for change. When audience opinions differ from those of decision makers, their views are dismissed. Furthermore, surveys seem to be mostly retrospective. Opinions are sought on what has been seen or read by audiences in the *past*. It is not clear that audiences are ever really consulted about what they would like to see or read in the *future*. Instead, conclusions are drawn about past sports programming choices in which the audience had no say. Such conclusions serve to comfort sports media content decisions, giving credibility to the dominant programming of men's sports, loosely under the guise of yielding to what the audience wants.

(III) SPORTS SELECTION

When asked on what basis sports or athletes were chosen and prioritised for inclusion in their media, including choices for 'front page', responses were consistently linked to three criteria: newsworthiness, nationalism and notoriety.

Newsworthiness

Print and television media concurred conclusively that the principal criteria for selection was the news value of a sports result or performance. Newsworthiness was delineated by the sporting calendar of events, which as Florent pointedly remarked "is not so rich that there is much discussion or many choices to be made." He refers to the cyclical nature of the

competitive sports season (e.g. annual VI Nations' rugby and Roland Garros Open, four-yearly Olympic Games), which both media and audiences are aware of long before they occur (Wu, 2008). The predictability of the sports calendar not only provides a steady supply of news but also, according to Wu (2008), reinforces encoded messages about, for example, gender, through the "unconscious patterning of everyday behaviour" (p.157). The predictable calendar of sports helps explain why a handful of sports dominate media coverage (Wu, 2008).

What we theme our programmes around revolves around the news – the recent events. [Bertrand]

We focus on the events that'll happen during the week. We look for the major sports in the calendar of events, the "must haves". [Gaston]

We try and construct a paper based on the calendar of events and what we think our reader will be interested in. [Florent]

The quality of a performance and the level and impact of a result were key determinants defined by participants in qualifying newsworthiness. This finding is comparable to Knoppers and Elling's (2004) most cited criterion, objectivity, which referred to top performance or achievement and was used by Dutch journalists to justify their 'objective' selection choices. For participants in this present study, results and performance were naturally equated to victory.

First criteria: performance. It's the quality of the result that counts. [Leon]

It's the performance... the result that counts and the manner in which victory was achieved. [Hugo]

It depends on who was beaten, the level and impact of the competition; if it's a world championship, national championship or just an ordinary game. [Florent]

For me, the front page is about victory, success. [Linda]

Nationalism

A winning performance alone was nonetheless deemed insufficient to guarantee exposure, let alone front page or lead item positioning. Decision-makers also stipulated that if the team or athlete was French, this considerably augments the chances of favourable coverage. Knoppers and Elling (2004) also found that nationalism played a part in the content selection of Dutch sports media. As with this present study, nationalism was closely tied to their top performance (objectivity) criterion.

It's primarily about patriotism, where France is triumphing. [Linda]

For the little sports to exist, it's essential there's a French champion. It helps our readers get interested... It's very much related to whether they are French or not. It's quite chauvinistic⁷. [Sandrine]

I also prioritise French victories; we're quite patriotic... As soon as France wins, it becomes an 'in' sport [Hugo]

Notoriety

Completing the sports selection criteria trifecta, notoriety was cited by all participants (n=9) as an interrelated factor in coverage choices. Notoriety was defined in terms of popularity, reputation and renown. The more popular the sport or the more interesting an athlete's personality, the greater the likelihood of attracting media attention. This finding has perhaps surprisingly, not emerged in other content production studies, although admittedly such studies have been few.

Participants credited the notoriety of a sport or athlete to enhancing audience numbers and sales of their media, exposing the undercurrent of commercial logic that weighs in on editorial choices.

The emblematic figures in sport interest us more than the second tier, who have very little to say and don't sell very well. [Maurice]

⁷ translated from the French *chauvin*, which means to show a limitless patriotism or excessive preference for one's country, people, region or village.

Personalities count... It's the (sportsperson's) impact on the public that either works or not. [Florent]

If they have a bland personality that doesn't gel with the public, then they won't be of interest to anybody. There have been plenty of great, great champions but who haven't interested the public. People haven't felt any connection to them. [Sandrine]

Florent stated that notoriety played a role in his coverage choices of athletes more than sports. He used Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt as an example of an exceptional athlete whose charisma is such that the public is drawn to want to know more about him. In contrast, he said, although American swimmer Michael Phelps has a debatably more impressive sporting record, "he has no charisma, and that, we need. We're in a universe where that counts."

Indeed, notoriety's influence in coverage choices seems such that editors are prepared to overlook sporting ability in preference of the celebrity factor. French rugby player Sébastien Chabal was cited by several (n=4) as an example of notoriety gained because of persona, rather than on-field skill. As Leon explained:

If we bring Chabal onto our programme it's because he's a personality, it's his look. He's the only one the general public recognises... He's better known than Vincent Clerc who is certainly a better player than him.

These participants were not particularly at ease with giving prominence to an athlete with dubious sporting talent but seemed resigned to comply in order to maintain or increase their audiences and therefore their commercial revenue.

Notoriety counted especially for front page/lead item choices. Even when the two other principal criteria (newsworthiness, nationalism) were met, if the sport was considered minor or the athlete(s) relatively unknown, the result/performance might well not make the front page or be given prominence elsewhere. Gaston was quite clear, "The criterion for me for

the front page is that they be known to the mass public.” Florent articulated the bottom line sentiment:

It’s not the same thing to be world champion of football and world champion of squash. There’s a hierarchy of choice.

Football

The distinction made between football and squash is not innocuous. Football has traditionally been considered the national sport in France. Bairner (2001) describes a national sport as one with which the people of a country identify strongly. Respondents in this study attributed football’s domination in France to two factors: simplicity (easy to play and understand) and the country’s hosting and winning of the 1998 World Cup. Responses from every participant showed that all other sports take a back seat when football is included in the sports coverage mix. This became evident when they were asked to choose their front page/lead item from a selection of four European championship events. This question was formulated with the intention of confirming the researcher’s supposition that football would be the first choice of sports media decision makers.

Participants were asked to choose which of four events they would put on the front page of their paper or show live on television. Of the event choices, three were European championship finals where, hypothetically, a French athlete or team was competing/had won. The European championship football match was purposely chosen as a quarter final rather than a final, to see how this affected decisions. The sports were a mix of both men’s and women’s, and team and individual events. Respondents were asked to pick their lead story (1) and prioritise the remaining events (2, 3, 4). Table 2 summarises event choices and results. Where a categorisation is absent in the table, participants had indicated that those events would not receive any coverage in their medium.

Table 2: Front page choice

Question: "If the following events were held on the same day and were won by a French team or athlete, which would you choose for your front page/lead item?"

Choices (in order asked):	European championship women's team gymnastics final	European individual championship men's figure ice-skating final	Bordeaux football team in UEFA Champions League ¼ final	European athletics championship women's marathon final
Florent	2=	2=	1	4
Sandrine	3	2	1	4
Maurice		2	1	
Linda			1	4
Baptiste			1	
Bertrand	2=	2=	1	4
Gaston	3	2	1	2
Hugo	2	1	4	3
Leon	3	2	1	4

Participants were asked to explain their choices. Eight picked football as their first choice without hesitation, describing it as the national sport that guaranteed an audience. The exception, Hugo, was asked why he rated football last. He conceded that he would "normally" give football prominence but had thought the question was gender slanted. This was an interesting reaction as at that point in the interview schedule, questions specifically relating to the gendered nature of sports media coverage had not been addressed. Furthermore, his first choice was nonetheless a men's sport. Most participants were ambivalent about the other sports. The marathon was described as a spectator, rather than a media, event and ranked last by most. Gaston was the exception, but his choice most likely reflected his own participation in the sport. The men's individual ice skating choice narrowly outranked that of the women's gymnastics team. Participants explained that it had been a long time since a Frenchman had won a European title in this sport.

On analysis of participants' justifications, it would be accurate to describe editorial priorities as focusing firstly on football then on other sports. The popularity of football was overwhelmingly cited as sufficient in itself to take centre stage in sports selection and front page choices. Bertrand encapsulated this in saying "football is above everything else by light years." The economic importance of football was clear and evident:

We know that in France, first of all there is football, then there is football and after that, there is football. It's football that makes or breaks a programme. It's the most watched sport on television...
[Leon]

Basically, football occupies about 40% of coverage ... It's football that lifts sales; it's what puts food on the table. [Baptiste]

We can tell how an edition has sold based on what we've put on the front page. We know that football sells more than badminton.
[Florent]

The impossibility of *not* including football was explained in terms of audience wants and needs. Concomitantly football was seen as synonymous with guaranteed sales and better audience ratings. The spectre of economic survival in the struggling media industry was never very far from participants' minds:

The priority is what the reader wants. The priority is to sell newspapers. Readers buy our paper primarily for football. [Sandrine]

When we ask readers what sport makes them buy our paper, 80% reply: football. That doesn't mean they only buy it for football, but it's primarily for that. [Florent]

For our 70 minute programme, we'll include up to 30 minutes of football... because we know more people will be watching, more people will be interested. We know that it works. We know that football will give us our biggest audience. [Leon]

There was the occasional expression of 'exasperation' at football's dominance. Gaston attributed the emphasis given to the sport to the French population being "absolute maniacs about football. It's too, too much!" Yet at the same time he readily acknowledged and accepted that it was mostly football that drew readers and advertisers to his newspaper.

Resistance of sorts to football's hegemony was expressed in one of the leading media for sport in France. The managing editor explained his conundrum:

Our surveys tell us that we have too much football coverage and at the same time not enough. Those that say there's too much still buy the paper to read about football... It's important to put something other than football on the front page at every opportunity, to send a message that we remain a multisport paper. [Florent]

His deputy editor, Sandrine did not disagree with the domination of football, but did add "It's a breath of fresh air to put something other than football (on the front page). But it's not easy." Maurice best summed up the influence of football on editorial decisions in saying "We're obliged to cover football. Everyone is obliged to cover football."

Football's hold on the French sports media is a phenomenon shared by many countries. The International Sports Press Survey (ISPS) (2005) revealed that football in Europe occupies 50.9% of the written sports press pages, far ahead of the next most prominent sport, cycling (6.3%). It reflects football's position as the national sport of those countries surveyed (ISPS, 2005). Bairner (2009) contends that sports considered 'national' are more likely to receive widespread attention than other sports. This is consistent with Knoppers and Elling's (2004) finding that football in the Netherlands is considered the number one sport, topping the A-list of an informal sports categorisation used by journalists to prioritise coverage.

Football sits supremely at the top of an unwritten sports media hierarchy in France too. All other sports are supposedly subject to the selection criteria of newsworthiness, nationalism and notoriety for a spot in the media, as Table 3 encapsulates. Yet as the next section shows, when women's sports are singled out for scrutiny, these criteria fall largely by

the wayside and a different set of standards is applied by media decision makers.

(IV) WOMEN'S SPORTS

The questions pertaining to women's sport coverage were deliberately raised last. The intention was to elicit as much information as possible beforehand on their purported editorial decision-making process, in order to then compare how stated criteria compared to actual practice.

None of the participants was surprised to hear that sports media content analyses (worldwide) show that women's sports receive considerably less coverage than men's. For seven participants this was 'normal'. The overall impression given during interviews was that participants were certain their decision making was objective and gender neutral:

When there is a good performance, whether it's a man or a woman, I concentrate on the performance. Ah, otherwise, I'd be an old macho... I try to be objective... To me, there aren't men and women; there are athletes. [Hugo]

We're not fixated on any one particular sport. We talk about elite sport as well as leisure sports... What counts is that the subject is original and that there are good photos. [Gaston]

I have never rationalised in terms of men's sport and women's sport... We talk about performance so if a woman has broken a world record, we'll talk about it... We try and give equal treatment. [Sandrine]

I don't think there is discrimination in the French press. [Maurice]

When asked therefore to explain the huge disparity in sportsmen's and women's media coverage, participants' justifications fell into the following, often overlapping, categories – exceptional performance, appearance, some sports aren't for girls and inferior standards.

Exceptional Performance

In order for women to receive (more) coverage, the previously expressed principal criterion of newsworthiness (performance and results) is not enough. Lemieux (2000) had previously concluded that winning at elite level was necessary for French sportswomen to gain media attention. Similarly, Knoppers and Elling (2004) found that top performance within an implicit sports hierarchy was the criteria used by Dutch sports journalists to decide whether women's sports received media coverage. However this present study has identified that French media require a performance or result to also be *exceptional*. Winning in itself is insufficient, even at elite level. This finding is new to sport media content production studies and offers a deeper insight into the discrepancy between decision makers' discourse and actual practice.

The researcher was 'reminded' by some participants that sports media audiences are predominantly male with the underlying assumption being that men do not care much for women's sport and will only take notice of extraordinary results:

In the absolute – this will make you laugh – it has to be either a great story or an exceptional performance for it to be of interest. After all, our target audience is 80% men. [Baptiste]

The audience is after all essentially masculine... Other than an out-of-the-ordinary performance by a (women's) national team, it's not (women's sport) that attracts an audience. [Bertrand]

As prior research (e.g. Knoppers & Elling, 2004) and this current study have shown, the media claim to treat top male and female sports performances equally, but this new finding of 'exceptional performance' illustrates just how hollow that criterion is. It substantiates claims that decision making in sport media is manifestly lopsided when women's sports are singled out for examination. Furthermore, such decisions are rarely questioned, either by peers or the public. The unequal standards applied to women's sport lend support to assertions of seditious practices to protect the masculine hegemonic position in sport (Creedon, 1998; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

Participants in this study used the Olympic Games to support their 'exceptional performance' standard for women. Five participants, including both female participants, indicated that success at the Olympics was the quintessential outstanding performance that would *always* ensure coverage, whereas other competitions were subject to additional selection criteria. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that gender identity takes a backseat to national identity when the nationalistic zeal of the Olympics is factored in (Capranica et al., 2005; Knoppers & Elling, 2001). It may also explain why participants had the impression they were objective in their Olympic coverage choices and treat men's and women's success equally. Yet as the following comments show, women's sporting performances are still measured against those of men, countering claims of objectivity and gender neutrality:

Take the Olympics. We give as much weight to a medal won by a woman as that won by a man because it's of equal value. It has to be an exceptional performance in a sport of note. We are exigent.
[Hugo]

When it's the Olympics, I don't discriminate between a woman and a man. A female 100m champion is worth as much to me as a man.
[Maurice]

The Olympics were also cited as the reason for waning coverage of women's sports. Maurice and Gaston pointed to the 2008 Beijing Olympics where, for the first time in several Olympiads, French women had taken home fewer medals than men. "As a result", Gaston said, "we logically talked less about women." However, research shows that even when French sportswomen have taken home more medals than their male counterparts, media coverage has never exceeded that accorded to men. Articles written about French sportswomen in the major written press during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney represented only 34.2% of total coverage (Capranica et al., 2005). Media claims of equitable coverage when a female sports performance is deemed exceptional therefore fail to hold true when the results of content analyses are scrutinised. Furthermore, the media spotlight for two weeks every four years hardly compensates for the negligible coverage accorded at other times.

Appearance

Contextual factors also contribute to decisions as to whether women's sports and sportswomen get media attention when national identity is *not* at stake. Although interview participants were adamant that an exceptional performance determined media coverage of women's sport, the physical appearance of female athletes materialised as a contributing factor in their decision making.

If a girl has won and she is nice, cute, funny and if she speaks well, perhaps it's her that I'll lead with. If she's well known, that is... She'd have priority over a guy. [Hugo]

It's better if she is shapely and cute than a shot put thrower, that's for sure. [Leon]

Some rationalised the importance of appearance as responding to audience expectations, a reason also highlighted in Knoppers and Elling's (2004) study and justified by the assumption that audiences are predominantly male:

Men don't really like watching women's sports, unless it's to watch a cute tennis player or a real star, an exceptional champion that plays really well. [Bertrand]

There was a real buzz over the handball team. It was a good mix of women's handball with girls that were physically normal. Just like the men's team, they attracted chicks into the stadiums. It's that relationship of spectacular sport, good looking girls who are nice as well... and a winning team. As a result, there was a real buzz and super audience numbers. [Baptiste]

Paradoxically, some who stated that looks played a part in getting media coverage acknowledged the injustice in this.

Looks help... obviously it helps but you can't just focus on that. I don't overdo that. [Hugo]

It's complicated for women. Guys don't have to be super good looking. If they play well and are strong, well, that's all that's needed. Girls need to have charm and beauty too. It's much harder for them. [Leon]

This last comment in particular highlights the inherent difference in the perception of men's and women's sports, and reflected in media coverage. Sportsmen are characterised by their physical strength and power; sportswomen by their physical looks and femininity (Gumbel, 2007). Sexualising sportswomen in this way distances them from their sporting accomplishments and perpetuates the dominant belief that sport is a masculine preserve (Creedon, 1998; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Gumbel, 2007). As seen in several comments, the seemingly unconscious use by several male participants of the term 'girl' instead of 'woman' further exacerbates this by infantilising sportswomen. Such tactics reinforce men's sport as the default norm and women's sport as the 'other' (Duncan, 2006).

Interestingly, neither of the female participants in this study made any reference to appearance as a consideration in their coverage of women's sport. Both however commented that at some point in their careers they had 'reprimanded' their male colleagues for references made in articles about the physical appearance of women athletes. Sandrine was of the opinion that such comments were less frequent in the written press, a result, she said of the progressive retirement of 'old school' journalists. She nonetheless believed that sexist comments were still widespread in television commentaries.

The importance some participants gave to the looks and physical appearance of sportswomen was linked to their views on the suitability or otherwise of certain sports to female participation, as illustrated by Hugo's comment: "I don't want to be mean, but girls who play rugby aren't honouring womanhood... There are some very beautiful women cyclists but the majority unfortunately isn't that great. Women's football is the same. It's traumatic." The connection between appearance/ attractiveness and feminine-appropriate sports and behaviour shifts the focus once again from athletic ability. In doing so, the symbolic threat to the masculine

hegemony of sport is reduced (Duncan & Messner, 1998; Gumbel, 2007), as the next pretext for the disparate coverage also shows.

Some sports aren't for girls

The quasi absence of media coverage of certain sports was also attributed to the unsuitability of those sports for women. Contact sports such as rugby, football and boxing were regarded by decision makers as essentially masculine and therefore aesthetically unpleasing when played by women. Sandrine attributed this attitude to the French culture, saying that some sports are considered "a male domain and it shouldn't be any other way." Other (male) participants were quite resolute in their view that certain sports just shouldn't be played by women:

There are sports that are less compatible to women than others. I'm not sure that rugby is 100% suited to women. [Martin]

I think there are some sports that aren't suitable... I don't say to women 'you can't do this or that' but I think that there are sports that are less suitable for women than others. [Hugo]

People more readily accept disciplines that are gracious, that valorise women... Physical contact sports, people are less fond of those. [Gaston]

There was even a sense that some sports considered fundamentally masculine had been (mis)appropriated by women:

(Basketball) is a women's sport. Football is a sport that has become feminine... Women's basketball is a sport in its own right. It's not a man's sport played by girls. So we don't have any problem about putting women's basketball on the front page. [Florent]

Leon was the most virulent about this; his comments more a reflection of his aversion to women wanting, in his view, to be treated on a par with men. He had no compunction about expressing his opinion and was not at all self-conscious that it was to a female interviewer:

What annoys me is that they (women) want to copy men. That horrifies me. The chick that says, hmm, I want to play rugby *like a man* – I say to myself, why on earth does a woman think she has to play rugby?

There were some sports that participants identified as more 'natural' for women. Leon again was of such a view, stating "there are some sports played more naturally such as tennis or athletics where there's a mix of men and women participating. There, it's ok." His older colleague, Hugo agreed:

Tennis is beautiful, swimming magnificent, figure skating is more for women than men, I think. Gymnastics too... I don't think I would be as good on a beam as a female, just like I don't think a woman would be as good on a bike as me. That's the reality.

It is unsurprising then that participants frequently cited former champion swimmer Laure Manaudou as an example of a sportswoman who has received considerable media coverage. As a young, attractive, charismatic Olympic gold medalist and multiple world record breaker, participating in an individual sport considered gender-appropriate, Manaudou fulfilled the implicit media criteria applied to sportswomen. Not so fortunate are her counterparts competing in less acceptable sports, particularly combative team sports, where media coverage in France is negligible (Delorme & Raul, 2009).

Globally, sports labeled or understood as feminine are clearly regarded as more tolerable to the male decision makers in this present study than participation in sports that impinge on male territory. This resistance by French media to women participating in sports considered essentially masculine converges with prior sports media research. Lemieux (2000) found that both male and female journalists in France were adverse to women's participation in rugby because the sport was traditionally considered a male domain. Knoppers and Elling (2004) also found that sports such as football were considered by Dutch sports journalists to be more naturally suited to men. In a longitudinal study of more than ten years, Messner et al. (2001), Duncan and Hasbrook (2002) and Duncan (2006) suggest that media 'marking' of certain sports as female-

appropriate is a recurrent discursive strategy aimed at delineating women's sport from men's. They discerned that aesthetically pleasing individual 'feminine' sports receive more favourable media treatment than 'masculine' team sports. Gumbel (2007) also refers to research that shows sportswomen receive more (positive) coverage when participating in gender-appropriate sports that are considered socially acceptable.

Inferior Standard

Not only were some sports considered not suited to women, but there was uniformity in responses that much of women's sport was played at a level considered inferior to that of the implicit benchmark, men's sport. The purported mediocre calibre of play and competition was the principal reason given by both male and female participants in this study for the low levels of coverage of sportswomen and women's sports, and notably, team sports. 'It's not the same quality' was a recurrent phrase, echoed in the following extracts:

We don't cover the French women's football team like we cover the men's team, that's for sure, because from a sporting perspective, it's not interesting. The standard isn't there. [Florent]

The standard of those championships (football, basketball, handball, rugby) is such that they are way lower than men's. As a result, in my opinion, they get the coverage they deserve. [Sandrine]

I react in terms of television impact. It's the level of performance and audience interest... There's also the physical aspect – (men) hit harder, jump higher, run faster. On television, people prefer to see the 100m run at 9.6 seconds than 10.58 because it's faster. [Bertrand]

What really annoys me, frankly – and again this is very macho – is when I think how second rate the level of women's tennis was at Roland Garros this year. It was crap. And they earn the same pay. Phhh! [Leon]

Sandrine, while articulating the same opinion about the standard of play, added that some sports should not be compared in such a way:

I always say that women's football is not the same sport as men's football. Women have far different qualities than men. Men are more physical; women are more technical, suppler. They shouldn't be looked at in the same light as the masculine equivalent.

Her opinion though resonated alone. For the other participants, including the other female participant, the yard stick for women's sport remains that of men's, and it is normal that comparisons be made with the sport as practiced by men. This finding strengthens Messner et al. (2001) and Duncan's (2006) view that the media continue to persist in constructing differences between sportsmen and sportswomen, and is consistent with prior research. The skill level of women's soccer in the Netherlands and rugby in France was taken to be inferior to that of men's (Knoppers & Elling, 2004; Lemieux, 2000). Drawing on interviews with female journalists, Hardin and Shain (2006) concurred with industry assumptions that women's sports competitions were inferior to men's and therefore had diminished value. Pirinen (1997, in Duncan, 2006) concluded that the media often portray women in certain sports as 'less than' their masculine counterparts. Dismissing certain women's sports as substandard and using this as grounds to deny media coverage helps fuel the perception that women's sport is unworthy of a viewer or reader's time. Such exclusionary tactics, whether conscious or not, symbolically deny power to sportswomen (Duncan, 2006; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Schell & Rodriguez, 2000) and help to maintain masculine hegemonic control of mediated sport.

(V) BLAME

Having provided what they espoused as 'valid' reasons for the mediocre coverage afforded to women's sports, participants were asked how women's sport could improve its share of coverage and whether their own media had a role to play in making this happen. This line of questioning touched a nerve. Respondents did not see their media as a centre point for change and deflected responsibility to other quarters. They contended that their audiences, other media and sports federations should be held

responsible and if change were to occur, it was to be led from these three fronts.

It's what the audience wants

Consistent with previous research on sports media content decisions, participants saw media coverage of men's and women's sport as conforming to what the audience wants. The audience for sports media was repeatedly described as primarily male and therefore assumed to be naturally adverse to women's sports. As Baptiste made clear, men like to look at women, but not necessarily sportswomen. Compliance with audiences' supposed wants was reflected by other respondents too:

Several times I've wanted to do stories on remarkable sportswomen... and I've been told 'no, the majority of our readers are guys and that's not the kind of story that's of interest to them.' [Gaston]

The public is, after all, mostly male and less receptive to graceful sports than a female audience. The male audience is more receptive to power, speed, boxing. [Bertrand]

If you look at the structure of the public that watches sports programmes, it's men in the majority. Men are more interested in sport than women. Women don't read sports papers, they don't participate in sport as much, they aren't in front of the tv as much, or in the stadiums. [Leon]

Generally, people are more interested in men's sport. [Maurice]

Sandrine gave the impression of being resigned to the fact that sports media producers and audiences are predominantly male when she commented: "Ninety percent of (sports) journalists are men. They react like men. And ninety percent of our readers are men too. So there you have it."

Attributing sports content decisions to audience demands is a recurrent finding in sports media research (Duncan, 2006; Knoppers & Elling, 2004). Dutch journalists justified their sports coverage priorities by reasoning that

men's sports are what their audiences prefer to read and see, however content decisions were found to often be based on the personal preferences of journalists rather than on actual audience requests (Knoppers & Elling, 2004). This contradiction has also been revealed in this present study, which has highlighted that even when formal feedback surveys are undertaken, audience wishes are not necessarily taken on board. In addition, some decision makers in this study linked the "what the audience wants" argument to economic viability, contending that failure to fulfill the client's needs would result in a sales or audience drop. A similar conclusion was reached by Lemieux (2000) in his study of the insignificant coverage of women's rugby in France. Such reasoning overlooks the fact that audiences have little influence in media content decisions and exposes the incoherencies in purported and actual decision making. It seems that sports that the audience might want will only get coverage as long as they are sports that media decision makers agree with.

It's not our role

While acknowledging that the media scales are not tipped in favour of women's sport and sportswomen, all but one of the decision makers interviewed did not think their media had a role to play in altering this. Only Florent conceded that his paper had a certain responsibility given it decided what exposure sports did or did not receive. Some thought the onus simply should not be on them, while others thought their media had no influence in changing the way things are:

I don't think it's our role at Canal+ to educate people by saying 'look at women's sport, women play sport too'. [Bertrand]

We've got no sway... We are a formidable relay medium but we're not the trigger... We're not here to help them find sponsors. [Leon]

I'm not here to help certain sports develop. [Maurice]

This finding again highlights the discrepancy between discourse and action. Baptiste, for example, had earlier asserted that his media group had an obligation to be exhaustive in its sports coverage. "We cover certain events that are of no interest because we have a sort of public service

mission, even though we're a private enterprise. That's also our point of differentiation." Yet when pressed specifically about improving women's sports coverage, he declared:

We're not a public service. We're a private enterprise and we acknowledge this. It's cynical to say but we have to sell papers... we're not here to help out. It'll be light years before we ever sell 800,000 copies thanks to a women's rugby match and before that happens, we're not going to let the company go under. [Baptiste]

Written press editor Gaston held television accountable for the coverage disparity, suggesting it set the tone for the public to follow and therefore could initiate change. He said "if sportswomen had better exposure on television, it would generate more press articles in its wake." Linda was dubious about television's role as a precursor. She thought that television often takes its lead from the written press, and not just with regard to sport. She believed there was a point when a newspaper of quality and renown should not follow other media. She conceded though that it was not that simple.

In addition to laying blame on television, Gaston also held *L'Equipe* answerable. As the only dedicated sports daily in France he said "they have clout, influence... If we had more clout...I'd be prepared to take the risk (of including more women's sport)." Florent rebuffed the idea that exposure in *L'Equipe* could make or break a sport or athlete. He thought that *L'Equipe* was the only media that gave decent exposure to women's sports and he was reproachful of the media environment generally, saying:

If women's basketball or handball is on the front page, it won't have much of an influence on other (media) that don't believe (in women's sport); that aren't interested. They almost consider it's up to *L'Equipe* to do it and if they don't, it's *L'Equipe's* fault.

No other sports media study to date has specifically examined whether sports media practitioners feel a professional or moral obligation to improve coverage of women's (or other minority) sports. In this regard, this current finding is enlightening in how it reveals the indifference and inertia of media decision makers to change. To a certain extent, this fits

with the “tradition/conservatism” finding of Knoppers and Elling (2004), which highlighted the reluctance of Dutch sports journalists to change their sports selection process. As in their study, this present research illustrates how the one-sidedness of a conservative position serves to maintain the prominence of a certain number of men’s sports to the detriment of women’s sport in particular. Decision makers in this current study fend off any responsibility to increase coverage of women’s sport in much the same way that the journalists interviewed by Knoppers and Elling (2004) construed this same idea as ‘promotional journalism’. On the contrary, as Knoppers and Elling (2004) point out, coverage of men’s sport is seen as giving the audience what they want, not ceding to promotional journalism.

Not professional enough

Rejecting their own media’s responsibility for the feeble coverage of women’s sport, seven participants pointed to national sports organisations (federations), which they said were responsible for the current situation and had a role to play in bringing about change. Sandrine was adamant that “it’s not the media that should create interest. People are either interested or they’re not... It’s the role of federations to create that interest.” She had support from her colleague at a television station:

Federations are primarily responsible. We the media aren’t here to do the job of federations, that is, to promote and develop their sport, irrespective of gender. [Baptiste]

Women’s sports were judged to be less professionally organised and managed than men’s sports, a fault attributed to the federations behind them. Sandrine commented that if coverage of certain women’s sport was to change, a more professional organisational structure was needed within federations. Linda thought that women’s sport had developed more slowly than men’s and correlated the imbalance in organisational professionalism with the perceived marked difference in standards of play and competition between men’s and women’s sports. Florent also linked the lack of professionalism to the disparity in performance levels:

If there was as much money put into women's sport as men's and it was developed as much for commercial reasons, women's sport would be at the same level.

However, Bertrand disagreed: "It's not even a question of performance. I think that men's sport is a lot more professional than women's sport." Both Baptiste and Bertrand claimed that the less significant financial and organisational resources put into some women's sports by federations, combined with the (inferior) skill level, negatively affected the (tele)visual impact. Smaller and older stadiums, fewer spectators and lesser technical infrastructure did not attract or sustain audiences, they postulated. Messner et al. (2001) and Duncan (2006) remarked that sports media producers frequently blame poor audience numbers for their underreporting of women's sports.

Duncan (2006) asks whether the audience is really the culprit and points to the less significant production resources as perhaps inhibiting viewer and readership. Her doubt seems substantiated when comments from participants in this research are taken into account. Bertrand said he puts more cameras and technical support into men's sport than women's because the former is played in bigger stadiums with bigger audiences. Baptiste admitted judging a sport's potential by the number of spectators it attracted to a stadium.

When asked what federations could do then to improve the media profile of women's sport, some respondents suggested that sports organisations adapt the rules or conditions of certain women's sports to make them more popular with spectators and audiences. Maurice was of this opinion, suggesting that it might well prompt an improvement in media coverage. Florent also advocated rule and format adaptations to render some women's sports more spectacular, a criterion he believed played a role in the popularity of some sports. Otherwise, he said, "you force women to be compared to men." He cited basketball as an example of where the rules and court dimensions caused the women's game to seem less impressive than men's:

Why don't women basketballers slam dunk? Because there aren't many women who are 2m tall; women don't have the same muscle

power in their legs and yet the net is placed at 3.05m, just as it is for men. [Florent]

Whereas Florent was conscious that suggesting rule or format changes touched on what he called the “sacrosanct notion of equality”, Leon had no compunction in advocating this idea. Blaming sportswomen rather than sports organisations, his comments continued to reflect his apparent abhorrence for equality in sport: “It’s quite incredible that women have shown so little imagination in... adapting certain sports to make them more attractive. Of team sports, it’s only in volleyball that women have said we’ll lower the net, we’re not going to play just like men.”

There may well be merit in exploring rule and format changes – first and foremost for the benefit of participants - and this is worth further investigation, however it is doubtful that such changes would revolutionise the media’s interest in women’s sport. Any such modification is likely to further exacerbate the perceived difference between men’s and women’s sport. By accentuating differences, the ‘other, lesser’ label evoked by Duncan (2006) would be all the more harder to erase from women’s sport and provide fodder for those seeking to reinforce the masculine hegemonic system in sport.

Grouping findings under five themes, this chapter has detailed the intersecting criteria, practices and decision making patterns of key French sports media managers and discussed the implications from a critical feminist perspective. In the next and final chapter, conclusions are drawn on the role sports media makers have in perpetuating the hegemonic masculinity inherent in sports coverage. Practical recommendations are made for the sports media profession on how treatment of sportswomen and women’s sports can be improved. Directions for future research are also suggested.

5. CONCLUSIONS

By analysing interviews from a critical feminist perspective, this exploratory case study of key French sports media has contributed to an understanding of how sports media coverage decisions are made. Similar to research by Knoppers and Elling (2004), it has shown that an illusion of equity and fairness guides media decision makers' coverage choices through an informal doctrine of selection criteria. When delving below the surface, this prioritisation process is revealed to be less than objective, yet actors are convinced their process is robust. Rather than applied consistently across all sports and both sexes, this study has shown that participants' selection criteria are used to uphold an industry-accepted (male) sports hierarchy, atop which men's football reigns supreme. As with studies undertaken by Knoppers and Elling (2004) and Claringbould et al. (2004), there was almost no distinction in the viewpoints of participants from the written or audiovisual media: public or private, male or female.

Participants in this study oppose any deviation from the 'natural' sports hierarchy in favour of women's sport, which are seen as going against (male) audience wishes and commercially unviable. Findings align with those of Lemieux (2000) that the majority of coverage of women's sports in France centres on socially acceptable individual sports played at elite level and that uphold conventional images of femininity. Interestingly, this study highlighted the unique finding that even then, performances have to be deemed exceptional by media decision makers before they receive due attention. Concomitantly, contact team sports that fall outside the feminine mould and challenge the traditional male dominance of sport are marginalised, irrespective of performance or results. As a result, coverage of women's sport in France continues to lag – in both quality and quantity – behind that of men's. Participants readily acknowledge the disparity, but see no reason to change their model of practice. They generally consider women's sports to be of a lesser standard than men's and some sports as gender inappropriate. The contrary depictions and mixed messages conveyed to audiences about the quality and worthiness of women's sports supports Duncan's (2006) notion of a media ambivalence that creates a pretence of equity in journalism.

Although journalistic principles such as performance and results were championed as the 'objective' basis from which sports coverage decisions are made, this study showed that the principal justification looming over editorial choices is commercial. Fear of losing audience numbers and newspaper sales seem determinant in coverage decisions remaining largely unchallenged within the media itself. With commercial considerations weighing ever present on editorial decisions, the sports media readily embrace the accepted sports hierarchy as a guarantee of economic survival, reinforcing Bairner's (2009) view that market forces influence the hegemonic power balance. Certainly, the findings in this study lend support to previous research that shows sport is still unequivocally a masculine domain, and women's sport considered inferior.

In summary, this study has contributed to the limited knowledge available on sports media production in France and the general literature. It has demonstrated the subtle ways in which the taken-for-granted "maleness" of sport perpetuates hegemonic control over sports media coverage. The findings provided insight into the decision-making process in France, showing that men's sports are posited as the most popular and economically rewarding for media and their audiences. Within the sports media, editorial decisions continue to be made by men, who still dominate management positions of responsibility. These findings concur with Hardin and Shain's (2006) view that men 'own' sports journalism because they 'own' sports. Women's sports continue to be denied access to power through exclusionary tactics, which sports media decision makers deny are intentional, but instead are convinced are normal and right.

Practical Recommendations

The prevailing sports media culture appears to offer little motivation for decision makers to initiate change. This suggests that any major shift in perspective will require strong challenges to come from outside the media industry. It may well be that media audiences can influence future editorial choices. In the context of content production, this present study touched only briefly on audience feedback, however, the findings suggest that many media makers ignored reader and viewer opinion when it did not concur with their own perspective. French sports media should therefore be encouraged to survey their current and potential readers and viewers

on what they would like to see/read *in the future*. This would allow a more accurate light to be shed on sports preferences than the current practice of gathering opinions essentially on *past* content, the selection of which the audiences had no say in. With economic viability at the fore of editorial decisions, sounding out audiences on their preferences might draw media decision makers' attention to sports hitherto ignored, but with media-marketable potential.

Given these findings, for change to occur from within the French sports media, editorial decision makers must first acknowledge that their sports prioritisation and selection process is flawed. If their principal criteria of newsworthiness, nationalism and notoriety are maintained, then they must be applied fairly across all sports and not used as a means to weed out sports considered commercially insignificant. Objective application of criteria would of course rock the traditional sports hierarchy but it would then allow women's and other overlooked sports to gain greater media profile. This would help those sports attract supporters and sponsorship, which in turn would benefit the media (and their commercial stakeholders) by opening up potential new audiences.

Future Directions

This research investigated content production from a critical feminist perspective, taking into account masculine hegemonic influences within the French sports media. Because the findings suggest that sports that sell papers and attract audiences have a strong bearing on media content decisions, the same data could be re-examined from a power control theory/economic interest perspective. As consumers have the power to bring about change, future research could also explore the extent to which the market place may be the ultimate arbitrator of content production practices and decisions in the sports media.

Given that audiences interpret texts differently from producers (Kinkema & Harris, 1998), additional research could focus on the motivations and experiences of media audiences to sports coverage content. This angle of enquiry would offer insight into obstacles preventing readers and viewers from demanding subject matter that falls outside the traditional sports hierarchy, such as women's and other undervalued sports. It would also

provide an independent assessment of audience reactions to texts, validating or contradicting surveys carried out internally by individual media.

It would also be of value to undertake a case study of a sports media organisation that has attempted to cover women's sports on a more substantial scale. Exploring the barriers encountered of going against the tendencies of the mainstream media would make a constructive contribution to the limited body of international research on sports media production.

All but one of the decision makers in this study graduated from journalism school, which prompts consideration for an examination of the sports component of media and journalism courses offered by tertiary education providers. An analysis of study programmes would highlight whether enough emphasis is being placed on sports media, and more specifically, on gendered sports coverage, in preparing future journalists and editors for their profession. This in part would help provide a more complete picture of the issues facing graduates that prevent them from contesting the status quo in sport and sports media.

Final Reflections

During the interviews with the heads of these major French sports media, it was difficult at times not to agree with some of the arguments they put forward. At the time, certain responses to questions about the paltry coverage of women's sports seemed so convincing that I left the interview feeling won over and wondering how anyone could envisage sports media being constructed any differently. It was a challenge then not to approach subsequent interviews subjugated by their seemingly persuasive reasoning. As a consequence, there were moments of doubt during the data collection period that the angle of research taken for this exploratory case study would prove unfruitful.

It was not until the recordings of interviews had been listened to, transcribed and read through that the extent of patterns in the persistent discourse became apparent. This analysis was carried out in French, a language in which I am fluent, but nonetheless, it was a delicate task

translating comments into English without losing the nuance of remarks or putting words in participants' mouths. The initial sentiment I had that sports media heads were right and challengers to the status quo were misguided was turned around after re-reading the interviews. This experience was a salient reminder of how easy it is to be drawn into and accept the dominant (masculine hegemonic) discourse and consequently how difficult it is for minority groups, such as female journalists, to counter the culture of male dominance in sport. The two female participants in this study bear witness to this. Although they said they contested inappropriate comments or attitudes of their male colleagues about sportswomen or their own role in sports journalism, overall they unquestionably operated within, and were accepting of, the male dominated (work and sports) environment.

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7. APPENDICES

Appendix I: Ethics Committee Approval



Massey University

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
(Research Ethics)
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4 May 2009

Bridget Gee
4 Rue George Gershwin
75012 Paris
FRANCE

Dear Bridget

Re: Investigating Sports Media Content Production in France

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 1 May 2009.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia V Rumball (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics)**

cc Assoc Prof Sarah Leberman
Department of Management
PN214

Prof Claire Massey, HoD
Department of Management
PN214

Dr Farah Palmer
Department of Management
PN214

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council



Appendix II: Participant Information Sheet

SPORTS MEDIA CONTENT PRODUCTION IN FRANCE

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher Introduction

Bridget Gee is undertaking the aforementioned research project as part of a Masters degree in Management (Sport Management) currently being undertaken at Massey University, New Zealand.

Project Description and Invitation

The research project is concerned with sports media content production in France. It requires interviewing experienced and novice sports media makers, such as journalists, editors, producers and directors. As your professional profile fits this description, the researcher would like to extend an invitation to you to participate in this project.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Of the sports media in France, this research project will focus on television and written press only. Participants will be invited from sports programmes on free-to-air and cable sports television channels as well as national written general and sports press. Participant names have been obtained through the researcher's own contacts and complemented with those provided by media department heads following an introductory telephone call and follow-up letter.

There will be a maximum of 20 participants in the target sample. Both male and female participants are required for this project. Only sports media decision-makers will be considered for interviewing.

Participation is on a voluntary, non-remunerated basis.

Project Procedures

Interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted at the workplace, with the consent of media department heads where relevant. The estimated time for each interview will be 1- 1½ hours.

Data Management

Data collected from the audio-recorded interviews will be analysed and findings reported in the research report submitted as fulfillment of the Masters thesis. Data will be treated as confidential. No names will be mentioned in the report. Age, gender, role and media will be used as references. Data will be stored for five years before destruction.

A copy of the Masters thesis will be sent to participants on request.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;

- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project Contacts

Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or her supervisor if you require further information on this project:

Researcher:
Bridget Gee
Tel 06 73 95 48 74
bgee@orange.fr

Supervisor:
Dr Sarah Leberman

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

**SPORTS MEDIA CONTENT PRODUCTION
IN FRANCE**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name:
(printed)

Appendix IV: Interview Schedule

QUESTIONS	Probes
Name	
Age	
Sex M F	
Job title	
Your favourite sport(s)	
Do/Did you practice any sport(s)?	
In what capacity? Athlete, coach, manager, etc	
For fun or competition?	
To what level?	
ROLE	
Describe the nature of your job	
Your qualifications for it	
N° of years in profession	
N° of years in current role	
Reason(s) for choosing profession	
In your view, is there a profile best suited to your job?	Single vs married Male vs female Family vs none Accept odd work hours Experience in sport
Describe your typical work routine	
STAFFING	
Can you describe the diversity of personnel in: - your profession in general - your department	Ethnicity Gender (ratio of men to women) Age Experience Career background Sporting background Social class
Do you have input into staff hiring?	
(If yes) What particular criteria are used in the hiring process?	Profile above? Experience? Knowledge or 1 st hand involvement in particular sport? Compatibility with work hours? Equal opportunity provisions?

How does the internal promotions system work?	
How has this system worked for your career?	
Do you want to ask them for scenarios in terms of someone they did/did not hire and why?	
SPORTS SELECTION	
On what basis/using what criteria are sports or athletes covered/not covered by your media?	Criteria? (explore boundaries of each criterion): Tradition/history What audience wants Economic (sponsor, advertisers) Top sports/newsworthiness
How do you prioritise sports choices?	Criteria?
Who has a say in what sports/athletes are covered/not covered?	Media owners? Managers? Sponsors? Advertisers? Journalists? Audience?
How much influence do (prompts) have on choices?	Media owners? Managers? Sponsors? Advertisers? Journalists? Audience?
In your opinion what makes a newsworthy story in sport?	
(TV) If the following events were held on the same day and time and French teams or athletes featured, which would you choose to show live? (Newspaper) If the following sports were held on the same day and time and French teams or athletes won these events, which would you put on the front page? Can you please explain the reason(s) for your choice?	European championship women's team gymnastics final European championship individual men's figure ice-skating final Bordeaux in first UEFA Champions League pool match European athletics championship women's marathon

In your view, what sports matter most to the French public? (Ask to explain reasoning)	
In your view, what stories matter most to the French public with regards to sport?	
Some question about local, regional, national, international stories ... what is the priority?	
FEEDBACK	
Do you seek input/feedback from stakeholders? If so, which stakeholders? If not, why not?	Audience? Those with economic/commercial interests?
What are the channels for stakeholder feedback?	Formal or informal? (Meetings, lunches, hearsay, surveys) Internal and/or external research?
Input/feedback comes mainly from what sources?	Audience? Commercial partners? Media owners? Colleagues? Competitors?
What are the most common themes to feedback?	Subject? About what? Positive or negative? (Content/ amount/ nature of coverage?)
How much influence does input/feedback have on which sports or athletes you cover/give priority to/not cover?	Your reactions to criticisms? Modify behaviour (type/content)? Ignore (you know better than them)?
(If no feedback sought) through what decision-making process or format are (sports coverage) choices made?	
What is the bottom line for sports	Number of papers sold?

media in your opinion?	Advertising revenue? Social responsibility?
WOMEN'S SPORTS	
How would you describe the level of coverage of women's sports and women athletes?	Inadequate? Adequate? Equal with men's coverage? Secondary to men's?
In your previous response, what was your basis of comparison?	Men vs women? Historical (more women's coverage today than in past) Women perform better
What differences/distinctions do you see in coverage of men's and women's sports or athletes?	
Content analyses show that men's sports receive more coverage than women's sports. - Why do you think this is so? - How do you feel about this? -	
Portrayal of sportsmen also differs in nature than that of sportswomen. - Why do you think this is so? - How do you feel about this?	
Are these things you think ought to/can be changed?	If yes, how If no, explain why you think so
Some suggest that men's sport is covered more in the media because there is more professional men's sport - Why do you think this is so? - How do you feel about this?	
What do you think would need to happen in order to increase the quantity and/or quality of media coverage of women's sport?	