

**'STILL STRUGGLING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?': THE  
REPRESENTATION OF SPORTSWOMEN IN MIDDLE-BROW BRITISH  
NEWSPAPERS 2008-2009**

**Amy Pressland**

**PhD**

**The University of York**

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is widely acknowledged by scholars of sport media that female athletes are largely under-represented in all forms of news coverage. It is also commonly stated that sports media coverage has a tendency to infantilize, sexualize and marginalize sportswomen and their performances. At the same time there has been a growing number of studies (King 2007; Kian et al 2009; Mackay and Dallaire 2009) in recent years which suggest that sports media coverage is achieving, or close to achieving, gender parity. Such claims are often based on media coverage during major sporting events, such as the Olympic Games. This thesis will explore these claims over a two-year period. The semi-longitudinal approach, not previously undertaken in similar research, will provide the opportunity to investigate whether these claims of gender parity are sustained when investigating day-to-day reporting in selected British newspapers in 2008 and 2009.

The thesis investigates the representation of sportswomen in the British print media 2008-2009. Based on archival research of five Sunday national newspapers, three broadsheets (*The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Telegraph*) and two tabloids (the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sunday Express*), and using content analysis this investigation contributes new knowledge to the field of sport, gender and media with its original timeframe, newspaper sample and findings. 22,954 news articles and 25,717 photographs were collected and constitute the quantitative data set which sets the scene for understanding how sportswomen are reported on, how coverage of sportswomen is organised and dominant themes within the quantitative representation. The qualitative data set of 172 news items explores in greater detail *how* sportswomen are represented in three thematic chapters on the construction of bodies, the media discourse of inequality and the use of stereotypes.

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I certify that all the research and writing presented in this thesis is original and my own. Over the course of my PhD I have used parts of my research in papers given at academic conferences. An extract from Chapter Five 'Sexism and Gender Inequality in Sport and Sports Reporting' was presented at the British Sociological Association Conference 2012 in Leeds. In addition, an abridged version of Chapter Four 'Representative Bodies?' was presented at the Centre for Women's Studies' 'Gendered Practices, Perceptions and Representations' Conference in 2011 in York.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

In this thesis I investigate how sportswomen figure in five contemporary middle-brow Sunday newspapers in the United Kingdom between 2008 and 2009. I focus on this for two reasons. First, sport is an important part of my life; I enjoy watching and reading about sport as well as taking part in a range of sports. On a wider scale, it can be enjoyed as a leisure activity or at a competitive level. Many people take part in sport for recreational and health reasons, while a few earn a living from it. Sport is a global, multi-billion dollar industry, 'omnipresent, not only in Western culture, through sports pages in print media and online, tv programmes and channel and speciality magazine' (Brace-Govan 2010: 269). This is the second reason for investigating this topic. The media is a phenomenon which has grown exponentially since its inception (Turner 2004). The power of the media is evident in its capacity to reach and communicate to most parts of the world. Mass media are an essential part of social life as they shape, transmit and construct important cultural information and ideas (Allan 2004).

The relationship between sport and the mass media is a complex one; fundamentally it is a symbiotic relationship in that sport sells mass media and mass media sell sport (Boyle and Haynes 2009). As Hardin (2005) argues in relation to print media: 'what is printed in sports sections does more than simply reflect the status quo, it helps shape it' (62). Sports reporting has developed with the growth of the sports industry. No longer are sports media simply about announcing the facts of who has won and who has lost; sports news constitutes a significant section of media space and airtime (Nylund 2004). In terms of the sports section within newspapers, Rowe (2007) explains it is 'economically important in drawing readers (especially male) to general news publications, and so has the authority of its own popularity' (400).

Due to improved technologies, sport can now reach even the most remote places as a function of the globalisation of the mass media (Ross and Byerly 2004; Boyle and Haynes 2009). The Olympic Games are reported to be the most viewed sports contest globally; an estimated 51.9 million Britons (90% of population) viewed at least 15 minutes of the London 2012 Games on the BBC and 900 million people globally watched the opening ceremony ('London 2012. . .'). However, before the advent of the multimedia, written coverage of sports competitions, via newspapers, was the primary way to access sports news (Wenner 1989).

The sporting world has long been considered a male domain where hegemonic masculinity operates (Dunning 1994; Messner 2002; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007; Cox and Pringle 2011). This is reflected in media coverage and numerous studies concur that sports reporting on women pales in comparison to that about men (Bernstein 2002; Capranica and Aversa 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Bishop 2003; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Crossman et al 2007; Boyle and Haynes 2009; Davis and Tuggle 2012; Biscomb and Griggs 2012). Davis and Tuggle (2012: 53) argue that this 'lack of parity of attention takes its toll on audience as well as participants', and suggest that girls in the United Kingdom struggle to negotiate their femininity and sexuality in the context of sports participation.

Historically women have been discouraged from participating in sports due to the 'frailty myth' (Cahn 1994; Choi 2000; Hargreaves 2000; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007). Dowling (2000) explains that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a consensus regarding women's physical and mental weakness, attributed to women's 'nature'. Women were advised not to stretch themselves mentally or physically in order not to harm their reproductive systems. Dowling suggests that in a time when women's physical labour is not recognised as integral to the workforce, 'frailty' becomes a feminine attribute, an idealised and attractive characteristic. She argues that the frailty of women is a learnt weakness that all members of society are socialised to believe in. Dowling suggests that even in contemporary culture women are still socialised to think that involvement in sport is a male attribute and that sports participation may undermine their 'feminine' cultural capital if engaged in too extensively. Brace-Govan (2010) argues that 'despite the changes of the last century there continue to be constraints around physical activity for women' (372). There is a lack of representation of women at institutional level in sport, less funding for national teams and fewer role models are visible in the media (O'Reilly and Cahn 2007; Boyle and Haynes 2009). However, Dowling (2000) insists that women who take part in sport, despite this socialisation process, are excelling, breaking previous barriers and performing as never before, threatening the male hegemony of sport.

It could be argued that the prolongation of the 'frailty myth' is an attempt to ensure that sport remains a male domain. If the 'frailty myth' still exists, a gender-based hierarchy will remain in sport since this myth is a concept based originally on biology offering easy beliefs about men's physical superiority over women in sport. In spite of these challenges, women currently have greater access to sports, as competitors and fans, than ever before. Over the past two decades,

the percentage of women competing in the Olympic Games has risen substantially (King 2007; Davis and Tuggle 2012).

Comparing the opportunities of today's women with those of fifty years ago, it is clear that women in the west experience increased mobility and economic independence, greater legal equality in the family and the workplace, more health awareness and access to medical rights. It could be said that legally and thus theoretically the overall social position of women has improved in the United Kingdom over the last half century, although in reality that may not be quite the case (Walter 2010). With increasing access to sport, for example, and a greater acknowledgement of its importance in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, women are now more able than ever before to participate in what is still considered a male institution (Pope 2012). Numerous sportswomen have succeeded and widened possibilities for women in sport. Sportswomen who were pioneers in their chosen disciplines changed the path for women and the perception of what the female body was capable of. They include: Gertrude Ederle, long distance swimmer who was the first woman to cross the English channel in 1926; Mildred 'Babe' Didrickson Zaharias, the first woman to play on the men's Professional Golf Association (PGA) tour in 1938; Olga Korbut, a Russian gymnast who performed the first ever back flip on beam in 1972; Billie Jean King, an advocate of sexual equality in tennis who set up the women's tour (WTA) in 1973 and won 12 Grand Slam singles titles; Florence Griffith-Joyner who became the fastest woman on the planet when she set the 100m and 200m world records in 1988; Yelena Isinbaeva who was the first woman to pole vault over five metres in 2005; Chrissie Wellington, four-time Ironman world champion, beaten by only one man at the 2008 Alpe d'Huez long-course triathlon; Nicola Adams, the first woman to win an Olympic gold medal for boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games. These pioneering sportswomen have changed opportunities for women in sport over the last century, but gender assumptions about female sports participation continue to pervade people's general perceptions.

This project was borne out of my own passion for sport. I take part in triathlons and long-distance swimming, but also enjoy watching and reading about sports. My own experience in sport has been varied. As a young girl I dreamed of swimming across the English Channel after reading stories of Gertrude Ederle and Lynne Cox. At school I took an active role in sports, playing and competing in netball, hockey, tennis, rounders, swimming, athletics and trampolining. Every day after school was filled with some sports club or other. Saturday school

always ended with a trip to a rival school where netball, hockey, rounders and swimming competitions took place – the highlight of my week. I remember feeling very comfortable and happy in my sports uniform, always confident in my ability. I thrived on competitiveness and used to challenge the boys to swimming races. My most vivid memory of sports at school is how much fun we had training and competing. However, when I went to sixth-form college at age sixteen, the sports community was not as well developed and most of my peers were not involved in sport. I quickly became disinterested. My involvement in sports dissipated completely. I gained weight and struggled, as many teenage girls do, with body confidence. At university I began to attend the gym for vanity reasons, attempting to become slimmer, desiring the skinny ideal I'd seen in fashion magazines. However, going to the gym left me unfulfilled and I was not able to lose the weight I had gained in my exercise-free years.

Hutchinson (1996) claims that the relationship we have with our bodies is the first and most important one we (as women) have as it is 'the keystone of [our] identity' (1996: 153). And yet a dualism is created by the division between ourselves and our bodies; the self as subject and the body as object. The body becomes a burden, an unfixable entity that we dedicate time, money and effort to trying desperately to sculpt into better, younger, prettier, thinner and firmer versions. The creation of this troubled relationship with our bodies has been much debated in feminist literature (de Beauvoir 1974; Wolf 1991; Greer 2006; Orbach 2006; Jeffreys 2007) as being part of a patriarchal web of oppressive structures women experience throughout their lives (Bordo 2003). Feminist researchers have linked the intersection of the pressure to be thin with patriarchal media institutions and the construction of femininity: 'both on television and in magazines we are exposed to images of women who are anorexic, surgically altered. . . these are not real women' (Hutchinson 1996: 154). Nonetheless, these 'fantasy' women are presented as the feminine ideal and thus 'we see the images and "buy" the need to measure up' (154). Black (2006) posits that a lack of 'investment' in the female body can lead to the potential 'annihilation of female identity' (2006: 157). The alternative option can be to engage in arguably self-destructive beauty and extreme fitness practices (Jeffreys 2007) and conform to cultural expectations. It is easy to critique such damaging practices on the abstract level. In reality resisting the temptation to engage in practices which are deemed to be culturally and socially desirable to fit into the 'feminine' ideal is challenging. I too have been lured by the mediated promotion of the 'perfect woman' and consequently have undertaken regimes, treatments, activities and

bodily practices in search of attaining the aesthetic image which mirrored the beautiful, lithe, and desired physique of the women in magazines. Inevitably I did not find internal or external contentment during this process and certainly did not achieve what I had imagined would make me happy.

Swimming had always been the sport in which I excelled most at school, and so, still dreaming of the English Channel, I began to swim with more intention in my early 20s. As the distances I swam increased from 500m initially to 5kms daily, I realised that this had been the thing that was missing in my life since joining sixth-form college. As I invested more time in sports training I began to trim down and finally felt content in my own skin. There have been several critiques of the 'need' for women to feel 'happy' about their bodies in a way that does not concern men. Orbach claims that 'bodies have almost come to define the way our lives can be lived. Without a body that girls feel all right about, nothing much in their lives feels OK' (2006: vii). This is relevant to my own feeling of 'contentment' in my skin; at this stage in my life I clearly connected my bodily aesthetic to my overall happiness. As Wolf argues: 'female fat is the subject of public passion, and women feel guilty about female fat. . . women's bodies are not our own but society's and. . . thinness is not a private aesthetic' (1991:187). Thus by buying into the 'need to be thin' women not only attempt to make themselves happy but fulfil a societal requirement that women should be desirable objects that fit into certain standards, such as size ten jeans. Women's obedience and societal pressure to achieve this female ideal of thinness certainly influenced my desire to be thin. However, as sport became normalised in my life, what may have started out as a desire to be thin, became less of a priority and was no longer in the foreground of my mind.

After several years of improving my fitness and increasing the time I do sport weekly, I finally felt content. I am now happy with my weight and body, and have found what makes me 'tick'. Doing sport has changed who I am. After years of struggling to reach my ideal weight, believing that being 'skinny' would make me happy, I have found that the opposite is true; I do not need to weigh a certain amount when exercise has made me feel good about myself on many levels. One might argue that having reached my 'ideal' size, professing to have rejected the need to be 'thin' is an oxymoron. It is important to point out that sport changed for me in that its purpose of 'doing exercise to lose weight' was transformed and while exercise helped to maintain my weight, this became a side-effect rather than the central focus. Sport now is a central part of my life because I enjoy it at

the physical not aesthetic level and it makes me feel empowered as my body becomes stronger and more able to do things that previously I could not do. Chrissie Wellington, four-time Ironman world champion, discusses her battle with an eating disorder and body dissatisfaction in her early 20s in her autobiography. She explains, however, that once sport became the main focus of her life, she revelled in how strong her body was, rather than striving to be thinner, and thus treated her body with more respect (Wellington 2012). This idea that realising that bodies are what they *do* instead of what they *look* like is liberating; *The Guardian* published an article during the London 2012 Olympic Games which discussed this topic: ‘we live in an age which is constantly about looks and now we’re watching bodies that are running fast and jumping high. . . Suddenly, worrying about “am I thin?” seems as silly as it is’ (‘The Only Way is Ennis. . .’, 12/08/12: 27).

Hutchinson (1996) argues that the only way for women to become whole beings is to ‘clearly see the toxicity of patriarchal culture as it impinges unrelentingly on our lives’ (153). By engaging in sports that I had previously loved and avoiding mirrored, narcissistic gyms and beauty magazines, I rediscovered the joy of sport and the power of my body. My body became a tool which, if treated well, would allow me to perform and achieve both physically and mentally. Additionally, perhaps recognition of the socially constructed and damaging mediated image of the feminine ideal would favour women’s chances of improving their relationships with their bodies. This would allow an understanding that there are a plethora of women’s shapes and sizes as opposed to the narrow media representation of the impossibly beautiful, youthful, slim woman. Hutchinson claims that political action against oppressive structures is the way to liberating women’s bodies from the binds of body dissatisfaction. But what type of political action? There have been several campaigns by the fashion and beauty industries to widen the range of women’s bodies on show in the public sphere. For example the ‘Dove Campaign for Real Beauty’ is a media project which has endeavoured to show ‘real women’ in television and print advertising. Women of varying shapes, sizes, colours of skin and ages appear in their underwear together in an attempt ‘to widen today’s stereotypical views of beauty’ (‘About the Dove Self-Esteem Fund’). By questioning what is beautiful, the Dove campaign aims to dismiss narrow understandings of what a woman should look like. A democratisation of women’s bodies, such as the Dove adverts, in media representation might encourage greater bodily acceptance for women. Gok Wan, a fashion consultant, presents a television show called ‘How to Look Good Naked’ which promotes the idea of



'natural' beauty, no matter what size, and attempts to show women how to look good and feel confident without their clothes on ('How to. . .'). Wan's campaign could be praised for encouraging women to reject the option of plastic surgery, however, it advocates a particular kind of naked beauty. Campaigns such as these continue to promote the concept of the beautiful female body, which does not really channel Hutchinson's idea of political action or challenge established patriarchal images of female beauty.

My own connection to sport is arguably class-related. Wilson (2002) discusses the paradox of sports involvement and social class. He states that the higher the social class you belong to, the more likely you are to be involved in sport. 'Prole' sports – those typically associated with the working classes – are not commonly engaged in by the people belonging to the other end of the social spectrum. Using Bourdieu's 1978 concept of cultural capital, Wilson (2002) argues that involvement in sport, and more particularly 'certain' sports which emulate upper-class values such as leadership, discipline, honesty, order, productivity and fair play build cultural capital. Involvement in sport commands both economic and social capital as money and leisure time are integral to being a participant or spectator of sport, attributes that the middle and upper classes are likely possess to a greater extent than the working classes. Moreover, sports traditionally associated with the upper classes tend to be sports that require more financial investment such as golf, tennis, rowing, horse riding and polo. This model is easily relatable to my own participation in exercise. Because my return to an active involvement in sports occurred at a time when, as a student, I had flexible leisure time and came from a middle-class family that was financially stable at the time, I was able to join a fee-paying leisure centre. Moreover, there are clear links between my perception then of what was the best way to 'get into shape' and the cultural capital I thought I would earn replicating the image and fitness regimes of the attractive and slender women in magazines.

I was motivated initially to re-engage with sport after a hiatus during my college years for aesthetic reasons. No one told me to do it, but celebrity and fashion magazines influenced my belief that there was a better me to be achieved if I just weighed a bit less. Having a boyfriend, wearing the 'right' clothes, makeup, trying to lose weight, straightening my hair - practices that helped me conform to the feminine 'ideal' - were the activities that occupied my late teenage years while my twin brother was skateboarding or riding his bike. His bedroom walls were covered with posters of his BMX idols, and mine were of pop stars and models. I

wonder how different those years would have been, had there been prominent female sports role models for me to aspire to emulate, or if I would not have noticed them, blinded by the prominent images of women as slim, heterosexual and attractive which seemed to be everywhere (Bordo 2003). My gendered teenage years could be explained through a structural and cultural context. Leaper (in Miller and Scholnick 2000) discusses the importance for feminist development psychology to recognise the link between gender inequalities in adult life, displayed in patriarchal power structures and behaviours, and children's development. Gender-typing, including parental interactions with children, types of toys, physical activities and schooling, proscribes specific gendered roles for boys and girls (Leaper in Miller and Scholnick 2000). Stereotypically 'feminine' forms of play encourage a more docile, caring and passive girl, whereas forms of play which are more stereotypically 'masculine' develop characteristics of activeness, competitiveness and aggressiveness for boys (Messner 2002). These personality traits are carried through adolescence and into adulthood. Once learned, these behaviours are difficult to unlearn (Bourdieu 1979). This might explain the stark difference between my twin brother's and my own choice of leisure activities.

Reading about sport in newspapers was something that I avoided as I did not identify with any sportsperson. As I became more involved in sport in my early 20s, my interest in women's sport increased. Initially I became aware of prominent sportswomen through advertising campaigns, television coverage of major events and interviews in fashion magazines or Sunday newspaper supplements. Once conscious of certain iconic women in sport, my interest extended and through more specialist magazines (such as *Runner's World* and *Triathlon 220*) and internet searches, my knowledge of other women in sport spread. Subsequently, on a daily basis I would search the morning newspapers waiting to see how my favourite female athletes had fared in their respective events. However, on many occasions I was disappointed because either their event had not been covered or there was not enough detail to satisfy my interest. More and more I started to see the domination of men's football, closely followed by rugby and cricket, in the media in this country which trumped all other sports, and particularly the ones in which my sports role models competed. This thought niggled away at me for a while until I decided to investigate what the actual situation was more systematically by commencing my PhD study.

However, this thesis is not about whether football wipes out the coverage of sportswomen in swimming, tennis, cycling, athletics etc. Instead this project will investigate how sportswomen figure in contemporary middle-brow British newspapers. I chose a sample of five middle-brow newspapers (*The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sunday Express*) for a number of reasons. Firstly, I wanted an ample-sized range of newspapers including broadsheets and tabloids. My range of newspapers varies to a degree in style, audience and politics and is read by large sections of the British population. Secondly, the newspapers I chose are not particularly known for their sports coverage unlike newspapers such as *The Sun*, for example (Harris and Clayton 2002; Vincent et al 2002). Such newspapers have been the focus of several studies and would normally present an 'obvious' choice for a researcher of women, media and sport. However, my range of newspapers was selected partly because they are not the obvious choice and therefore I will be covering new ground in this study of women and sport in the British media. A few cross-cultural studies of the media representation of sportswomen have used *The Times* (Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007). But no previous study has been based on such a broad range of middle-brow British newspapers. Moreover, using Sunday newspapers is not common in other studies of this nature, adding another difference to my work and allowing me to demonstrate how the representation of sportswomen operates during weekend editions of national newspapers. I will discuss the benefits of choosing to use Sunday newspapers in more depth in the Methodology chapter. Thirdly, I based my choice of newspapers on Sunday editions that I read, particularly *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*; my awareness of these newspapers' structures and styles helped me in the data collection phase of this thesis, and on a personal level I was curious to see how the newspapers I read depicted sportswomen. Finally, I chose a sample of newspapers across a moderate political range in order to see what would emerge. Because of the newspapers' moderate politics, I thought that there would perhaps be a more even-handed coverage of the sportsmen/sportswomen binary, and across a wide range of sports.

### Representation: The Power of Sport

The way in which sport and its players are depicted has greater implications than the simple act of giving an account of a sports match or contest. The idea of representation is a challenging concept. Dyer (2002) has described the typography of representation as consisting of the following four elements. Firstly,

representation as 're-presentation' is made up of the language and conventions that the media employ to represent the world and events to the masses. Secondly, representation is about being representative of social groups and events, taking into consideration the common stereotypes of such social groups. Thirdly, representation involves the people who are responsible for this representation and how the institutions which create media discourses, can influence the representation of groups and events in the media. Finally, there is the audience's perception of what is being represented to them and how they comprehend this (in Lacey 1998). I am primarily interested in the first three elements of Dyer's typology of representation for my study, namely how the media represent events through language; if the representativeness of the media image of sportswomen as representative of the athletes and women, and how the people and institutions who create media discourses influence what is being represented. These three elements of media representation will constitute part of the qualitative analysis of my data.

The media, as an institution of cultural production, structure the presentation and representation of people and events (Hardin 2005; Kian and Hardin 2009; Deninger 2012). Issues linked to the way in which individuals and groups value their places in society include how a social group is represented, how one person within a social group is presented as representative of the whole group, and the way in which the group is spoken of through the process of representation. Equally, representation and representativeness are connected to hierarchical values and how others view members of a certain social group. Social standings, individual worth, rights and the ability of one group to affect another's rights can all be influenced by the way in which they are represented in the media (Dyer 2002). In other words, all representations are shaped by several factors and project a certain 'reading' of the world (Hardin 2005).

Considering the case of Wayne Rooney can help to demonstrate the way that media images can be controlled to show a particular representation of a person or event. In 2009 Wayne Rooney, the Manchester United and England footballer, was accused of sleeping with a prostitute when his wife was pregnant with their first child. The story initially broke under the guise of a money-hungry prostitute, Jennifer Thompson, trying to ruin a perfectly happy marriage and earn some money from the publicity ('Wayne Rooney and Colleen Speak of "Pain" Caused by Prostitute Claims'). Subsequently when it became clear that Rooney had actually paid to have sex with a prostitute, instead of accusing Rooney of

adultery, many newspapers printed stories on the prostitute's attempts to 'bed and wed' a Premiership footballer ('Wayne Rooney Affair: Prostitute "Had Sex with 13 Premier League Stars"'). This story was framed in such a way that the blame was consistently deflected away from Wayne Rooney and onto the prostitute who was portrayed as the instigator of the 'dirty affair'. Factors in this case, Wayne Rooney had more social, economic and cultural capital than either woman in this story. More than that, this footballer holds a significant amount of sporting capital since he is widely acclaimed by football fans nationally and internationally for his ability on the football pitch, rendering his behaviour away from matches as less significant. In other words the depiction of this story highlights the insignificance of Rooney's adulterous actions because they do not affect his football performance or credibility (Vincent et al 2011). Similarities can be seen with the case of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. When it was revealed in 1998 that Clinton, the then-current President of the United States, was having an affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, he was initially attacked by the media and his political opposition. However, his political credibility remained intact and his role as President seemed to negate his adulterous actions ('Oral History. . .'). In both instances, a complex range of discourses evolved but neither man's public standing was ultimately discredited. This demonstrates the power of media representation in presenting a particular version of news.

In relation to women, despite positive developments to improve the gender order in the media, the media appear to be 'stuck in a very traditional and stereotypical groove' (Ross and Byerly 2004: 9). In the UK this has been a theme in relation to, for example, the absence of older women newsreaders on television (Allan et al 1998; Ross and Carter 2011). The trend for young, slim, and attractive women newsreaders has been highlighted as sexist, particularly when taking into account the forced retirement of female newsreaders when they reach a certain middle-age. Ross (in Meehan and Riordan, 2001) describes the 'F-factor' of 'fanciability' integral to women's role as newsreaders; they must be the object of men's fantasies, without being intellectually threatening. Consequently, older women who work in television are discarded or 'forced to retire' as soon as they no longer fit a certain youthful image. In 2007 the BBC was criticised for dropping two prominent women presenters in their 50s and 60s, Moira Stuart and Arlene Phillips, in favour of younger women ('BBC Does 'Not Value' Older. . . Female Newsreaders. . .').

This has to be seen in a context where at all levels, from owners to journalists, the media are dominated by men. It is therefore not surprising that a “masculine” ethos permeates news-room culture’ (Ross and Byerly 2004: 25). In the media masculine discourses are favoured over feminine ones and thus these modes of thinking influence the way in which the world is represented. The media privilege the white, male, heterosexual gaze, thereby limiting the variety of narrative and hence representation (Meehan and Riordan, 2001: 115). An example of this can be seen in Virgin Media, a principal media provider in the UK, and its treatment of elite female volleyball players. On their website the company offers the viewer ‘20 reasons why beach volleyball will be one of the most popular sports in London 2012’ (‘Beach Volley Babes’). The 20 photographs present only the bodies of the bikini-clad women players, focusing primarily on the lower parts of their bodies and particularly photos which show the women’s bottoms or two women embracing. A particular gaze could be said to have influenced this portrayal of these sportswomen, deflecting the attention away from their sporting achievements and instead producing a pseudo-sexual presentation (Hardin 2005). The sexualisation of women, and especially sportswomen, has been discussed in depth in the current literature on women, sport and the media. I will return to this theme later in the literature review, which I now turn to.

### Literature Review

The field of sport and gender is vast and research has encompassed numerous different approaches from bodies as weapons and the embodiment of masculinity and violence in sport (Messner 1990), and gender relations between male coaches and female athletes (Tomlinson and Yorganci 1997), to the gendered nature of injuries in non-professional and professional sportspeople (Young and White 1995; Thing 2006) and non-mainstream sports such as roller derby (Finley 2010).

Being new to research in the field of sport, gender and media before I began this project meant that reviewing feminist sport studies literature was a new venture for me as a researcher and vital to my overall understanding of this topic. Moreover, when I began to consider this topic for doctoral investigation, much of this literature formed the basis of the rationale for selecting my methods, methodology and choice of analysis. For example, I recognised that there is a gap in the literature on print media representation of sportswomen between King’s (2007) longitudinal investigation and projects which focus on single major sporting events such as Crossman et al (2007). Thus the literature I will now

review forms an important part of this thesis by filling in knowledge gaps from my point of view, providing the rationale for the investigation, informing methodological choices and as a way of interpreting my data throughout my analysis chapters.

The mass media and sport have been described as two of the most hegemonic social institutions and cultural practices in society today (Duncan and Brummett 1993). It is widely agreed in the literature that sport is a male-dominated hegemonic institution (Dunning 1994). The preservation of sport as a male domain is maintained partly through the media's treatment of sportswomen and men (Kane and Lenskyj 1998). Birrell and Theberge argue that 'women's sport is regulated, in part, through the control of media images of sportswomen's bodies' (in Harris and Clayton 2002: 400).

Horne et al's (1999) *Understanding Sport*, Choi's (2000) *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*; Hargreaves' (2000) *Heroines of Sport*; Messner's (2002) *Taking the Field*; O'Reilly and Cahn's (2007) *Women and Sports in the United States*; and Boyle and Haynes' (2000; 2009) *Power Play* are some of the most seminal texts in the field of sport, gender and media. Choi (2000) describes the way in which the medical profession upheld particularly sexist beliefs about women's physical capacity and the need to protect their reproductive systems. Messner (2002) explains how gendered childhoods and the normalisation of the 'biologically different' discourse dictate gender roles for girls and boys from birth. O'Reilly and Cahn (2007) describe the female athlete as an oxymoron in the battle to overturn the concept of sport as innately masculine. Boyle and Haynes (2009: 123) state that sport is a 'sexual battleground' where women have to 'play the game' in order to participate. These are some of the key issues and debates which have occupied this field since its inception.

I will now briefly examine research conducted over the past fourteen years (1998-2012) on the media representation of sportswomen. My decision to concentrate this literature review on the years 1998-2012 was a pragmatic one; by reviewing literature exclusively from the past 14 years, I aim to ensure a certain freshness to the sources. Moreover, the literature review starts precisely 10 years before my timeframe begins. By focusing on contemporary academic work, my literature review focuses on the most recent studies, methods and findings. This is particularly relevant given that my investigation will debate recent findings regarding the idea that media coverage of sportswomen is improving, and thus it sits in dialogue with the most up-to-date work in this field.

There are eight dominant themes in recent literature which I will address. These are: newspaper coverage of sportswomen, television coverage of sportswomen, the representation of sport in other media, the representation of women in individual sports, case studies of individual sportswomen and their media representation, how notions of the national impact on the media coverage of sportswomen, the global dimension of research in this field, and research which suggests the media coverage of sport has become more equitable.

Research into the newspaper coverage of sportswomen has predominantly agreed that sportswomen are under-represented by print media (Harris and Clayton 2002; Pederson 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Crolley and Teso 2007; Crossman et al 2007; Biscomb and Griggs 2012). Pederson (2002) sought to investigate an under-researched area of newspaper reporting: photographic coverage at secondary school level. Pederson examined 827 photos from 602 randomly selected daily newspapers from the State of Florida over a one-year period. Using content analysis he found that female athletes were significantly under-represented in the number and size of photos. Photos of male athletes were found to be better positioned within newspapers and were published in colour more frequently. These findings, although different in scope from previous work, produced similar results, namely that newspaper coverage of women in sport upheld hegemonic masculinity by under-representing and marginalizing sportswomen. This investigation reveals that even at high school level gender discrimination is present in newspaper sports reporting. Pederson's research is relevant to my investigation because I shall also examine photographic content to see if this corroborates these findings. It should be noted that the majority of research on newspaper coverage of sportswomen examines both textual and photographic reporting.

Vincent et al (2002) conducted a comprehensive study of the media coverage of the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games which included both photographic and textual analysis. Their sample was a cross-national combination of tabloids and broadsheets using two national newspapers from Great Britain (*The Times* and the *Daily Mail*), Canada (the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*) and the United States (*The New York Times* and *USA Today*). Vincent et al's newspaper sample was similar to my own in the combined use of tabloids and broadsheets. However, mine focuses specifically on British newspapers. Vincent et al considered both articles and photographs of male and female athletes in the six newspapers. For the 11-day period under review, 1,425 articles and photographs



were examined. In their qualitative analysis they found that the 'popular' newspapers tended to publish articles focusing on the 'negative' (describing sportswomen's physical appearance). Moreover, they found that most sportsmen were depicted in active sporting roles while only half of the sportswomen in photographs were in the same active poses. Nonetheless, they concluded that generally men and women were awarded equitable news coverage in the six newspapers and that sportswomen received more coverage when they were involved in major sporting events such as the Olympics. This is a misleading claim considering the period under review covered only 11 days during an Olympic event which lasts a month. Therefore this work only demonstrates the pattern of coverage over a short period of time. Perhaps if the study had been extended to encompass days without a major sporting event, their conclusion would have been different. My own investigation covers a period of 24 months.

Research on newspaper sports coverage has tended to examine short timeframes, often focusing on a specific event. Crossman et al (2007) employed a cross-national format of investigation using a sample of *The Times* (UK), *The New York Times* (USA) and *The Globe and Mail* (Canada). Their timeframe covered the day before the 2004 Wimbledon championships, its duration, and the day after the competition had ended. The authors paid particular attention to the frequency of coverage of male and female players, type and location of coverage. The cross-national element was never fully explored in relation to how it intersected with the media representation of sportswomen. In the 44 newspapers analysed, they concluded that male players were awarded significantly more articles and photographs; male players received 1.4 times more newspaper space than female players. The authors of this study appeared surprised to find that the 2004 Wimbledon women's winner, Maria Sharapova, appeared in 44 photographs, whereas the men's winner Roger Federer featured in only 26 photographs. The authors thought that their findings showed equitable coverage of sportswomen and men. However, the figures for news items and photographs suggest an asymmetry in reporting which supports the idea of the gendering of sports (Matteo 1986). The timeframe of my investigation is significantly longer than in Crossman et al's (2007) research and thus aims to dispute claims of increased parity in newspaper coverage of sportswomen as it includes reporting of major events and day-to-day sports news.

When the under-representation of sportswomen became widely acknowledged, scholars turned to the question of *how* sportswomen are represented. Crolley and

Teso (2007) examined the extent to which qualitative differences in reporting on women and men in sport exist in Spanish print media. Using data collected during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, they investigated the narratives and images employed in two of Spain's best-selling dailies: *El País* and *Marca*. Their research confirmed that sportswomen are under-represented. However, they found that despite the gender gap narrowing in coverage, gendered discursive strategies prevented further progress. Such strategies include: asymmetrical gender marking, gender marking of sports and using different language for sportswomen and men.

It is important to consider the national dimension in this research in that sport in Spain is highly gendered, particular with the prevalence of men's football (Crolley and Teso 2007). Male footballers are referred to most commonly by their last names, emphasizing formality and hierarchy. Crolley and Teso found that first names were mostly used for Olympic female athletes in Spanish coverage, suggesting more familiarity and less social distance between them and the readership. This is an interesting finding because one might assume that gender discrimination might not be as prevalent during major sporting events when all athletes compete for their nations on the same stage.

Shared space in sport has been highly contested from access to facilities to equal media coverage (Bishop 2003; Hardin 2005; Rodriguez 2005; Vamplew 2010; Tavers 2011; Pope 2012). Vincent et al 2011 examined the shared space of the English football team and WAGs<sup>1</sup> in the media coverage of the 2006 World Cup in Germany. They looked specifically at the reporting of Wayne Rooney, David Beckham, Coleen McLoughlin, and Victoria Beckham, using Connell's theory of gender power relations in five national newspapers. They found that Rooney was described in line with hypermasculinity, using war-like vocabulary. Beckham, while lauded for his football talents and captaincy was the subject of contradictory narratives. Questions of 'who wears the trousers' in his household were

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<sup>1</sup> The term WAG is an acronym which refers to 'wives and girlfriends' of sportsmen. It was originally coined by tabloid newspapers in reference to the spouses and partners of Britain's most prominent footballers. However, it now extends to other sports traditionally considered male such as rugby and cricket. The label WAG is derogatory and has been used to suggest these women are lazy because such women allegedly live off their husbands' salaries. A WAG is reported to be mostly interested in shopping for designer clothes and partying. The presence of the WAGs at the 2006 World Cup in Germany was blamed for the English team's poor performance ('A WAG's Life').

contrasted with the narrative of his wife who was depicted as dominant and overbearing. Vincent et al's (2011) research investigates a new area of newspaper reporting; previous work has predominantly focused on the coverage of sportswomen and men. Studies have also looked at sportsmen's wives from a sociological and gender relations perspective (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 2004; Forsyth and Thompson 2007), but rarely has the media representation of WAGs been investigated alongside that of sportsmen. It has to be said that they are also a relatively new phenomenon. The findings by Vincent et al (2011) reveal a significant aspect of sports reporting, namely that many 'types' of women feature in sports news, not only sportswomen, but decorative women too. This is particularly prevalent in the reporting of all-male sports news. The focus on women in sports reporting who are not actual sportswomen is an important feature of my own research.

Vincent et al (2011) examined coverage of an all-male event, whereas Biscomb and Griggs (2012) focused on the print media reporting of an all-female event. The latter analysed the representation of England women's performance at the 2009 Cricket World Cup in Australia. They employed qualitative content analysis of 29 articles from seven English daily newspapers. They found positive shifts in reporting patterns including fewer comparisons between women and men (using men as the 'acceptable' standard) and less gender marking, namely newspapers referred to players as *cricketers*, rather than as *women*. They discuss a media strategy of ambivalence (combining positive reporting and negative reporting of women) which is interesting given the context, namely that the team won. An analysis of adjoining photos might have provided more insight into how the women's performance was depicted in newspaper reporting, particularly given that cricket is a male-dominated sport in which female and male players wear similar kits and thus there is little gender-marking in their appearance.

Investigations on the television sports coverage of women have produced some interesting results, which I shall turn to now. Capranica and Aversa (2002) analysed Italian television coverage of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games from a gender perspective. They found that women's events constituted 29% of the total Olympic broadcast. Despite an increase of 4% in the participation of sportswomen at the Games, they found a decline in coverage by 2%. The juxtaposition of such reporting figures with an emphasis on the importance of the Games in publicizing women's achievements in sport is stark in this research. Their findings also reveal that women constitute only 12% of expert

commentators who are generally retired athletes asked to comment on the Games alongside journalists. Sports newsrooms are predominantly male, from journalists and commentators to editors (Boyle and Haynes 2009), which is likely to influence the content of sports news.

Hardin (2005) employs the term 'gatekeeping' for the decision-making process editors use to choose stories, which in turn shapes the social reality that readers 'view'. Hardin is sceptical of the debate that readers' interests influence sports editors. Most editors in her sample were male (97.5%) and white (96%). She found that editors determined the content of sports news based on their own sense of audience interest, which she argued was 'embedded in myth not reality' (72).

Kian and Hardin (2009) examined the effects of the sex of sports writers on framing athletes in print media coverage of intercollegiate sports. They found that women were more apt to cover news on sportswomen and men were better at reporting on men's sports. Male sports journalists were more likely to reinforce gender stereotypes and praise male athleticism. They conclude that the sex of sports journalists has an impact on how they frame sports news. Mastro et al (2012) investigated the influence of gender-based norms on the evaluations of sports reporters using communication accommodation theory. They found that female commentators were favoured more for women's sports but white male commentators were preferred over every other category of commentator.

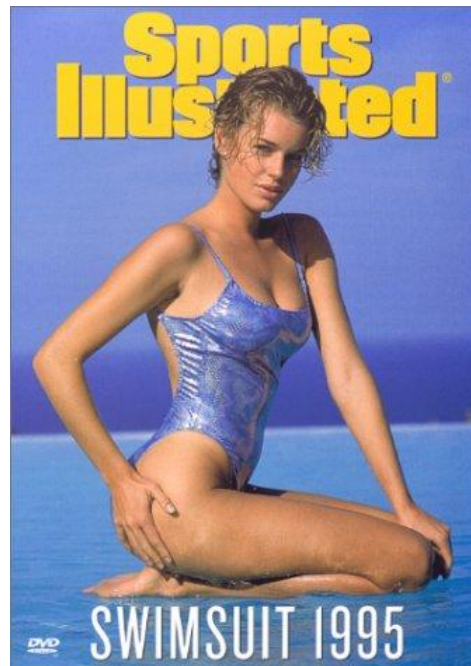
Angelini and Billings (2010) considered the way in which sports television coverage is framed, using theories of agenda setting and framing to examine NBC's reporting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. They reviewed 74.5 hours of NBC's prime-time coverage over 17 nights during the Games. They found that five sports (gymnastics, diving, swimming, athletics, and beach volleyball) received 90% of the total prime-time coverage. In terms of agenda setting, they concluded that viewers were 'watching history through the lens of a handful of key producers. . . with a vested interest' in creating an 'Americanised version of the Olympic Games (2010: 364). NBC's coverage was gendered in the way it framed success; they found different gender narratives in the majority of prime-time reporting, particularly by emphasizing male athletes' superior strength and commitment to sport.

Davis and Tuggle (2012) examine NBC's broadcast coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and compare it to previous years. They argue that Olympic

coverage is important to female athletes, more than male ones, because they may not receive much media attention between Games. They found that while participation of female athletes had improved at the 2008 Games compared to previous years, 97% of airtime of women's events was devoted to six 'socially acceptable' sports. Moreover, nearly 60% of women's coverage featured them in swimsuits or leotards in gymnastics, swimming and diving. They conclude that the main US broadcaster of the Olympic Games presents a highly gendered version of sport to viewers, which reinforces Angelini and Billings' (2010) findings. While my own investigation centres on newspapers' sports reporting, both these studies chime with aspects of my research in terms of women's sports that were privileged by the media.

Research into the reporting of sport on television adds another dimension to understanding how sportswomen are treated by the mass media. It suggests that this research too corroborates the findings in newspaper reporting, namely that sportswomen are under-represented and marginalized by sports media. Other media such as radio and magazines have not been examined as much in recent years. Nevertheless questions can be raised about whether they follow similar reporting trends as the mainstream media in the representation of sportswomen. I shall now turn to review the research on the representation of women in other sports media including magazines, sub-cultural media and radio. Lenskyj (1998) asked if sportswomen are 'Inside Sport' or 'On the Margins'? She examined 12 monthly issues of the Australian sports magazine *Inside Sport* in 1995. Her predominantly qualitative approach concluded that while overt sexual exploitation of sportswomen in the media continued to exist, particularly in the photographic content, more complex mechanisms were used to marginalise sportswomen. She found that 88% of all articles were on male athletes and male sports. Articles on female athletes were stereotyped and sexualising. Despite the magazine claiming to be a serious source of sports news, Lenskyj likened it to the swimsuit edition of the US *Sports Illustrated* (Image 1).

Image 1. *Sports Illustrated* front cover of swimsuit edition, 1995.



Source: Google images, accessed 03/09/10.

The cover photo of the magazine was most frequently of a female model and represented the classic 'pinup' girl (Bishop 2003). She found that other photos of women positioned them decoratively and often on the sidelines of men's sports as girlfriends or cheerleaders. Sportswomen's heterosexuality was emphasized over sporting performance in photographic coverage. These findings guided me in creating my data sheet in terms of what to expect in the photographic coverage of women, namely that photos of women outside sport (girlfriends etc.) might be present in my findings.

Wheaton and Beal (2003) examined sub-cultural media and the discourses of authenticity in windsurfing and skateboarding, described as alternative sports. The authors conducted 12 interviews in the UK and the US in the year 2000 amongst participants in these two sports. They set out to investigate the media consumption and perceived representation of people actively involved in windsurfing and skateboarding in sub-cultural or 'niche' media, which they argued can be seen as a counter-hegemonic response to 'dominant' mass media culture. They found that in these marginal sports, male subjects dominate the images in their respective sub-cultural media. The images presented were recorded by participants as representing a traditional, white and masculine hegemony. This was the standard image for acceptance within the sports and these images were classed as 'authentic'. Women in windsurfing and skateboarding were named as

'other'. The characteristics required by enthusiasts in both sports were consistent with masculinity. They found that skateboarding media used overtly sexual and misogynist imagery while windsurfing media contained both images of the commodified female body as well as presenting women as active in the sport. The research suggested that due to their status as marginal sports, the mass media did not meet the needs of windsurfers or skateboarders and thus they relied on the sub-cultural media available.

Misogynist reporting was prevalent in Nylund's (2004) examination of sports talk radio in the US. He provides a critical analysis of The Jim Rome Show which is the most popular nationally syndicated show in the US. Using material from 130 shows in 2001 he found themes of dominant ideologies of hegemonic masculinity and a prevalence of masculinist humour. Sports talk radio functions differently from other media such as newspapers and television because it is based on opinion rather than factual sports commentary (Nylund 2004). Women's sport was not covered in The Jim Rome Show. This is revealing in that in informal contexts of sports discussions, real sportswomen are not relevant. The only way women were discussed was either as sexualised objects of pleasure or as lesbians. Nylund found that 'lesbian baiting' was common and highlighted the threat they, and women more generally, seem to present to the male hegemony in sport. Wright and Clarke (1999) discuss heterosexuality as compulsory for women in sport. Kolnes (1995: 62) suggested that heterosexuality and sport are intrinsically linked: 'we become our gender by relating to heterosexuality as a norm and as an organizing principle'. Griffin (1992) argues that heterosexuality and femininity are interchangeable terms and femininity, in the case of sportswomen, can act as a code word for heterosexuality. This is evident in contexts when sportswomen's sexual identity is questioned (Caudwell 1999, 2011b).

The questioning of sportswomen's gender and sexuality is not a recent finding and has been widely documented (Sullivan 2011). Individual, male-dominated sports and gender have been examined from a sociological, feminist and organisational perspective. They include: football (Caudwell 1999, 2000, 2011b; Cox and Pringle 2011; Hong 2012); golf (Vamplew 2010); baseball (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001); cricket (Velija and Malcolm 2009); rugby (Wright and Clarke 1999; Martin 2011); boxing (Menesson 2000 and Lee 2009); and motorsport (Pflugfelder 2009).

Non-mainstream sports have also been examined in relation to gender issues, for instance on femininity and hegemonic gender relations in roller derby (Finley 2010; Beaver 2012); sex segregation in ski jumping (Tavers 2011); combining motherhood and sport in climbing (Frohlick 2006); negotiating femininity in bodybuilding (Roussel et al 2010); female strength as a social burden in wrestling (Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009); media representation in handball (Lippe 2002); participation and gender relations in windsurfing (Wheaton and Tomlinson 1998) and the consumption of sub cultural media in skateboarding (Wheaton and Beal 2003).

In research on the media representation of individual sports, Stone and Horne (2008) identified a gap in research on print media reporting in Britain and winter sports. They aimed to fill this gap by examining the media portrayal of athletes in 2004 and 2005 in skiing and snowboarding. They analysed 226 articles from national and local newspapers, and magazines. They explored three themes: gender, stardom and risk. Male athletes received 15.6% more coverage than females. Sportswomen featured in more non-task stories which diminished their athletic status and undermined their ability. Feminising language was employed, such as 'queen of cool' and 'alpine angel' (102). Women were often described as smiling and giggling and sexist descriptors, like 'hot stuff' were employed (103). Stone and Horne concluded that sportsmen affirm their identity and status as heterosexual, and assert dominance over women through sport. It is interesting that gender discrimination in sports reporting is present even in a non-mainstream competitive sport such as skiing. However, the context is important, namely that winter sports are not popular in Britain as there is no significant tradition of participation or success in the Winter Olympics (with the exception of Amy Williams winning gold at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, 'Vancouver 2010. . .').

A sport which is growing in stature in Britain, particularly with the occasion of the 2012 London Olympic Games, is beach volleyball. It is a relatively new sport and thus few studies have been conducted on it thus far. Sailors et al (2012) provide a critique of media representations of beach volleyball. The method, timeframe, sample, and choice of analysis is not clear. However, they conclude that there is no tangible progress in how women are portrayed in the media representation of beach volleyball, because women are confined to two roles: sex object or mother. The authors provide little commentary on the agency of female players who openly promote the sport through the discourse of wearing little clothing to



compete. This research misses an opportunity to expand understanding of how women's beach volleyball is represented in the media.

By contrast, media representations of tennis have been widely discussed (Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Crossman et al 2007; Vincent and Crossman 2009). In 'Femininity, Masculinity and Physicality and the English Tabloid Press' Harris and Clayton (2002) analyse articles and photographs in the *Sun* and *Mirror* during the Wimbledon Championship in 2000. They use the case of Anna Kournikova to discuss how the media trivialise sportswomen's accomplishments by manufacturing a 'sexy' image of women in sport. Harris and Clayton argue that this mechanism of sexualising women in sports media is not exclusive to sportswomen but includes women who are not athletes but appear in the sports sections in supporting roles. Women photographed for their roles as girlfriend, wife, mother or fan in the sports pages are 'targeted for erotic photography', along with real sportswomen 'in order to establish their femininity and trivialise their bodies' (Harris and Clayton 2002: 408). By doing this the focus on sportswomen is directed away from athleticism, emitting a sense that women's place in sports does not fit in with gendered notions of femininity. Framing sportswomen as feminine and sexy is not exclusive to tennis. Nevertheless, it appears to be a well-established media mechanism in this 'female-appropriate' sport.

Research on the reporting of individual sportswomen tends to focus on case studies of women who compete in 'female-appropriate' sports, such as athletics or tennis. Wensing and Bruce (2003) examined the media coverage of Australian sporting hero Cathy Freeman during the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. They analysed a sample of 700 articles on Freeman from eleven major Australian newspapers. Before the Olympics began Freeman was focused on as the 'face of the Games' for Australia and started her race as the overwhelming favourite to win. Wensing and Bruce anticipated finding evidence in reporting of 'female fragility' in terms of coping with media pressure. However, this was not the case. They found that the media coverage of Freeman was mostly positive and reflected her winning performance. Although some elements of her private life such as her marital status were occasionally mentioned, she was not on the whole framed by gender. Wensing and Bruce describe Australian media coverage as male-dominated. They highlight 'old rules' in media reporting of sportswomen, which include: compulsory heterosexuality, emphasizing appropriate femininity and non-sports related aspects. However, in the case of

Cathy Freeman, these media rules were 'bent' during the Olympics when 'national identity overrides all other identity markers such as gender' (2003: 388), particularly as her aboriginal heritage marked her as a symbol of national reconciliation. It could be argued that these findings are specific to the context in which this investigation took place. It would be interesting to see if similar data could be gleaned from media texts after the Olympic Games in Sydney when their poster girl's winning performance had become a distant memory. In other words, the specificity of the context of the reporting on Freeman, I would argue, was vital to the positive media coverage she received.

The case of a Kenyan distance runner demonstrates how great sporting performances can be 'forgotten' by the media, particularly the legacy of sportswomen if they present a threat to the institution of sport. Mwaniki (2012) examined media representations of Tegla Loroupe throughout her career. She was one of the first female Kenyan runners to achieve international success beginning with victory at the New York City Marathon in 1994. She no longer runs professionally but is a United Nations Ambassador for Sport and has a peace foundation. The media narratives of her produce a complex picture; she is described as an athlete, rather than a *female* athlete, moving discussions of her beyond gender assumptions. This is juxtaposed with representations of female frailty due to her seemingly small body size. Loroupe's sexuality and gender are questioned as a result of impressive performances in races against men. However, she is reported to need male pacemakers as no woman was deemed fast enough. This type of media coverage demonstrates a theme in the media treatment of sportswomen, namely that there are multiple readings of female success, depending on the audience and who is reporting. I would argue that Mwaniki's findings in her analysis of the media coverage of Loroupe suggest that Western media began to 'forget' her success when she spoke out about the treatment of women athletes. She was framed as a feminist icon and her 'star status' in Kenya faded to a certain extent because of this (she was originally sponsored by Nike but latterly switched to Mizuno). This turn in reporting might be due to the subjective nature of sports reporting (Hardin 2005). Such subjectivity could arguably be the stimulus for elevating sportsmen to 'sports star' status (Boyle and Haynes 2009), whereas sportswomen infrequently achieve such adoration from the media.

The sports star has experienced an exponential increase in media popularity in the past decade. Cashmore (2002), Whannel (2002) and Kellner (2003) highlight

the centrality of the sports star in contemporary popular culture, who is seen as untouchable – a ‘super’ human capable of feats unattainable by the average person. Rojek (2006) states that sports stars ‘exert a disempowering effect in popular culture by emphasizing the gulf between the celeb and the fan’ (682). This gulf is why sports stars have reached new levels of celebrity. Nonetheless, only certain sportspeople achieve this. Boyle and Haynes (2000: 92) write: ‘women do not feature prominently as sporting heroes. . . and are marginalized as cultural icons’.

Hughson (2009) employs the term ‘sporting hero’ as part of a particular discourse on the status of sportspeople; the word ‘hero’ comes from the Greek word *heroes* meaning ‘a person distinguished for exceptional courage, fortitude, enterprise, superior qualities or deeds’ (Berg in Wenner 1998: 134). Barney and Barney (1989) explain that sports heroes must not only perform exceptionally well consistently over a long period of time and achieve outstanding physical feats but must also be ‘recognised for their exceptional morality, social responsibility and intellectual capabilities’ (in Wenner 1998: 137). In this sense, David Beckham is one of the most recognisable ‘sports heroes’ (Smart 2005; Parry 2009).

However, David Beckham has also been labelled as a celebrity and a star. There has been a significant debate regarding the superficial interchanging of the terms ‘sports celebrity’, ‘sports star’ and ‘sports hero’. Nayar (2009) explains that celebrities are only possible through the proliferation of the mass media which circulate their images, thus constructing their heightened visibility. Turner (2007) claims that a celebrity’s fame is not dependent on their achievements, but that they may just be famous for being famous. There is a growing cross-over of sports and entertainment and more than ever sportspeople are labelled as ‘celebrities’ due to their enhanced visibility outside the sporting arena. Rowe (1995) adds that before the 1970s there was nothing fashionable about sport or sports stars. However, ‘a shift in the cultural and economic location of sport resulted in the increased marketing of sports stars as commodities’ (in Turner 2007: 39). A sports celebrity, on the one hand, then is famous because of the mass media’s generation of his images, although his fame does not depend on extraordinary sports achievement. The sports star, on the other hand, is not yet a sports hero because his status as ‘star’ denotes a certain temporality. Sports stars are people who have achieved a great result or performance once or twice but lack the representational potential, staying-power and integrity of a sports hero. Moreover, a sports star is more likely to be commodified as an advertising

or media icon, thus gaining celebrity status in the process (Nayar 2009). The sports hero is the ultimate description of a sportsperson. Boorstin (1978) aptly details the difference between a sports hero and a celebrity: 'the hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name' (in Wenner 1998: 136).

Absent from most academic and media discussions on sports stars and heroes are female heroes. Female stars are associated with the entertainment industry rather than with sport. Hopkins (2002) argues in *Girl Heroes* that supermodels, pop stars and actresses are the heroes for young girls today. The female star who appeals to the young female generations of today is desired by both sexes. She has the perfect body, is ultra-feminine and is the subject of male fantasies (Nayar 2009). The male star's body is hyper-masculine and his abilities are admired by men and attract women alike. Herein lies the difference between male and female sports stars; sportswomen's bodies are more muscular than the 'feminine ideal', restricting the possibility of them embodying the ultimate female star. Sportswomen compete against examples of stars in the entertainment industry such as Beyonce, Cheryl Cole and Kate Moss. Sportsmen's physiques however already emulate the male star's 'perfect' body. Thus it is clear that the process of becoming a star and fitting that specific 'cultural' mould is easier for sportsmen than sportswomen. This could explain partly why there is so little material on female sporting heroes.

The majority of research done on sports heroes has been dominated by a focus on sportsmen (Trujillo 1991 studied Nolan Ryan; Kellner 1996 used the example of Michael Jordan; Wenner 1998; Whannel 2001). Hughson (2009) suggests that sports heroes tend to come from individual sports, although the striker of a football team or the bowler in a cricket team can also become a 'hero' because of an outstanding performance which promotes the whole team to victory. Of the seven sportspeople used as examples of 'heroes' in Hughson's study, two are women. Hughson notes that the idea of a sports hero has been 'framed by the image of a man' and thus 'the female sports hero, or heroine, faces a contradiction by very definition' (2009: 95). This is linked to the feminine ideal; sportswomen often do not, or not fully, comply with traditional notions of femininity. However, to become adored by the masses a sportswoman must display certain feminine characteristics (Choi 2000). This creates a complex situation in which very few sportswomen are able to please the public by being

strong, skilled and fast enough to attract sports fans but not show too many traditionally 'male' characteristics linked to sporting excellence such as aggression and ambition. Hence there is a dearth of women sports 'heroes' because to reach that level of stardom almost exclusively involves embodying masculine traits and 'male' sporting values.

While Hughson's work is current, its protagonists are not; the most recent example used is John McEnroe who retired from professional tennis in 1992. It would have been perhaps more revealing had Hughson looked at who is classed as a 'sports hero' nowadays using a case study such as Ellen MacArthur, the sailor, for example, who broke the world record for the fastest circumnavigation of the globe in 2005. She was catapulted into 'hero' status upon her return to England ('MacArthur Sails into Record Books'). MacArthur is an interesting case because not only is she a current example of a sportswoman as a 'sporting hero' but also her sport is not a stereotypically 'female' sport like tennis and appeals to a greater variety of people. Her endeavour captured the nation's hearts and interest in sailing (she was runner-up in the BBC Sport's Personality of the Year in 2001 and 2005) and raises the question of how she achieved 'hero' status when the majority of sportswomen do not? Perhaps it is useful to consider the impact of nationality and patriotism and how they influence the 'creation' of sports heroes in the media.

There is an inextricable link between sports heroes and national identity. Rowe et al (1998) claim that sportsmen personify the national character. Boyle and Haynes (2009) argue that few other cultural institutions have the power to act as an indicator of national identity. The embodiment of national identity by sportsmen competing for their nation, emphasized by their expression of masculine values intertwined with sport, produces a narrative in the media of the nation's masculinity in relation to the defence and promotion of patriotism in sport. Brookes (2002) argues that men are significantly more likely to identify with notions of nation-state and national identity than women. The embodiment and celebration of national identity is played out, mostly, by all-male sports teams, more specifically the football, cricket and rugby teams (Brookes 2002). The performances by men's teams on the world stage at regular intervals reinforce the stereotype that men are the defenders of national identity and its integrity in front of foreign competitors.

One way in which patriotism and national identity are harnessed by a nation in sport is during major sporting events when the national team competes on the world stage. Team sports have been the main focus when investigating the relationship between sport and national identity. Research on the role of the British media and the construction of national identity has mostly focused on football teams and all-male international football competitions such as the World Cup (Brookes 2002; Boyle and Haynes 2009; Vincent et al 2010). In their study of Euro 2000, Harris and Clayton discovered a clear link between sports achievements, national identity and the use of war metaphors. In this all-male tournament, the English tabloid press placed high levels of 'national' expectation on the players. Sportswomen, however, do not inspire the same type of nationalist expectation. A probable explanation of this is that nationally famous sportswomen tend to compete in 'female-appropriate' individual sports which do not display the masculine characteristics linked to notions of sports heroes and national identity. Kane (1989) found that in both visual and print media, sportswomen were more likely to be given media coverage when involved in individual rather than team sports. Brookes comments on the representation of Englishness in the media as obviously gendered: 'no women's sports team has got anywhere close to representing the nation in the way that the England men's soccer, cricket and rugby teams have' (2002: 101). My findings on women's team sports, particularly cricket, will challenge Brookes' statement.

Lippe (2002) examined media texts of women's handball teams at the 1998 European Championships. She investigated five nations' (Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Romania) media representations in relation to the construction of female bodies and the symbolic processes of nation-making. She found that newspapers presented female handball players as emotional, on and off the court. Lippe expressed doubt that sportsmen's nerves and tears would ever be reported in the same context, alluding to the existence of double standards. Lippe proposed that if women are to contribute to the construction of national identity through sport, four factors must occur: the sport must have a glorious mediated history; the sport must be sex-appropriate; female bodies must be aggressive, tough, strong and non-fragile; and the sports competitions must be big media events. It is not surprising, considering this list of requirements, that sportswomen do not contribute to the construction of national identity. The literature reviewed thus far demonstrates that it is particularly problematic for sportswomen to participate in a 'sex-appropriate' sport and also have mediated aggressive and strong bodies.

Strong female bodies are rarely presented in a positive light, particularly in 'female-inappropriate' sports. Lee (2009) examined 'red feminism' in images of female boxers in North Korean communist media texts. Findings suggest that women are not sexualised or eroticised here; rather they are appraised as skilful boxers. Despite this, a gender order was evident in the privileging of typically 'male' characteristics, such as strength and aggression. Lee found that female boxers were predominantly valued by the communist government propaganda. The media facilitate the image of boxers as non-gendered, however, the image of the female boxer as a symbol of feminist liberation was overshadowed by the dominant social system maintained by patriarchal and nationalist political discourse. In other words, these data demonstrate similarities with previous findings, namely that sportswomen function to maintain a certain dominant social order.

Lee's (2009) analysis of the representation of sportswomen in North Korea is one of a growing number of studies which demonstrate the global interest in this field. The majority of studies on the media representation of sportswomen stem from Anglophone countries (Messner et al 1993; Crossman et al 1994; Lenskyj 1998; Jones et al 1999; Eastman and Billings 2000; Knight and Guiliano 2001; Harris and Clayton 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Nylund 2004; Hardin 2005; King 2007; Mackay and Dallaire 2009; Biscomb and Griggs 2012; Davis and Tuggle 2012). But in Asia there is an increasing interest in women's sport and its representation. Yu (2009) examined news stories on female Asian Olympic athletes from January 2000 to August 2008. This timeframe is unique in that it incorporates both summer and winter Olympic Games. Yu used content analysis to evaluate 266 articles from Asian and international newspapers. Her findings show that the top three mediated sports for female Asian athletes were diving, marathon running and weightlifting. They highlight how other countries or regions' appreciation of different sports can alter the latter's media representation. At the summer Games Yu discovered that the sports in which Asian sportswomen win most medals, judo and taekwondo, were not covered frequently. This could be because they are considered 'female-inappropriate' sports which involve hard physical contact and power. The marital status of female athletes was the least mediated aspect, which demonstrates different findings from Western research on the representation of sportswomen (Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Crossman et al 2007). Or perhaps it could be argued that Yu's findings represent a shift in media coverage of sportswomen.

Several scholars have posed the question: are we seeing progress towards more equitable sports media reporting?

Bernstein (2002) has asked 'Is it Time for a Victory Lap?' and Crossman et al (2007) stated 'The Times They Are A-Changin'. Literature post 2000 has begun to investigate whether changes are taking place in the sports media. Bernstein (2002) used mixed methods in her study, showing that quantitatively sportswomen are not majorly under-represented by the media, but she revealed that the quality of the media coverage of sportswomen could be significantly improved to show the same respect towards both women and men. In other words, the figures show little inequality but the finer details demonstrate gender discrimination. She cites sportswomen's improved participation and performance rates as proof that the gender gap is closing in terms of ability, access and media coverage. Bernstein argues that there is still a disparity in the reporting about women and men in sport, and questions if the amount of coverage matters as much as the quality: 'does more coverage necessarily bring about a truly equal representation of women in sport? Or are we simply getting more of the same?' (Bernstein 2002: 419) This is an interesting point because 'more of the same' would not equate to a *better* representation of women in sport. Bernstein concludes that while women are participating and receiving better coverage at major sporting events such as the Olympics, the day-to-day coverage, both in quantity and quality, still lags behind that of sportsmen.

A growing number of studies use research on the media coverage of Olympic Games and other major sporting events as a barometer to evaluate gender equity. King (2007) used a longitudinal study of the newspaper coverage of female and male track and field athletes at every other Olympic Games between 1948 and 2004. He focused on how the coverage changed over the 56-year timeframe. King chose to use British newspapers, reviewing *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. A total of 1,292 articles, headlines and photographs were examined. Overwhelmingly King found that male athletes received more coverage than female athletes in Olympic Games between 1948 and 2004. King argued that over the years the gap had narrowed between the coverage of male and female athletes. He suggested that in 2004 there were more images of sportswomen than in the two previous Olympics. King proposed that improved results by sportswomen influenced this increase in photographic media coverage. In my work I argue that this underlines the double standard in sports reporting between men and women. On the one hand, sportswomen must 'prove' themselves and



their sports ability by winning gold medals or breaking world records in order to be awarded some media space or airtime. On the other, sportsmen do not have to jump over such hurdles in order to receive media coverage. They simply turn up at competitions and compete, and this normally secures them, if it is a dominant sport, attention from the media.

Signs of progress towards gender equality in sports coverage have also been highlighted in research conducted in other countries. Mackay and Dallaire (2009) ask if gender parity is possible in 'Getting Closer to Equitable and Sports-Related Representations of Female Athletes?' They examined English and French student newspapers at the University of Ottawa in Canada 2004-2007. Their findings exposed few differences in the sports coverage in textual and photographic formats between sportswomen and men. Although sportsmen appeared more frequently on the front page of newspapers, sportswomen received more coverage overall. Moreover, they found that female athletes were not sexualised but described as 'just athletes'.

Kian et al (2009) ponder if the sports channel ESPN has become a 'women's network'. They examined internet sports coverage of 'March madness' and analysed the prevalence of gender-specific descriptors. They claimed that their findings contradict previous research which states that the media continue to uphold the male hegemony in sport. Kian et al conclude that their investigation indicates that sports media are changing.

In response to the studies which profess that there has been an improvement in the media's treatment of women in sport, authors such as Bernstein (2002), Crossman et al (2007), and Davis and Tuggle (2012) respond that there has been no such development and it is simply a false impression. They argue that the media now employ 'modernised' mechanisms in order to reinforce traditional notions of femininity and maintain male hegemony in sport. This is evident in the size, quality, content and function of articles and photographs of sportswomen. Bernstein criticizes studies which claim that sports media coverage is more equitable for men and women, for not highlighting the fact that sportswomen are mostly only represented in individual sports which are 'socially acceptable' for women (2002: 418). Mechanisms which exclude women can also include the placement of articles and photographs of sportswomen below that of sportsmen, or not placing them on the front or back pages, using women's first names and referring to them as 'girls' rather than 'women', focusing on their private lives (non-task relevant reporting) and photographing them in non-active poses.

Bernstein has argued that while there may be an intention to 'appear' concerned with gender equity, the quality of media coverage still belittles sportswomen and their achievements. Bernstein (2002), Crossman et al (2007), and Davis and Tuggle (2012) warn that these new variations on old themes must not be mis-read.

Overall the literature has demonstrated that sportswomen remain under-represented in the media. Moreover the quality of coverage has been addressed and evaluated as significantly different from and inferior to the way that sportsmen are reported on. Most stark in this literature review is the focus on certain individualised sports; 'feminine' sports such as tennis and athletics have been the focus in relation to gender issues. However, there is an absence in the literature of discussion of gender-neutral sports. With the exception of handball, there has been very little research conducted on sports which have been traditionally open to women and men alike. This justifies the assertion that sport is highly gendered, and little academic attention has been paid to this gap in understanding how media representation of sportswomen works in these gender-neutral sports. My investigation will focus on the sports in which women are most commonly given media coverage.

The literature review indicates that significant barriers exist in achieving equality for women in sport, and particularly in their media representation. However, more recent studies show a shift away from sexist sports reporting towards more gender parity, particularly in the content of sports news. My thesis will seek to investigate whether these findings can be upheld. I turn now to outline the structure of this thesis.

### Thesis Structure

Following on from this introduction, I present my methodology chapter. This will discuss the process of data collection and the issues I encountered while collecting the data. I will explain my choice of methods and the way in which I analysed the data and any difficulties which arose in this. I shall also discuss my standpoint as a feminist researcher. I then present four chapters that detail my findings. The first of these, 'The Presentation of Sportswomen and Men in Selected British Newspapers: Quantitative Findings' centres my quantitative data along three levels of analysis: a) the overall quantity of coverage of sportswomen and men, b) the organisation of reporting on sportswomen in terms of photographs and the most prominent sports, and c) the thematic content of this

coverage. This chapter will set the scene for the three qualitative chapters which follow. The first of these will discuss the media images of bodies of sportswomen. The second will examine the equality/inequality discourse in newspapers. The third qualitative analysis chapter will consider how stereotypes are used in the media representation of sportswomen. These topics which are at the core of the three qualitative chapters arose from reviewing my data after collecting them, as I will explain in the following Methodology chapter.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

### **Introduction: What does Feminism Mean in my Investigation?**

Feminism was the starting point of this investigation. The recognition that sportswomen are under-represented by the British media (Harris and Clayton 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007; King 2007; Biscoomb and Griggs 2012) led me to privilege gender as a category of enquiry and do so from a position that seeks to improve the position of women in contemporary culture. Studies such as Jones et al (1999), Crolley and Teso (2007) and Biscoomb and Griggs (2012) not only demonstrate the under-representation of sportswomen in the media, but they also provoked me to ask *how* sportswomen are represented. These issues provide the basis for this investigation with the privileging of gender being the key component of my feminist methodology.

It is difficult to give one distinct definition of feminism since there are many different versions (Beauvoir 1949; Greer 1970; Daly 1979; Jeffreys 2005; Walter 2010). Despite the plethora of possible definitions, one of the founding notions underpinning all feminisms is a belief in the advocacy of women's rights and the struggle against male-dominated patriarchal structures which have subordinated women. At the same time I do not think of feminism as a war between the sexes;<sup>2</sup> it is about striving for equality, creating a more just society where gender is not a hindrance. As a feminist researcher, I attach these beliefs to my work, shaping my methodological perspective on many levels, beginning with my choice of subject and privileging the category of gender.

It is hard to pinpoint what exactly constitutes a feminist methodology; it is a question that has been explored widely by feminists (Harding 1986, 1988; Margaret and Cook 1991; Scraton and Flintoff 1992; Humphries and Truman 1994; Ramazanglu and Holland 2002; Bryman 2008). Harding (1987) argues against a singular, distinctive feminist method of inquiry. My choice of methods was determined by my research focus in that I opted for the content analysis of certain newspapers both in numerical and qualitative terms. These methods are not in themselves feminist but I would argue that my research focus is.

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<sup>2</sup> However, there are feminists who argue that it is a war between the sexes. See Daly (1991) *Gyn/Ecology* and Gray (1992) *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*.

Gender has material effects on sportswomen. In the world of business the pay gap between the genders in the UK is still significantly large.<sup>3</sup> In sport the notions of biology as destiny in terms of women as physically inferior and of 'natural' gender differences continue to be used as counterarguments against those who fight for greater equality between sportswomen and men. Gender therefore plays an important role in the representation of women in sport. In light of recent studies (King 2007; Kian 2008; Mackay and Dallaire 2009; Biscomb and Griggs 2012) which have claimed that media coverage is improving for sportswomen, I aim to investigate what the situation is for sportswomen in 2008 and 2009.

Gender also has an impact on my ability to conduct this research: I entered into this project as a sportswoman and a feminist. I am aware that due to my standpoint as a white, female, heterosexual, middle-class, and athletic person I bring particular traits to this research. These factors are important because they shape my research. There are two aspects of myself I want to discuss briefly. Firstly being a woman investigating gender relations in the media immediately creates a particular bias in my work. Secondly, as an athlete I am personally as well as academically interested in this topic. Being actively involved in sport determined my topic from the outset, but as a triathlete I am concerned with particular disciplines of sport. Whilst my investigation will look at all sports covered by the media, I am conscious of my particular interest in certain sports. Having explored why I wanted to investigate the media representation of sportswomen, I needed to decide *how* I would conduct the research in terms of sample and timeframe.

### Thesis Parameters

I decided to focus on a particular subset of the British middle-brow print media. I chose five English Sunday newspapers, three broadsheets (*The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Telegraph*) and two tabloids (the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sunday Express*). These newspapers were selected for four reasons: firstly, using purposive sampling, the newspapers in my sample are middle-brow and therefore represent a particular subset of British newspapers thus responding to my main research question (Bryman 2008). Secondly, they include some of the newspapers I read on a daily basis and therefore I am familiar with them. Thirdly, these newspapers are not usually considered for analysis in

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<sup>3</sup> Walter states that the 'hourly pay gap for women working full-time is around 17 per cent, but it is around 35 per cent for women working part-time' (2010: 10).

research on sportswomen and representation<sup>4</sup> and thus they add a new body of knowledge to the field of sport, gender and media. Fourthly, they were chosen because they have a wide national circulation and thus warrant analysis in terms of their treatment of female athletes. The national readership of the newspapers in my sample can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. NRS readership estimates of newspapers and supplements for 2008 and 2009.

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b><i>The Sunday Times</i></b>	3,221,000	3,237,000
<b><i>The Sunday Telegraph</i></b>	1,703,000	1,708,000
<b><i>The Observer</i></b>	1,379,000	1,291,000
<b><i>Mail on Sunday</i></b>	5,612,000	5,387,000
<b><i>Sunday Express</i></b>	1,752,000	1,628,000

Source: <http://www.nrs.co.uk/>, accessed 15/05/2010.

It is interesting to note that there are significantly more female readers of the tabloids in my sample than the broadsheets (see Table 2). This gendered difference in audience has been paid little attention to by scholars of media representation of sportswomen. Chapter Three will explore this issue in more detail by evaluating the results of my quantitative data set and showing in these newspapers the distribution of articles on women in sport.

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent et al (2002) examined *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. However, my sample of newspapers is unique because they are Sunday editions and have never before been researched together in this way.

Table 2. NRS readership estimates of newspapers and supplements for 2008 and 2009 based on people over the age of 15, by gender.

	2008		2009	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	1,753,000	1,468,000	1,804,000	1,433,000
<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	885,000	818,000	852,000	856,000
<i>The Observer</i>	750,000	629,000	655,000	636,000
<i>Mail on Sunday</i>	2,741,000	2,871,000	2,646,000	2,741,000
<i>Sunday Express</i>	847,000	905,000	793,000	835,000

Source: <http://www.nrs.co.uk/>, accessed 15/05/2010.

My initial plan was to centre this investigation around the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games because that was the period of time when I first became interested in the topic of media representation. I watched these Olympic Games with interest and followed the media coverage on television and in newspapers. The British team surpassed all its expected goals and performed better than I had ever witnessed ('Beijing Olympics. . .'). The news coverage they received was intriguing to me; it appeared that the surprise achievements by the British sportswomen and men harnessed national pride, mirrored in the celebratory coverage dedicated to them in the mass media ('Beijing Olympics. . .'). I started to wonder why certain sporting accomplishments were privileged over others, more specifically why men's achievements were advantaged in newspaper coverage over the sporting equivalent of women's during these Olympic Games.

Subsequently reading related literature indicated that there was a gap in research on sportswomen and media coverage. Most studies focus on one major sporting event<sup>5</sup>, such as the Olympics or Wimbledon. These events take place over a

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<sup>5</sup> I must clarify what constitutes a major sporting event: I define it as generally an international event of any sport involving a contest competed by elite sportspeople between at least two nations. However, not all major sporting events are well publicised in the British print media. There are two explanations for this. First, there are a limited number of news items which fit into any newsprint publication, and second, the dominant cultural narratives in sports print media tend to favour the reporting of certain events and

number of weeks and can be considered separate from 'normal' everyday reporting norms. Some studies have suggested that the media coverage of sportswomen is improving and reaching near gender parity (King 2007; Kian 2008; Mackay and Dallaire 2009). I wondered, however, whether such gender parity, if indeed it exists, is particular to major sporting events. I also pondered whether or not this argument of gender parity could be sustained over longer periods of time, including major and everyday events. Thus, I decided to elongate my timeframe (Jan 2008-Dec 2009) to include a greater variety of events making it semi-longitudinal. My investigation thus examines whether claims of near gender equality can be justified over a two-year period – data which a single sporting event cannot provide.

The years 2008 and 2009 were particularly successful for women in sport, especially in male-dominated sports. In England, the national women's cricket team retained their Ashes title and won their One Day International (ODI) against India in 2008. In 2009 they won the Ashes again, alongside the Twenty20 and the World Cup. England women's football also made the headlines when they

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sports over others. For example the World Badminton Championships are below the reporting radar in comparison to Wimbledon. While there are numerous 'major sporting events' which take place throughout the year worldwide, particular events are privileged by the media and thus become well publicised major sporting events. Hence, when discussing major sporting events, I therefore refer to those which are well publicised by UK main media.

Major sporting events have an important place in my sampling dates because any 12-month period in the United Kingdom includes an annual cycle of events such as the national football Premiership league, the rugby leagues (both union and league), regional cricket leagues, the Ashes contest, the FA Cup, the Champions league, the Formula One series, and national track cycling competitions among other events. Newspapers cover particular sports depending on variables such as patriotic interest, where the sports take place and at what time of year. For example, winter sports which do not take place in Britain are not generally reported on. Events which take place in Britain are reported on most frequently, as are international competitions in which there is a strong patriotic British interest (for example the 2012 Tour de France in which the British cyclist Bradley Wiggins won). The news coverage of the annual sporting calendar varies throughout the year. There is a 'bunching' of sports and events at certain times of year. That is to say that particularly in the British summer months when more events and a wider range of activities take place, news coverage responds to this by reporting on more sports than during the winter months.



reached the final of the European championships in 2009 and were awarded central contracts by the Football Association (FA).<sup>6</sup> The England women's rugby team won the Six Nations competition in 2008 and 2009 and the 2008 Women's European Championship ('England Women Win. . .'). Moreover, during my research period, significant coverage was produced when women were granted access to compete in boxing in the 2012 Olympic Games. Several other Olympic sports, including track cycling, implemented gender parity in the number of events open to women. These events and the success of British sportswomen in recent years reaffirmed my decision to study the two-year 2008-2009 timeframe rather than focus solely on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. I wondered if success in a variety of sports by women would equate to more media coverage of women in sport in general. The events I have mentioned here are amongst many other competitions in which women participated over that 24-month period. The timeline of events (Table 3) I created where women won significant international sports competitions demonstrates the quantity of competitions for sportswomen, independent of the media's coverage of them.

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<sup>6</sup> Central contracts were awarded to the England women's football squad ahead of the European championships in 2009, allowing the women's team to go from full-time to part-time work in their day jobs away from football. These contracts are worth £16,000 per player per year ('FA announces. . .').

Table 3. Timeline of selected national and international sporting events in which women competed in 2008 and 2009, either in women-only contests or alongside men in competitions such as the Olympics.

<b>Date 2008</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date 2009</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>Jan</b>	Tennis, Australian Open	<b>Jan</b>	Tennis, Australian Open
	Golf, Women's World Cup	<b>Feb</b>	Badminton, European Champs
<b>Mar</b>	Athletics, World Indoor Champs		Athletics, AVIVA Grand Prix
	Ice Skating, World Champs	<b>Mar</b>	Golf, Singapore HSBC Champs
	Cycling, World Track Champs		Athletics, European Indoor Champs
	Swimming, European Champs	<b>Apr</b>	Cycling, Track World Champs
<b>Apr</b>	Swimming, World Short Course		Tennis, Miami Open
	Athletics, London Marathon		Badminton, Individual European Champs
	Badminton, European Champs		Horse Riding, British Show Jumping Champs
<b>May</b>	Rowing, World Cup		Athletics, London and Chicago Marathons
	Football, Women's FA Cup Final	<b>May</b>	Tennis, Strasbourg WTA International
<b>Jun</b>	Tennis, French Open	<b>Jun</b>	Horse Riding, International Trials
	Rowing, World Cup		Athletics, Berlin Golden League
	Horse Racing, Royal Ascot		Tennis, WTA Eastbourne
	Triathlon, World Champs		Golf, British Women's Open
<b>Jul</b>	Tennis, Wimbledon		Athletics, Madrid Grand Prix
	Golf, US Women's Open		Golf, US Women's Open
<b>Aug</b>	Sailing, Cowes week	<b>Jul</b>	Rowing, World Cup
	Golf, British Women's Open		Tennis, Prague Open
	Beijing Olympic Games		Swimming, Rome World Champs
	Cricket, Women England v South Africa		Tennis, WTA Istanbul Cup
<b>Sep</b>	Athletics, World Final		Badminton, World Champs
	Tennis, Fed Cup Final	<b>Aug</b>	Athletics, World Champs
	Tennis, US Open		Rowing, World Champs
	Cycling, World Road Champs		Tennis, US Open
	Paralympic Games	<b>Sep</b>	Golf, Canadian Open
<b>Oct</b>	Squash, World Champs		Athletics, Berlin Marathon
	Gymnastics, Artistic Grand Prix		Tennis, Madrid Masters
<b>Nov</b>	Athletics, New York Marathon		Artistic Gymnastics, World Champs
	Tennis, Women's Champs Final		Tennis, WTA Tournament of Champions
<b>Dec</b>	Swimming, European Short Course	<b>Oct</b>	Golf, Shanghai Champions
	Athletics, European Cross Country Champs		Tennis, Fed Cup Final
			Badminton, Scottish International
		<b>Nov</b>	Horse Riding, London International Horse Show
			Swimming, European Short Course Champs

Source: Adapted from the BBC and *The Guardian* websites, accessed 23/02/2010.

Having described the newspaper sample and timeframe, I will now turn to look at how previous studies helped to guide me in terms of my research methods.

### Relevant Research which Influenced my Research Design

My choice of research design, sampling strategy, methods and structure of analysis was inspired by other recent studies on the representation of sportswomen in the media. Harris and Clayton (2002) examined 'Femininity, Masculinity, Physicality and the English Tabloid Press: The Case of Anna Kournikova'. Their sample involved collecting data from two British tabloid newspapers, the *Sun* and the *Mirror*, chosen for their wide national circulation and focus on the interplay between the world of celebrity and public life. The sampling dates covered the duration of Wimbledon 2000 and the initial stages of Euro 2000, a total of 22 days, excluding Sundays. Harris and Clayton applied both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques to their data, highlighting eight dominant themes within the newspapers' images and narratives. They analysed 1348 sports-related articles. My investigation, with a longer timeframe and thus more data, along with a different sampling strategy and theoretical framework, produced different, but equally informative outcomes. Harris and Clayton's focus on a major sporting event, Wimbledon 2000, reaffirmed for me my choice of a longer two-year timeframe, rather than focusing solely on a major sporting event.

In general, the research in the area of media portrayals of sportswomen and men has tended to have quite limited timeframes. Wensing and Bruce (2003) used the duration of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games as well as a week prior to and a week after the event as their timeframe in research on the representation of Cathy Freeman across 11 national newspapers. Vincent et al (2002) researched the coverage of male and female athletes using a sample of six newspapers from three countries for a period of 15 days, covering the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games. There are many more examples where shorter timeframes of research were used to identify a specific sporting event and develop a deep analysis of its news coverage. However, a shorter timeframe may reveal different ways of reporting which might only be relevant during specific moments of the sporting calendar, such as during a major sporting event. Focusing solely on a major sporting event can be fruitful. However, a longer semi-longitudinal timeframe allows a longer term view of the media representation of sportswomen including everyday and major sporting events. In other words, I will investigate the average

media coverage during a specific period of time, rather than the peaks and troughs of individual events.

Vincent et al (2002) made 'A Comparison of Selected "Serious" and "Popular" British, Canadian, and United States Newspapers Coverage of Female and Male Athletes Competing in the Centennial Olympic Games: Did Female Athletes Receive Equitable Coverage in the 'Games of the Women'?' This multi-national study was a bold attempt to produce data utilising a cross-sectional and comparative research design that involved tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. News items, both narrative and photographic, were collected and analysed using content analysis. While this study endeavoured to include a vast number of variables to understand the representation of sportswomen during the Centennial Olympic Games, the numerous units of analysis detracted from a deep comprehension of the subject area. The cross-national emphasis and newspaper selection were interesting choices and demonstrated that sportswomen are often represented in similar ways across tabloids, broadsheets and in different continents. This investigation certainly expanded the field of understanding sportswomen in the media as an increasingly global phenomenon. However, the analysis of the coverage of sportswomen was somewhat lost. This study encouraged me to think more strategically about limiting the number of variables in order to focus more specifically on the representation of sportswomen in the British print media.

Hughson (2009) studied the phenomenon of sporting heroes in the media. Seven sports 'stars' were considered: five sportsmen and two sportswomen. Hughson demonstrated a binary division between the identity of 'prowess' heroes and 'moral' heroes, concluding that their cultural capital and media image were inextricably linked to their sporting 'kudos'. The seven sport stars were from a different sporting era than is the focus of my research, mostly from the mid-1950s to the 1980s. The article did not take into consideration the media metamorphosis which has taken place over the last few decades regarding the elevation of today's sports stars into the celebrity stratosphere, including an intense public interest in both their public and private lives (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). Moreover, by not tracking the development of sports heroes into the current era, the article has less obvious relevance for the understanding of sports stars today. By comparison, my investigation of the representation of sportswomen in the media between 2008 and 2009 produces data which are relevant for this era,

particularly after an Olympic Games which aimed to be the most gender-equal in terms of participation by competitors ('Beijing Scores Records. . .').

The research mentioned in this section (Harris and Clayton 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007; Hughson 2009) provides some examples of how current literature in this subject area has influenced my choice of research design. I shall now turn to explain how I selected which data for investigation.

### How I Decided Which Data to Collect

Prior to the data collection, I did a series of pilot tests in order to create a data recording sheet. I used a 2009 edition of *The Observer* and the *Mail on Sunday* to identify the key parts of the sports pages which would inform the basis of my data sheet. I created one data sheet per month (a sample data sheet is in Appendix A) per newspaper, thus giving a total of 144 data sheets. The data sheet was the same for each newspaper over the two-year study timeframe.

I designed four levels of analysis which dictated the data I needed to collect. The first dimension was gender. At the macro level I divided the sports news by gender for articles and photographs. I assigned the articles to three possible categories: articles on sportsmen, articles on sportswomen and mixed or gender neutral. The 'mixed or gender neutral' category referred to instances where the content of news items concerned a combination of sportswomen and men, or alternatively a topic which could not be assigned to either gender. For example, during my timeframe an article on the construction of a new roof over Wimbledon's Centre Court in *The Sunday Times* (17/05/09), would be part of the 'mixed or gender neutral' category. This first level of analysis set the scene for understanding at the macro level the difference in quantity of coverage attributed to sportswomen and men.

The second dimension focused on how the representation of sportswomen was organised quantitatively. I analysed the material by recording the size of an article (full page, half page, quarter page, eighth page or small), and whether it appeared on the front page or not. A similar analysis was then undertaken for the photographs; total number of photographs, divided by gender, categorisation of photographs of sportswomen by size and position. I sub-categorized the photos of women as either photographs of sportswomen or photographs of women not in sport, in which case I specified their role/job (i.e. dancer, fan, cheerleader, politician, WAG etc). Finally, I noted the sports in which women were textually

reported, in order to understand the variety and range of sports in relation to which women received coverage. This second level of analysis gave a greater understanding of how the coverage of sportswomen is organised and appears in newspapers.

The third dimension of analysis centred on the content of the articles on sportswomen and sought to examine five particular themes within these: Success, Failure, Injury, Sponsorship and Other. These categories emerged from the content of the articles I analysed during the pilot test I conducted. An article would be categorised under 'Success' if it celebrated women's sporting achievements through positive language and news stories. An article would be classified as 'Failure' if it referred to a defeat or was negative in its reporting of sportswomen. The 'Sponsorship' category was designed for articles which discussed sportswomen and their sponsorship deals, their public image or the equipment and kit they use. Articles which discussed sportswomen's injuries and illnesses were placed in the 'Injury' category. The 'Other' category catered for any news item which did not fit into the first four categories<sup>7</sup>.

The fourth level of analysis also related to the content of the articles and images and examined the micro-level of sports reporting. This level informs the qualitative analysis chapters of this thesis, in other words chapters Four, Five and Six. Here I produced a set of qualitative data meaning a sub-selection of articles and images on which those qualitative analysis chapters are based. The aim was to understand in greater depth *how* sportswomen are reported on. A total of 172 news items constituted the qualitative data set.

The reason for creating the qualitative data set was, at the time of data collection, not explicit or fully explored. I had not intended to collect qualitative data, however, during the time I spent at the British Library in Colindale filling in my quantitative data sheets, I also noted all the news items that I identified as particularly pertinent to my research by systematically recording headlines, photographs and articles (see Appendix B). Lacking sufficient space on the quantitative data set, I used a notebook to record details of news items, noting, in most cases, the newspaper, date, page number, author and headline, content or

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<sup>7</sup> An example of a news item which did not fit into the existing four categories was an article about a footballer dating a glamour model (*The Observer* 20/12/09). The story could not be categorised into any of the four existing categories, hence the addition of the 'Other' category.

image. This allowed me to document elements of newspaper reporting which the quantitative data sheet did not allow for. For example, in *The Sunday Times* I categorised a photograph of Victoria Pendleton crouching beside a bike (06/01/08: 22) as a photograph of a sportswoman on my data set (see Appendix A), however, I recognised the value of interpreting this image further and thus noted its details and subsequently found the image by conducting an internet search upon arriving home after completing my data collection. As already mentioned, collecting this data was not intentional which is why completely this data set, particularly in terms of photographs, required a number of internet searches to locate images from online versions of the newspapers in my sample.

Latterly this note-taking took on greater importance in my project and these news items and images constituted a selected qualitative data set which provided the material to analyse in more depth the way in which sportswomen are depicted in British print media. This fourth level of analysis was subsequently devised on the premise of complementing my understanding of the quantitative analysis detailed above and to provide greater comprehension of how sportswomen are represented in the media.

#### Collecting the Data

I used the archives of the British Library Newspaper Reading Room in Colindale, London, in order to view the microfilm versions of my sample newspapers in January 2010 for approximately four weeks. In retrospect I realize that using hard copies of the newspapers allowed me to collect my data in the same way that the newspapers' readership read the news. Not only was the original format of the sports sections vital to my investigation for analysis reasons, I also became aware while searching online that the experience of reading the news online is quite distinct from how it is read as part of a newspaper's offline hard copy format (Chyi and Lasorsa 2002; D'Haenens et al 2004; Waal and Schoenbach 2010). The offline news-reading experience is qualitatively different from the online experience. The latter therefore warrants a separate investigation to understand how women and sport appear in a different reporting medium. There are both benefits and drawbacks about reading news online. Internet news sites provide a wider selection of stories and images because the internet has a much greater storage capacity than a daily newspaper in hard copy. Online a person can search and select what they look at and read, in other words one is one's own editor. Conversely, paper versions of newspapers present readers with a selection of sports news chosen by sports editors, and therefore readers are

'guided' more when browsing a newspaper, in terms of viewing all sports news rather than picking specific stories. The distance between sports star and consumer is very different between online and paper media outlets; online the sports consumer has never before seemed closer to the elite athlete who now has much more control over their internet image because of blogs and social media, particularly in the wake of Twitter (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). Most internet news sites are constantly updated meaning that one can access the latest news online any time throughout a 24-hour period.

Some potential disadvantages of reading news online include the eye strain that can occur from staring at a computer screen for too long, the lack of 'cues' about the importance of a news story (for example in newspapers a high-value news story often appears on the front or back page, moreover the size and position on a page of a photograph indicates importance), and the proliferation of advertising online has been cited as distracting for the reader, sometimes discouraging them from reading a story to its finish (D'Haenens et al 2004). Further, people who use computers at work may prefer reading newspapers to online news sites as they could be considered an extension of their working hours, sitting in front of a computer at a desk. The experience of reading a newspaper is perhaps a more relaxing one, particularly with the knowledge that many news websites host several adverts alongside news articles, potentially distracting the viewer. The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) produced a report in 2010 detailing the future of print journalism. Their concern was the loss of journalistic standards due to the proliferation of online news and as a consequence they argued that online readers have a more superficial understanding of the news and a 'more fragmented news experience' ('The OECD on News. . .'). While there is more selection online, news items tend to be shorter and do not always include as much analysis as a newspaper. However, with the advent of the internet and satellite mobile phones, there are sections of the population who tend to read the news solely online, without ever picking up a newspaper. Nonetheless, newspapers continue to be read by large sections of society and provide different news 'experience' from the online version.

### The Process of the Analysis

The quantitative data collected were subject to a content analysis which Bryman (2008: 275) describes as 'an analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and reliable manner'. This method of analysis ensures a certain amount of



transparency as the data collected can be re-analysed by another researcher. A total of 22,954 news articles and 25,717 photographs constituted my quantitative data sample.

In the qualitative data set of 172 items I operated an inductive mode of analysis, within the constraints of my empirical sources and given that this data set formed a sub-set of the data I initially collected. Analytic induction is a way of building explanations in qualitative analysis. It permits concepts to be modified and altered throughout the process of doing research with the aim of representing, as accurately as possible, the reality of the situation under investigation.

In order to analyse the images in my qualitative data set I drew upon feminist media theory and used guides to visual methodologies and analysis including Zoonen 1994; Jones 2003; Pink et al 2004; Gill 2009; Evans et al 2010. These sources informed my approach to reading the photographs in my data set.

I also drew upon a grounded theory approach in order to thematically analyse my qualitative data set. Grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and is most commonly associated with qualitative research. I employed part of the foundational reasoning of grounded theory and applied it to both my research methods and findings. Seale (2004: 241) describes how constant comparisons can be made when using grounded theory; he argues that it is a 'systematic tool for developing and refining theoretical categories and their properties'. I drew on grounded theory in order to let the key themes emerge from my data rather than taking a particular theoretical position and testing it.

The benefit for my study of using this framework lies in its flexible nature. It affected my research in three distinct ways. Firstly, as already mentioned above, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games were the original inspiration for this research project. However, during the data collection and influenced by my reading of the literature in this area, I reshaped this idea and reduced the importance of the 2008 Olympics from being the central point around which the research revolved, to being part of a longer research timeframe. The freedom to recognise changes that need to be made and redesign my project accordingly was emancipatory from the researcher's perspective, and was one of the ways in which I drew on a grounded theory approach.

Secondly, my original research design did not include mixed methods. Initially I intended to collect only data using quantitative methods. But during the data collection process I systematically noted down details of photographs, news

stories or simply headlines which interested or shocked me as a researcher, but was unsure of how these would fit into my existing research design. I did not decide until later, when I realised that the set of qualitative data I had collected was significant in size and content and could provide additional insights into the position of sportswomen in the media, that these notes would constitute my qualitative data. Having not planned to use mixed methods, drawing on the grounded theory approach opened up the possibility of adapting and changing my research design and indeed methods throughout the process. Although I had intended to collect only quantitative material from the five newspapers, employing elements of a grounded theory approach encouraged me to enter into the data collection phase with an open mind, and thus develop a mixed methods approach when the data required it.

Thirdly, unsure of what would emerge from the data, drawing upon a grounded theory approach alongside an inductive mode of analysis was ideal. After doing a review of the existing literature, it was not obvious what I would find because of the original dimension of my investigation (i.e. semi-longitudinal timeframe and newspaper sample). Nonetheless, my reading reinforced that there are a plethora of methods of investigation and analysis that can be employed to glean an understanding of the techniques used by the mass media to represent sportswomen (Urquhart and Crossman 1999; Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Crossman et al 2007; King 2007; Mackay and Dallaire 2009; Biscomb and Griggs 2012).

The use of mixed methods in social research generates divided opinions regarding their efficacy, validity and feasibility (Bryman 2008). The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods has yielded many supporters who suggest that employing mixed methods has a number of benefits. Primarily greater validity is considered the key benefit of mixed methods because findings can be 'mutually corroborated' by multiple methods (Bryman 2008: 608).

A further reason for employing mixed methods is the notion of completeness; the combination of quantitative and qualitative data can produce a more comprehensive account of a particular field of investigation. Using mixed methods allows one set of findings to illustrate the other; in other words, the qualitative findings put "meat on the bones" of "dry" quantitative findings' (Bryman 2008: 609). In my study this is a key point since the quantitative results show what is happening at the meta-level of the representation of sportswomen, whereas the qualitative discussion provides a deeper interpretation of those

quantitative findings. Overall the decision to employ mixed methods in this investigation provided a richer and more complete understanding of how sportswomen are represented in the media.

### Conducting Archival Research: Archival Challenges

I spent nearly a month collecting the data in London, which was longer than anticipated because I had under-estimated how long the process would take. Mostly there were obstacles that could not have been foreseen. I had not anticipated the many benefits and disadvantages of archival research that I encountered during the data collection process at the archives. Although writing on archival research is plentiful and very informative (e.g. Hill 1993; Steedman in Griffin 2005) I realised that working with archived material is a unique process which cannot easily be transferred from one discipline to another. This is mentioned by Hill who comments on the archive reading rooms as 'a singular space with special rules' (1993: 54) which he describes as being 'virtually a "sacred space" for many scholars'. Hill documents several issues which people researching in archives may encounter such as 'interactional ambiguity' with staff members, whose ineptness, Hill argues, the researcher must tolerate in order to get the materials they need, and reading room protocols particularly around the care and respect that must be shown by the researcher towards the materials they access. Further frustrations arise from a feeling of being watched; Hill comments that the culture of surveillance is inevitable but unnerving and can only be matched by the frustrating and complicated bureaucratic rules and organisation of the archives. Retrospectively I can certainly appreciate and empathise with some of the issues Hill describes for researchers working in archives. However, during my data collection I was less aware of these challenges and entered into it with an open mind.

The first of the challenges I faced in the archives was my initial difficulty accessing the material. I was informed that the best way to view archived newspapers was using microfilm machines as opposed to the hard copies which are archived in large, heavy books. It must be noted that not all of the newspaper editions I needed were available in hard copy because the later dates in my sampling period had not yet been archived by the time I was collecting my data in January 2010. The newspaper microfilm reels had to be ordered four at a time. The reels for the five newspapers varied in the number of Sunday editions they contained per reel. Some only held one Sunday edition, while others had four.

This made it difficult to assess how long the data collection process would take for any given newspaper.

As mentioned previously, after creating the data sheet I tested its functionality before going to the archives and timed myself to estimate how long approximately the data collection would take in total. However, despite these well-intended practices, the ordering of reels, changing the reels on the microfilm machines and finding the material I needed on each reel took a substantial amount of time which I had not previously calculated, or even anticipated. Ordering subsequent reels followed a certain rhythm – something I had read about previously in Steedman's 'Archival Methods' (in Griffin 2005). Steedman talks about the importance of remembering to fill out request slips for more reels or documents in advance in order to use your time in the archives efficiently. However, because of the large quantity of newspapers I was viewing at the archives, the library staff, after I explained my project, very kindly presented me with a loophole in the bureaucratic and rigid system of ordering reels and gave me a tray of reels for each newspaper covering almost the entire time period I required. This sped up the process significantly. Hill (1993) is quite critical of microfilms in comparison to using hard copies of archived materials. He cites eye strain, a lower quality of vision and the microfilm machines as less fun than 'real' paper documents. My experience was not, on the whole, negative. Although getting used to the microfilm machines was not a swift process and the lighting was difficult at first, I enjoyed the overall experience of using microfilm machines.

During my first trip to the archives in London I noted in my field diary some of my frustrations working in the archives such as the prohibition of taking photographs of the microfilm reels. Photocopying images and information from microfilm machines is a complicated and lengthy process and thus I transcribed in full any headlines or articles which I thought would be particularly useful.

Other issues which emerged during the data collection process included my initial struggle with the operation of the microfilm machines and attaching the reels. This is a process which I only began to master half way through my time spent at the archives. The benefit of the microfilm machines is the ability to move quickly from the beginning to the end of a reel. The machines also allow you to fast forward, go backwards, zoom in and out, focus and twist the images to your preference. The disadvantage of this function was its nausea-inducing feeling during the first few hours as I slowly got used to the images passing quickly in front of my eyes in the darkened surroundings.

The British Library Newspaper Reading Rooms were cold and required many layers of clothing since jackets must be handed in prior to entering the reading rooms, along with cameras, bags and water bottles – another piece of practical advice that Steedman proffers (in Griffin 2005). Further, the microfilm rooms are very dark so that the images can be seen. However, upon entering these gloomy rooms you seem completely cut off from everyday life and with no natural sunlight, you become entrenched in the process, unaware of the time of day. This affected me as I was leaving the archives at the end of every day – I felt dazed, as though I had been in another world, disconnected from ‘normal’ life. Steedman comments on this, emphasizing the loneliness that is often felt by researchers working in archives. She contrasts this lonely feeling with the simultaneous and contrasting pleasure that can be achieved after a period of research in archives. I experienced something similar, ending a day and thereafter the entire data collection process feeling as though I had been on an adventure, a journey through the newspaper archives, emerging from hours and weeks of hard work in dark gloomy conditions with a feeling of accomplishment. The process provided an element of discovery to the data collection. Uncertain of what shape the material would take before collecting it, the feeling of having achieved something during my time spent in the archives overturned my initial hesitancy and replaced it with a sense of surety of the substance and depth of my data.

I collected my data during December 2009 and January 2010 which were part of the United Kingdom’s harshest winter in many years (‘Harshest Winter. . .’). Unexpected levels of snow slowed the nation’s services down, including the British Library. Luckily, however, the deep snow affecting the railways only forced the archives to close early on one day while I was collecting my data. Aside from weather complications, the main obstacle to obtaining the full set of the sample of newspapers was the last six weeks of the sample (mid-November to the end of December 2009) which had not yet been archived in the British Library Reading Rooms. This meant that I spent the last two days of my data collection in London literally running from one public library to the next. Eventually I managed to find three libraries, namely the Hammersmith and Fulham Library, Kensington Library, and Chelsea Library, that stored the five Sunday publications that I needed to complete my research. I was fortunate to have alternative sources to complete the data missing. However, due to sports sections being missing from the newspapers kept in the first of these public libraries, a visit to all three libraries became necessary. Steedman comments on the difficulties of working in archives which are ‘incomplete’ because items have been ‘lost’ or are simply ‘missing’ (in

Griffin 2005: 25). Luckily such gaps were not as common in the other two establishments I visited, and thus I was able to end the research process, happy but exhausted, with a complete set of data.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed my feminist disposition, my methodological decisions, the choice of methods and how other research influenced my research choices. I explained how I came to decide on my data, the analysis of said data, its collection and the challenges I faced in archival research.

The following chapter will present the quantitative findings of my data collection in order to set the scene for the subsequent qualitative analysis of the textual and photographic coverage of sportswomen in the British media.

## **Chapter Three: The Presentation of Sportswomen and Men in Selected British Newspapers: Quantitative Findings**

### **Introduction**

Given that during my literature review I found references which claimed that the frequency of representation of sportswomen is increasing, I decided to conduct a quantitative analysis to see if these findings of progress could be corroborated. In reviewing 22,954 articles and 25,717 photos I was subsequently astonished to find that only 3.6% of all coverage in this semi-longitudinal investigation of British sports print media was allocated to sportswomen. This clearly indicates a decline in representation at the same time as sportswomen have been making more impact in their performances and professionalism. This finding was therefore both surprising and depressing.

This chapter is intended to act as a quantitative backdrop to the qualitative analysis of newspaper representations of sportswomen and men in selected British newspapers which follows in chapters four, five and six. The following analysis details my findings in order to establish how, on a purely quantitative level, sportswomen and men are presented in the five newspapers in my sample 2008-2009. Firstly, based on my investigation of my newspaper sample, I shall show the results of the preparatory research I conducted which focused on the way in which gender is articulated in the organisation of sports competitions both in domestic and international spheres. Secondly, I shall present the results of a close thematic and visual content analysis of the newspaper data. The data is organised around three levels of analysis as detailed in the Methodology chapter (the fourth level of analysis will follow in chapters four, five and six). The first level of analysis shows how gender functions at the macro level in media coverage of sport, in other words the absolute number of sports articles written about women and men. The second level of analysis looks at how newspapers' coverage of sportswomen is organised including the most commonly reported-on sports, and the quantity and content of images used. The third level of analysis takes a micro-level approach to the primary themes within the reporting of sportswomen. The data are divided into five content categories (Success, Failure, Injury, Sponsorship and Other) and further sub-categorised into 'Positive' or 'Negative' headings. The positive articles are those which overwhelmingly support sportswomen and their achievements, applauding their successes and all-round contribution to sport. The articles classed as negative are those which are critical of women in sport, focusing mostly on failures and issues unrelated to sports

which could be argued have no place in sports reporting (such as a sportswoman's marital status and personal relationships). These findings will illustrate how sportswomen are quantitatively represented in British newspapers, how coverage of them is organised and the dominant themes within this reporting.

### Access to Major Sporting Events for Women and Men

Before undertaking the task of my own data collection, I did some preparatory research in order to better understand the wider context of sportswomen, their participation in sports events and the reception of sportswomen's achievements in British society. One important topic, which has had only limited media coverage,<sup>8</sup> is the access to sporting events for women at elite level. Whilst it is still commonly professed by many that women will never possess the same physical abilities as men due to biological factors, women are no longer restrained from athletic participation on medical advice, as was once the case.<sup>9</sup> However, there remains a dearth in the number of events available for women to compete in. Four contexts on which I conducted preparatory research support this: the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2009 Berlin World Athletics Championships, the BBC and *The Observer's* calendars of national and international sporting events over 2008 and 2009, and the history of the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award.

In the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games 10,479 competitors took part in 38 sporting events, 5,966 sportsmen participated, constituting 56.9% of the total number of competitors. In comparison, 4,513 sportswomen competed, totalling 43.1%. Of the 38 sports available, 17 disciplines (44.7%) had equal numbers of men and women taking part. In a further 17 sports, sportsmen significantly outnumbered

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<sup>8</sup> Several high-profile British sportswomen have lamented the lack of events available for women in the Olympic Games. Victoria Pendleton, the 2008 World and Olympic track cycling sprint champion, has been very vocal regarding this issue. During the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games she could only contest one medal, whereas the male sprinters had three events to compete in ('Pendleton Wants Equality in 2012'). The 2012 London Olympic Games were named the 'Gender Games' by many journalists and pundits. For the first time in Olympic history women competed in every event. The introduction of women's boxing was perhaps the most visual demonstration of the gains that have been made in gender equality at the Games.

<sup>9</sup> It was claimed up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that sports that strained the body could jeopardize women's child-bearing capacity (Lenskyj 1986: 18).



sportswomen. This gender imbalance was due to athlete quota lists, which can be seen on the official 2008 Beijing Olympic Games website,<sup>10</sup> although it must be noted that it is not the host country which sets out these rules, but the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Women were prohibited from equal access to events compared to men in just under half the Olympic events in Beijing. It was estimated that up to 4.5 billion people watched some part of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games ('Official: Beijing Olympics. . .'). Thus, during one of the most viewed sports competitions internationally, women were not allowed to participate on equal terms with men. King (2007) interestingly argues that despite this inequality in participation, media coverage of sportswomen during the past Olympics up to Athens 2004 was increasingly equal to that of men. My thesis will endeavour to investigate this statement.

In the 2008 Olympics there were three women-only sports: rhythmic gymnastics, softball and synchronised swimming - easily identifiable as 'feminine' sports.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, boxing and baseball – arguably 'masculine' sports, were male-only in Beijing. In 17 of the male-dominated sports, including kayaking freshwater, kayaking slalom, BMX, track cycling, road cycling and wrestling, women's participation was less than a third.<sup>12</sup> One might argue that these sports are male-dominated not only in participation figures, but also by an image of hegemonic masculinity, connected to ideas of power and strength, the opposite of traditional femininity.

One might ask, then, how the gender quotas for certain sports are compiled? Is there a link to gender assumptions in certain sports? Does the gender history of a sport matter? Or is access devised due to the numbers of men and women who take part in these sports, at an elite level, globally? If some sort of gender bias

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<sup>10</sup> The athlete quota lists refer to the numbers of athletes that each country is allowed to enter into every event at the Olympics. Prior to the Games, every country has national trials and the winners of those are then selected to compete at the Olympics (the specific selection process is country-specific). The names of these competitors are added to the host country's list of athletes able to compete for each specific event ('Sports').

<sup>11</sup> Apart from being a female-only sport, the language used to describe them, 'soft', 'synchronised', and 'rhythmic' is arguably 'feminine'. Moreover, the sports of rhythmic gymnastics and synchronised swimming were amongst the initial few which were encouraged for female participation because of their elegance and posture-correcting properties, as well as emphasizing the 'feminine ideal' (Choi 2000: 23).

<sup>12</sup> Robinson (2008) investigates masculinities in extreme sports, with a focus on climbing in *Extreme Sport: Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport*.

occurs during the selection process of world-class athletes and start list quotas for competitions, how does this impact on grassroots perceptions of gender and sport? I am unable to answer these questions within this project, nonetheless they could create the basis for future investigations.

Since the Beijing Olympics in 2008, several changes have been made to the events in which women are permitted to participate. In the 2012 London Olympics, sportswomen competed in boxing for the first time in Olympic history, and track cycling increased its number of events for women from three to five, now equalling men's opportunities to compete.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, every nation sent a female athlete to compete in their team, a previously unprecedented achievement.

In the Berlin World Athletics Championships which took place in August 2009, women constituted 45.3% of the competing 2,381 athletes ('Home of World Athletics'). In 19 of the 26 events, there were higher participation levels of sportsmen than sportswomen. Therefore at 73.1% participation, male athletes occupied the majority of the events at the World Athletics Championships. The question remains as to why the international sporting bodies which organise this event do not allow as many women as men to take part in this competition? Perhaps this is indicative of the era when the modern Olympics began and its founder Pierre de Coubertin prohibited women from participating (O'Reilly and Cahn 2007).

The two events which were male-only, the decathlon and the 50kms walking race, are arguably two of the most strenuous events in the World Athletics Championships.<sup>14</sup> Could this be linked to antiquated opinions of medical experts who denied women's ability to compete in sporting events, assuming innate weakness?<sup>15</sup> Such medical opinions dominated the discourse on women in sport

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<sup>13</sup> This is not an exhaustive list of sports which now give more women the chance to participate.

<sup>14</sup> The 50kms walk race is the longest event in distance and the decathlon involves ten events over two days. By contrast, women compete in the 20kms walk race and the heptathlon which involves seven events over two days.

<sup>15</sup> The founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was opposed to women's participation in the Olympic Games as he found it to be 'unnatural and anaesthetic' Choi (2000:13). The extremely controversial inclusion of the 800m running race for women in the 1928 Olympics was immediately withdrawn after the event as the general consensus was that it was a dangerously long distance for women to run, which

until the 1970s. Some elements of this discourse prevail in modern sport. Women were not allowed to run in the marathon until 1984 (Choi 2000: 13), nearly 100 years after men had been competing in what is the longest distance in the Olympic running category. Gender inequality in participation is not as stark nowadays, but the question of why women compete in fewer events and shorter distances in comparison to their male counterparts, remains unanswered.

Prior to collecting my data I analysed a list of sporting events to 'watch out for' over the course of 2008, compiled by *The Observer* newspaper online. In 55 of the total 286 events both genders took part. Of the 286 events that were recommended, 18 were women-only events and largely comprised of tennis, golf and football, whereas 200 of the 286 events were men-only. The events dominated by men demonstrated the plethora of competitive opportunities available for sportsmen on a global and domestic scale, including sports such as bowls, darts, snooker, basketball, football, rugby, cricket, motor sports, cycling, golf, boxing, American football and horse riding. This list was intended to show 'what to watch' in 2008 but it really showed male-dominated sports, thus providing limited knowledge about the availability of women's sport. Another interpretation might be that this list makes a statement about sport as a predominantly 'male' event, thus curtailing women's access to sport as fans of women's sport and limiting sportswomen's visibility in mainstream media.

For one sports calendar of 2009, the online BBC website presented a detailed schedule for sports viewers ('January 2009 Calendar'): of the 316 events offered for public consumption, 226 were male-only, and as in 2008, the range of sports available was vast. In comparison, mixed gender events constituted 58 events, while women-only events made up 32 events.<sup>16</sup> The limited selection of sports in the women-only field for 2009 was a continuation of what *The Observer* promoted as events to follow in 2008. Sports fans during 2008 and 2009 might assume, given the lists of sports competitions on *The Observer* and the BBC websites, that professional sportswomen compete in many fewer events than sportsmen.

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could be detrimental to their female 'capacities'. The event was reinstated in 1960 (Choi 2000: 13).

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the lists of sporting events in 2008 and 2009 by *The Observer* and BBC online were not comprehensive. They were the 'recommended' viewing for sports fans and therefore perhaps, due to lower viewing figures among women, male-only events were given preference. However, one could argue that this type of listing also encourages a limited version of women's sport.

The table of events I compiled (Table 3) demonstrate the plethora of events on the domestic and international stage in which sportswomen compete.

The fourth and final section of the preparatory research focused on a British television programme, which highlights the achievements of British and international sportspeople in any given year. The BBC Sports Personality of the Year Award (SPOTY) takes place every year in December in front of a live and televised audience. The show began in 1954 and has celebrated sporting achievements since then. The main award is voted for by elite sportspeople and the British public. The list of ten nominees for this award is compiled by a 'panel of over 30 leading sporting experts from a selection of newspaper editors. . . and magazines'.<sup>17</sup> The viewing public then votes for its favourite from this list. As can be seen in Table 4 below, of the 56 winners of this prestigious award, 76.8% have been men, 21.4% women and 1.8% mixed.<sup>18</sup> The sports which have triumphed most frequently in this contest are more typically associated with male-dominated sports. 'Feminine' sports do not receive the same sort of recognition in the SPOTY contest.

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<sup>17</sup> In 2011 there was controversy over the all-male nominee list for SPOTY. Further furore was sparked in the revelation that the editors of men's' magazines *Nuts* and *Zoo* contributed to the list of nominees which did not include any sportswomen ('Women-free BBC. . .').

<sup>18</sup> The 'mixed' % is from the year (1984) when ice-skating couple Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean jointly won the award.

Table 4. Winners of BBC Sports Personality of the Year 1954 to 2009, by category of sport and gender.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>Total</b>
Athletics	10	7		17
Car Racing	7			7
Football	5			5
Boxing	5			5
Cricket	4			4
Ice Skating	2		1	3
Horse riding	1	2		3
Tennis	1	2		3
Golf	2			2
Cycling	2			2
Swimming	1	1		2
Snooker	1			1
Rowing	1			1
Rugby	1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>56</b>

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/keyfacts/stories/spoty.shtml>, accessed 10/12/2009.

This preparatory research compiled from several media sources gives a general impression of how sportswomen and men are treated differently by the British media and international sporting institutions, in terms of sports events available to women, accessing women-only sports for the non-participatory public and recognising sportswomen's achievements in public fora.

#### Macro Division of Newspaper Space by Gender in terms of Absolute Numbers

Over the research period of January 2008 to December 2009, across all of the five Sunday newspapers in this study, there were 22,954 articles in the sports pages, of which 21,527 articles focused on sportsmen and 829 articles on sportswomen. It is important to clarify here that all these articles were classified into three categories: sportsmen, sportswomen and mixed gender/gender neutral. An article was judged to belong to a certain category if more than 80% of its written content was about sportsmen, sportswomen or a mixture. In other words,

if a full-page article on tennis was reporting on Andy Murray's success at Wimbledon but contained a sentence on the British female tennis players, it would be classed as belonging to the 'sportsmen' category. However, if the same article was half a page, and it had a paragraph about female tennis players (which constituted more than 20% of the article) then it would be deemed to be mixed gender/gender neutral. Moreover, an article about sport which did not pertain to either gender, for example an article on the advancement of sports technology for example, would be labelled mixed gender/gender neutral.

Focusing on individual newspapers, *The Sunday Times* (see Table 5) contained the most articles overall on sports, regardless of gender, with a total of 5,354. It also had the longest sports section at the time of investigation with a total of 2,351 pages over 2008 and 2009, and a monthly average of 98 pages dedicated to sports news. The newspaper with the second-most articles written on sport was the *Sunday Express* with 5,253 over 2008 and 2009, equating to 64 pages of sports news on average per month. *The Observer* printed the third largest number of articles on sports with 4,888, averaging 91 pages monthly, and thus the second largest sports section of the broadsheets. *The Sunday Telegraph* had the least number of sports articles over the two-year period with 4,096 articles. Furthermore this newspaper contained the least number of pages for sports news with only 1,328 pages, giving a monthly average of 55 sports pages, only half that of *The Sunday Times*.

Table 5. Showing the five newspapers and their total number and percentage of articles on sports, divided by gender and the average monthly page number.

	Total no. and % of articles on sports in 2008 and 2009		No. and % of articles on sportsmen in 2008/9		No. and % of articles on sportswomen in 2008/9		Average no. of monthly sports pages
<b><i>The Sunday Times</i></b>	5354	100%	4965	92.7%	208	3.8%	98
<b><i>The Sunday Telegraph</i></b>	4096	100%	3907	95.3%	77	1.8%	55
<b><i>The Observer</i></b>	4888	100%	4599	94.0%	180	3.6%	91
<b><i>Mail on Sunday</i></b>	3363	100%	2989	88.8%	236	7.0%	57
<b><i>Sunday Express</i></b>	5253	100%	5067	96.4%	128	2.4%	64
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22954</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>21525</b>	<b>93.7%</b>	<b>829</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	

Source: Data analysis of material collected in 2010 from British Library, Colindale, London.

Lastly, the *Mail on Sunday* had the least articles on sport by a significant margin with 3,363 articles and a monthly average of 57 pages of sports news.

In sum, it seems that, with the exception of the *Sunday Express*, the newspapers in this study appeared to follow a similar trend of number of articles on sports being closely linked to the number of pages written about sports in their Sunday editions; the newspapers produced articles sized to fit the page size and number. Every newspaper averaged between two and three and a half articles per sports page, per month. This can be seen in Table 6 below. It is clear that proportionately, *The Sunday Times* published the fewest articles per sports page at 2.28 articles per page, per month. The *Sunday Express* fit more sports articles onto its pages with 3.42 articles per sports page, per month.

The broadsheet papers have been defined as ‘quality’ papers, meaning that their reporting, writing and depth of analysis is supposedly of a higher level than that of the popular newspapers. On the one hand, *The Sunday Times*, as a quality paper, is likely to have longer news articles which contain more detail and a more sustained evaluation of news items, and thus have fewer articles per page. On the other hand, the *Sunday Express*, a tabloid newspaper, employs tactics such as eye-catching headlines in order to sell more newspapers. Therefore it is less likely to print long articles. Instead, it produces shorter and many more news stories than its broadsheet rivals.

Table 6. Ratio between the number of articles on the sports pages per month, including the number of articles on sportswomen per page, per month.

	<b>Average no. of articles/per sports page/per month</b>	<b>Average no. of articles on women/per sports page/per month</b>
<b><i>The Sunday Times</i></b>	2.28	0.08
<b><i>The Sunday Telegraph</i></b>	3.10	0.06
<b><i>The Observer</i></b>	2.24	0.08
<b><i>Mail on Sunday</i></b>	2.46	0.17
<b><i>Sunday Express</i></b>	3.42	0.08

Source: Data analysis of material collected in 2010 from British Library, Colindale, London.

So far I have presented my analysis of how much space there is in the sports pages of the five newspapers in my sample 2008-2009. I shall now turn to my analysis of how that space is divided by gender.

Of the 22,954 articles collected as part of this study, the percentage of articles on women constituted just 3.6% in contrast to 93.8%<sup>19</sup> of the total number of articles over the two-year period devoted to men in sports. The five newspapers averaged a monthly production of 35 articles on sportswomen in comparison to 897 articles on sportsmen; that is 862 more articles per month dedicated to men in sports. This figure provokes a multitude of questions about why this is the case

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<sup>19</sup> These figures do not add up to 100% as the total number of articles in the mixed gender/gender neutral category were excluded from this particular calculation.



which might warrant further research, such as: are there more sports articles about men in sports due to the newspaper editorial policy? Is it because fewer women participate in and 'consume' sports compared to men? It is because as a society we believe that the world of elite sports, involving strength of mind, physical effort and pain paired with precision, skill and a hunger to win – not very 'ladylike attributes' - is still dominated by men? These questions perhaps require a different enquiry into the behind-the-scenes decisions made by newspaper editors.<sup>20</sup>

In 2008 the coverage of sportswomen across the five newspapers peaked in July at 7.5%, just prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (King 2007), and during the Wimbledon tennis tournament. In 2009, a similar pattern occurred: in June there was 8.8% coverage for sportswomen, perhaps explained by 'pre-Wimbledon fever', which many of the newspapers under review seemed to capitalise on.<sup>21</sup>

The *Mail on Sunday* had the most articles on sportswomen with an average of 7.0%. It is interesting to note that even with the least number of total articles on sport, and the second to least number of pages, the *Mail on Sunday* had the smallest ratio, albeit still a significant one, of articles written about sportsmen and sportswomen. This newspaper, which dedicates the most space to women in sport, also has the highest female readership of these five newspapers as discussed in the Methodology.

*The Sunday Times* and the *Observer* came a very close second and third place in terms of the total number of articles on sportswomen. *The Sunday Times* devoted 3.9% of its total coverage over the two-year period to women in sport, whilst *The Observer* allotted 3.7% to sportswomen. Finally the *Sunday Express* and *The Sunday Telegraph* assigned the lowest amount of coverage to sportswomen, at 2.4% and 1.9% respectively. This means that *The Sunday Telegraph* printed less than a third of coverage which *the Mail on Sunday* had on women in sport. Both the *Sunday Express* and *The Sunday Telegraph* are right-wing conservative newspapers. However, while the latter appeals more to a male readership, the *Sunday Express* has a higher female readership. From the data,

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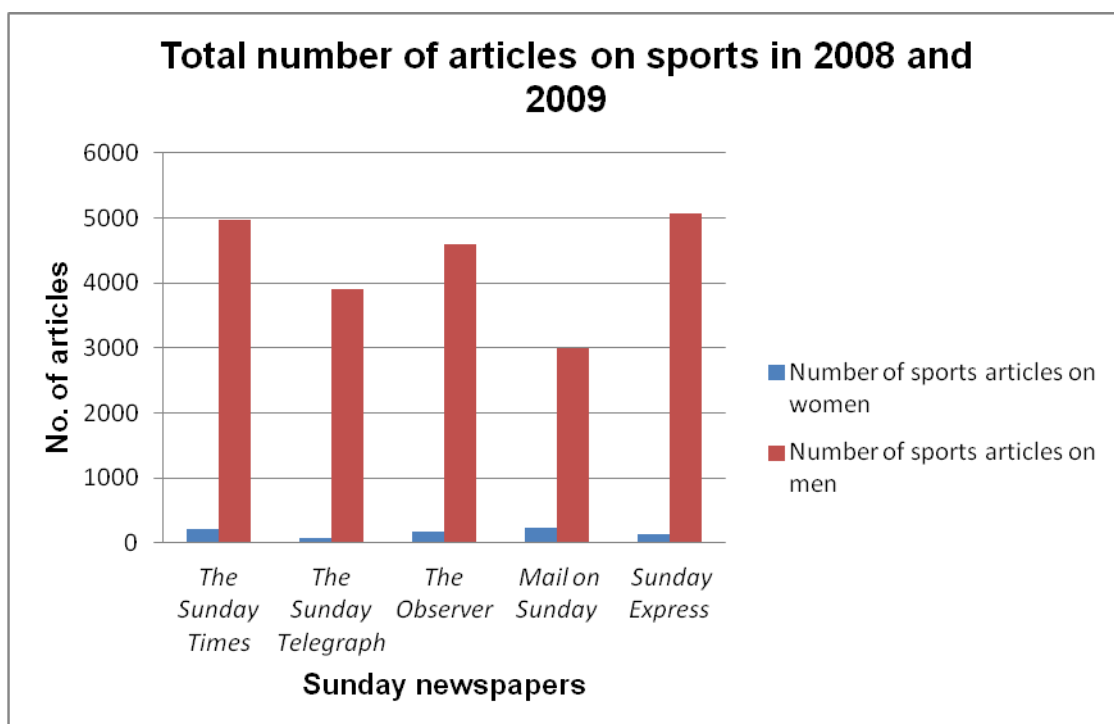
<sup>20</sup> Scholars who have examined the role of sports editors in determining the content of sports news include Hardin (2005), Kian and Hardin (2009), and Deninger (2012).

<sup>21</sup> All five newspapers published substantially more articles in the month of June 2008 on tennis.

it became clear that despite these differences in audience, both *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sunday Express* articulate conservative notions of women in sport in terms of the amount of written coverage they publish.

Considering the data reviewed so far, a clear disparity between the number of articles written on sportswomen and sportsmen in the five national Sunday newspapers emerges (see Table 7). It demonstrates that there is a numerical discrepancy between the sports coverage allotted to men and women in sport. This reinforces findings from previous research about the gender inequality in sports reporting in the UK (Bernstein 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007; Biscomb and Griggs 2012). I shall now turn to the types of sports reported.

Table 7. Total number of sports articles in 2008 and 2009 in five Sunday newspapers, by gender.



Source: Data analysis of material collected in 2010 from British Library, Colindale, London.

#### Organisation of Representation: Most Popular Sports and Quantity of Photographs

In discussing how media coverage of sportswomen was organised, I shall begin with the most prominent sports. The types of sports that were covered by the five Sunday newspapers varied dramatically. Fifty-two sports were written about in

relation to sportswomen over the time period of investigation. Three of the newspapers, *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and the *Mail on Sunday* published on the widest variety of sports where women competed (33 in total), *The Sunday Telegraph* reported on 29 varieties, and the *Sunday Express* on 22 (Table 8).

Table 8. Most commonly reported sports involving sportswomen in five national Sunday newspapers in 2008 and 2009.

	<i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	<i>The Observer</i>	<i>The Sunday Times</i>	<i>Mail on Sunday</i>	<i>Sunday Express</i>	Total
<b>Tennis</b>	42	38	70	38	24	212
<b>Athletics</b>	38	32	38	42	26	176
<b>Swimming</b>	16	13	30	26	12	97
<b>Horse riding</b>	2	15	12	17	1	47
<b>Cycling</b>	13	4	25	26	8	76
<b>Hockey</b>	9	1	4	0	31	45

Source: Data analysis of material collected in 2010 from British Library, Colindale, London.

These figures are reflective of the newspapers' overall policy of reporting on sportswomen. It is probable that the right-wing papers prefer to publish stories on women in 'feminine-appropriate' sports (King 2007: 195). According to Mennesson (2000), the sports which are acceptable for women to participate in are those which do not show behaviour traditionally linked to hegemonic masculinity, in other words sports which are the polar opposite of the most popular sports in the United Kingdom. By contrast, my data showed that there was a far greater number of sports in which sportsmen compete published on.

Several studies have found that the most commonly reported sports for sportswomen are those which 'emphasize traditional feminine attributes such as grace, balance and aesthetics,' such as gymnastics, swimming, diving, figure skating, skiing, tennis and athletics (Crossman et al 2007: 29). Harris and Clayton (2002) have found that that there were only four sports reported on involving women in 'active' sporting roles. These were tennis, swimming, golf and athletics,

sports consistent with feminine characteristics. Davis and Tuggle (2012) found that 97% of women's sports coverage focused on six 'socially-acceptable' sports. The results of my data support these findings, in that four of the six sports given most coverage where women compete, swimming, athletics, tennis and horse riding could be judged to fit into the category of relating to 'feminine' qualities.

Almost exclusively, sportswomen were most frequently reported on in tennis, the exception being the *Sunday Express*, which featured hockey significantly more. This is an interesting departure from the popularity of tennis in the other four newspapers. The prominence of hockey in the *Sunday Express* can be explained in a variety of ways; there were very few articles on men playing hockey, therefore the emphasis on this sport was not solely because of the sport itself. The articles on hockey in the *Sunday Express* tended to be extremely short and almost exclusively reported on news from regional teams from the south of England. This perhaps suggests a partiality from the editorial board of this newspaper (Hardin 2005).

In *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (1992), the description of women's initial entry into sport begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when only 'feminine' sports were deemed acceptable for 'young ladies' to participate in. Women's cricket and football teams were derided, 'only hockey was able to establish itself as a credible team-sport for women' (Holt 1992: 129). Although this was written about 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes to women and sport, it could be argued that some of these antiquated opinions still prevail, and might serve as an explanation for the elevated coverage of women's hockey in the *Sunday Express*.

As a right-wing, mid-market paper, it could be assumed that local hockey teams are the female equivalent of men's Sunday football leagues, only with less participation and certainly less media coverage. Hockey has been considered a "jolly" sport with a private school profile' (Holt and Mason 2000: 12). The image of women playing hockey fits into traditional notions of femininity that do not threaten the patriarchal dominance in sport; female hockey players wear short skirts and tend not to have bulky muscle, which can be regarded as masculinizing in women. Choi (2000: 60) has suggested that, 'images of the muscular woman. . . conflict with the associations of men as strong and women as weak that underpin roles and power relations in society.' Hence, hockey can be seen as a non-threatening sport and therefore is allotted more coverage in the *Sunday Express* than sports such as track cycling or weight-lifting, which require large muscles, strength and power on full display. However, the predominance of news

items on women's hockey in the *Sunday Express* is not able to be fully explained and presents a quandary in this context; this finding warrants future research to understand this anomaly more completely.

Tennis was the most frequently reported sport in the other four newspapers. Kane (1989) has found that women are more likely to be allotted media coverage in both print and visual formats when they are involved in individual rather than team sports (in Creedon 1994: 35). Tennis is a highly gendered sport at the elite level of competition; women are required to play fewer sets than men in order to win in the major contests (Grand Slams), most women tennis players wear tight skirts or dresses whereas men wear loose shorts and t-shirts. Media coverage tends to replicate gendered differences of tennis in its reporting; women are seen to provide a pleasurable media message by 'decorating' newspapers in feminine, sexy outfits, whereas male tennis players demonstrate their strength and speed – characteristics essential to successful athletes in whatever discipline. Gender inequalities within the sport are thus played out and emphasized by newspapers (Harris and Clayton 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007; Vincent and Crossman 2009).

Athletics was the second most commonly reported sport for sportswomen in all five newspapers. Athletics competitions are normally held in venues where both male and female athletes participate alongside one another in the same arena unlike sports such as cricket or football which have separate competitions for female and male players thus making gender more of an issue in media reporting. Moreover, there is a significant display of flesh by sportswomen in athletics competitions, which may contribute to newspapers' interest. Sailors et al (2012) discuss the media representation of women's Olympic beach volleyball after the introduction of new clothing rules which states that female players must wear a bikini which is no wider than 7cm on the side. Tickets for the beach volleyball event at London 2012 were reportedly some of the quickest to sell out due to the sport's growing popularity ('Sold Out But Underpaid. . .'). But is this due to the sport itself, or did the women's bikinis increase sales? In athletics some female athletes also wear bikini-like kit for competitions.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the display of flesh in athletics, like in beach volleyball, coupled with athletics' long

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<sup>22</sup> The alternative view is that the kit used by elite female athletes is appropriate for their sports; beach volleyball players have commented on the lack of chafing they experience in bikinis. I will explore the use of gendered sports uniforms more in Chapter Six ("What You See is What You Get". . .').

history of success in the United Kingdom, can explain why women athletes are frequently reported on in newspapers.

### Use of Imagery

Not every article that I reviewed was supported by a photo, although where published adjacent to an article, the majority of photos focused on the predominant theme of the written news item. They were thus illustrative. During the data collection, it became evident that shorter articles were less likely than longer ones to contain adjoining photos. There was a stark difference in the total number of photographs of sportsmen and sportswomen: a total of 25,717 photos appeared in all the five newspapers under review in 2008-2009. Of these, 1,780 were of women.

*The Sunday Times* was the paper with the greatest number of photographs overall, 7,956, of which 7,195 photos of sportsmen and 761 of women. Thus of the newspapers' total photos during the time period, 9.6% were of women. During the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008, photographs featuring women totalled 16.4%, the highest amount over the 24 months studied. In 2009 June, August and October also had much more visual reporting of women in sport, with 14.7%, 14.3% and 15.6% respectively. The lowest level of photographic sports coverage was 3.8% in February 2008 and March 2009.

Whilst some of these fluctuations can be explained by the calendar of women's sporting events, there is a further dimension to my analysis of photos which may serve to explain this. There were many cases in which women appeared in photographs as wives or partners of sportsmen. There were other cases in which they appeared as cheerleaders, dancers, models and even porn stars, which I labelled 'Non-sports related' photographs. An example of this can be seen below.

Image 2. Photograph of a woman published in the sports pages of the *Mail on Sunday* in the category 'Non-sport related'.



Source: Photo taken from the *Mail on Sunday* 13/09/09, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-1213067/Andrey-Arshavin-complaints-Arsenal-ace-tells-wife-Yulia-quiet.html>, accessed 10/06/2010.

Of the 761 photographs of women in *The Sunday Times* 31.1% were non-sport related.<sup>23</sup> These photographs of women, lacking a clear connection to sports, were published most frequently in *The Sunday Times*, three times more than *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sunday Express*. Thus only a small number of photographs of women actually represented sportswomen, limiting the space to advertise the accomplishments of female athletes visually. The non-sports related photos of women had decorative purposes, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

*The Observer* newspaper had the second highest amount of pictorial sports reporting of the five newspapers, with 5,024 photos. Of these, 4,742 were of sportsmen and 282 were of women. This equates to 5.6% photos of women. In July 2008 16.4% of photos were on women. December 2008 and May 2009 recorded the lowest number of photos of women: 1.1%. In *The Observer*, 16.0% of photos of women were classed as non-sport related, meaning that over the two-year period a total of 237 pictures were published of actual sportswomen. In December 2009 100% of photos on women were not actual sportswomen. I

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<sup>23</sup> In *The Sunday Times*, during the months of February 2008 and December 2009, 25 of the 29 photos of women published in the sports pages were non-sports related, meaning that four out of 29 photos were of actual sportswomen, during the same period.

found that December is a peculiar month in sport; it signals the end of certain sports cycles annually (Formula 1, tennis, athletics), the annual BBC SPOTY competition, and important football and rugby contests traditionally occur during December. Newspapers tend to adopt a different style of reporting in December in regards to women. This might be part of a wider media strategy in winter months where 'decorative' women are used to adorn sports news, such as the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* which is released annually in February (Davis 1997; Bishop 2003). Very few studies do month-on-month analyses of sports media coverage. This is because shorter timeframes do not give enough scope for monthly analysis. Researchers tend to use averages to gauge more effectively how coverage functions over shorter periods of time. My finding that the month of December functions differently from other months is new and requires further investigation in order to understand it better. I do not have the opportunity to explore in more depth this interesting finding, however I will briefly discuss the language used in December's sports coverage in Chapter Six.

*The Sunday Telegraph* published 4,427 photos in its sports pages, 4,229 of men and 198 of women (4.5%). *The Sunday Telegraph* produced the most photos of women in August 2008 (22.1%) - the highest percentage across all the newspapers for photographs of women in any given month. This substantial rise in the number of photographs of women, in this instance, can be linked to the Beijing Olympic Games which took place in August 2008. However, in October 2008 there was not a single photograph of a woman in the sports pages of *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Nonetheless, *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sunday Express* produced the most months with the least amount of non-sport related photographs. In other words, they had the lowest number of photographs of women who are not professional sportswomen, and thus where photos of women appeared, they tended to be of actual sportswomen. Perhaps it could be argued that *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sunday Express* published photos which represented sportswomen the most fairly.

The *Sunday Express* published 4,415 photos in total, 4,272 of which were of sportsmen and 143 of women. They printed 3.2% photos of women on average, the lowest percentage of all the five newspapers under review. The most photos of women were printed in July and August 2008, perhaps indicative not only of the 2008 Olympics which produced an increase in newspaper coverage of women but also reflecting the fact that the most commonly reported sports for



women (tennis, athletics, swimming and cycling) require good weather in order for competitions to take place outdoors. Thus there is more visibility of sportswomen and particularly their bodies.<sup>24</sup>

December 2009 was the worst month for sportswomen in the *Sunday Express* with zero photographs of women out of a total of 196 printed in the sports section that month. Overall the *Sunday Express* had the second lowest percentage of non-sport related photographs with 9.8% over the two years. The *Sunday Express* had the shortest sports section of all the newspapers under review. The sports coverage was not as detailed as the other papers and did not develop depth in the majority of its news items. It also had fewer opinion-based stories.

The *Mail on Sunday* had the lowest number of photographs in its sports section with 3,895, less than half the number printed in *The Sunday Times*. In spite of this the *Mail on Sunday* produced comparatively the highest percentage of photographs of women, at 10.2%. In 10 of the 24 months under review, photographs of women accounted for more than 10% on average of all images of sport, reaching 15.8% in July 2008 and peaking at 18.8% in December 2009. In August 2008, the month of the Beijing Olympic Games, the *Mail on Sunday* produced the lowest percentage of photographs of women (2.1%). Furthermore, the four photographs of women published during this month were non-sports related, thus zero photos of actual sportswomen were published in this newspaper during what could be considered as one of the 'sporting highlights' in my timeframe.

Although the *Mail on Sunday* produced more photos of women than other newspapers in their sports sections, over one-fifth of those were non-sport

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<sup>24</sup> Tight clothing worn by athletes arguably enhances performance by improving the aerodynamics of the body. Tennis outfits mostly complement gendered notions of femininity, and the media often comment on 'fashionable' female players. There are other sports where women wear tight clothing such as diving and gymnastics. However, in gymnastics most of the women who compete are very young and have pre-pubescent bodies. They also are quite muscular. Sports where women wear short skirts, such as netball and squash, are not 'mainstream' sports. Women's team sports are not as popular as individual sports where, in a celebrity-driven society, sports 'stars' are more likely to come from, such as Jess Ennis and Victoria Pendleton. Choi (2000) has written on the threat that all-female teams pose to the male hegemony in sports and the media. Sportswomen who compete in individual sports are perhaps 'allowed' to become more famous than if they were part of a team.

related (21.5%). It is evident, then, that sports photos of women in the *Mail on Sunday* do not represent sportswomen fairly since they 'share' photographic space with women unrelated to sport. By discounting non-sports related photographs, actual sportswomen were allocated 13 photographs per month on average in the *Mail on Sunday* compared to 144 photos of sportsmen.

I have shown how newspaper coverage of sportswomen is organised in terms of how much coverage is allocated, the most commonly reported sports and how photographs are used. The photo analysis demonstrates that not only are sportswomen under-represented in print media, but they are also not 'fairly' represented. Non-sports related photos occupy significant media space, which might otherwise be allocated to actual sportswomen. I shall now turn to consider, at micro-level, the thematic content of newspaper coverage of sportswomen.

#### Categorisation of Newspaper Reporting on Sportswomen: Positive and Negative Reporting

I categorised articles on sportswomen thematically under the headings: Success, Failure, Injury, Sponsorship and Other. These categories provided the data for a meta-category of Positive vs. Negative articles, in other words how much of the reporting on sportswomen could be classed as 'positive' and how much as 'negative'. This analysis develops a more detailed understanding of how newspapers coverage of sportswomen functions.

The 'Success' category refers to articles which celebrate sportswomen's achievements through positive language and news stories. For example, *The Observer* published an article about the quality of women's football in the United States of America and how the support the women's teams receive there motivated European players to consider transferring to American teams (05/10/08). The data collected in the 'Sponsorship' category was predominantly positive as well, focusing on sportspeople gaining substantial sponsorship deals and the advancement in sports technologies such as the LZR Speedo swimsuit (*Mail on Sunday* 15/03/09). Articles which were particularly critical of sportswomen and focused mostly on failure were classed as negative. An example of a 'negative' article occurred in the *Mail on Sunday* where the journalist described the introduction of boxing for women as an Olympic sport as 'unnatural' and making him want to throw up (27/01/08). The 'Injury' category contained news of sportspeople's injuries, which for the person themselves, their team and their fans, was mostly deemed to be negative news. An example of an

article about injury can be found in *The Sunday Telegraph* in a story about British swimmer Rebecca Adlington being ill and therefore unable to compete in a particular event (15/02/09). The 'Other' category catered for all news stories which did not fit into the four previous categories. News in the 'Other' category tended to be stories about aspects of sportswomen that did not relate to sport, for example, a news story and photo of Paula Radcliffe with her husband and baby talking about their plans to have another baby before the 2012 London Olympics (*The Sunday Telegraph* 13/01/08). Although she is a professional athlete, this news item was not directly about sport. By dividing the articles into positive and negative, I could determine if the reporting of women in sports had a more positive or negative style and theme. *The Sunday Times* had the most positive articles at 67% in contrast to 33% negative. Broken down into individual categories: 65% on Success, 4% on Failure, 3% on Injury and 2% on Sponsorship. 26% of all articles on women could be categorised as Other. *The Sunday Telegraph* had the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest percentage of positive sports coverage with 66% compared to 34% negative. There were 66% on Success, 9% on Failure, 5% on Injury, 0% on Sponsorship and 20% on Other. This newspaper produced the lowest amount of news items in the Other category.

*The Observer* produced 54% positive and 46% negative articles with 49% on Success, 9% on Failure, 3% on Injury, 5% on Sponsorship and 34% of articles as Other. *The Sunday Express* showed an almost equal division between positive and negative articles at 53% and 47% respectively: 51% on Success, 14% on Failure, 3% on Injury and 3% on Sponsorship. 29% of articles fell into the Other category.

*The Mail on Sunday* was the only newspaper which produced less than 50% of all articles in the Success and the overall positive category: 48% were positive and 52% negative, equating to 45% of articles on Success, 7% on Failure, 4% on Injury and 3% on Sponsorship. The most significant figure was that 41% of articles on women were classed as Other. There was consistently an emphasis on sportswomen's lives outside their profession or women not related to sport in the 'Other' category, which replicated findings of the photographic content in this newspaper namely that 21.5% were non-sports related photos. This is demonstrated by an article about Victoria Beckham's new perfume (24/08/08), which was published in the same month as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Although Beckham is married to a famous footballer, this article was classed as 'Other' because she is not a sportswoman herself and the topic of the article was

not related to sports. This has been analysed by Choi (2000) as a diversionary tactic within sports and the media; she found that reports on women in sport focused primarily on their personality, marital status, dress and attractiveness before commenting on their sports performance and achievements.

To conclude this section of the results, it is clear that the individual newspapers differ in their approach to the type of coverage allotted to sportswomen. *The Sunday Times* was overwhelmingly more interested in reporting on successful news stories, whereas there was near parity amongst the five newspapers in their level of coverage on failure and sportswomen. *The Sunday Times* and the *Mail on Sunday* published more articles on injury, while *The Observer* devoted the most space of all the newspapers to women and sponsorship. The *Mail on Sunday* was the only newspaper with less than 50% positive coverage.

Moreover, it allocated the highest number of articles, nearly half of all news items to women, on stories of women not-related to sports in the 'Other' category. In other words, in the sports pages, actual sportswomen featured almost on equal terms with women outside sport, such as dancers, models, WAGs etc. This might suggest something about the *Mail on Sunday's* attitude to women in sport. It was also a common feature amongst the other newspapers in my sample: four of the five publications produced between a quarter and a third of stories on women outside sport.

An interesting conclusion from these initial findings show the *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sunday Telegraph* as producing coverage in opposite ways; the *Mail on Sunday* had the most news items on women, but the least news on actual sportswomen, whereas *The Sunday Telegraph* published the lowest amount of stories on sportswomen but they were mostly on sportswomen, rather than WAGs or otherwise.

It is important to point out the difference in readership figures between the newspapers, as discussed in the Methodology; the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sunday Express* have a higher female readership than the broadsheets in my sample. This may explain to a certain degree the phenomenon of publishing stories on non-athletic women in the tabloids in my sample. However, very little research has been conducted on the subject of the appearance of women not related to sport in sports media when reviewing overall media representation of sportswomen. Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) investigated how the lives of baseball wives are shaped by the occupations of their professional spouses by doing interviews with these women. They stated that 'she is viewed in large

measure as a player's property, part of the assets he brings to the games' (346). As well as being required to look good all the time, baseball wives, it is stated, run the risk of threatening their husband's career if their behaviour is not acceptable, 'you're part of the package' (346). Being seen as part of their husband's 'brand' is perhaps relatable to my findings in that the women who were in 'non-sports related' photos conformed to traditional femininity and it could be argued that as a consequence they advertise a particular brand of masculinity, that of their husbands, which underpins much of sports media discourse. The attachment to their husband's identity reinforces compulsory heterosexuality (Wright and Clarke 1999; Vincent et al 2011) and may even be seen to challenge the more masculine position that sportswomen occupy compared to the decorative spouses of sportsmen. For the male reader, photos of decorative women are perhaps a reminder to them and to sportsmen of the 'type' of woman acceptable as a partner, a reminder of the gender rules within sports media.

Rodriguez (2005) investigated the place of women in Argentine football as both spectators and players. She found that female spectators occupy a complex and ambiguous identity within a football stadium, citing that they are the ones who 'look bored'. She found that the perception of women football fans in the media is that they do not understand football, cannot really be fans and therefore must be attending the game with a man. She describes how the media discourse of women is totalizing as it 'focuses on young sexy women as representatives of all women' football fans (240). Forsyth and Thompson (2007) in 'Helpmates of the Rodeo: Fans, Wives and Groupies' explore ethnographically the support network that women provide for professional cowboys. Amongst other sources they use internet chat room material, but do not consider how these women are treated by more established media. Vincent et al (2011) compared the coverage of English footballers during the 2006 World Cup in Germany with that of their wives and girlfriends (WAGs). They used Connell's theory of gender power relations to analyse the gendered narratives of male athletes and non-athletic women who received similar media coverage in the same media context.

The difference between my research and previous work is that the studies mentioned here (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Rodriguez 2005; Forsyth and Thompson 2007; Vincent et al 2011) focus directly on non-athletic women and contrast their lives and media representation with that of their partners, athletic men. In my investigation I was surprised to find extensive and consistent media attention to non-athletic women, alongside coverage of sportswomen and men.

My research revealed that there are three groups of people represented in British newspapers: sportswomen, sportsmen and non-sports related women. Thus my findings reflect a departure from previous research, particularly in terms of how much coverage quantitatively is given to non-sports related women. Moreover, previous studies have neglected to consider the impact this coverage has on sportswomen. I have argued that the considerable amount of attention directed at non-sports related women correspondingly detracts attention from sportswomen. In Chapter Six I will develop this argument further when focusing on the 'social hierarchy of femininity' within sports media reporting.

### Conclusion

This chapter has considered quantitative data collected from five British national Sunday newspapers in 2008 and 2009. Most importantly, this project, thus far, has attempted to demonstrate the way in which gender operates in sports media, and how sportswomen are represented and how that representation is organised. I began this chapter by reviewing three sports competitions and sports calendars from 2008 and 2009 to describe the context in which my investigation took place. By reviewing the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the 2009 Berlin World Athletics Championships and the 2009 BBC SPOTY contest, I suggested that access to competitions for elite sportswomen and the reception they receive in popularity contests show how particular gender assumptions still lead to inequalities within professional sport, despite some attempts in recent years to level the playing field. I looked at three levels of analysis: 1) how gender works at the macro level of reporting, i.e. the quantity of coverage in the sports pages of newspapers divided by gender; 2) how the reporting of sportswomen is organised in newspapers including which sports are most commonly covered and the use of photographs; 3) the themes which are prevalent at the micro level of reporting, in other words, the actual way in which sportswomen are reported on..

Whilst it is easy to become embroiled in the quantitative analysis of the data collected on sportswomen, it is crucial to remember the wider picture. The initial data presented in this chapter show that overall, the five newspapers under consideration averaged only 3.6% news coverage of sportswomen over 2008 and 2009. Hence over 95% of the sports coverage was allotted to men doing sports. These figures are startling considering the increasing numbers of women participating in sports at the highest level and the mostly gender-equal readership of newspapers.

The equality that women and feminists have fought for in other areas of life has not been replicated in the media's coverage of sportswomen in the context of my investigation. Certainly in the western world, women are free to take part in sports during their schooling, as adults, and are free to consume sports, either visually, through listening or by reading about them, but it seems that the reporting of sports is aimed more at the male readership.

From the analysis of the data in this chapter, it is clear that the reporting of sportsmen and sportswomen in the media differs greatly. During the period of time under review, the sports coverage in the five national Sunday newspapers largely under-represented sportswomen. At times, sportswomen were not allocated a single article or photograph despite prominent sports competitions taking place. Also, on occasions when photographic coverage of sportswomen became more prominent, a significant proportion of the photos published were of women who were not and had no connection to professional sportswomen, thus misrepresenting the place of women in sports and inferiorizing *real* sportswomen's achievements.

While women's progress in sport is increasing, as is their level of participation in major sports events, it seems that newspapers are some way behind in their coverage of sportswomen both textually and visually. I shall now turn to the fourth level of analysis as set out in the Methodology, which focuses on three thematic dimensions of the newspaper coverage of sportswomen, commencing with the representation of their bodies.

## **Chapter Four: Representative Bodies?**

### **Introduction**

'Numbers in the sense of quantities of coverage, are not the whole picture . . . *how* women are described also matters' (Eastman and Billings 2000: 196). In the previous chapter I analysed my quantitative data which provide an understanding of how much, or rather how little, media coverage sportswomen receive compared to sportsmen, and how that coverage is organised in British middle-brow Sunday newspapers. I will now turn to the examination of how sportswomen are reported on in more detail. In particular in this chapter I shall discuss how sportswomen's bodies are presented in terms of seven specific categories, which emerged from the data I collected. They include: the body (1) as sexualised, (2) trivialised, (3) secondary, (4) ambitious, (5) commercial, (6) feminine and (7) disposable. In listing these categories I start from the most frequently covered topic (sexualised bodies) to the category which appeared least (disposable bodies). It is important to note that within the categories of how sportswomen's bodies appear, certain examples overlap. Where this is the case, the overlap will be highlighted.

Across all the five newspapers I examine the depiction of women in sports reporting as sexualised was the most common type of presentation in my sample. However, and surprisingly, the most depictions of this were in *The Observer*. Here and in *The Sunday Times* (the newspaper with the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of sexualised body representations), at least one example of women's bodies as sexualised was published almost every month during the two-year period of my study. This was one of the 'surprise' findings in my data as I had certain preconceived ideas regarding the moral and intellectual levels of broadsheet newspapers in my sample. Nonetheless, this fact emphasizes the pervasiveness of this trope in the media.

The news reports which will be discussed in this chapter and the following two chapters covered the period 2008 and 2009. There were slightly more data from 2008, 71 examples compared to 59 news items from 2009.

### **The Sexualised Body**

The sexualised body was mapped onto three sub-categories of women who made their appearance in the articles in question: actual sportswomen, WAGs (wives and girlfriends of sportsmen) and glamour models/porn stars. These three



categories emerged from the data, in a grounded-theory informed manner, as the most prominent types of women presented. They were also sexualised by the sports media. By sexualised I mean that women are portrayed as sex objects either in photos or in their textual descriptions. As I shall show, the manner in which the sexualisation of women's bodies occurs across these categories differs somewhat because these three types of women hold different social positions and identities, further emphasized in this coverage of them. The sportswomen in question were elite athletes who compete in the professional realm of sports, sometimes on an equal footing with sportsmen (as in the case of golfer Michelle Wie or elite horse riders where women have entered men's competitions or compete beside them without any gender differentiation). The WAGs are associated with sport through their marital or romantic connection to elite sportsmen. Although they generally do not compete in sports, their association with sports is clear, and their roles as supporters, child-bearers and pleasure-givers will be discussed in relation to their media coverage. The glamour models/porn stars are often romantically or sexually associated with sportsmen; however, unlike the WAGs, this link to sport is more temporary and tenuous, and often illicit or frowned upon.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted in this context that heteronormative sports coverage is 'naturalised' by the display of exclusively heterosexual relationships. This encourages heteronormativity as universal and reinforces deeper ideological understandings in society about hegemonic masculinity, inferior femininity and the widespread homophobia present in sports media reporting which idealises a specific and singular type of sexuality.

### Sportswomen as Sexualised

In *The Sunday Times* an article titled 'Victoria's Secrets' read: 'She's a world champion and favourite to win an Olympic gold medal in Beijing, so why has Victoria had to resort to posing in a black dress with a spanner in her hand?' (06/01/08: 22). Victoria here is Victoria Pendleton who won a gold medal at Beijing in the sprint event of the track cycling and at the time the news item was published was a four-time world track cycling champion.

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<sup>25</sup> Wayne Rooney's supposed extra-marital affairs are a good example of a situation where women (often glamour models, porn stars or prostitutes) are briefly in the media because of their sexual relations with sportsmen ('Wayne Rooney Affair. . .').

Image 3. Photograph of Victoria Pendleton next to adjoining article titled 'Victoria's Secrets.'



Source: *The Sunday Times*, 06/01/08: 22.

The title of the article 'Victoria's Secrets' references a high-end lingerie brand famous for its exotic shows where supermodels strut down the catwalk in racy lingerie, often with wings attached to their backs as though they were angels (see Image 4).

Image 4. Victoria's Secrets fashion show, 2009.



Source: <http://www.awkwordsilence.com/wpress/2009/10/13/victorias-secret-angel/>, accessed 01/03/11.

In Image 3, the body of Victoria Pendleton is sexualised in a number of ways. Firstly, the reference to Victoria's Secrets creates a direct link to the semi-naked

lingerie models in Image 4, thus connecting this sportswoman to a highly sexualised industry where women, in the Victoria's Secrets show in particular, are offered as decorative display ('Give Me That Old Time Feminism'). In this case it is most likely for a significant male readership of the sports pages (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). Secondly, the photograph of Victoria Pendleton sexualises her body in a specific but not overtly 'sexy' way. In the photograph Pendleton crouches beside a track bike, putting her on a level with a bike. She is holding a spanner in a mock-phallic way, pointed towards herself, as if asking the viewer to help her use the tool to fix her bike/herself. She is wearing a baby-doll style short black dress which highlights her seemingly naked legs. Her hair is loose and frames her made-up face. The focus of the photo is on her bare legs and arms which are not overtly muscular from the photo's angle. This neutralises her identity as a sportswoman who is highly competitive and very muscular, characteristics often associated with sportsmen (Harris and Clayton 2002). The photo suggests a subtle sexiness and does not highlight her identity as a sportswoman; instead it associates her with a sexualised femininity by highlighting her feminine attributes; legs, bare skin, loose hair, makeup, short dress etc. The sexualisation of sportswomen's bodies by the print media is a common occurrence. However, as in the example of Pendleton, it is not always overt sexualisation, perhaps rendering it less questionable to the reader (Koivula 1999; Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Lippe 2002; Vincent et al 2002; King 2007; Stone and Horne 2008). The image emphasizes a certain heteronormative sexualised femininity rather than crudely portraying Pendleton as a sex object.

My research illustrates that women's bodies are sexualised in both photographic and textual coverage. Image 5 below shows a photograph of Rebecca Romero, Olympic gold medallist at Beijing Olympics in track cycling, naked on a bike.

Image 5. Photograph of Rebecca Romero.



Source: 'Rebecca Romero: The Pursuit of Happiness', *The Sunday Times*, 04/01/09.

Romero's skin has an artificial sheen to it, reminiscent of the marble statues of Greek gods. Similar to the photo of Pendleton, Romero is not showing any genitals or her nipples. The image is thus less directly suggestive. The sophisticated nakedness it displays is different from glamour models' (full frontal) nudity which can be seen in adult publications. Despite this, the first thing one notices when looking at the photo is her body (as female) and secondly that she is on a bike. She does not look at the camera and does not display the same inviting look as Pendleton. Nonetheless the focus is on her naked body.

Why sportswomen choose to be photographed in such a way is complex. On one level, their body is their trade – it is integral to their profession and the display of bodies in competition reinforces the focus by the athletes, coach and audience on the sporting body. How sportspeople's bodies perform the task of their particular event is part of the media remit in the reporting of sports. However, sportswomen's bodies are subject to much task-irrelevant reporting and in a sexualised fashion. To put it another way, whilst sportswomen's jobs centre on their bodies as athleticized performance tools, their media coverage re-focuses on their bodies as sexualised rather than athletic.

It could be argued that Romero is complicit in this agenda to sexualise her body by agreeing to take part in a photo shoot where she is naked. However, dominant trends in media reporting to publish photos and news items of sportswomen in

this way may influence women into believing that this type of coverage is the best way to gain publicity and sponsorship, since their sporting performances do not attract as much attention.<sup>26</sup>

The reverse trend is true for the media coverage of sportsmen; sports performance takes precedence over stories or photos which highlight their bodies in a sexual manner. In other words, men's bodies are primarily represented as sporting bodies (Lenskyj 1998). However, as young men have become objects of display (Carniel 2009), several high-profile sportsmen have taken part in 'sexy' photo shoots, the details of which I shall discuss later. The photo of Romero was part of an advertising campaign by the sports drink company Powerade. They photographed two other sportspeople, both men, in a similar manner to Romero. One of the sportsmen was Phillips Idowu, the 2009 World Champion triple jumper from Great Britain (see Image 6).

Image 6. Phillips Idowu photographed for Powerade campaign.



Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1041069/Naked-ambition-Britains-Olympians-strip-prepare-make-history-Beijing.html>, accessed 15/03/11.

Although three athletes were part of this advertising campaign, Rebecca Romero received the most publicity from her nude shot on the bike ('Rebecca Romero: The Pursuit of Happiness', 04/01/2009). This could be because within the space

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<sup>26</sup> Sue Tibballs, Chief Executive of WSFF cited that sportswomen receive 0.5% of all sports sponsorship in the United Kingdom ('The Game Changers', *The Guardian*, 14/08/12).

of a year, a fellow female British cyclist posed nude in an almost identical fashion to Romero. Victoria Pendleton was photographed by *The Observer* in 2008 (see Image 7).

Image 7. Victoria Pendleton photographed for the front cover of *The Observer's Sport Monthly*.



Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2008/mar/02/sportmonthly>, accessed 09/05/11.

Image 8. Lance Armstrong photographed by Annie Leibowitz for *Vanity Fair*.



Source: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2008/09/armstrong200809>, accessed 17/05/11.

Images 5 and 7 of Rebecca Romero and Victoria Pendleton appeared in *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer*. The images of Philips Idowu and Lance Armstrong (Images 6 and 8) appeared outside of my data set in a Powerade campaign and in *Vanity Fair* respectively. The four athletes seem to be naked in a position which they would normally adopt in their chosen sports of cycling and triple jump. Noticeably, the photos of the sportswomen are passive, in other words they are posing on bikes in a still position. The photo of Romero looks less passive because a wind machine is being used to blow back her hair which creates the impression of movement. The sportsmen, by contrast, are active in their photos. Idowu is jumping in order to capture the movement of doing a triple jump. Armstrong also seems more active in the photo because of the way his muscles are tensed and on display. In a passive shot, a sportsperson's muscles are relaxed which makes their bodies look smoother than when the muscles are being used, which explains why the women appear softer and do not look as muscular as the men. Media mechanisms such as using active and passive poses in photos can produce subtly different images. To the untrained eye, it may appear that all four photos are similar or perhaps that the men simply look stronger, which is a common belief in sport (Ezzell 2009; Tavers 2011). The different types of representation are however laden with unequal gendered messages which serve to reinforce the notion that women are physically less active than men.

There are numerous examples of sportswomen who are depicted as passive rather than active athletes. The *Mail on Sunday* printed a photograph of BBC commentator Sharon Davies, a retired GB swimmer, in a swimsuit (03/02/08) and of Kelly Southerton, Olympic heptathlete, wearing only a bra (03/08/08). In *The Sunday Times* sports section photos were published of Serena William's cleavage (24/02/08), a photo which appeared in *Playboy* of a completely naked woman (17/08/08), of Ana Ivanovic, a Grand Slam winner, wearing a short dress and high heels (18/01/09) and of the girlfriend of Michael Clarke, England cricketer, wearing only a bikini and cricket pads (09/08/09). The numerous photos of women in posed positions in the sports print media is, then, in stark contrast to the plethora of photos of sportsmen in active poses (Lenskyj 1998; Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007).

Harris and Clayton (2002) discuss the issue of the sexualisation of sportswomen by the media using Anna Kournikova as an example. They examine the way that Kournikova's body is presented as highly sexualised with little reference to her

ability as a tennis player. This emphasis on task-irrelevant commentary and images reinforces hegemonic notions of sportswomen as inferior athletes to sportsmen. Moreover, it obliterates athleticism as an achieved process in favour of sexualised aesthetics. Photographs of naked sportswomen, such as the Romero photo (Image 5), are in direct contrast to how they would normally train and compete; in other words, a binary is created between the representation of sportswomen as nude, sexy and passive, and the reality of their identity as sportswomen, dressed in technically appropriate clothing for their sport, focused and active. Dyer's (2002) typography of representation is helpful in this case namely because it seems clear that the image of sportswomen as sexualised is not representative of sportswomen as a group, thus it can be argued that a particular version of sportswomen is presented to the readership of the newspapers in my sample.

An article in *The Sunday Telegraph* during the Beijing Olympic Games demonstrated a different way in which sportswomen's bodies are sexualised. Here, stereotypical views on the aesthetics of two sports (women competing in 'feminine' and 'masculine' sports respectively) were contrasted and the relative 'sexiness' of those two types of female competitors compared. Written by Jasper Gerard, the article suggests,

The Olympics are in bad need of some thrilling, against-the-odds British victory, or failing that a tear-jerking defeat. The BBC doesn't help itself by, for instance, screening women's weightlifting rather than women's beach volleyball. No man could have made such a schoolboy scheduling error (10/08/08: 13).

Gerard here refers to the aesthetic appeal of women's volleyball as opposed to women's weightlifting. He seems to assume that there is a male-dominated audience, interested exclusively in the aesthetics of sport rather than performance, since the women's beach volleyball contest is one of the most sexualised events at the Olympics because of the tiny bikinis that the women wear. Gerard also creates a hierarchy of sports in terms of visual preference and interest due to a gendered perception of which sports are 'feminine' and sexy. The notion that women's weightlifting is not an interesting sport is related to the kind of female body on display there. This view is informed by a hegemonic ideology which claims that aggressive, bulk-building, 'masculine' sports such as weightlifting, boxing and rugby should be male-only (Lenskyj 1998). Sports such as beach volleyball, regardless of the physicality and athleticism required, are



acceptable for women to play since they provide a pleasurable visual spectacle through the amount of female flesh on show.

Gerard's comments are directly linked to ideas about femininity and masculinity in sport. The first scholar to theorise women's relation to femininity in a male-centred context was Joan Rivière, who discussed 'womanliness as masquerade' in 1929. She argued that womanliness was a mask put on by women to compensate men for assuming a position in their domain (Rivière and Hughes 1991). One might therefore suggest that sportswomen 'wear' the mask of womanliness to appease those people who do not support the presence of women in sport.

Gerard seems to be blaming the women producers of the BBC breakfast program covering the Olympics because, 'no man could have made such a schoolboy scheduling error' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 10/08/08). The sexualised body of sportswomen is constructed here as more newsworthy and more entertaining than the athletic body. The desire to repress the female athletic body, whatever the sport, is apparent in sports media coverage except where sportswomen are willing to engage in 'apologetic behaviour' to reinforce the gender hierarchy in sports (Davis-Delano et al 2009).<sup>27</sup>

In all the five newspapers I looked at, there were references to women who pose naked for publicity, as has already been discussed in the case of Rebecca Romero. The following example differs from the cases where sportswomen have colluded with the sexualisation of their bodies through semi-naked photographs. It appeared in *The Sunday Times* and concerns the potential nude photographs of a sportswoman, which the journalist discusses in an almost fantasising way. The article, titled 'The Magic of Maria' states: 'Russia's most famous tennis export will not be drawn on whether she would strip for *Playboy*, but bares her soul on her dreams for the future' (13/01/08: 22). Maria Sharapova, the four-time Grand Slam champion, is represented as an object because of the way she is described as an 'export' from Russia, like any other commodity. The central focus of this news item is her sexualised body with two references to nudity, first, in the

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<sup>27</sup> Davis-Delano et al (2009) examined the use of 'apologetic behaviour' by sportswomen. They found that female athletes engage in practices including emphasizing heterosexuality, dressing according to feminine norms and apologizing for aggression in order to justify their place in sport.

speculation whether she would strip off for *Playboy* and secondly, indirectly, in the phrase 'baring her soul'.

Sportswomen are often framed in this way, as sexual beings, something that Harris and Clayton (2002: 404) have termed 'sporting pornography.' But such pornography references only one gender. Sportsmen are very rarely asked similar task-irrelevant questions. There appears to be a different set of rules for sportswomen and sportsmen (Cole 1993; Koivula 1999; Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Lippe 2002; Wheaton and Beal 2003; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007). In all the articles I analysed there was not a single case where sportsmen were asked if they would pose nude for a photograph. Indeed, in the article about Sharapova the journalist said he had asked the tennis star 'the question I would never have asked Federer or Nadal' (13/01/08). The journalist suggests he would not ask sportsmen about posing nude, perhaps because the majority of sports reporters are male and thus it might put into question the heterosexuality of the journalist and the sportsman, and because it is not as common for men to do 'sexy' photo shoots since their audience is more male dominated. He fails to admit other reasons for not asking sportsmen if they would pose nude, such as professionalism and respect.

However, there have been a handful of high-profile sportsmen who have posed in underwear or aftershave adverts, displaying significant amounts of their flesh. Despite this, sportsmen almost exclusively pose semi-nude for advertisements or magazines, never for the sports pages of newspapers. The audience is the key difference here; the photos of semi-nude sportsmen in adverts on billboards can be viewed by both men and women and are not specific to sports readers, whereas sportswomen who pose nude or semi-nude appear in sports-specific publications are more likely to be viewed by the significantly higher male readership. Thus, photos of nude or semi-nude sportswomen, in some instances, cater specifically to men whereas the equivalent male photos are not aimed at one gender only. David Beckham<sup>28</sup> is the most prominent sportsman to be photographed outside the arena of sports. His commercial value is almost on par with his sporting reputation (Carniel 2009; Vincent et al 2011). Beckham's commercialization popularized the idea of sportsmen as 'models' and since then several sportsmen from a variety of sports (including Roger Federer, Tiger

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<sup>28</sup> Beckham embodies a particular kind of 'sporting pornography'. He promoted erotic photography of himself as a sportsman, particularly photos of him in underwear only. There is now a growing trend for sportsmen to do similar photo shoots.

Woods and Cristiano Ronaldo) have taken part in framing themselves as commercially viable 'models' alongside being professional sportsmen. These photos have played on the sportsmen's physical strength and supposed dominance as athletes. For example, Rafael Nadal, the former World No.1 tennis player, appeared in Armani underwear adverts in 2011 (see Image 9). In the photo Nadal's body is presented as strong and sexy with a brooding look on his face. His legs are apart and his crotch, covered in Armani underwear, is the focal point of the photo, not least through the white of the underpants against the grey of the rest of the image. However, he does not look as though he is trying to seduce or please the audience. This could be argued alongside Mulvey's theory of women as spectacle representing male fantasies for the male audience; sportsmen who pose semi-nude in photographs are selling a product to other men through their status and strong bodies, whereas sportswomen are selling themselves for publicity by 'begging' the audience to consider them as valid, attractive and popular women through sexualised photos.

Image 9. Rafael Nadal posing for Armani advert.



Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1349534/Rafael-Nadal-peels-latest-Armani-campaign.html>, accessed 16/03/2011.

One sportswoman subject to this misrepresentation is the squash player Vicky Botwright who in 2008 was described as, 'England's Vicky Botwright, perhaps more famous for posing in a thong at the British Open in 2001, will play her last ever match before retirement' (7). There was no mention of her sporting contribution to the game, the length of her career or the reason for her retirement. Instead the focus was primarily on her posing nude. It could be argued that Botwright colluded with this sexualisation by posing semi-nude. However, the article makes reference to this photo first, before turning to the news of her retirement. The sequence in which this is presented is significant. *The Sunday Telegraph* first reminds the audience, by mentioning her thong photo, that she is primarily a sexy woman who has 'revealed all'. Moreover, although biographies tend to be selective in the material included in the story of a person's life, if the journalist had wished to present a biography of Botwright's career on the occasion of her retirement, one might expect mention of other aspects of her career, rather than the most salacious one. This article was less than an eighth of a page and included little more than the headline. Thus the journalist privileged information about Botwright which might be said to be discriminatory since it gave little idea of the squash player's career.

Further, by using 'perhaps' in the title, the author highlights an important issue in sports reporting and society more generally regarding how women gain publicity. If we look at popular culture in the UK for an idea of how women become 'famous', it is clear that fame is often linked to aesthetics and the body. For example, a brief review of the *Daily Mail's* 'TV and Showbiz' section on their website shows that it is dominated by stories of famous women and pregnancy, shopping, dating, posing nude, beach-body photos, and launching new perfumes/clothes lines (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/index.html>, 20/03/11). The majority of this 'soft news' centres on women's femininity, sexiness, and heterosexuality. There is an avoidance of 'serious' topics which would be classed as 'hard news', the almost exclusive domain of men, thus framing women as entertaining subjects. Women are presented as 'light' stories, whereas men constitute the majority of the 'serious' news.

In *Living Dolls* (2010) Walter discusses the growing desire amongst young women to become famous. She explains how the sex industry, particularly glamour modelling, seems an 'easy' option for women who dream of becoming famous. Walter describes one woman, 'wondering how on earth she could fulfil her ambition of being famous without having an obvious talents' (2010: 27). This

glamour model, without any life skills or further education qualifications, decided to pose in her underwear for men's magazines in order to gain the fame she dreamed of. Posing nude or semi-nude is connected to the normalisation of the sex industry. Many high streets in the UK have an Ann Summers shop which sells 'sexy' outfits (including mock-latex dominatrix outfits reminiscent of more hard-core pornography) and sex toys. There is a growing trend for women who do not work in the sex industry to buy such products and display their semi-naked bodies in places such as nightclubs or on the web. There is little difference in 2012 in British culture between the formal sex industry (i.e. strip clubs, illegal brothels, pornography websites) and the informal engagement by women in strip-club/glamour model activities such as pole-dancing (Moran 2012). The mass media have promoted and responded to this change and the normalisation of the sex industry. Thus one of the most common ways in which women gain notoriety is through displaying their bodies, and this is highly prominent in sports reporting.

The sexualisation of sportswomen's bodies was also evident in the reporting of Michelle Wie, a professional golfer. In an article titled, 'Wie Regains Her Pulling Power', the author states that, 'the "Big Wiesy" could turn up at your local golf club and go around in 66 in a cocktail dress' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 14/12/08: 11). The adjoining photo is of Wie playing golf in a short dress. At the time this article was published, Michelle Wie was nineteen years old. The sexualisation of this young woman reduced her status as a golf prodigy.<sup>29</sup> The success of Wie, particularly since she beat top male golfers during her teenage years, provokes a negative reaction from the press rather than a celebratory one because Wie's success threatens the male hierarchy within golf and sport in general (Bernstein 2002). There is an assumption within media institutions that men constitute a larger proportion than women of the people who watch and read about sports (Wenner 1998; Hardin 2005). An article published on the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) website by Graham Hays gives an example of why men do not watch women's sports. He explains that women's sport is not as exciting or as fast as men's, although he is willing to watch women's tennis because the players wear tight clothing and their skirts often fly up ('Why Men Don't Watch Women's Sports'). The focus on Wie's sexiness in the photo of her wearing a short dress and in the way the title of the article plays on

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<sup>29</sup> Wie began to play professional golf when she was four years old, became the youngest player ever to qualify for a LPGA competition at the age of 12 in 2002 and has since competed in several men's PGA tour contests (Dean 2005).

both regaining form and an imaginary flirtatiousness, may attract a male readership to this news item. Nonetheless, the possibility of Wie 'turning up at your local golf club in a cocktail dress' is ludicrous and demeans her status as a professional sportswoman. The reference to Wie's romantic status, 'Wie Regains her Pulling Power', assumes several things about her identity such as her sexuality and her desire to find a partner – information not related to her professional sporting career.

Highlighting women's clothing as in the case of Wie playing golf in an imaginary cocktail dress, is a common way in which sportswomen's bodies are sexualised by the print media in Britain. An article on Bethanie Mattek, the tennis player, indicates this (*Mail on Sunday*, 29/06/08: 90). In 'It's High Time You Took Me Seriously Says the Tattooed Blonde Who Likes to Wear Leopard Skin Dresses' the author was clearly trying to create an ironic contradiction in the request by Mattek to be taken seriously. On the one hand Mattek appears to express her personality through her sense of fashion and her choice to have tattoos. However on the other, she is criticised for what is represented as a ridiculous request for respect considering the 'outrageous' clothing she wears. It is as though the journalist who wrote this news item is scolding Mattek for attempting to be sexy and asking to be taken seriously; seemingly the two are not synonymous. This may be connected to the gendered typology of sports (Matteo 1986) and the connection of certain sports to specific social classes. Tennis has been classified as a 'female-appropriate' sport (Vincent et al 2002, Crossman et al 2007), however, tattoos and leopard print dresses do not conjure up the image of ladies elegantly playing tennis. Furthermore, sports such as golf and tennis were traditionally played by the middle and upper classes, requiring economic and cultural capital to take part and a certain dress code to adhere to ('What Not to Wear at Wimbledon'). Leopard print dresses would presumably not be considered as expressing these types of 'lady-like' codes still prevalent in many sports today.<sup>30</sup> Mattek, in this instance, is represented as a subversive woman whose appearance is not synonymous with the 'normal' image of female players; she is painted almost as predatory, and thus dangerous, and as someone who does not deserve to be taken seriously until she begins to conform to the existing mores of the tennis world.

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<sup>30</sup> The official rules and regulations of the Wimbledon Tennis Championship state that all players must wear only white clothing ('What Not to Wear at Wimbledon').

Such reasoning extends to other sports reporting. In 'Naked Ambition', Folley writes, 'I'll do anything to win an Olympic medal, says the girl who stripped off for the cameras' (*Mail on Sunday*, 06/04/08: 76), inferring that in the women's competition at the Olympic Games winning a medal could be achieved through stripping off for the cameras. Moreover the association of the words 'I'll do anything' and 'the girl who stripped off for the cameras' implies that the sportswoman in question is prepared to engage in potentially demeaning acts, such as posing nude for publicity, in order to win an Olympic medal. During the months before and throughout the Beijing Olympic Games, I found that much of the media coverage of sportswomen and men emphasizes the hard work and training that is required to qualify for a national team and to win a medal. In contrast, the article by Folley does not make any suggestion of the physical work needed to win a medal, but instead seems to suggest that 'stripping off for the cameras' will suffice. One of the central issues here is how the media simultaneously highlight and condemn stripping. Here the journalist draws attention to a sportswoman stripping while the tone of the article could, at the same time, be judged as condemning: 'says the girl who stripped off for the cameras'. By not mentioning the sportswoman's name the journalist frames her as a faceless object, desperate for the limelight. Liepe-Levinson (2002) describes stripping as neither misogynist nor feminist, although she argues that it is always provocative and threatens public officials. Walter (2010) articulates a third-wave feminist perspective on stripping and its democratisation; she explains that the act of stripping and visiting strip clubs has become normalised, with famous women engaging in pole dancing classes (she cites The Spice Girls learning to pole dance). The 'girls-just-want-to-have-fun' attitude is the common explanation used to justify stripping, 'we are all young amateur performers and trying out our sexuality. . . It's the one kind of power that is sanctioned for women – the power to look sexy, to draw attention to your sexiness – and it can feel very good to succeed on that ground' (2010: 44). This 'power' that is described, the sexual allure that women supposedly have, is often shown however to be the *only* attribute that women possess in order to achieve success. But, as bodies age and fashions change, this does not amount to 'real' power since the sex industry changes daily and demands that the models are fresh, young and provide new visual pleasure – thus the aforementioned power, if one wants to describe it as such, is only temporary.

In 'In the Buff: Female Athletes Take it all Off' Hastings (2007) comments on the growing trend for elite sportswomen, many of whom are Olympic athletes, to

'bare their buffed bodies for public viewing' (in O'Reilly and Cahn 2007: 258). One athlete reasons that posing nude is not a bad thing, 'we do good things with our bodies and they are functional. Why not show them off?' (2007: 258). However, Hastings thinks that these women are de-clothing for cash, publicity and fame, although she argues that the primary reason must come from their frustration: 'frustration at being largely ignored by the media and sponsors can make people do desperate things' (2007: 259). Hastings highlights the symbiotic relationship between the media and professional sportswomen; the media hold a significant power in society today and can greatly influence the success of an individual or team. Featuring regularly in the media has the potential to influence sponsorship deals. Those people who compete in dominant sports are likely to receive media coverage which can boost their career, whereas sportspeople in less popular sports perhaps need to engage in practices such as 'selling' themselves through their bodies. In other words, Hastings alludes to the fact that sportswomen need to pose 'in the buff' in order to be noticed by the media.

Two weeks after the 'Naked Ambition' article, the *Mail on Sunday* printed a photograph of British sportswomen who had been chosen to be on the Great Britain Olympic team heading to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games (20/04/08). However, instead of showing the athletes in typical training or racing sportswear, they were photographed naked, albeit draped in a union jack flag. The display of the athletes in this way suggests that the upcoming Olympics at that time were not attracting enough attention in themselves and needed half-naked sportswomen to remind the *Mail's* readership that a major sporting event was soon to take place, and that it was better to wrap four Olympians in the national flag as eye candy for readers than to publish any factual news about them or details of the Games. This could be said to be indicative of the privileging of certain sports and their contests over others, such as the men's football World Cup.

This photo combined sex appeal with a nationalistic agenda. By wrapping the sportswomen in the union jack they were defined as national icons or at least athletes who would represent Britain. However, traditionally women's sports teams do not generate the same sense of national identity as men's. The sports star, according to Boyle and Hayes (2000), is predominantly male and only rarely are individual women celebrated as embodying the 'national spirit' through sports achievements (Wensing and Bruce 2003). Hence by printing a photograph of semi-naked women covered only by the union jack, a symbol of national identity



is associated with the sportswomen but with a focus on their sexualised bodies. The sportswomen in the photo are not wearing sporting attire, thus distancing them from their identities as sportswomen.

It is not always clear why sportswomen play the role of the 'sexy sportswoman' in cases where they have agreed to pose nude or have discussed posing nude, or have indeed self-presented themselves as 'sexy'. In the article 'Victoria's Secrets' (*The Sunday Times*, 06/01/08), Pendleton discusses how 'macho' track cycling is and why she likes to go for manicures and wear dresses in order to feel feminine after a day training with muscle-bound men. Although she does not explicitly justify or explain why she poses nude, or in sexy outfits, she alludes to a sort of counter-balance to the 'masculine' sport she competes in. Moreover, Pendleton states in the article that it is hard to encourage girls into sport when they are young because there are no role models they can aspire to. Pendleton thus indirectly justifies her choice to pose nude to highlight her femininity and show young girls that sportswomen can be both feminine and strong. Pendleton does not seem to be willing to engage in discussing the issue of sportswomen's bodies and nudity as a publicity tool.

Rebecca Romero's nude photo shoot was debated in the media when it became known that she had not been fully nude, but had worn underwear that was subsequently digitally erased before the photo was published. In an interview with *The Telegraph*, Romero's mother says that her daughter only took part in the advert because it was done 'tastefully' ('Olympic Faking. . .'), thus suggesting that she would have turned down anything more revealing. It is possible to see this as self-censorship by sportswomen; female athletes are willingly photographed nude. However, they impose restrictions on the extent to which their bodies are revealed as 'sexy'. There is an internal contradiction perhaps between doing a *Playboy* photo shoot where women tend to pose fully nude and being photographed by a fashion or men's magazine in sexy outfits, but not revealing 'too much'. In the British press, despite collusion, there is little self-explanation by sportswomen regarding the reasons why they participate in sexualised representations of themselves. I would like to suggest that there is a certain amount of 'negotiation' by sportswomen when it comes to femininity, sexiness and nudity. Sportswomen must negotiate with themselves and the socio-cultural expectations surrounding womanliness; their identities as athletes in some respects contrast sharply with their identities as women. Thus, by broadening their feminine attractiveness, heterosexual appeal and playing down their

athleticism, they can reconcile these oppositional aspects of their lives. However, the process itself also reinforces this binary.

By contrast, the role of WAGs and the narrow understanding of who they are and what they represent in the media is almost taken for granted. There is little divide between the WAG community of those women who conform to a sexualised stereotype, compared to actual sportswomen who are painted as either 'playing the game' (of sexualised self-representation) or not.

### WAGS

In the five newspapers I analysed, WAGs were treated as sexualised playthings of sportsmen. Their 'claim to fame' was exclusively their relationships with sportsmen. The exposure of their private lives, centred particularly on intimate details, constituted the most common representation of WAGs. Sometimes they were seen as 'dangerous' in terms of their sexuality and sexual tendencies. For example on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008 *The Sunday Times* featured an article titled 'Don't Mess With Trouble and Strife'. The article began,

Rory Sabbatini takes his wife Amy and their infant son on tour with him in a luxury motor-home, and Amy is certainly not afraid of making her presence felt. . . She is not the only sports wife with a 'forceful personality'. . . The fragrant Anna, (husband, baseball player for Baltimore Orioles), who has her own reality TV show, an internet poker site and a 34DD chest, told her husband – in public – that if she ever finds out he has cheated on her, she will sleep with every one of his teammates (26).

This news item begins with a title utilising cockney-rhyming slang, 'trouble and strife', in a derogatory manner to refer to someone's wife. An independent radical feminist magazine which was in publication in Britain from 1983 to 2002 named *Trouble and Strife* claimed it chose this title because, 'it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance' ('About Trouble and Strife'). By using a derogatory phrase to refer to women the newspaper sets the tone for the article and the way it will address women and particularly wives of sportsmen. But the newspaper also makes a comment about gender relations as unequal because of women's supposed roles in life as wives who are problematic for men when they are outspoken and demanding.

This article which was featured in the sports pages of *The Sunday Times* is about wives of sportsmen who are represented as forceful and demanding characters. The second woman in the article, Anna Benson, is talked about in a highly sexual way. The size of her breasts is described, highlighting her gender and mentioning her intention to sleep with her husband's teammates if he is disloyal. This presents her as promiscuous. There is an element of self-commodification in the case of Benson, in that although she is presented as sexualised, she is not simply an innocent victim in the way she frames herself as sexual. By participating in sexualised discourse she is colluding with the idea of herself as sexually available. Benson provides 'entertainment' for the audience by showing that she is sexually adventurous and open to having multiple partners, and *The Sunday Times* paints her as decorative and sexualised by describing her chest size.

The corporeal details of a sportsman's wife should have no place in sports reporting. However, the function of a WAG is as sexualised entertainment in newspaper reporting. There is a growing trend to publicize salacious information about WAGs in order to sell more newspapers (Harris and Clayton 2002). Turner (2010) cites the tabloidization of the mass media, 'increasing commercialisation of modern life and a corresponding decline in "traditional values"' (2010: 26) as one reason for this. Turner explains that although the term 'tabloidization' is employed by those aiming to criticise the morality of the popular media, a certain faction of these media, 'sets out to offend middle-class standards of taste as a deliberate commercial and discursive strategy' (2010: 30). The gossip-style reporting shown in the news of WAGs reinforces this idea. However, it is clear that women are, at least in part, the victims of such a strategy.

It could be argued that presenting WAGs as sexualised and entertaining underscores the status of their husbands, the sportsmen, as alpha males who can 'have' a certain type of woman. The masculinity of sportsmen is enhanced by having a girlfriend or wife who epitomises the binary opposite of a sportsman, in other words a woman who is domesticated, aesthetically appealing and has all the characteristics of the 'feminine ideal'. Articles such as 'Pearce Lets His Wife Call The Shots' (*The Observer*, 06/01/08), do not often appear in the sports news as they show a different image of WAGs from the norm. This news item read,

It appears that he may not wear the trousers in his own household. After Wind Instrument finished a decent 2nd at Lingfield in the Pearce colours,

he was questioned on his thoughts about the performance, "I don't know you'd better ask my wife". Liz P has a background in show jumping (19).

Boyle and Haynes (2000) confirm the need for sportsmen to espouse masculinity: 'men who abstain from male sporting subcultures can be stereotyped as being effeminate' (2000: 135). By presenting WAGs as sexualised, entertaining and decorative, the media simultaneously frame their husbands as masculine sportsmen, thus reinforcing their hyper-masculinised statuses and the gendered divide in roles for women and men in sports.

### Glamour Models/Porn Stars

The idea of women as visual 'gifts' for a mostly male audience can be routinely associated with the media representation of women in the category glamour models/porn stars. It is common for these women to be nameless and often faceless in newspaper sports sections. Mostly these women appear exclusively in small text-only news items. However, an exception was published in the form of a photograph of a Brazilian woman on the beach in a revealing bikini. The caption read 'Ideal Hosts: A Warm Welcome is Guaranteed in Brazil' (*The Sunday Times*, 04/10/09). The article was in reference to Brazil's successful bid to host the football World Cup in 2014. The photo and caption of a bikini-clad Brazilian woman was laden with sexual innuendos; it infers that Brazilian women would happily play hostesses to the fans who travel to watch the World Cup in 2014. This idea of female sexualised servitude conjures up the image of 'easy women' who will make the fans feel 'welcome' by appearing in skimpy bikinis and presumably catering to their sexual needs. Contrast this with the role of Brazilian men who will supposedly be doing the serious job of playing football and defending the national pride, often associated with football success. This article also plays off the well-known stereotype of Brazil as a carnival country, where everyone spends time at the beach, the women wear thong bikinis and the men are world-class footballers. Nevertheless it frames Brazilian women in a narrow role as providers of visual and sexual pleasure. This type of media representation encourages the belief that women are purely decorative in terms of sport. In particular in masculine sports, such as football, rugby, American football and cricket, women are deemed to be at the disposal of men in terms of pleasure (Lenskyj 1998; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Wedgwood 2008; Vincent et al 2011). They have nothing 'serious' to do with sport in terms of participating, coaching, hosting, organising, presenting, umpiring or even working in the sports industry. They are decorative but disposable and therefore their existence is

ephemeral. It could be argued that this is one of the primary reasons why women, including professional sportswomen, submit themselves to a degrading sexualised representation because they are under threat of being ousted by the majority (men) in favour of a woman who *is* willing to give the 'public' (male viewers) what they want.

The reference to pornography in sports media is often a mechanism employed to justify the sexualisation of women's bodies. For example, in *The Observer*, Will Buckley wrote, 'Easier to part Jermaine from his fiancée than his many references to porn stars' (13/01/08: 16). Furthermore, on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008 in the same newspaper, a section of the sports pages titled 'Women's Lib News' (7) reported that sexist remarks had been made towards a female football referee. The article then pointed out that she had posed nude for Brazilian *Playboy*. In the first article the reference to pornography almost excuses the need to discuss women's bodies in a sexualised manner. In the second article the fact that the woman referee had posed nude in *Playboy* magazine seemed to negate the sexism of the remarks, supposedly because by posing nude she had willingly made herself the object of such comments.

It is clear that pornography has no direct link to sports. However, Harris and Clayton (2002) argue that sexual statements and sexy photographs of sportswomen 'strengthen the assumption that "real" sports are for men and women are there to provide excitement and arousal' (2002: 404). The comments made in the articles above refer to women in non-active roles in sports, or partially-active roles (as in the case of the referee). Therefore I suggest the term 'irrelevant bodies' here to describe the women in this category as they are not actual sportswomen or WAGs, and their relation to sport is tenuous and dependent upon their heterosexual encounters with sportsmen. Their bodies are irrelevant to 'actual' sports reporting other than to provide an element of pleasurable imagery to male heterosexual readers. This further reinforces the gendered binary present in the dominant sports ideology that women are inactive and passive and men are active and reactive (Harris and Clayton 2002).

Sporting pornography is becoming more common in sports reporting. However, the pornographic element is often masked by a link to 'factual' sports news. In *The Observer* a photo of a lap dancer accompanied an article reporting that the winning jockey and the horse's trainer in the Brighton Handicap race would receive membership to a lap dancing club plus £1000 of 'entertainment' (10/08/08: 20). Apart from the prize being aimed at male jockeys specifically, the

sexualisation of this woman's body was justified through her role as a lap dancer. The woman in the photograph was presented as a gift for men in two ways; firstly, the photo of her semi-naked body was as a visual gift for male readers. Secondly, she was an image of the actual prize, a real-life lap dancer, awarded to the winner of a supposed sporting contest. In my data there was no instance in which the reverse was true, in that a competition would award a woman a male lap-dancer or equivalent. The exchange of women between men has been highlighted by feminism for a long time. Levi-Strauss defined culture, like marriage, as a 'total relationship exchange. . . not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners' (Levi-Strauss 1969: 115). Irigaray suggests that society would collapse if it were not, 'assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves' (Irigaray in Schrift 1997: 174). The article about the lap dancer 'prize' for the winning jockey demonstrates the physical exchange of visual pleasure between groups of men, and the sports news item shows male dominance over women between groups of men in the media (male newspaper journalists/editors and the male audience).

The exchange of women as objects between men can be seen in a story on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2008, when it was reported that, 'Brazilian press said the national squad smuggled "loose women" into the team hotel before their World Cup qualifier against Chile' (22). The journalist seems simultaneously to applaud the footballers' actions as they display overt virility, while condemning the women for being 'loose'; they are presented as objects for the national football team's pleasure and consumption, but are also highlighted as being a 'certain type' of woman. Although the news item places the footballers as the agents of the action of 'smuggling' the women into the hotel, supposedly against team orders before a big match, the description of the women as 'loose' neutralises the mischievous behaviour of the men as the term carries with it a negative connotation of non-law abiding women, but also of the sexually promiscuous.

News about sex workers appears frequently in *The Observer*. In the ironically titled 'Women's Lib News' it was reported that Nuremberg FC star Eva Roob said that she quit football because a career in porn was better for her 'as a woman' (19/10/08: 7). On a similar topic *The Observer* reported, 'Argentine glamour model seen out with Carlos Tevez says she snares players with her lusty ways' (02/11/08: 7). In the same newspaper an article titled 'WAG Retirement News' informed that 'Glamour model Wanda Nara marries footballer Maxi Lopez, moves

to Russia and gives up porn movies' (16/11/08: 8). *The Observer* also commented on news that Rebecca Loos entertained an ex-rugby star on a flight under a blanket (30/11/08). These four examples demonstrate how common this type of reporting is in *The Observer*. It is somewhat disturbing that the supposedly most left-wing newspaper in my sample was the publication that was most dedicated to this type of sexist reporting.

These articles suggest that a career as a porn star is acceptable and should be publicised by newspapers. The normalisation of the porn industry can have a negative impact on other women in the media. Glamour models and porn stars provide a contrasting image to sportswomen and they cater exclusively to male sexual desire, which sportswomen do not since they often present an opposing image to that of the 'feminine ideal'. Using images and stories of women from the sex industry dilutes the message of the sports pages if we consider that sports reporting ought to report on sports, and not salacious news. However, that is perhaps an idealised version of the role of the media. In reality the media are economic institutions 'competing in the marketplace for audiences and advertisers' (Wenner 1998: 89). Scholars in media studies have identified four dimensions of newsworthiness: deviance (unusualness/novelty), sensationalism, conflict/controversy, and prominence (Wenner 1998). It is true that sports sections aid the sale of newspapers and equally sex sells newspapers (Rowe 2007). The convergence of the two is a relatively recent phenomenon, although it is specific almost exclusively to one sex: women. Heterosexual sex appeal and women are framed in the context of sport to increase sales. The use of glamour models and porn stars in sports news is justified by editorial staff in terms of the newsworthiness scale; on the one hand salacious stories are certainly consistent with the need for stories to provide controversy, sensationalism and novelty. On the other hand, sportswomen are a deviation from the male sporting norm. Nevertheless, the imbalanced reporting of women demeans the role of sportswomen and their media image as professional athletes.

An example of an irony-laden titled article 'Jane Austen News' which provided salacious news for sports readers opened with,

Argentine glamour model Melina Pitra – who revealed last week why being 'immobilised in bed' with ropes is the 'natural order' for a lady – says she will marry 'sweetheart' Las Palmas keeper Fabian Assmon. 'Our physical love is based on respect. Sometimes the back door, and I respect that' (18/10/09: 20).

Despite the pornographic dimension of this reporting, Pitra is also represented as feminine in her submission to sexual acts, the reference to her as a 'lady' and the title of the article 'Jane Austen News'. She is painted as secondary to her future husband in two ways; firstly as the spouse of a footballer her career as a glamour model is inferiorised because not only does her job garner less respect in comparison to that of a world-class footballer, but also this article appears in sports news where the only connection the woman has to the theme is her romantic relationship. The article presents Pitra as a subordinated object, subject to the sexual whims of her partner and under the scrutiny of the mass media regarding her private life.

The representation of glamour models/porn stars on the sports pages falls into two categories: the nameless woman who seems to provide an imaginary visual pleasure for the mostly male audience and the foreign *Playboy* model/porn star connected to footballers. The nameless woman, as in the case of the Brazilian host story and the jockey's lap dancer prize, is the entertaining part of a story about men and sport. She is nameless because she has little value other than her sex appeal. The other type of woman in this category is always connected to football, she is foreign (Wanda Nara and Melina Pitra are from Argentina, and Eva Roob is German) and thus exotic. The stories about these women centre on football and sex. It is important, however, to note that none of these women are British. Furthermore, they come from countries which have traditionally had successful football teams. It could be argued that there is an element of nationalism involved in the reporting of these women. The England men's football team do not have a particularly good record against these nations, especially at international competitions. Thus it could be suggested that the newspapers present these nation's women as promiscuous, overtly sexualised and with few morals to counter the foreign footballers' success on the field.

There is perhaps another agenda at work in the representation of foreign women as glamour models/porn stars which is not a driving force behind the representation of sportswomen or WAGs. I suggest that this agenda is related to a privileging of British culture and values. The discussion of foreign women's bodies as sexualised is almost imperialistic in a way that simultaneously negates responsibility by displacing the 'risky' representation of women onto foreign women, and exerts power over those women and by extension, their countries of nationality, by their media representation. This media technique justifies the presence of such news items as they seem not to 'belong' to British culture and



journalists are simply reproducing this type of news which reaffirms certain cultural stereotypes.

The final aforementioned examples of the sexualisation of women's bodies surprised me when I was collecting my data since they could easily have been found in an erotic magazine, rather than a national Sunday newspaper. However the position of the news item within the newspaper, and more generally the other articles which focus on glamour models and semi-pornographic news, is most commonly at the bottom of a page in one of the corners, near the end of the sports section. It is plausible to suggest that eroticised versions of women's bodies do not belong in the sports news. However, by page placement, newspapers may be attempting to moderate the presentation of such salacious news items. A common theme in this category of representation of women is viewing their bodies as an object for public enjoyment. Difficulties arise for professional sportswomen from these representations of glamour models and porn stars, whether the women are complicit in their sexualisation or not. The image of elite sportswomen is in stark contrast to the women who are part of the 'sporting pornography' news coverage, but mostly do not have any formal connection to professional sports participation. The majority of these women are glamour models and porn stars, and are represented as overtly sexualised. Sportswomen as previously suggested are more subtly sexualised, with journalists alluding to posing nude or their 'sexy' bodies. Thus there are two contrasting images of women: sportswomen who are 'softly' sexualised or glamour models with overtly sexualised and sexually liberated bodies. Perhaps the frequent publication of news about glamour models/porn stars in the sports pages influences the representation of professional sportswomen in terms of expectations of femininity amongst all groups of women. It could be argued that the normalisation of sex workers and the coverage they receive in national daily newspapers changes the perception of other women (e.g. elite sportswomen) in that it sets up the suggestion that all women should appear as visually pleasurable and provide stories as salacious as the glamour models/porn stars (Walter 2010).

Producing stories about irrelevant bodies is a phenomenon exclusive to the portrayal of women; in all my material over the two-year period, there was not a single news item which included the equivalent for men.

There are two possibilities that I would suggest could improve the sexist reporting which promotes the sexualised image of women in sport. A liberal approach may

be to encourage the sexualisation of sportsmen as well as women to create equal sexual objectification between the sexes. There is an increasing interest in nakedness and sexiness in British popular culture (Walter 2010), but the focus tends to be one-sided and promotes sexualised images of women, much more than men. A readjustment in the gendered presentation of sexiness may balance this out. Alternatively, a move away from publishing images consistent with a sexualised culture and focusing on sporting bodies as athletes rather than sexualised objects may encourage people to take sportswomen more seriously. In other words, by encouraging sports reporting to distance itself from sensational stories of sexual encounters and images of semi-naked women, perhaps more 'real' sportswomen will be awarded equitable coverage.

One way to lessen the identity of sportswomen as 'real' athletes is to trivialise their bodies. The subsequent discussion will look at the way in which the sports media promote an image of trivialised bodies as sexy, fun-loving and promiscuous.

### Trivialised Bodies

Several studies have examined how the portrayal of women and men in sport are part of a socially constructed reality with particular gendered notions (Messner 2002; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007; Horne et al 2012). The majority of the work has demonstrated an imbalance in the way that sportswomen and men are represented by the media. One of the ways in which this occurs is through the trivialisation of women's bodies and thus the trivialisation of their achievements (Koivula 1999). Sportswomen's bodies can be trivialised in a number of ways, which are: being dependent on men (particularly partners, husbands, or trainers), using task-irrelevant reporting (focusing on sexuality, clothes and activities outside of sport), relationship status and highlighting appearance and personality over sporting achievements. I shall discuss these four ways in which the media trivialise sportswomen's bodies. The women I refer to here are all professional sportswomen, as opposed to the other categories of women (WAGs and glamour models/porn stars) in the previous section on sexualised bodies.

One way in which sportswomen's bodies are trivialised by the media is by framing them in terms of their social position, as girlfriends or wives, or as mothers (Sailors et al 2012). For example in the *Mail on Sunday* on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2008 an article titled 'I'll Take Nick's Name To Cheer Him Up' (91) refers to Sarah Ayton, a sailor who won gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics in the Yngling

category, and her upcoming wedding to fellow British sailor Nick Dempsey who did not medal at the 2008 Games. Not only does the article focus solely on Ayton's private life, but it trivialises her status as an elite sportswoman by simply connecting her to a man. Perhaps by focusing on her adopting her partner's surname when they marry, the sportsman's disappointing performance at Beijing is appeased by deflecting the focus from Ayton's win and onto his 'dominant' surname. Ayton's submission to the dominant gender regime which affirms women must adopt their husbands' surnames upon marriage, is represented positively. Her femininity is enhanced by complying with this inferiorising tradition. Suarez explains, 'a woman's willingness to relinquish her surname after marriage and accept her husband's represents the deterioration of an essential part of her individuality and her submersion into her husband's person' (1997: 233). Thus Ayton's own success in sport is diminished as she plans to lose part of her identity by adopting her future husband's surname. Moreover, when Ayton won a gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics she was called Sarah Ayton, a sportswoman known due to her own training, hard work and success. However, in future competitions she will forever be referred to in connection to her husband, because of changing her name. This is of course linked to the wider issue for feminists about women adopting their husbands' surnames upon marriage and therefore losing part of their identity and becoming subsumed under their spouses' name.

It is common for newspapers to combine two media mechanisms in order to trivialise women's bodies in sports reporting: showing their dependence on men (in the case below, the jockey's trainer) and task-irrelevant reporting (focusing on their sexuality). *The Observer* reported that a Newmarket horse trainer, Gary Kellaway, was allegedly having an affair with an apprentice jockey: 'She won the Ian Carnaby Selling Stakes with horse Avoca Dancer and was presented with a stick of Brighton Rock, "it's the biggest I've had for a while" she jokes' (07/09/08: 19). The female jockey's achievement is trivialised by framing her as connected romantically to her male trainer and through the sexualisation of her body, the sexual innuendo, and the phallic form of the prize, a stick of Brighton rock. Part of the third wave feminist discourse centres on achieving equality with men through women's ability to discuss their sex life freely and without judgement. However, there are two issues here: firstly it is only the woman who discusses her sex life, while men's coverage in sports reporting is predominantly task-relevant. Secondly, the woman in the story is nameless and therefore lacks any agency. This invisibility is contrary to any debate about women's 'sexual liberation'. The

female jockey is completely over-shadowed by her trainer, Gary Kellaway, and is only highlighted in reference to a sexual comment, thus framing her in a purely sexualised way.

There were many examples in my data showing how the media trivialise sportswomen by focusing on task-irrelevant reporting. In an interview in *The Sunday Times* the interviewer asked Carolina Klufft, 'Have you ever felt under pressure to take off your clothes to promote your sport?', to which Klufft responded, 'Not here in Sweden, where we have many successful female athletes. We are taken seriously and not hidden behind men in terms of press coverage. I have never felt forced to do anything like that to promote myself' (01/02/09: 23). It could be argued that the interviewer was simply referring to the pressure to pose nude for publicity. However, the following question in the interview, 'When was the last time you were drunk?' (23) confirms that the interviewer is mainly interested in discussing Klufft's body and private behaviour, thus trivialising her identity as a sportswoman. Drinking alcohol and being drunk is widely recognised in sports as anti-productive for sportspeople who aim to excel physically, as it inhibits the ability to train consistently at a high level ('Fitness: Drink Aware'). In this way, the question seems to disrespect Klufft's position as a world-class athlete, suggesting that she would engage in behaviours likely to be counter-productive to her success.

The discussion of sportswomen's romantic lives is the third type of trivialisation of women's bodies by the media. 'Single Life for Kirsty' pondered the state of a sportswoman's romantic life,

Might racing's most fascinating relationship finally be over? The Newmarket people-watchers have enjoyed the coupling of jockeys Kieran Fallon and Kirsty Milczarek and their comings and goings have fuelled rumour after rumour around the town. Admirers of Milczarek (and indeed Fallon) can take encouragement from the fact that the blond haired rider recently changed her status on her publicly open Facebook page from 'in a relationship' to 'single' (*The Observer*, 26/07/09: 14).

Although the news item relates to two heterosexual jockeys breaking up, the author focuses on the female jockey by using the title, 'Single Life for Kirsty'. She is constructed as 'available', rather than him. News articles such as this encourage the idea that sportswomen's lives are open for public scrutiny, whereas the male jockey in the article seems to escape the attention directed at

his personal life. To further reduce the focus on the sportswoman's career as a jockey, the article describes her as a 'blond haired rider' but does not describe the male jockey in the same way.

Sportswomen's bodies are trivialised by the media by this focus on their appearance and personality. King (2007) states that in the 1980s, media coverage of sportswomen 'used language that could be construed as celebrating looks and style more than athletic performance' (2007: 196). Bernstein (2002) argues that this trend has continued into the 1990s and the new millennium. My data supports this continuing trend. For example, in an article which detailed the ten contenders of the annual BBC Sport's Personality of the Year Award, the second 'contender' on the list, Jessica Ennis, was described as 'The planet's best all-round woman athlete who has the complete package of looks, personality and ability' (*Mail on Sunday*, 13/12/09: 74). The focus is first on her appearance, then on her character traits even though she became World Heptathlete Champion in 2009 ('Superb Ennis Wins Heptathlon Gold'). In the description of why she constitutes a 'complete package' the last thing that is mentioned is her physical ability. Jones et al (1999) found that descriptors of athletes as 'pretty' were often used for sportswomen competing outside traditionally female-appropriate sports.

Another reading of the news story about Jessica Ennis employs Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity to explain the representation of Ennis as a 'complete package' and her collusion in such an identity. Ennis is the embodiment of the feminine ideal; she is pretty, petite, slim, not over endowed with muscles, never out-spoken and rarely complains. Perhaps most importantly she complies with heterosexual norms and frequently discusses her fiancée (the British media took great pleasure in announcing when Ennis became engaged to her long-term boyfriend ('Golden Girl Jessica Ennis Engaged')). Ennis is often described as the 'golden girl' of British athletics and is one of the most marketable sportswomen in the UK, according to the aforementioned article. One might ask whether Ennis would have been listed in the top-ten contenders for the BBC competition if it were not for her gender performance of the 'feminine ideal'. Ennis does not challenge any gender norms or tries to push gender boundaries; unlike Victoria Pendleton who fought for and achieved gender parity in the number of track cycling events for women, Ennis is presented as quite content to participate in her event without making any comparisons between herself and other male athletes.

The BBC Sports Personality of the Year has a national dimension with all the contenders coming from the United Kingdom. This type of competition encourages an investigation into the relationship between sportspeople's national identity and their media representation. Although Hargreaves (2000), Boyle and Haynes (2000, 2009), and Hughson (2009) explain that the national sports hero is most commonly male, sportswomen who represent their countries when competing at international competitions are nonetheless contributing to patriotic pride through sports achievement. Turner (2009) suggests that the status of sportspeople depends on their performance in that as soon as they seem to "let the fans down" they can expect a thorough rebuke from the media' (2009: 105). Sportswomen thus occupy a precarious position in sport and its reporting; they must not achieve too much success which might threaten sportsmen in the same sport, but when they do not achieve their goals, they are likely to be berated for it (see the case of Paula Radcliffe who was celebrated by the media for breaking the marathon world record in 2002 and was subsequently criticised for not finishing the 2004 Olympic marathon in Athens; Rebecca Adlington was expected to defend her two gold medals from Beijing at the 2012 London Games, but upon winning two bronze medals she was featured in stories of disappointment rather than celebration). Conversely, my data suggest that sportsmen do not ever seem to be in danger of becoming too successful according to their media representation, which highlights a double standard for women and men in sport reporting. Another double standard in sports reporting occurs when the media describe sportswomen as though they are in subordinate positions to sportsmen, which I shall now discuss.

### The Body as Secondary

*'Women will always come second and, usually, a very poor second to men' (Cashmore 1996: 120).*

Sportswomen are considered to be secondary to men in terms of strength, speed and skill. Media representation reinforces the idea of sportswomen as secondary to their male counterparts in terms of ability and importance. Koivula explains: 'it has been proposed that one of the functions of sport in society is the construction and validation of masculinity and male superiority' (1999: 591). The prioritising by the media of sportsmen as superior and sportswomen as inferior is thus not surprising. One way in which this functions is by highlighting the qualities of sportsmen before acknowledging the feats of women related to them.

For example, the *Express on Sunday* published an article about the sons of two women, famous in their own ways (28/06/09). Annabel Croft's son was reported as excelling in golf and Andy Murray's mum Judy was helping him move house. Both women were depicted as mothers despite both women having their own careers. Annabel Croft is a former British no. 1 tennis player and is now one of the principal commentators for the television news channel Eurosport ('Former Tennis Star Annabel Croft Reveals. . .'). Judy Murray has brought up two of Britain's best tennis players for many years, Andy and Jamie Murray, but her professional career has included being a Scotland tennis coach and performance manager and in 2009 she set up an academy for children to find Britain's next World no.1 tennis player ('Judy Murray Quitting LTA').

These examples of women's status as trivialised by the media are from British newspapers. Studies from other Anglophone countries, namely Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States show similar results in the trivialisation of sportswomen's bodies (Messner et al 1993; Lenskyj 1998; Jones et al 1999; Eastman and Billings 2000; Vincent et al 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Crossman et al 2007; Mewett and Toffoletti 2008; Stone and Horne 2008; Sailors et al 2012). Lee (2009) demonstrates that the national politics of a country can have an impact on the representation of sportswomen. Lee's study 'Red Feminism and Propaganda in Communist Media' investigates the media representation of women boxers in North Korea. The study concludes that the communist state contributes to better media treatment of sportswomen by reinforcing the ideology to the people of North Korea that everyone is equal and that the national interest is foremost. The Korean media representation of women boxers revealed that they are not sexualised, nor are they represented as secondary to male boxers. Instead the female boxers are presented as model citizens as they reinforce loyalty to the nation-state. The nationalist agenda of the communist government creates a cloudy understanding, however, of how much 'liberation' North Korean women and sportswomen actually experience. Lee concludes that 'the communist state politically manipulates the cases of female boxers in order to maintain its social order' (2009: 208). Perhaps we can deduce from Lee's investigation that the politics of a country has an implicit or indeed explicit impact on the media representation of sportswomen due to the wider national agenda, and in this case it is national interest which is privileged over individual women's sporting development.

The British media tend to represent sportswomen as secondary to men by framing them as outsiders to the national agenda. 'Brits - and Victoria - Look Good for Huge Haul of Gold Medals' (*Express on Sunday*, 03/08/08: 109) referred to the British track cycling team and the national expectation that they would win several gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Overall the GB track cycling team won 12 gold medals, two by women, Victoria Pendleton and Rebecca Romero. However, in the 2008 Games there were seven races available for men and only three for women in track cycling. Overall 153 male indoor male cyclists competed in the Beijing velodrome compared to 35 women ('Olympic Games 2008. . .' and 'Cycling Track'). Regardless of the impossibility of women winning as many gold medals as men, the article in the *Sunday Express* frames Victoria Pendleton as outside the GB team by saying 'Brits - and Victoria'. Her status is classed as secondary to the male cyclists who would seem to be the 'real' athletes representing Great Britain. Koivula (1999) confirms this by stating that on a national level 'the performance of women athletes was less important and less interesting than the performance of their male counterparts' (1999: 597). Crolley and Teso (2007) also found that sportswomen were represented as secondary to sportsmen in the Spanish newspaper coverage of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games despite the Spanish women outperforming the men. It is often during major sporting events such as the Olympic Games, where both sexes compete for their national teams, that there is less overall disparity in the media coverage of sportswomen and sportsmen (King 2007). However, this is not always the case as this example in the *Sunday Express* demonstrates gender discrimination in print media reporting of the Olympics.

The most common mechanism used to present women as secondary to men in sport is by directly comparing them. *The Sunday Telegraph* suggested that some sportswomen do not understand the physical requirements of a professional athlete in an article titled, 'Women Are Waking Up to Reality'. The news item read, 'It is wonderful to see women's golf finally starting to scratch the surface of its potential. . . The women's game is waking up to the fact that excellence equates with talent and an awful lot of hard, sweaty work' (08/02/09). The indirect comparison to the men's game means that women golfers are judged by referencing male golf standards. I think that ideally women and men should be judged by the same standards because I do not think that physically they are dissimilar, although, the common consensus is that women and men are binary opposites and have therefore historically been assigned different roles in society. There are mixed views in the media about the physical abilities of women and



men in sport. Many feminist media scholars have argued that media institutions are guided by existing gender ideologies which reiterate the belief that women are physically and emotionally fragile and should be discouraged from bodily exertion whereas men are physically strong enough for sport. This discourse has been translated into actual sporting norms which restrict women's access to certain competitions and events. For example, downhill ski jumping is still deemed too dangerous for women to compete in (Tavers 2011), and in tennis men play up to five sets compared to women who play a maximum of three sets.

Sport scientists have found that women and men differ physically in some sports, depending on which muscle groups are used. Much attention has been directed at investigating how the onset of puberty triggers more injuries in female athletes as certain parts of their bodies become more susceptible to weakness, especially during specific times in their menstrual cycles (Weimann 2002; Quatman et al 2006). Freedson (1994), using studies from the 1970s, explained that in some instances women are more powerful than men in their lower body strength compared to their weight and height ratio. Miller et al (1993) concluded that the 'data suggest that it [physical difference in sports performance between women and men] is largely an innate gender difference' (254). Dowling (2000) argues that there is no difference between women and men but a 'frailty myth' has created a belief in gender difference. There are several examples where women have outperformed men in sports competitions; in the 1970s Billy Jean King beat Bobby Riggs in a match labelled 'The Battle of the Sexes'; Chrissie Wellington ran the fastest marathon split at the South African Ironman in 2011 of any woman or man; Hayley Turner regularly wins horse racing competitions against male jockeys and ultramarathon runner Pam Reed won outright the 2002 and 2003 Badwater Ultramarathon. Nonetheless, the overwhelming view in both sports journalism and the academic field of sport studies is that women are 'naturally' weaker than men.

With examples of strong women and cases where women have beaten men, why does the myth of the 'weak' woman still pervade societal understandings of women? Roth and Basow (2004) suggest this attitude towards women's frailty begins during childhood, and possibly even earlier in life. They argue that the emphasis for people to conform to, and the divisiveness of, the masculinity/femininity binary is interconnected with ideas of strength and weakness. They state that the feminine ideal posits that girls should be small, slim, nicely dressed, not too loud, passive and weak. Moreover, the construction

of femininity through feminine bodies must be worked on constantly through girls' and women's self-discipline including 'dieting, exercise, hair removal, cosmetics use and so forth' (249). They argue that these daily activities to discipline their bodies as feminine restrict women's physicality: 'Femininity discipline begins working upon females during their childhood. . . by transmitting to children a mental connection between femaleness and weakness and by forcing girls to embody that weakness in their bodies' (249). Thus as children and adults, girls and women are encouraged to be feminine, especially when doing a physical activity which contradicts typical femininity.

This restricted feminine upbringing impacts on women in terms of their understanding of their bodies and what they are, and particularly what they are not, capable of doing. Alongside a gendered socialisation, sports institutions can further influence women's sporting aspirations by controlling how and in which ways they access and experience sport. Very infrequently women and men receive equal access to sports, facilities and training. However, in both competition and media reporting, sportswomen and men are compared as though they exist on a level playing field. Evaluating sportswomen's performances against men's, taking into consideration the unequal upbringing, gendered notions of ability and access to sports are inevitably going to indicate that men are superior athletes to women. But until women receive the same opportunities as men in terms of training, funding, coaching and equal treatment by media institutions, comparisons cannot be drawn between women and men on equal grounds. Most importantly it is impossible to compare sportswomen and men until the gendered socialisation of children is equalised because this period of time greatly influences a person's character and abilities as an adult. Without changes to socialisation, access and equal opportunities for women and men, they cannot compete on similar terms because of their contrasting socialisation. It is thus unfair that sportswomen are judged by the physical standards of sportsmen, because of the different and unequal opportunities open to women and men in sports from a young age.

In an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* the author presents women golfers as secondary to male golfers through the asymmetrical gender marking of sports. In other words by saying 'women's golf', instead of simply 'golf' which is reserved for the men's game, there is an underlying assumption that the men's game has primary importance, and the women's game is secondary. Crolley and Teso state that by gender marking women's sports, women are portrayed as a 'variation

from the (male) norm' (2007: 159). This is linked to the national agenda when both women and men compete during major sporting events. Crolley and Teso found that the Spanish press referred to the men's handball team as 'the Spanish handball team' (158) whereas the women's team was gender marked.

Major sporting events such as the Olympic Games gender mark all events throughout the competition. For example, at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games when Usain Bolt broke the world record for the men's 100m sprint in athletics, many media institutions reported that he had broken the 'world record' with no reference to gender. It could be argued that because the men's 100m record is faster than the women's, it is the world record for both genders. However, by asymmetrically marking the gender of only the women's 100m, the media present the men's event as superior to the women's, literally and symbolically ('Olympics: Usain Bolt Takes Olympic Glory with New 100m World Record'). In other sports, such as the Premiership football league in England, there is no gender marking because it is exclusively for men, and football is traditionally a 'male' sport. Whenever the women's football league is given any television airtime,<sup>31</sup> the sport is clearly gender marked. Perhaps it is useful to consider the possibility that gender marking, if used for both women's and men's sports, could neutralise the unequal reporting produced by it. Gender marking both women's and men's sports might expel the idea of sportsmen as the 'norm' and standard in sports, thus giving more prominence to sportswomen's events and achievements. Perhaps an alternative to alter the notion that men are 'naturally' stronger and better at all sports would be to reassess how we categorise sports. In other words, instead of grouping together all sports into one category and judging women and men against the same criteria, perhaps we should re-categorise sports into 'skill-based', 'strength-based' and 'agility-based' and 'stamina-based' sports. In this way the idea that men are better at sports would need to be readdressed and allow women to 'compete' on a more level playing field, particularly in skill and stamina-based sports.

The status of sportswomen as secondary is in contrast to the identity of a competitive professional athlete of either gender. The aim of the elite in sport is always to win; second is not good enough. Ambition and drive are two qualities which are closely associated with successful sportswomen and men. The media

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<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note that the male dominance in football did not exist in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Williams describes how in the 1920s there were approximately 150 women's football clubs in England and matches were well attended (Williams 2003).

representation of ambition is distinctly different for women and men, as I will now explain.

### Ambitious Bodies

Strength, muscularity, athleticism, aggressiveness, competitiveness and ambition are all qualities associated with sportsmen (Lorber and Moore 2006). Ambition and sportswomen are not normally seen as synonymous. However, when a woman openly drives forward her ambition to be the best in her sport she is often derided by the media. In spite of this, sportswomen, by the nature of their profession, are taught to be ambitious and to want to win every race or competition they take part in. The sportswomen who feature in newspapers are not often described as overtly ambitious regarding sporting achievements. However, certain women are framed as 'ambitious' in the sports pages in relation to goals outside of the traditional arena of sports participation, such as earning more or becoming famous. In, 'So Farewell', *The Observer* reported: 'Sad to be moving on: Karen Brady – famous for attacking excessive salaries. . . Brady's exit package to leave Birmingham: £1m, including £780k in bonuses' (18/10/09: 20). If the person in question had been a man, there might have been a different reaction from the media. However, Karen Brady is one of the few women who are successful within the top echelons of the Premier League football in the UK. She is openly ambitious and has attempted to work as chairwoman alongside mostly white, middle-aged men in a totally male-dominated institution ('Exclusive: Karen Brady. . .'). In fact, Brady was at the centre of a sexism scandal in January 2011, when Sky's main football commentators Andy Gray and Richard Keys made disparaging remarks about Brady and how she argued for more gender equality in football ('Sky Sports Presenters in Sexism Row. . .'). In *The Observer* article, Brady is represented as greedy and immoral for leaving Birmingham with such a big pay package, perhaps because she is already seen as a deviant from the (male) norm of chairmen at football clubs.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Karen Brady spent 16 years as chairwoman at Birmingham FC and received £1 million as part of a severance package. Rick Parry was chief executive at Liverpool FC and was paid £3 million upon leaving the club after spending ten years in charge. Considering the excessive salaries of Premier League football club players and managers, Wayne Rooney earns in the region of £200,000 weekly, Brady's severance package was lower than the amount given to most chairmen.

In the *Mail on Sunday*, an article referring to a female sailor's goal of winning a gold medal at the London Olympics in 2012 was titled, 'Blonde Ambition' (23/03/08: 92). The colour blond has stereotypically been associated with a woman's perceived inability (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Oswald 2008). 'Dumb blonde' is a common insult. In this case, 'Blonde Ambition' would seem to trivialise and reduce the sportswoman's goal, making it appear to be a contradiction in terms. Subtle language mechanisms such as this reinforce gendered constructions of women in sport, suggesting that women are not the natural athletes that sportsmen are.

The majority of the examples in this category demonstrate how women are framed as ambitious through their goals, personalities and salaries, but do not collude with this representation. Importantly, there are no examples of sportswomen represented as ambitious in a positive sense, in terms of the desire to perform well in sport and win. This contrasts with the media's fascination with sportsmen, particularly the national teams, and their determination to win world titles, such as the football World Cup and the rugby World Cup (Brookes 2002).

### Commercial Bodies

The representation of women's bodies as commercial in the sports media occurred only in *The Observer*. The relevant news items discuss sportswomen's commerciality in two opposing ways, as having commercial capital and as not being commercially viable. Sportswomen's sex appeal and conformity to femininity greatly impacts on their commerciality. There is a particular interest by sports institutions that employ tactics to increase sportswomen's commercial price tag, thus making them more popular through increased media presence, carefully selected advertising campaigns and more likely to be watched as athletes. These 'tactics' could also be explained as a way of halting sportswomen's developments as professional athletes. For example, on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008 an article discussed Korean women golfers and that they must pass an English language exam in order to compete on the professional women's golf tour. The article explained that while women golfers from Korea were becoming very successful, they did not have the right image to garner commercial support from sponsors. The article suggested that the central problem was their lack of English language skills. However, this requisite for Korean golfers could be seen as a way of imposing double standards on the players: since it is only Korean players who are highlighted as lacking English as a language, and because it is only the women golfers, not the men, who are subject to this ruling. By creating

such a gendered rule, the sportswomen are represented as having a lower level of education than the men. Perhaps after the success of Michelle Wie in the men's game of golf, representing women golfers as inadequate by western golfing standards, is a way of ensuring no further women 'outshine' the male golfers, or at least compete with them in the same competition ('Michelle Wie to Play on PGA Tour. . .').

Double standards also persist in the reporting on women in traditionally 'male' sports. News stories frame these sportswomen as more commercially valuable when they conform to certain 'feminine' beauty ideals in their appearance. The commerciality of the sportswomen here refers to the sale of the club's kit and by extension the interest in the women's football club. The ironically titled article, 'Women's Lib News' read,

Dutch women's side FC De Rakt say their new 'sexy kits' are 'no publicity stunt'. Skirts and tight tops promoted a rush of hits on the club's website. 'Many girls have wanted to play in skirts'. 83% of *Das Bild* readers say all women should wear skirts during games (*The Observer*, 21/09/08: 5).

Although the sportswomen are represented as commercial, as in their ability to sell goods, and perhaps be 'goods' themselves, because there was 'a rush of hits on the club's website', it would seem that this new-found popularity of the women footballers was due to the 'sexy kits' which promoted a rise in sales and interest. The need to frame the women as 'sexy' in 'skirts and tight tops' contrasts with the usual football kit for men: loose shorts and t-shirts. The article alludes to the idea that without the 'sexy kit' the women footballers, on their own sporting merit, would not be as popular with fans or the media, unlike their male counterparts.

The opposing representation of the commercialised body in the media is the de-commercialised sportswoman's body. Interestingly women in this kind of coverage all participate in typically 'feminine' sports. *The Observer*, for example, published an article on netball denouncing the spectacle of netball based on its commercial value: 'After all girls played it in big knickers. . . what possible interest could there be?' (22/02/09). This article represents women netball players as having non-commercial bodies because they wear 'big knickers' as part of the netball uniform. It makes four assumptions about netball players: firstly, that the sport is not interesting because the women do not dress sexy and secondly, that the only interest in watching women play sport is related to their sex appeal. Thirdly, the author assumes that women's interest in netball is irrelevant, and

finally that netball is not a 'proper' sport. Tagg (2008) examined the entry of men into the typically 'female' sport of netball in New Zealand. The identity of male netballers is generally a negative one, since it is a 'female' sport and men taking part in it are considered to have failed at 'male' sports. Tagg revealed that they are labelled as 'effeminate' or 'gay cross-dressers'. If a man playing netball can cause such a reaction from other men, it is clear that the sport itself is not viewed with respect for either men or women. The feminised connotations attached to netball are echoed in the article; it is not viewed as a 'proper' sport and thus without providing a pleasurable sports visual for spectators, there is little reason to be interested in netball.

In a different sport and one which some people may consider as more of an art form, ballet is a physical discipline but it does not normally appear in the sports news. An article talked about the aesthetic beauty of ballet versus football in an all-male context, despite ballet being a more typically 'feminine' activity. Titled 'Head for the Ballet – It's Where Aesthetic Beauty Still Lives On', the journalist reported:

When you break it down, that is what most of us – fans and writers and the guys playing the shots – want, a bit of beauty to savour, memorable moments fashioned by the gods. . . These thoughts came to me in unfamiliar surroundings the other night when I found myself at the ballet. I can't quite believe I just wrote that, but what I say is in the wondrous form of Carlos Acosta at the Coliseum in London was all the grace and power, as well as courage of a champion athlete (*The Observer*, 26/07/09: 14).

Ballet is a typically 'female' activity and conjures up the image of slim ballerinas in tutus on pointe shoes. However, this article focuses solely on a male ballet dancer, Carlos Acosta. Ballet rarely receives media coverage in the sports pages because, I would argue, it is considered to be more of an art than a sport. In this article the journalist draws parallels between the beauty of a male dancer and football. Acosta clearly embodied the masculine grace and power that the journalist has seen in football. It is telling that the article only focuses on the male ballet dancer considering it is a typically 'feminine' activity. I would argue that the journalist would not write a similar story about female stars of ballet because the beautiful spectacle they create on stage is different from male ballet dancers, who embody strength as well as beauty. As discussed previously, characteristics such as power and strength are linked to sportsmen. Women in sport might be beautiful to look at passively in photos but the performances they produce are not

typically reported as 'beautiful' in terms of athletic prowess since they are not seen to perform on the same level as sportsmen. Here the journalist writes about the 'unlikely' conjunction of a feminized activity and masculinity. The tone of the article expresses the journalist's surprise at this.

### Feminine Bodies

'Feminine bodies' are distinct from the media's representation of 'sexualised bodies' in that there is a subtle difference between the aesthetic appeal of the former and the (overt) sexual appeal of the latter. Representing sportswomen as feminine is a mechanism to frame them in a certain way in line with normative femininity. For example *The Sunday Telegraph* printed a photograph of Ana Ivanovic playing tennis. In the photo her dress is flying up showing her tight shorts underneath and the caption reads: 'Ivanovic sitting pretty for top spot' (18/05/08: 14). By framing Ivanovic as 'pretty' the focus on her athleticism is avoided. The words 'sitting pretty' contrast with the photo of her 'in action'. Referring to Ivanovic as 'sitting pretty' reconnects her to the aesthetic appeal of sportswomen (Crolley and Teso 2007).

It is more often textual descriptions than images that present sportswomen as feminine. One article in the *Express on Sunday* stated: 'She had an astonishing elegance and beauty on court. . . muscle-bound limbs that go on forever' (29/06/08: 112). This item was about Venus Williams, the seven-time Grand Slam tennis player, here represented as hyper-feminine, an object of beauty to be admired. The 'muscle-bound limbs' comment hardly intimates the athleticism and success of Williams. Harris and Clayton (2002) argue that such mechanisms 'drive the audience's attention away from Williams the athlete' (407). Stone and Horne (2008) demonstrate that descriptions such as 'astonishing beauty' diminish the athletic stature of sportswomen. They explain that these are 'media strategies used to marginalise females within the text' (2008: 103).

In contrast to the media framing women as feminine, there is a tendency for women in typically 'masculine' sports to actively seek a feminised media representation to balance their participation in un-feminine sports. *The Observer* reported that,

Jaslyn Hewitt. . . one half of a celebrity couple. . . now into bodybuilding. . . doesn't want to bulk up like a 'she-man'. . . Jaslyn says breathlessly, 'I love my job and it's great hanging out with Rob (actor husband). We laugh all the time' (01/06/08).



This article centres on Jaslyn Hewitt, a female bodybuilder, competing in a 'male-appropriate' sport (Choi 2000). Three recent studies on women in boxing, wrestling and body building (Mennesson 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009; Roussel et al 2010) have argued that when women participate in typically masculine sports they more frequently engage in the use of feminine beauty practices in order to appear less masculine. Roussel et al (2010) claim that female bodybuilders are generally discredited outside the subculture of bodybuilding. They contend that female bodybuilders have 'bodies widely discredited, arousing shock and disgust' (2010: 104). The female bodybuilder therefore has a dangerous body as it lingers between the genders in terms of image. Hence Hewitt enhances her femininity, and her heterosexuality by saying, 'it's great hanging out with Rob' and recognising the impact of her sport on women as she 'doesn't want to bulk up like a she-man'. The author of the article is complicit in framing Hewitt as feminine by saying that she talks 'breathlessly'. In this way Hewitt's self-presentation as 'feminine' is mirrored by the media coverage she receives.

### Disposable Bodies

One way in which women and sportswomen are framed by the media is as disposable or replaceable. *The Observer* discusses women's bodies as replaceable in relation to the 'exchange' of sportsmen's wives between men. For example, the newspaper described badminton as 'an excuse for suburban wife-swapping' (01/03/09: 20). One week later in the same newspaper a journalist wrote: 'Becks and Cole need to go on wife-swap' (08/03/09: 4). The wives of these sportsmen are depicted as disposable objects who can be exchanged when they become problematic. It is a demeaning way of referring to women and paints a negative picture of women as exchangeable.

*The Sunday Telegraph* suggested that readers, 'Forget the Wife, Hang on to the Remote'. The journalist Jasper Gerard continued, 'It's TV heaven as the second Ashes Test and the Open near their finales' (19/07/09: 9). Gerard assumes that all *Telegraph* readers are male, both heterosexual and married and watch sport. He assumes that women are not interested in sport and would be an obstacle to men who want to watch it. Moreover, Gerard represents women as disposable 'forget the wife' and replaceable 'hang on to the remote'. This representation is consistent with gendered notions of who plays and enjoys watching sport (Hardin 2005; Boyle and Haynes 2009).

*The Sunday Times* produced an example of sportswomen as disposable bodies using car metaphors. In 'Jenny a Chip off the Old Block', Andrew Longmore reports with reference to a professional badminton pair: 'Nathan Robertson might joke that he had upgraded to a new model, swapping his thirty-something blond for a 21-year old brunette in readiness for 2012' (08/02/09: 18). The author represents the first sportswoman in the article as a replaceable element of the sportsman Robertson's equipment. The metaphoric suggestion is that sportswomen are like possessions; replacing an old car with a new model presents the women as disposable. The author of the article suggests that the sportsman 'might joke' about replacing his badminton partner with a 'new model'. However, Longmore assumes Robertson has as little respect for the sportswomen as he does. By framing women in this way the value of their sporting talent and any possible longevity in their careers are brought into question.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the different representations of sportswomen's bodies in the British media. The bodies of sportswomen have been framed as sexualised, trivialised, secondary, ambitious, commercial, feminine and disposable/replaceable. The theme of sexualised bodies is divided into three 'categories' of female roles and identities: sportswomen themselves, WAGs and porn stars/glamour models. The data shows that this is a media mechanism which occurs across the five newspapers in this investigation and over the two-year period of the research.

The media representation of sportswomen differed throughout the study timeframe. *The Observer* was the newspaper with the highest number of examples of the sexualised body, particularly regarding glamour models and porn stars; only this publication produced news items on women in this category. As a left-wing newspaper this is surprising and provokes the question as to whether the editors realise the quantity of sexualised material they publish in the sports pages. Few studies have addressed how the politics of a newspaper affects its sports coverage in terms of gender. Work by Harris and Clayton (2002) identified the likely disinterest in the reporting of conventional news stories in the *Mirror* and *The Sun*, because of their focus on 'the interplay between the public world and the private world of celebrities' (398). Despite a clear understanding of the genre of newspapers in their sample, the authors provided little discussion on how that interacted with the content of the newspapers in relation to women and sport.

Crossman et al (2007) stated that the newspapers in their sample, 'represent a more conservative and 'serious' approach to reporting the news in contrast to a more sensational approach often found in tabloid-style newspapers' (32). However, little comment was subsequently made about how the political leaning of the sample impacted on the data they collected. The sensational news items found in *The Observer* were not anticipated before the data collection and were certainly unprecedented in that no other studies have indicated this trend in any British broadsheet newspapers. In my sample *The Observer* was the newspaper which I suspected would be the most unlikely to produce such sensational material and therefore this elicited the greatest surprise of the investigation.

The most quantitative data on sportswomen came from the *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sunday Times*, which were also the newspapers in which trivialised bodies were mostly discussed. The body as secondary was constituted mostly by articles from the *Express on Sunday* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, the newspapers which produced the least quantitative data on sportswomen. The category of ambitious bodies was represented in the *Mail on Sunday*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*, whereas commercial bodies were exclusively discussed in *The Observer*. *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Observer* and the *Express on Sunday* all published articles which represented sportswomen as feminine bodies. Finally the disposable bodies category was only relevant in the broadsheet newspapers. This demonstrates that the newspapers sometimes focused on differing representations of women in the sports pages and sometimes the representations overlapped across the newspaper sample. There may be numerous ways of interpreting this; the ownership of news corporations, editorial groups, individual journalists and consumers are part of a matrix with multiple aspirations and interests. These four elements shape the directions and style of newspaper content, and in this case, the way in which sportswomen are presented. Market pressures may also influence the interplay between these four elements and over time they react to popular culture and in turn shape the mediated image of women's roles in sport.

There are some differences between the titles. For example, the *Mail on Sunday* was the newspaper which provided the least positive news coverage of sportswomen in terms of content (see quantitative analysis chapter) and painted them predominantly as ambitious bodies. Perhaps it could be suggested that with the knowledge of their large female readership, they are aware that their place in the newspaper market is associated with a pro-women stance and therefore they

produce some articles and photos which support this. Conversely, *The Observer*, possibly the title which is most affected by a declining readership in the face of newer technologies, attempted to halt this trend in part by emulating tabloid publications such as *The Sun* which sells many more copies than *The Observer* due to its propensity to a more sensationalist style.

In times of economic recession, and the accompanying threat of falling sales, newspapers might tend to separate themselves from one another by focusing on differing representations of sportswomen. But there are cases where newspapers will 'join forces' to support one another in the face of adversity. For example, Richard Littlejohn of *The Daily Mail*, an outspoken critic of *The Guardian* surprised his readers by showing unequivocal support for the left-wing paper when it came under threat by the Metropolitan police who attempted to revoke the Official Secrets Act in order to reveal *The Guardian's* sources ('Richard Littlejohn. . .'). This story amounts to two unlikely newspapers coming together in defence of a commonality. The same could be applied to the manner in which sportswomen are described by the five newspapers in my sample. In other words, it could be that the threat of 'equal pay' and more gender equality encourages the mostly-male sports editorial staff to cooperate and 'agree' on the generally negative representation of sportswomen in order to combat a changing market.

There was more of a pattern across the newspapers in terms of the schedule of when the news items which made up the purposive sampling data appeared, with the exception of the *Mail on Sunday* which consistently published one or two task-irrelevant commentaries through the two-year period. During the winter months of October to April in 2008 and 2009 there were more data from purposive sampling (qualitative data) on sportswomen in the sense of material which mostly consisted of task-irrelevant reporting. During the summer months of June, July and August there was a direct correlation between an increase in quantitative material on sportswomen, and the number of task-irrelevant news items. More sports coverage of women did not equate to more news quality in news reports (Bernstein 2002), instead it tended to mean more of the same, body-related news items. In other words there was proportionally more task-irrelevant reporting of women in the sports pages from June to August than other months in 2008 and 2009.

I have discussed in this chapter how women's bodies are represented in sports media. I have shown how sportswomen engage in 'apologetic behaviour' by

colluding with the sexualisation of their bodies, how WAGs are presented as sometimes controversial figures whose sexuality is 'controlled' by their relationship to sportsmen, and how glamour models/porn stars are the group of women most likely to be represented as 'sporting pornography'. Despite the numerous representations of the female body, very little has been said about the athletic body which is integral to any professional sportsperson. The following chapter will deal with how sexism manifests itself in the sports media, in both subtle and explicit formats and how the media portray demands for more gender equality by athletes, commentators, coaches and politicians.

## **Chapter Five: Sexism and Inequality in Sport and Sports Reporting**

### **Introduction**

*'Even the most intellectual discussion came down to men's supposedly superior strength as a justification for inequality' (Steinem 1994: 95)*

The issue of sexism in sports reporting has been widely recognised by scholars, particularly by feminist media studies scholars (Carter et al 1998; Lenskyj 1998; Bernstein 2002; Brookes 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Pederson 2002; Lippe 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Crolley and Teso 2007; Crossman et al 2007; Biscomb and Griggs 2012; Davis and Tuggle 2012). The way sexism and inequality between the genders manifest themselves is an important part of understanding the overall representation of sportswomen in the media.

In this chapter I will discuss the different ways in which sexism and gender inequality manifest themselves in sport and sports reporting, namely how the media employ and present gender inequality and sexism in relation to their reporting on female professional athletes. Sexism is active discrimination against women because of their sex, whereas gender inequality refers to a lack of equality, often due to structural and socially constructed inequalities. These terms are not synonymous. However, their meanings often overlap in the way in which sportswomen are treated by sports institutions and by the media. For example, under-representing sportswomen, or not allocating news coverage to women's sports can lead to a misinterpreted view that women's sport is not interesting *because* it is rarely seen in print media. I will analyse how sexism and gender inequality occur in sport as an institution, in terms of different salaries for women and men, disparate opportunities and unequal treatment by sporting bodies. I will also show how sexism creates a culture of gender inequality in sports reporting, sometimes because of existing structural inequalities in sport and sometimes due to the sexist views of those doing the reporting.

In the articles I read, four categories emerged in terms of the ways in which sexism and gender inequality in sports reporting occur. The first one deals with the discussion of the 'failings' of women in sport. This is a mechanism which operates by focusing on the inadequacies of sportswomen. The 'failings' of sportsmen are of course also reported but because they receive much more coverage overall than women, we can say that the proportion of such 'negative' reporting for sportsmen is much lower than for sportswomen (43% of all coverage of sportswomen in the five newspapers under review was categorised as

negative). Moreover, as I shall demonstrate, the inadequacies of women in sport are cast in a certain light by newspapers. The second category shows the opposite side of negative reporting by focusing on sportswomen 'raising the bar'. This category deals with the way in which the media celebrate sportswomen's achievements and indirectly present sportswomen as equals to sportsmen in ability and status. However, as the analysis will show this celebration is cosmetic only and there is another agenda at play. The third category focuses on sexism in sport and sports reporting as the norm. For example, the media coverage of sportsmen on 'significant' days in the sporting calendar, I will argue, demonstrates the subtle ways in which sexism is employed by simply ignoring sportswomen. The fourth category relates to the overt ways in which sexism in sport and sports reporting are discussed in the media. This includes how the media address inequality, and calls for more gender equality *and* inequality in sport and media institutions from politicians, sportspeople and journalists.

The four categories detailed here will serve to define how sexism and inequality in sport and sports reporting are articulated by the print media in the UK, whether explicitly or indirectly. I reviewed 63 news items in this context; their distribution across the newspapers will be discussed in the analysis of each of the four categories. However, it is interesting to note that while there was a similar number of relevant articles in *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Mail on Sunday*, there were none in the *Sunday Express* relating to the discussion of gender inequality in sports and sports reporting. I found that the majority of the articles in the *Sunday Express* provided more factual reporting on sportswomen and less opinion-based reporting. The lack of opinion pieces on women's sport may be understood as sexism by omission rather than by commission, because silence on a particular aspect of reporting highlights an unequal judgement nonetheless. The significantly few news items on sportswomen in this newspaper are in fact evidence of the editors' disinterest<sup>33</sup> in women's sport on the whole.

### Sportswomen's 'Failings'

'Failings', 'inadequacies', 'inabilities' - these are words that can describe the media's treatment of some sportswomen (Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Crolley and Teso 2007; Crossman et al 2007; Biscomb and Griggs 2012). Although it is an integral part of sports reporting to discuss losing alongside

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<sup>33</sup> By disinterest I mean the lack of interest in, or indifference to women's sport by sports news editors.

winning moments, in my material I found that this type of reporting was predominantly directed towards sportswomen. Moreover, whenever sportsmen lost in competitions the newspaper coverage framed their failure as an inevitable part of sport where there are winners and losers. However, in reporting sportswomen's failures, as I shall demonstrate, gender was offered as the primary factor in women's lack of success in sport. Of the 63 news items which constitute the material for this chapter, there were only five articles in the category of 'failings' of sportswomen. However, it must be noted that the qualitative data did not include every news item collected as part of the quantitative material; in total 22,954 articles constitute the quantitative data set, whereas only a fraction of this number form part of the qualitative data. Thus it must be taken into consideration that these examples do not fully represent all sports reporting but instead highlight certain aspects of how the media represent sportswomen.

Of the five articles in this category on the 'failings' of sportswomen, four were about women's tennis, and the fifth was about athletics (these were the two most reported on sports for women in my findings). These news items came from the *Mail on Sunday*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*. One way in which the British media discuss the 'failings' of sportswomen is to lament the lack of competitors or talent within women's sport. The *Mail on Sunday* (20/04/08) engaged in this discussion referring to the lack of world-class female tennis players in the UK compared to Andy Murray who in 2009 was a top-5 player in the world. However, the article did not mention the improving status of the UK's female tennis players (Elena Baltacha, Anne Keothavong, Katie O'Brien, Heather Watson and Laura Robson). Within British sports reporting there appears to be a 'blame game' when individuals or teams representing the country do not win, thus 'letting the nation down' (Boyle and Haynes 2000). This is counter-balanced by media coverage before an event which expresses optimism, perhaps unrealistically, regarding the potential outcome of an event for a national player (Vincent et al 2010). For example, in the case of tennis, Andy Murray is presented by the British media as a 'real' contender in big tennis competitions. Still, every time he fails to win the media seem to sink, deflated, after such high expectations. This is subsequently reflected in the media representation of the player and how the competition unfolded. It could be said that these expectations are grounded in national pride, and whenever Murray loses the media represent supposed national disappointment. Sportswomen, by contrast to sportsmen, do not frequently embody national pride through their sporting achievements



(Hughson 2009). The *Mail on Sunday* laments the lack of British female tennis players, not because they represent the country's national pride, but because this is a mechanism to discriminate against women in sport by suggesting that they are not good enough for international standards. In sports reporting sportsmen are subject to negative media coverage if they do not produce the result the 'nation' expects and hopes for, whereas sportswomen are derided for not being good enough or in sufficient numbers to represent their country. This demonstrates the different ways in which women and men are perceived and thus presented by the sports media.

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2008 *The Sunday Times* complained that there was no talent in women's professional tennis at international level. The *Mail on Sunday* continued this by questioning the system of ranking women's tennis (05/07/09). These two articles or 'complaints' by the *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sunday Times* are linked: the system used to rank players is the same for the women's and men's professional tours (Women's Tennis Association, WTA and Lawn Tennis Association, LTA). Therefore it is not the system which the newspapers questioned. In professional tennis, there has been a dominance on the men's side, of two players, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, between 2004 and 2010. They won the majority of the Grand Slams (between them 20 out of 24 Grand Slam finals between 2004 and 2009). The media discuss this dominance and the consistency in the men's game and thus the quality of male winners. Nonetheless, in this supposed period of dominance (2004-2009) there were six men who won Grand Slam titles. During the same time period there were nine women who won Grand Slams, three more than the men's winners. On the women's side there was much discussion regarding the lack of quality women players, their inconsistency in performance and the need to find women who could emulate the dominance of Federer and Nadal. On the one hand, it could be argued that the lack of dominance by one or two players made the women's draw for big competitions more exciting because it was less predictable who would win due to the plethora of women tennis players at the top of the game. On the other hand, there is evidence to show that two men have dominated the men's game suggesting that other male tennis players are not as good. The media treatment of women and men tennis players framed the state of play in distinctly gendered terms. The newspapers viewed the multiple female winners negatively and presented, as the examples show, the quality of women's tennis as in a state of crisis, when it could equally well have argued that there was an exceptional range of talented players among the women.

These two examples of sportswomen's 'failings' do not display overtly sexist reporting tendencies; instead they demonstrate how a gender-unequal system, in the case of professional tennis, translates into gender inequalities in the media coverage of women tennis players. The imbalance in the sport is mirrored by the coverage of the newspapers in my sample. Still, it is important to recognise that the media could refute the gendered hierarchy in tennis and open up a debate about greater access for women into tennis, instead of replicating 'real' inequalities in their 'represented' inequalities. Moreover, this is the only discourse offered by the mainstream media; no alternative 'reading' is published (Dyer 2002).

All this is indicative of the way sportswomen are dealt with generally by the British media, in that their achievements are seen as secondary to sportsmen's (Koivula 1999; Crolley and Teso 2007). Brookes (2002) attributes this to the reproduction of gender inequalities through sport. He argues that 'women's increased success in sport could play a major role in challenging exclusive representations of masculinity as the gender of physical prowess' (2002: 124). However, by representing women as athletes who produce inconsistent results, the media reaffirm the belief that sportsmen are stronger athletes. As in the case of the tennis Grand Slam winners, the multiple women winners, it could be argued, demonstrate the strength and depth across the women's field, whereas on the men's side only a handful of men are able to win.

Sexism in sports reporting also occurs by subtly painting a particular picture of sportswomen, and here more specifically, British sportswomen are framed as 'failures'. The supposed dearth of sportswomen has an impact across generations as it is represented as affecting future generations of women athletes who have no role models to emulate. In *The Observer* article, British sprinter Janet Kwakye was quoted as saying, 'I never had British role models, I was always looking on a worldwide level' (15/02/09: 16).

Kwakye claims here that there are few female role models in Britain and she therefore looked for inspiration among the other nationalities. The 'British' dimension highlights a case which is specific to the British media; reporting a lack of sportswomen in a particular sport can have harmful consequences to its future. The possibility of using a sportsman as inspiration is not mentioned. It is unlikely for Kwakye to have male sports role models because of the gendered division in sport which assigns differing behaviours and physical characteristics to both sexes. The media representation of sports stars is highly gendered. The creation

of role models in sport needs to be considered in more detail; it is a sport-specific issue and I would argue that female role models are more likely to be legitimised by the media in sports where women can demonstrate sufficient 'feminine credibility' (Davis-Delano et al 2009). Kwayke is a sprinter which is considered a 'female-inappropriate' sport because competitors build bulky muscles in training, leading to the explosive speed and strength which characterise this sport. The sexist media representation of sportswomen in traditionally 'male' sports underlines a lack of tangible role models for girls and women in particular sports where femininity is not easily 'worn' on the bodies of sportswomen.

The division in sport by gender is the most apparent and divisive categorisation (very few sports allow men and women to compete together) and arguably the most 'naturalized' division. The 100m running race in which Kwakye competes is highly gendered because the men's race is promoted as a blue-ribbon event, showcasing the 'fastest person on earth' and the competitors demonstrate typical traits of the hyper-masculine sportsman. Teamed with the speed, aggressive stance and strong physiques, the 100m race is not presented as a place for women to be 'feminine'.

Here is an occasion where sexism has led to a gender-unequal situation. The hyper-masculine mediated image of sprinters in athletics may have had a profound impact on the number of British girls who enter the sport. This contributes to a gender-unequal system in which girls and women prefer sports where they can maintain their feminine 'credibility' by appearing lithe and passive rather than built-up with muscles (Roussel et al 2010).

This story about Kwakye's lack of role models demonstrates sexism in sports reporting as well as gender inequality in athletics and particularly sprinting. Without commenting on the Kwakye story the journalist indirectly passes judgement on women in sport. There could have been a suggestion made by the journalist regarding the current plethora of female role models in athletics in order to positively compare them to past generations. However, his stance mimics Kwakye's comments in that there is a lack of encouragement for women in sport by sporting institutions, as there is in media.

Sportswomen are presented by the media as 'failing'; failing themselves, failing their sport and most importantly failing their country. In 'Women Seize Chance to Shine' *The Sunday Times* reported: 'that endangered species, the British female tennis player, is staging a welcome resurgence' (22/06/08: 11). The reference

here to British women tennis players as an 'endangered species' is an animalistic term which distances them from a 'professional athlete' identity and categorises them as different, less capable (than British male tennis players) and 'failing'. Secondly, the nationalistic aspect of this example produces an indirect comparison to the supposedly healthy state of British men's tennis. At the time this article in *The Sunday Times* was published, Andy Murray was ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the world and was expected to surpass the achievements of Tim Henman ('Andy Murray ATP Rankings History'). This news item demonstrates an internal contradiction, because as already explained, the sports 'star' who is predominantly male, is also the embodiment of national identity and patriotism. The media, in this example from *The Sunday Times*, attempt to encourage the resurgence of British women tennis players, while at the same time condemning them for their recent failures and lack of form. It could be argued that criticising the women's failures is justified. However, the animalistic and patronising language employed to describe them as an 'endangered species' suggests that there is a subtle sexist agenda at play. The media ideology which supports the idea of sportsmen as stars and national heroes is in direct contrast to what this example is actually doing, namely avoiding representing sportswomen as part of the national conscience.

#### Sportswomen 'Raising the Bar'

The discussion on sportswomen 'raising the bar' in sports occurred ten times in my qualitative sample across the newspapers in the two-year period of this study. *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Telegraph* had one and two examples each of this category, whereas the *Mail on Sunday* published five articles relating to sportswomen 'raising the bar'. This category, as the previous one on the 'failings' of sportswomen, articulates sexism indirectly. Discussing sportswomen 'pushing the boundaries' in sport on the surface appears to demonstrate a different approach by newspapers towards the representation of sportswomen in comparison to the previous category on the 'failings' of sportswomen. Nonetheless, a deeper analysis of the material displays the similarities between these two categories through the use of specific forms of language and comparing sportswomen and men. Such media techniques highlight a general disinterest (see footnote 33: 130 for meaning of 'disinterest'), in the majority of the newspapers under review, towards gender equality in sports and sports reporting. In the *Mail on Sunday* there were more than twice as many examples of seemingly positive coverage than negatives ones whose content

displayed a manifestation of sexism; that it to say there were five examples of women 'raising the bar' and only two of sportswomen's 'failings'. In *The Observer* there were equal numbers of articles on sportswomen's 'failings' and 'raising the bar'. In *The Sunday Times* there were twice as many negative articles as positive ones, whereas in *The Sunday Telegraph* there were no articles on sportswomen's 'failings' and two articles on 'raising the bar'. This demonstrates that the newspapers in my sample articulate discrimination against sportswomen in different ways depending on the papers' interest in female athletes. The *Mail on Sunday* was the newspaper which tended to seemingly promote the achievements of sportswomen most frequently.

In the examples of sportswomen 'raising the bar' an array of sports were covered: cricket, swimming, horse riding, rowing, motorsport and pool. Swimming and horse riding are traditionally considered to be 'feminine-appropriate' sports (Matteo 1986) whereas the other sports mentioned are more typically associated with sportsmen and masculine characteristics.

Although on the surface the articles in this category appear to focus on sportswomen 'raising the bar', the principal characteristic of the news items in this category was sportswomen's connection to sportsmen and male sporting standards. The *Mail on Sunday* for instance stated: 'As she targets the magic 100 wins, jockey Hayley Turner insists: I'm just one of the boys' (28/12/08: 60). Here Hayley Turner is presented initially as a successful jockey by aiming to reach the elusive '100 wins'. However, this image is then followed with her saying that she is 'just one of the boys'. The way in which this article is structured frames her outside traditional femininity and womanhood, and explains her success through the claim that she is 'just one of the boys'. This infers that in order to reach her goal of 100 wins, she has to emulate male standards and characteristics. In this way although the article begins by celebrating Turner's aspiration and success, her 'raising the bar' is reported as achieving something by performing a certain masculine position. Crolley and Teso (2007) report that sportsmen are the 'norm' in reporting and sportswomen are thus represented as a deviation from the norm. In this case the norm is masculinized and hence Turner aims to embody male characteristics in order to place herself effectively. This news items relates to the 'different but equal' debate regarding the physical abilities of sportswomen and men, which I do not support. This line of thinking suggests that women and men are biologically different but that they should be treated equally regardless of who is superior or inferior in ability. In the case of sportspeople this idea of equal but

different supports the widely accepted belief that men are 'naturally' stronger than women. The male standard is thus highlighted as the top level of achievement for both women and men, even though women most likely, according to this philosophy, would never be strong enough to reach the male level. I think that we live in a highly gendered society and the current way in which children are socialised into 'male' or 'female' roles (Messner 2002) creates consequences for their bodies and minds during their lives, in terms of their understanding and expectations of their roles and their own abilities, particularly physically.

Currently women and men in sport have 'different' abilities but should be awarded the same treatment by institutions and the media, in terms of equal access, training and promotion opportunities, salaries and facilities. Ideally there needs to be an ideological and social shift in order to achieve true equality in sport and the reporting of sport. By assigning people a 'gender role' they are restricted to certain behavioural traits. In sport the socialisation of people into genders creates expectations as far as achievements are concerned. In a gender-neutral society, or one in which neither gender is privileged, sportswomen and men might potentially, I think, achieve similar standards. The current belief that women are 'naturally' weaker than men may for example have a psychological impact on sportswomen's performances.<sup>34</sup> Eliminating such a belief could see an improvement in gender equality, both in perception of ability and resources available for women and men in sport. Therefore in the case of Hayley Turner I think the reporting of her success is positive for women. However, it is framed in a way that places Turner in a masculinised world where she must show that women can be as good as men. The media's tendency to promote the standard of achievement as male is sexist since this accords little or no respect to women and their achievements in sport. Until there is complete gender parity in sport and other aspects of society, the question of 'equal but different' is very complex. Debating this issue could help to create a better understanding of women's place in sport and the discrimination still present. Nevertheless, it is a discussion which has mostly been avoided by the media, as I shall demonstrate later.

A slightly different way of representing sportswomen 'raising the bar' occurs by showing women who aspire to compete in predominantly male sports. For example, in the *Mail on Sunday* an article reported on a woman taking the role of

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<sup>34</sup> Velija and Malcolm (2009) used Elias' 'established-outsider' theory to analyse how women who play cricket in the UK internalise feelings of inferiority compared to male cricketers, which subsequently has an impact on participation and performance (631).

the Cambridge cox in the Boat Race between Cambridge and Oxford (08/03/09). The rowers are normally all men and thus her presence, and even more so her role as cox or leader of the boat, was represented as a step forward for women in sport or perhaps as a one-off event to be enjoyed in the moment, but unlikely to be repeated. It is possible that the female cox is treated as a token woman, momentarily present as the only female presence, but really an anomaly.

In the same newspaper, there was a news story about a woman aspiring to be a Formula One driver (21/06/09). At face value it would appear that this woman is represented as 'raising the bar' for women in sport, but the way she is reported as achieving that is to enter into a typically male sport. In both of these examples, women 'raising the bar' are doing so by entering a male domain of sport and thus being judged by male standards, which supposedly elicit the highest level of credibility for any athlete (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). The representation of sportswomen aspiring to be like sportsmen is in direct contrast to the way in which women who are thought to be men in disguise are treated. I will discuss the case of Caster Semenya later in this chapter.

The third way in which sportswomen are represented as 'raising the bar' is when they beat their fellow male competitors outright; however, stories of this ilk are infrequently published. For example, the *Mail on Sunday* reported that a woman beat all the male competitors in a horse-riding competition (26/07/09). Furthermore in the article titled, "The Guys I Beat Didn't Take It Too Well. They Were Not Happy, Not Happy At All" Alison Fisher', *The Observer* reported,

In at the deep end: Alison Fisher won £111,000 in 2005, playing pool, more than any player male or female (*The Observer*, 16/08/09).

These two examples are out of the ordinary in that it is unusual that newspapers will explicitly state that sportsmen were beaten by sportswomen, particularly in male-dominated sports such as pool. The first article does not reveal much about how gender equality is reported by the media, except for the reference to the winner of the race (a woman) beating all 'male competitors', rather than simply writing 'all other competitors'. By highlighting the gender of the woman and her 'male' opponents, the newspaper presents this as an exception to the rule.

The second example from *The Observer*, however, is more revealing. The article focused primarily on the reaction of Fisher's male opponents to her gaining the highest earnings among pool players. The title claims that the men were not happy, presumably to have been beaten, at least in prize money, by a woman

player. The article does not refer to the reaction of other women players, and thus highlights a stark gendered division, in that other women are not expected to be on the same economic earning level as men. In the sport of pool the biological determinism argument cannot be employed as readily as in sports such as cycling or running where physical ability is more important than skill, to explain the differences between sportswomen and men and the latter's success. Pool is a skill-based sport and thus it is surprising that such a gendered reaction can exist, because it demonstrates the belief that men are dominant across sports, regardless of the skills required. It also suggests that losing to a woman is shameful. It could be argued that there exist deep-seated assumptions in British society that women are considered to be weaker and slower than men; the saying 'you throw/run like a girl' is an insult directed at men to insinuate that the way they throw or run is similar to a girl and therefore inferior to a man's ability.

The use of the double entendre in this article 'in at the deep end' suggests two things; firstly, that Fisher is unable to handle beating all the male players and thus compete against them as a woman, even though the news item explains that she had already beaten them. Secondly, she is in trouble and 'out of her depth' for having beaten all the male players because 'they [are] not happy'. Using the phrase 'in at the deep end', frames Fisher as in a precarious position, despite the fact that on the surface, she is reported as 'raising the bar' by earning more than 'any player male or female'. Here the media subtly celebrates sportswomen's achievements while at the same time introducing reference to men that deflect from that achievement.

In 2009, one sport in which women 'raised the bar' in England was cricket. The England women's cricket team succeeded above and beyond expectations and bettered the achievements of the men's national team. The women's results were especially spectacular because cricket is not typically associated with women and is considered a female-inappropriate sport according to the sport typology set out by Matteo (1986). The media coverage of the national women's cricket team was considerably less than that of the men's team, despite their successes.

Nevertheless, a handful of journalists applauded the women's team in articles such as 'Composed England on the Brink of Making History' which was published by *The Sunday Telegraph*,

If England women defeat New Zealand at Lord's today they will become the first international team of either gender to be world champions in all three formats simultaneously. . . if women can acquire – through training



benefits brought by professionalism – more of the physical prowess of the men's game, to blend with the mental strength of Taylor, the future of women's cricket as a spectator sport is assured (21/06/09: 11).

This article was an eighth of a page in length and published in the bottom corner of the newspaper. The remaining space on the page was occupied with stories about regional and national men's cricket. However, the title of the article promises a news story which celebrates women in cricket because there is no gender-marking in the reference to 'England'. Normally gender-marking is only used for women's sports and thus the assumption could be that the 'England' the journalist refers to is the men's team, since they are more likely to embody national pride (Boyle and Haynes 2000). As the article begins, it becomes clear that it is about England women's cricketers who are on the brink of making history. Thus the headline suggests they are as good as the men because of the absence of gender marking. They are represented initially as 'raising the bar', not only for women in sport, but for women and men of every nationality by becoming triple-world champions in one year. This celebration of women in sport, and particularly women who compete in a typically male sport such as cricket, is rare. Over the two-year period there were only 13 articles on women's cricket across the five newspapers, despite the women producing outstanding results (Biscomb and Griggs 2012). It therefore seems that sportswomen must achieve above and beyond their male compatriots in order to receive media attention, and even then the coverage is not close to parity.

As the article begins it subtly introduces the theme of gender relations in sport by mentioning that should the women win, they would be the first team of either gender to do so, thus highlighting the success of England women's team compared to the men's. One can say that that the journalist is suggesting that cricket is no longer exclusively a male-dominated sport. As the article continues, the journalist inverts the previous statement and begins to inferiorise the women's team by comparing male and female cricketers, 'if women can acquire. . . more of the physical prowess of the men's game'. Thus, he suggests that the women's cricket team are not as good as the men's, despite being on the verge of breaking a record which no men's team has been able to achieve, and also that the women would profit from the men's 'physical prowess'. This mechanism of applauding the women and simultaneously suggesting that they should look to men for improvements, is in itself a form of sexism.

The journalist ends the article by claiming that with improvements to the women's game, 'the future of women's cricket as a spectator sport is assured'. There is an internal contradiction here, because in the small and infrequent articles, the constant comparison to male cricketers produces the overwhelming sense that women in cricket are in the shadow of men, physically and mentally. This contributes to the invisibility of women's cricket as a spectator sport. Perhaps journalists who write articles such as this one have not considered that they too are contributing to the under-promotion of women's cricket by producing short articles and undermining women's performances in their content.

However, two news items in the category of sportswomen 'raising the bar' showed an alternative reporting style. Instead of comparing sportswomen to sportsmen, the first example's title simply discussed sportswomen and their achievements, without making a connection to men. This is unusual in sports reporting, particularly as the news item was about cricket. *The Sunday Times* reported: 'Can Bat, Can Bowl, Can Field: England's Women Are Now Ruthless World-Beaters' (11/10/09: 12). The title appears to celebrate the women's team and their current level of play. However, the journalist then discussed the different successes of the men's and women's teams in 2009. The most positive part of the coverage occurred when the journalist wrote, 'If Strauss wants to find the key to global domination, he might do well to listen to Charlotte Edwards, his opposite number, whose profile has soared this past summer' (12). This comment appears to celebrate the success of the women's cricket team and the leadership of Charlotte Edwards. Nevertheless, a deeper reading reveals gender marking in the use of the first name for Charlotte Edwards, as opposed to using 'Strauss's' surname only. This produces an element of formality, in terms of his status as a professional sportsman, thus distancing the men's team's captain from readers. In contrast, referring to the women's captain by her full name suggests a perceived lack of familiarity with Charlotte Edwards.

The journalist also explains how Charlotte Edwards has benefitted from playing cricket with men. Thus the reporting-style of making reference and comparison to sportsmen is restored: 'Playing men's cricket, she says, sharpens her reactions for the women's game' (12). The reference to the men's game as a source of improvement for women demonstrates the asymmetrical reporting on sportswomen in the discussion of sportswomen 'raising the bar'. There is a double standard in that sportswomen are almost always reported on in connection with sportsmen, whereas the reverse is not true; an article about

men's cricket almost never references sportswomen and their contribution to men's sport, because women are seen as inferior athletes participating in a traditionally male institution (Jones et al 1999).

Only one article in this category on sportswomen 'raising the bar' did not mention sportsmen. *The Sunday Telegraph's* 'Sports in Brief' stated: 'Swimming: Jo Jackson broke the world record in the 400m short course British Gas Grand Prix in Leeds' (09/08/09: 13). The short article (less than an eighth of a page) was published in the bottom right-hand corner of page 13. The British swimmer was reported as having broken a world record and thus as 'raising the bar', not only for sportswomen, but for all British athletes. But placing the article in the corner of a page and reporting the news in one sentence demeans the achievement overall. Jackson is thus presented as successful but her success is measured and treated according to a gendered ideology which supports certain types of sports and certain sportspeople. This type of reporting is connected equally to gender discrimination as it is to the hierarchy of sports in British culture and media.

The dominance of football, rugby and cricket has been discussed by Boyle and Haynes (2000). These sports tend to take precedence in newspaper sports pages over more 'minority' sports such as gymnastics, swimming, rowing, athletics etc. It is no coincidence, however, that dominant sports are mostly typically male-dominated, and minority sports are a mixture of 'male' and 'female' sports.

#### 'Blink and You'll Miss It': Sexism as the Norm in Sport and Sports Reporting

The subtle manifestation of sexism in sport was the second most common category in the discussion of gender inequality. There were 20 examples in this category; *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* had seven and nine examples respectively, whereas the *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sunday Telegraph* had one and three examples each. The examples were evenly spread over the two-year period with nine articles from 2008 and 11 from 2009, suggesting that this manifestation of sexism was consistently present throughout the two-year period.

There are several ways in which the subtle manifestation of sexism in sports reporting occurs. Firstly, the most obvious form is ignoring sportswomen. Two articles, both from *The Observer* highlight sportsmen as the only significant contenders for the 'history books' on sporting legacy. For example on 19<sup>th</sup> July

2009, *The Observer* printed an article on the front page of the sports section titled 'UNFORGETTABLE'. The article read,

Why Sunday 19th July 2009 could be one of the most memorable days in sport. . .

TURNBERRY: The oldest ever winner at the Open was 46. After another superb round at Turnberry, his favourite course, Tom Watson, aged 59, leads the field.

LORD'S: England have not won the Ashes Test here since 1934. They lead by more than 500 and Andrew Strauss's men are fair set to sink the Aussies today (1).

What is most striking about this news item is the lack of women because the date in question, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2009, is considered to be 'one of the most memorable days in sport'. The journalist presumably means one of the most memorable days in sport for male viewers, commentators and sportsmen, but not for women, unless as passive fans. Using superlatives to emphasize the importance of the day's sporting competitions is common practice in sport. However, highlighting men as the only viable icons demotes sportswomen to the position of under-valued athletes. The issue here is about a more general trend in that sportswomen are never described as athletes who help to create 'sports history'. This article showcases men's sport (golf and cricket) as the superior type of sport, despite women successfully participating in both. The idea of national identity through sport and patriotic following comes into play: 'the success or failure of the British Olympic team appears, according to sections of the media, as a direct barometer of the position and state of Britain in the world' (Boyle and Haynes 2000: 144). The same could be said for the England cricket team in the Ashes tournament against Australia. The significance of the two countries' history is symbolically played out in the Ashes where nationalistic sentiments and tensions are mirrored by masculine sporting performances. The importance of winning this tournament is shown in the article in *The Observer* through the emotive language used and the war-like vocabulary, 'set to sink the Aussies'.

By displaying sportsmen as the embodiment of national pride, this article places sportswomen in more ambiguous territory; they are not considered to be part of such 'unforgettable' days in sport, and thus they are allowed to participate in sport, but do not have the same status as their male counterparts.

In the second article *The Observer* published an example which displays a subtle form of sexist sports reporting. In 'Five Best Athletes of the Decade' the newspaper stated,

1. Roger Federer
2. Tiger Woods
3. Shane Warne
4. Zinedine Zidane
5. Usain Bolt (13/12/09: 16).

There is no gender marking in the title, in other words it does not read, 'Five Best Male Athletes'. Thus it would seem at first that the article might be referring to both men and women. However, not a single woman is on the list, which indicates one of two things; either the lack of gender marking suggests the journalist means 'male athletes' but uses the universal 'athletes' because he considers the word athlete to represent men only, or the article is in fact referring to men and women but does not consider any woman worthy of being on the list of the five best athletes of the decade. The list does not appear to be driven by a nationalistic agenda as it features sportsmen from five different countries. Moreover, the list is comprised of five different sports and their individual (male) stars. The men on the list compete in tennis, golf, cricket, football and athletics respectively, which are mostly male-dominated sports. Tennis and golf are considered to be 'feminine-appropriate' sports but nevertheless there is still gender inequality in the competitions of tennis and golf (women only play three sets of tennis whereas men play five, and the prize money is significantly higher for men in golf tournaments than for women).

The dearth of women in this list of the decade's best sports people according to *The Observer* may be a deliberate attempt by the media to maintain the male dominance of the institution of sport by actively choosing not to consider women within the category of 'best athlete of the decade'. This is a technique which emphasizes sexism in British sports reporting without overtly referencing it. The media reinforce the idea that sportsmen are 'real' athletes and sportswomen are inferior (Wheaton and Beal 2003).

I argue that there is a plethora of ways in which the media play on this idea of authentic male athletes versus questionable female ones. One way this occurs is when the media frame sportswomen as 'breaking the rules'. By questioning women's place in sport, the media participate in gender inequality in sports-

reporting, through the representation of women as subversive. In 2009 a gender debate about how to define a woman biologically, socially and aesthetically occurred in the media. *The Sunday Telegraph* reported in 'Sports in Brief',

Athletics: The world governing body of athletics has asked scientific experts to come up with a clear definition of what constitutes a woman to help it with future gender questions in the wake of the Caster Semenya controversy (11/10/09: 10).

The 'controversy' in question happened during the 2009 Athletics World Championships in Berlin where the young athlete Caster Semenya from South Africa was accused of being a man after winning the women's 800m race. Semenya was reported by several of her fellow competitors, journalists and sports commentators to look and behave in a masculine manner. Her lack of visible femininity and the fact that she overwhelmingly beat the other competitors raised suspicion and it was suggested that she could not be a woman biologically.

The gender debate which ensued resurfaced questions of what defines a woman,<sup>35</sup> the different interpretations of the biological makeup of 'woman', and the socially constructed 'woman'. The article in *The Sunday Telegraph* provides a commentary on the news of the 'controversy' but does not commit itself to making overtly gendered judgments about Semenya. The lack of overt judgement could be seen as a judgement in itself because the newspaper is questioning what it means to be a woman by placing sportswomen under medical scrutiny. The same rarely occurs with sportsmen. This interest by the media in the biology of women in relation to sport has occurred repeatedly throughout the history of women's participation in sport. Firstly, in the Victorian era when women began to take part in some sports, namely cycling, golf and tennis, for leisure purposes, male doctors warned of the detrimental effect physical exertion could have on women's health and particularly on their reproductive systems. Since women's role at the time centred on their ability to procreate, a possible risk to their fertility

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<sup>35</sup> Similar debates which have been in existence since the first wave of feminism can be found in *The Second Sex* (1949), *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and *Gyn/Ecology* (1979). In my data there were no examples of articles which questioned the biological essence of being a man. Perhaps this was because simply by taking part in professional sport, men are engaging in a masculinity ritual which defines them as 'real' men (Boyle and Haynes 2000).

generated a rise in medical experiments on women's bodies and a discussion about women's bodies, their roles and physical activity (Choi 2000). Several decades later, sportswomen from the Soviet Union were accused of looking like 'she-men' because of their 'bulked-up' physiques, producing an onslaught of criticisms about the detrimental effect sport could have on women's bodies. These athletes were accused of using drug enhancers to improve their sports performances which supposedly left them looking 'unlike a typical woman' (Choi 2000: 19). In the 1968 Olympic Games, the chief sex tester after examining 911 sportswomen, is reported to have concluded that their participation in sports, 'made them ugly with unattractive bodies and in some cases, hair on their chests' (Choi 2000: 19). Choi suggests that it is more than simply a coincidence that the introduction of sex testing was concurrent with increased numbers of female athletes competing at Olympic Games in the 1960s and 1970s. Only women were subjected to these sometimes invasive tests that are considered to be degrading and discriminatory while perhaps discouraging women from participating in sport at an elite level. Since the institution of sport and superior athletic prowess is believed, by so many, to be the domain of men, outstanding sporting performances by women are sometimes debated by the media and sports institutions by questioning their gender, in the name of 'fair play' (Sullivan 2010). The article in *The Sunday Telegraph* references this gendered belief and thus questions women's ability in sport. Most importantly, the newspaper highlights the narrow definition of what constitutes a woman, and reinforces the notion of a simple dichotomy between women and men.

A slightly different way in which newspapers subtly manifest gender inequality is to attack a woman's sexuality. 'Heterosexism is a system of dominance in which heterosexuality is privileged as the only normal and acceptable form of sexual expression' (Griffin 1998: xv). This is particularly true in the case of sport where heterosexuality is privileged as the norm, homophobia is widespread and women who 'bend' the limits of sexuality by playing 'masculine' sports are labelled as lesbians (Caudwell 1999, 2011b). These women are regarded as threatening and thus they are in turn threatened either by being labelled homosexual or by being excluded because of their sexuality. An article in *The Observer* demonstrates this:

Italian women's coach claims her club Lendinara sacked her by text 'for being gay'. An executive texted to say the club needed to stay 'clean and

honest'. "Am I dishonest for being a lesbian? Unclean? No one has been molested here. It is crazy. The girls love me" (12/10/08: 20).

This article questions a woman's place in sport due to her sexuality; by being a lesbian she is represented as deviating from the heteronormative order. This is an interesting case because football often connects women footballers and lesbianism (Caudwell 1999, 2011b). Caudwell states that the 'butch lesbian' label and image was a concern for the majority of the women footballers she interviewed (1999: 390). The Italian women's coach was fired for being an openly gay woman. It could be said that Lendinara's dislike of having a lesbian coach is actually a fear of having a homosexual presence at the club because, at the time the article was published, there was not a single person in football who was openly gay. In 2011 the first ever openly gay male footballer from Sweden<sup>36</sup> came out to the world's media and reported that he was sure there were many more male footballers who are homosexual but too afraid to admit to their sexuality because of the restrictive, homophobic atmosphere in football ('Hysen Stands Tall. . .').

The article in *The Observer* is not an opinion-based piece and does not provide any comment from the journalist who wrote it. However, not commenting on this issue of sexual discrimination can be regarded as a form of commenting in itself; by choosing to be 'silent' the journalist says a great deal about his stance on homosexuality in football. The quote from the Italian women's coach provokes questions and there is space for a dialogue on this matter. She asks: 'Am I dishonest? Am I unclean?' These questions require a discussion about popular culture, sport and how we judge people based on their sexuality. Nonetheless, the newspaper declines to comment and, as a consequence, its 'silence' around the issue of the coach being sacked because she is gay could be deemed to support the decision.

The questioning of women's place in sport has been discussed in examples which show that sexism in sports reporting is subtle, and suggest that sportswomen are a deviation from the male norm in sport. One distinct media mechanism places women outside the realm of professional sports participation and frames them in the domestic sphere. In the *Mail on Sunday* an article by Daniel King exclaimed, 'Chelsea boss Scolari reveals his secret for football

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<sup>36</sup> The first openly gay footballer ever was Justin Fashanu who committed suicide in 1998 ('The Secret Footballer: Fans Stop Gay Footballers from Coming Out').



success: Find a good wife' (07/12/08: 94). According to the article a good wife means someone who is not interested in the WAG lifestyle, a clever, down-to-earth girl, preferably a player's childhood sweetheart. The assumption made by Scolari is that, 'The best thing for a player in their football life is to have a good wife. If a player has a good wife, you don't need to worry about him' (94). It can be surmised from this that the Chelsea manager thinks that a 'good wife' will provide the player with a good, clean home where he can rest after games and not be influenced by the celebrity lifestyle and excessive wealth that are common for top sportsmen in the UK nowadays (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Forsyth and Thompson 2007; Boyle and Haynes 2009). Not only does this article present women in the domestic role of 'housewives' but it makes a commentary on the unitary nature of 'the good wife' as though they are a 'type' of woman and wife which can be compared to a 'bad wife'.

There is an interesting intersection between a 'good' wife, football WAGs and groupies. There have been numerous high-profile cases in recent years in the media where famous footballers have been reported to have cheated on their wives. Often the alleged 'affairs' are with women who are the polar opposites of the image of a 'good wife'. Perhaps the newspaper is commenting on the Madonna/whore binary which is present in the media representation of WAGs; a 'good wife' is the Madonna figure, willing to sacrifice her own ambitions for those of her footballer husband, whereas the whore image is that of the party girl/groupie, desperate to sleep with a footballer for fame. For perhaps similar reasons, Ortiz (2004) explains that WAGs often know of their husbands infidelities but refrain from leaving their disloyal spouses in order to maintain their lifestyles.

*The Guardian* suggested these two 'types' of women are not so distinct and acknowledge the existence of one another. In a column titled 'The Secret Footballer' the issue of the 'good wife' appeared in an article called, 'Why Wives (Not WAGs) Put up with Playing Away' (23/04/11). The anonymous footballer reasons that the lucrative contracts and luxurious lifestyles which top-Premiership players have and share with their wives, ensure that extra-marital affairs are ignored by women. Moreover, the footballer hints at the idea of the 'good wife' who can turn a blind eye to such infidelities, whilst still playing the role of housewife, which ultimately benefits the footballer and his club. The article suggests that only when wives gain some self-respect are they empowered enough to leave their cheating husbands.

Scolari encourages football players to find a 'good wife' to ensure football success, but women are the victims of this strategy. This article displays sexism by placing the onus on women as supportive, often one-dimensional appendages to sportsmen. The theme of women as supporters to male athletes is a common occurrence in sports reporting (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Ortiz 2004; Forsyth and Thompson 2007). Studies of the wives of professional sportsmen are full of evidence of the marginal, supportive, decorative, nurturing, and second-class role they play in their husbands' careers (Wedgwood 2008). There have, however, been few studies conducted on the wives of sportsmen. Most of the research in this area stems from North America and considers the wives of men who compete in rodeos, baseball and ice hockey (Forsyth and Thompson 2007; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 2004). Carniel (2009) discusses the rise of David Beckham's fame and football and how much influence his wife has had on his image as a 'lifestyle icon' (75). However, little work has been done on the lives of sportsmen's wives, their media representation, and particularly those who do not have careers aside from their 'housewife' roles.

The representation of the role of women as spectators in sport's media is common. Framing women outside-sport-looking-in has been studied by Schacht (1996). In 'Misogyny On and Off the "Pitch"', he investigates the rejection of the 'feminine' by rugby players in North American universities during practice to reinforce superiority over women and other men (typically homosexuals or non-athletes). Schacht demonstrates that women who watch rugby are sexually harassed by players during training. Such action, he claims, 'enables the players to relationally define what masculinity is, and perhaps more important, what it is not' (558).

While sportsmen are reported to reject the 'feminine' in the sports arenas, women are framed in narrow definitions of what is considered 'feminine'. *The Observer* has a tendency to frame women outside professional sport as one-dimensional, focusing particularly on their aesthetic appeal. The newspaper reported: 'Best Dressed Woman Competition at Doncaster Races, Derek Thompson said to the winner, a law student, "What brains and beauty?" he asked with incredulity' (14/09/08: 17). The commentator's disbelief that a woman could be beautiful and intelligent, whether said sarcastically or not, suggests that brains and beauty are not synonymous. The woman in the article is doubly discriminated against; firstly she is outside sport as a non-competitor and framed as a spectacle, just like the

sporting spectacle she went to witness at the Doncaster races. However, unlike the jockeys and horses, her 'talent' is her beauty and she is judged solely on that. Secondly, the commentator's joke about brains and beauty puts into question her intelligence.

The ability for women to be multi-talented has been questioned in relation to sport. It is widely recognised that sportswomen must adhere to heteronormative practices which include highlighting their femininity. However, only when a woman is beautiful in conventional feminized ways *and* good at sport, she is praised for it. Perhaps because fitting into the 'feminine ideal' she is seen as less of a threat than a sportswoman who displays masculine characteristics. Moreover, sportswomen who fail to win are often encouraged by the media to take solace in their aesthetic value. For example, Harris and Clayton (2002) using a case study of the Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova, discussed the notion of sportswomen's beauty outweighing their talent and physical prowess. Kournikova did not win significant tennis tournaments but she was one of the most popular players on tour amongst male audiences because of her beauty and toned body. Her losses did not discourage media coverage of her. Instead her sponsors and British newspapers focused on task-irrelevant news stories of Kournikova, promoting her as a sex symbol. Her failures in tennis were 'forgiven' by the press because she was regarded as beautiful. In some ways the depiction of Kournikova and the woman at the races who won the best-dressed contest are similar; both act as a prize to the audience in places (at the races, at a tennis match and in the newspaper sports pages) that traditionally have been male-dominated. In other words, their presence in these different situations is justified by their aesthetic appeal. In this case sexism in sport is articulated by presenting women as spectacle and framing women as pretty but not powerful (Jones et al 1999).

Being taken seriously as authentic athletes is an important shift which is yet to take place in the media representation of sportswomen. Likewise, gender parity in sporting organisations is yet to be achieved, and would improve the rights and access for women in sport. There is a significant gender imbalance at the institutional level of elite sport, in that very few women are included in the governing boards of clubs and tournaments (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009; Messner 2002; Scraton and Flintoff 2002; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007; Velija and Malcolm 2009; Horne et al 2012). The lack of women making important decisions in sports agendas became an issue in the United States when Title IX (part of

The Educational Amendments Act which stated: 'No person in the United States shall, on the basis of their sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal funding or finance. . .' (Brake 2010: 18)) was passed by the US Congress in 1972 (Taylor 2005). Title IX was supposed to prohibit sex discrimination in education, which included sports. Feminists and women hoped this would introduce a new era for girls and women in sport. However, although the law was enacted, there were not enough 'women-friendly' educators to administrate it. The issue here is implementation of laws. Title IX was an aspirational law which was never properly adopted. The ideological and political incentive was a positive move for more gender equality in sport; however, without a system to support its implementation, Taylor (2005) claimed that little had changed after the supposedly-revolutionary Title IX.

Including ex-professional sportswomen in the upper echelons of sports decision-making could certainly improve access for women in sport and provide a female voice in sports institutions. In 2012 there continues to be a great disparity in the number of women who sit on sport institutions' boards. For example, Clare Connor is the only woman on the England Cricket Board. There are no women on the Football Associations' board and the England Rugby Union Football Club's board employs only Sophie Goldschmidt as their Chief Commercial Officer. The dominance of men in national sports associations begs the question whether equality should be sought from within or developed separately? Should there be women-only and men-only boards for different sports? Or should there be one comprehensive institution which supports all participants, as the government claims to do? This issue is linked to the sex-typing of sports: what happens where one sex dominates a particular sport? I think that regardless of whether a sport is seen as typically 'female' or 'male' its national board of representatives should be 50% women and 50% men. Equal gender input at the decision-making level of sport equates to encouraging a less separatist view of sport in practical terms. I would encourage a gender-less approach to sport and athletes' abilities by using gender quotas to ensure professional sportspeople are fairly represented in the overseeing of sports institutions. The multitude of skills that a 50/50 gendered executive board would provide could greatly benefit sport on many levels and increase participation of both women and men.

The unequal representation of gender in sports media mirrors the male dominance at the board level in sport. *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that the

International Cricket Committee (ICC) invited Clare Connor, who was previously the England cricket captain, to become the first female member as a representative of the women's game (19/04/09: 7). By reporting this news the newspaper makes the audience aware of a woman joining a previously all-male club. However, it did not explicitly discuss this as an achievement for women in sport, instead focusing on the facts of the story. Using Rowe's (1992) model of sports news, Boyle and Haynes (2000) categorise sports reporting as either 'hard' or 'soft' news. 'Hard' news, 'records events, including match analysis, score lines and results in an apparently objective description of what has occurred' (174). 'Soft' news, by contrast, reports on sports gossip, personality and biographical stories and provides 'entertainment' around the more factual news. Most news items on sportswomen are 'soft' news because they involve task-irrelevant reporting, whereas reports on sportsmen are dominated by factual accounts of matches and competitions, thus considered 'hard' news. Some news items on women are given little embellishment because they do not fit the gender norms of behaviour for women and men.

The story about Clare Connor could be seen as celebrating women in sport. However, the article was treated as 'News in Brief' (7) and in a section which brings together several short stories of sports news. The marginalisation of important developments for women in sport, in the article's content and size, can be seen as a missed opportunity, either consciously or otherwise, by the newspaper to recognise the gendered histories of exclusion in sport.

Exclusion from sporting legacy, gender testing, sexism by omission and homophobia are some of the ways in which sexism manifests itself subtly in my findings on sportswomen. I shall now turn to the overt display of sexism and the discourse surrounding gender inequality debates in newspapers.

### Overtly Sexist Practices in Sport and Sports Reporting

There were 28 examples in the articles I looked at of overtly sexist reporting about sportswomen; this included both the reporting of sexism *in* sport and sexism *in* sports reporting. In other words, 'overt' sexist practices were found in how journalists described sportswomen, and certain sports personalities demanding less sexism in particular sports. A quarter of news items came from 2008 and the remaining three-quarters were published in 2009. This may be because of several factors: after the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 a number of high-profile sportswomen including Victoria Pendleton (cycling), Kelly Holmes

(athletics) and Charlotte Edwards (cricket), began to talk to the media and sports institutions about increasing opportunities for sportswomen at major sporting events. Track cycling increased its quota for women at the Olympics (at the 2012 London Olympic Games women could compete in the same number of races as men), boxing was introduced as an Olympic sport for women and alongside outstanding performances by the England women's cricket and football teams, a shift towards gender parity began to take place in sport ('Jowell's Fight to Bring Female Boxing to London'). This change was mirrored to a certain extent by the media reporting on calls for more gender equality in sport and sports reporting.

Over the two-year period, the *Mail on Sunday* published the most articles in this category, 11 in total. *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* both discussed sexism in sport six times and *The Sunday Telegraph* five times. In these articles 'overt sexism' occurred in three different ways: a) describing sexism in sport, b) claiming that sport was not a place for women and c) calls for gender equality in sport and sports reporting. The topics covered include the sexualisation of women in sport, a lack of races and sports open to women, discrimination against women in 'masculine' sports and reducing the number of 'women-only' sports at major sporting events such as the Olympic Games.

Newspaper stories describing gender inequality in sport most commonly took place in relation to typically 'male' sports. For example, as indicated in 2009 the England women's cricket team had a very successful year winning the World Championships in its three competitions (the Ashes, the World Cup and the Twenty20 Cup). *The Sunday Times* published an article which described the situation of women cricketers in terms of salaries, public interest and success. The news item hints at gender inequality. In 'Women Profit From Culture of Success: Today's Final was Fair Reward for Vision and Planning of ECB' Simon Wilde writes,

Back in 2005, the England women's cricket team were granted a walk-on part in the nation's consciousness. They had regained the Ashes after 42 years, but Clare Connor's side would have received scant acclaim had not the men's team also emerged triumphant from cricket's greatest rivalry after a torturous wait. In the event, the girls found themselves joining a spectacular victory parade (22/02/09: 21).

Wilde compares the women and men in the first part of the story. The language employed has an undercurrent of sexism by using the infantilising 'girls'

compared to the 'men's team' and not the equivalent 'boys'. Wilde suggests that the women were 'granted a walk-on part' because of the men's successes which indicates the marginalisation of women cricketers in 2005. This story of the 2005 victory parade is written about in an article published in 2009 to give a contextual understanding of the improvements and status of the women's team over four years.

However, the article does little to assuage the negative image of women in cricket as set out by Wilde. It is both the undervaluing of women cricketers by sports institutions and the media's treatment of them which subordinate the women's national cricket team. The gender inequality present in the situation of women's cricket and the journalist's description of them is prejudiced due to the women's gender and the history of cricket as an exclusively male-only sport.

The women won the Ashes, like the men, in 2005. But it was for the latter that a victory parade was held. The journalist suggests that the women were 'lucky' to be 'given' the honour of joining the men. The reality is that if the men had not won the Ashes that year, there would have been no victory parade for the women because women's cricket is not valued in the same way as the men's (Velija and Malcolm 2009). Despite the women's success, it seems that an institutional as well as ideological shift must occur in order to achieve greater acceptance of women's cricket. Wilde continues,

Possibly the key move was the decision to place up to ten players on contracts last April. These are not playing contracts awarded to the men, but arrangement by which the player is paid to spend 25 hours a week, eight months a year, coaching the game in state schools. This kills several birds with one stone. A future generation of players is being cultivated (the ECB claims a 49% rise in female participation in the past year). . . (22/02/09: 21).

Wilde outlines clearly the financial inequality in cricket; the England men's cricket team are all given 'central contracts', i.e. a full-time salary that allows them to focus only on training and competing for the national team when necessary (most players will also play regional cricket tournaments). In contrast, the England women's cricket team are not fully financially supported by the England Cricket Board (ECB). After the team retained the Ashes, beating Australia again in 2008, the women's team was 'rewarded' by the ECB, in that ten of the best players on the team were offered central contracts, allowing them to give up their other jobs

away from cricket. However, as Wilde explains, part of the deal for the national women's cricket team is that they must provide coaching to school children for 25 hours a week, eight months per year. The men's team, who are reported to earn five times the women's salaries, are under no obligation to coach as part of their contracts. The women's team's contractual obligations are reminiscent of what Hochschild (1989) termed 'the double shift' in dual-career families. The 'second shift' that women cricketers are expected to do resembles the inequality Hochschild discusses for women in terms of workload, household responsibilities and scarcity of free time. Wilde concludes,

Women's cricket is perhaps never going to have the appeal of the men's game. . . But as long as Edwards and co. ride high, it will gladden the hearts of the English (22/02/09: 21).

This article is an instance of unequal treatment and the view of that as seen by the media. The journalist avoids commenting on the difference in salaries between women and men as gender discrimination, and thus frames the situation of the women cricketers as one of inevitability since, 'women's cricket is perhaps never going to have the appeal of the men's game'. Wilde is oblivious to the gendered and sexist language he employs. His quasi-patronising, quasi-mocking tone towards the end of the article saying, 'as long as Edwards and co. ride high, it will gladden the hearts of the English', seems like a compromise that women must accept because of the supposed lack of interest by the media in women's cricket.

Perhaps the low salaries of the women are a way of maintaining the gender order in sport by national institutions. The national men's football team, and to a certain extent, the rugby and cricket teams are paid very large salaries ('Hope of Parity for England's Women'). The women's teams by contrast receive significantly less,<sup>37</sup> and often need to have a full-time job as well as play for their country ('Ashes Win Earns Heroines Central Contracts'). The bigger salaries for the men's team awards them 'star status' (Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). But the women's team earn very modest salaries and are thus not elevated to the upper echelons of the social and sporting hierarchy. The women's team explain their level of performance, compared with the men's team, to a lack of training time, funds and quality coaching ('We Had to Buy. . .'). But this connection is rarely

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<sup>37</sup> In 2010, the average salary for England footballers was £1.46 million for men and £16,000 for women ('Women's Football. . .').



made by the media. Instead an essentialist portrayal is often employed to describe the seemingly 'natural' differences of the women's and men's game in typically-male sports.

There would seem to be a plethora of ways in which the media divert attention away from the success of women in sport. The title of this news item 'Women Profit from Culture of Success: Today's Final Was Fair Reward for Vision and Planning of ECB' suggests that the women's success is an effect of the men's team's success. Moreover, the ECB which at the time of publication was all-male, is cast as the 'genius' behind the women's winning performance. The agency of the women is taken away from them and attributed to the all-male cricket board that made the decisions and the men's cricket team who seemingly inspired the women to achieve beyond what is perceived as their limited ability. Coaches, sports institutions and their directors, and fellow athletes are likely to inspire the women's performance. However, representing them as reliant on men removes athletic agency and demonstrates the positioning of women as weaker athletes than men and encourages sexist coverage in sports reporting.

The sexist presentation of sportswomen as inferior athletes in sports reporting is sometimes masked by employing mixed messages, particularly in the reporting of women in typically 'male' sports. In *The Sunday Times*, just three months after the publication of the previous story, the same newspaper discussed gender equality in cricket in a positive manner. In 'Women Leave Men in The Shade' Lawrence Booth reported,

England are receiving the plaudits they deserve after years of being belittled. . . the rise and rise of England's female cricketers is one of the success stories of British sport, but until recently the tendency has been to patronise them as purveyors of a minority pastime (14/06/09: 16).

The journalist describes how England's women cricket team has been belittled, and the women cricketers presented as players in a 'minority pastime'. Although he does not mention the 'other' England team, there is an inevitable comparison to the dominant men's team who are successful and popular, no matter how well they play. However, he applauds the women's success saying they 'deserve' it. This is a departure from the more common reporting style of women's cricket, which attaches their success to the men's team and training techniques. By stating that the women are leaving the 'men in the shade' he breaks with the

more common representation of women in male sports as 'purveyors of a minority pastime'.

There is a tendency in sports reporting for journalists to distance themselves from the ownership of the articulation of sexism and gender inequality. For example, a broadsheet journalist might quote a tabloid journalist to refer to sexism in sport but not take responsibility for contributing to it. Two articles I analysed demonstrate this clearly. In *The Sunday Telegraph* Jasper Gerard asks, 'Sex Sells, But Who are The Victims of This Game?' (29/06/08: 11). Here he refers to cameramen at Wimbledon attempting to take photos of women tennis players' bodies in a sexualised manner, such as bending over, when skirts and t-shirts fly up from movement. In the first part of the article Gerard writes accusingly about the 'disturbing' images taken, supposedly in the name of 'fashion' and 'entertainment'. As the article continues, however, he alters the tone of the argument and presents the idea that women are partly to blame since their outfits are often designed 'to create interest' and states that despite the sexist photographic angles women are at liberty to wear 'ankle-length' dresses to avoid 'invasive' photos (29/06/08: 11). Gerard claims that feminists attack the 'trivialisation of the women's game' but since sportsmen are equally sexualised in Armani underwear adverts, he asks if women 'are really victims' of the luring lens of cameramen? By using rhetorical questions Gerard negates responsibility for the questions and refuses to provide his own opinion. This is a distancing ploy of some journalists who employ sexist commentary. This is a recurring theme in my data and a new finding as it has not been the focus of investigation, thus far, in research on the representation of sportswomen.

*The Observer* also uses this technique when discussing women and sport where the news is potentially sexist. In 'Said & Done' David Hills asks, 'Who's to Blame for Football's Roasting Culture?' (10/02/08: 7) The by-line of this story reads 'The Moral Lead'. However, there seems to be a contradiction between this and the first line of the story because morals are not really what the journalist is discussing. By 'roasting' I suggest Hills means,

A grotesque sex culture among young footballers, with 'roasting' – the seduction of young women into degrading group sex in which they are passed from player to player and often filmed by the participants – a common and accepted practice ('The Ched Evans Case. . .').

The broadsheet journalist cleverly manipulates how this opinion is presented by quoting *The Sun* newspaper, who considers 'roasting' when women try to have sex with footballers for money, and thus transferring the blame to them for the sexist remarks about women who 'leave nothing to chance in their sordid quest' (10/02/08: 7). Instead of tackling this sensitive issue themselves, the newspaper quotes others; they cite a tabloid newspaper, unwilling to explore the issue fully, who places the blame completely on women supposedly trying to make money from sleeping with footballers. Agency is the decisive factor in these stories; *The Observer* shifts agency to *The Sun* who in turn blames women. In no instance are the footballers, some of who have been convicted of rape in 'roasting' cases, are brought into the equation ('Roasting, Pimping, and the Ugly Game'). In contrast, in cases where sportswomen perform well, newspapers remove the women's agency in their success and celebrate the men behind their performance. Thus one can see a stark dichotomy develop in the way the media treat sportswomen in their coverage.

The content of this news item has the potential to provoke a debate amongst journalists and sports and gender scholars about the social position of women in sport, the promotion of selling 'private' stories, and sexual violence. In the journalist's view the 'wannabe WAGs' are ambitious and desperate for money and therefore will do anything to sleep with a footballer and then sell their story to a tabloid newspaper, ignoring the brutality that often takes place in these situations. In a way this is partially a war between newspaper publications using women as arsenal; tabloids and the popular press out-sell the broadsheets in England ('NRS Suggests Big National Print. . .'). However, the broadsheets claim to have a different moral code, elevating and distancing themselves from salacious scandals. The technique of quoting tabloids allows the broadsheets to produce the same kind of gossip-style reporting as the tabloids but without the responsibility for having generated the stories.

The second way in which overt sexism manifests itself is in the presentation of women as deviants from the male norm in sport, namely in news stories where sport is described as 'not a woman's place'. The inclusion of women's boxing in the 2012 London Olympic Games, for example, provoked a number of responses from the media, most of which concurred that boxing is 'no place for a woman'. The *Mail on Sunday* was particularly present in this debate, publishing two articles in 2008 and 2009 on why women should not box. The first one explicitly

recounted the journalist's disgust at the sight of women in a boxing contest. In, 'Sorry Laura, But a Boxing Ring is No Place for a Woman', the journalist wrote,

The ugliest thing I ever saw in the world of sport was a fight between two women. . . I didn't wait for the verdict because I was hurrying away to throw up. . . And anyway, why shouldn't women be given the choice? I understand all that and I recognise that women are still shamefully denied all manner of opportunities which men take for granted. . . Personally, I continue to believe that the boxing ring is no place for women. Not because they are less valiant than men. But because they have more dignity, more self-respect (27/01/08: 80).

This news item is full of contradictions, in that the journalist recognises that women have limited opportunities in sport, but he still suggests that the boxing ring should remain a male preserve. Emotive language is used to elicit a certain response from readers; by describing women as having more dignity and self-respect he implies that men and women are opposites in that men lack self-respect and women are no less brave but more sensible than men.

Boyle and Haynes (2000: 137) claim that 'nowhere is the metaphor of the male body as weapon or fighting machine more evident than in the sport of boxing'. Scraton and Flintoff (2002: 18) describe the boxer Mike Tyson as an 'icon of atavistic masculinity'. In a sport where the main purpose is to render an opponent unconscious or unable to stand by punching their head and body, what is the feminist approach to understanding women's desire to box? Hargreaves (2003) explains that boxing is at odds with the essence of femininity and blurs the traditional male/female boundaries. She argues that women are taught to be vulnerable, passive and not aggressive, whereas women who box 'are empowering themselves by appropriating male symbols of physical capital and shifting gender relations of power' (2003: 219). There have been very few feminist appraisals of women's entry into boxing, particularly with the inclusion of women's boxing at the 2012 London Olympic Games. Boxing is problematic for feminists because of its violent nature. I do not think that women should inflict such significant damage on one another, however, as Hargreaves aptly writes, 'the ethics of arguments to ban boxing are as appropriate to men as they are to women' (2003: 217). I do not support women *or* men boxing because sport should not be about harming competitors. This is not a question of whether women should emulate men and gain equal access to a particular sport; this is

instead about humans protecting one another from damaging behaviour and a sport which should not be labelled as 'sport'. Sixteen months after this article was printed, the *Mail on Sunday* published another news item on women and boxing. This time the journalist, Patrick Collins, argued that women should have more restraint than the brutish men who box. In 'London 2012 is No Time for Women to Fight' Collins writes,

Now, my liberal instincts tell me that women have the same sporting rights as men. And if they choose to inflict pain and spill blood, then so be it. Yet there is another voice which insists women should have more sense, more dignity, more class (24/05/09: 76).

Here women are presented again as the culprits because it is suggested that women should 'have more sense'. By placing a moral responsibility on women's shoulders the news item gives them agency and also the blame for wanting to 'spill blood'. This is not simply about boxing as a violent sport. Although Collins has previously said, 'boxing has never been easy to defend, since it is the only recognised sport in which the primary purpose is to inflict a concussion' ('Haye's Farcical Night. . .'), the language he employs when discussing women and boxing is far more emotive and plays on ideas of gender roles and moral responsibility. Occasionally he paints male boxers as barbaric in their pre-fight taunts, but Collins rarely berates them for *being* boxers and fighting one another.

These two articles on why women should not box are related to the journalists' views of masculinity, as much as femininity and traditional roles for women and men. Boxing is a hyper-masculine sport and often war-like language is used to reinforce the power and ferocity of it in the media. The fighting language used to describe men here is presented as out of place in the case of women boxing. By stating that women should not box because they have 'more sense, more dignity, more class' the journalist suggests that women are in various ways 'better' than men and thus more responsible for upholding particular social values; this is part of a very traditional position that regards women as the moral standard bearers in society. Interestingly in these two articles the physical differences, which often serve as an explanation for the dominance of sportsmen over women, are not mentioned. Instead, women's supposed moral superiority is claimed to be one of the reasons why women should not box. Conversely, the morality of men boxing is not questioned.

All of the examples of newspapers presenting the idea that certain areas of sport are 'not a woman's place' are related to typically 'male' sports. Cricket was one of the sports in this category. *The Observer* published an article about men's cricket in the summer of 2009. It registered astonishment by some members of the Men's Cricket Club (MCC) upon seeing women at the men's competition. Will Buckley wrote: 'There were women in the pavilion! Women in shorts!' (07/06/09: 16). This is a demonstration of the still-present misogynist views in traditionally male spaces. The article was exclusively about men's cricket. However, it shows how the presence of women, even when not as competitors, is questioned, for instance when they do not comply with feminised codes of dress. This level of discrimination against women is surprising. However, there was no explicit comment about this sexist remark by the journalist, which is a form of comment in itself.

Steve James in *The Sunday Telegraph*, though, is more direct in his articulation of sexism, explicitly giving his opinion about women's place in sport. In 'And Another Thing. . .' James argues,

Claire Taylor should not have been made a Wisden Cricketer of the Year. True, she and her colleagues have enjoyed a stunning year. She deserves plenty of garlands, and should have become Wisden's first *woman* Cricketer of the Year. But Wisden has now attempted impossible comparisons. Physically the two games are poles apart. They should remain separate. Many in the game I have spoken to agree (12/04/09: 11).

The Wisden's Cricketer of the Year award is one of cricket's most prestigious awards. It is not a prize which is awarded to only one player; up to five players can be named and awarded the same title. 'Excellence in the previous English summer is the major criterion for inclusion in the Five, but not the only one. In fact, the award is recognition of a player's influence on the last English season' ('Wisden's Five. . .'). Moreover, a cricketer may only receive the award once in their lifetime. It is surprising that James is avidly against Taylor's nomination given that four men were also named. However, James is critical of her award on the grounds that the award should be for men only. He suggests Taylor should have won the Wisden's *Woman* Cricketer of the Year, despite no such prize existing. James claims that the women's and men's games are poles apart and making comparisons between them is unfair. The woman's game is thus

represented as separate and 'different' from the dominant men's game which, it is suggested, provides the benchmark for quality.

Perhaps the issue here is that traditions within the individual sports commonly associated with men have not adapted in parallel to the entry and success of women into these sports. An increase in women's participation should be mirrored by institutional change which recognises their presence in the sport. Creating a new category for women cricketers in the Wisden list of honours, concurrent with the gender marking present in many sports, would continue to reinforce the gendered divide between women's and men's sport. Having a more inclusive award system which considers the achievements of both genders would require a change in ideological stance regarding the view of women. Either alteration could help to create more equality in sports institutions. King (2007) suggests that increased participation of sportswomen at major sporting events has a symbiotic relationship with improved media coverage of them. However, this view places the onus on women, rather than creating an equal playing field, regardless of performance. It may be possible that institutional change is the key to changing more general views of gender and sport.

The third and final way in which sexism in sport appears in the media is through calls for equality. These pleas for more equality in sport and sports reporting come from a diverse range of people including professional sportspeople, coaches, politicians and newspaper journalists. The only journalist who openly discussed the need for more gender equality newspaper sports reporting was Anna Kessel from *The Observer*. In the summer of 2009 she wrote an article titled, 'World Records Might Be Beyond Women's Reach, But Wider Recognition Shouldn't Be' (16/08/09: 14). Here she refers to the 'murky' past of women athletes who were reported to have taken performance-enhancing drugs before their strict regulation and prohibition began. The world records set by women during this era remain and thus Kessel suggests that for 'clean' sportswomen nowadays, breaking records which were possibly attained with the help of doping is highly unlikely. However, she argues that despite this, sportswomen should receive more media coverage and institutional support. This is the only example in my data between 2008 and 2009 from the five national newspapers under review where a (female) journalist called for better newspaper coverage of sportswomen. There are no examples of male journalists engaging in the debate in this way. Hardin (2005) and Angelini and Billings (2010) describe how sports newsrooms are testosterone-filled places. They explain that the masculine world

of sports is transferred to the media institutions which report on sports, thus making it difficult for women and 'women's issues' to be heard. It is not surprising that so few articles lament the lack of recognition for sportswomen, particularly those written by male journalists.

The culture secretary in 2008, MP Andy Burnham, was also explicit in calling for more gender equality in sport and sports reporting. In, 'Burnham Calls for Girls in Sport to Be Taken Seriously' Simon Hart reports him as saying,

Let's broadcast women's success across the board and give young girls positive role models in sport (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 24/08/08: 5).

Burnham indicated that women in sport are not taken seriously. He seemed to suggest that the present role models for girls are not positive and do not come from sport. That women are not taken seriously is not a new problem. Women's sport has often been considered the side show to men's events. For example, the England women's rugby team are only allowed to play matches at Twickenham, the national rugby stadium, *before* the men's team play. In this way, the women are considered to be the 'warm up' event for the 'real' show. This could also explain why at major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and tennis Grand Slams, women always compete before men in the same event, which produces a gendered hierarchy of importance. The scheduling order at Wimbledon is similar in that the men's final is the last match of the tournament, and thus referred to as the highlight.

There have been very few investigations into women in sport as role models for girls (Biskup and Pfister 1999). Case studies of individual athletes such as Anna Kournikova (Harris and Clayton 2002), Cathy Freeman (Wensing and Bruce 2003), and Marion Jones (Bernstein 2002), consider these sportswomen in terms of femininity, sexuality, national pride, racialised identities and national reconciliation. Biskup and Pfister (1999) state that 'girls and boys predominantly chose role models who present traditional gender ideals' (212). In other words, female sports role models tend to espouse femininity, and are thus more likely to be admired by girls and women than female role models who are not 'feminine'. Thus, it is a particular type of sportswomen that Burnham is talking about who can inspire girls in sport. However, girls are still more likely to identify with role models in the entertainment world instead of sport, while boys may look to sportsmen who embody masculinity as role models (Vescio et al 2005).



This issue was picked up by David James, former England goalkeeper, in *The Observer* (04/05/08). It was the only example in my data of a sportsman lamenting the lack of positive role models for girls and women in sport. In fact, it is also the only time the presence of glamour models/porn stars was questioned and presented as inappropriate in sport. James is reported as saying,

This year, there has been a little progress and we must congratulate Gordon Taylor for inviting the England women's team to join the PFA, an historic gesture. . . Why are the only women in [football magazines] scantily dressed downloads for your mobile? . . . the women who work in football are too often perceived as bimbos with limited knowledge of the game (*The Observer*, 04/05/08: 13).

The former England goalkeeper here refers to the England women's football team being allowed to join the Professional Football Association (PFA) in March 2008, which gave them access to better legal representation and training among other advantages. James starts by congratulating the women's team on their progress. Secondly, he mentions their entry into the PFA in a slightly sarcastic manner, perhaps because it has taken 101 years for this decision to be made. Finally, he changes tack and questions the presence of 'scantily dressed downloads' in football, and hence the lack of female footballers. It is rare that a footballer questions the system which he is part of. However, the interview is presented as a frank questioning about the current gender hierarchy in football and the reporting of sport. By speaking out, James potentially threatens his place in football. Perhaps his long and successful career in English football gives him sufficient cultural capital to debate women's place in a predominantly male sport. James and other sportsmen have the capability and credibility, as insiders of the sport, to provoke change in the status quo, however the majority are not represented as taking a pro-women stance.

A further proponent for gender equality was featured in 'Our Women Need a Pay Rise', Bill Day wrote about a sportsman demanding greater financial equilibrium in another traditionally male sport:

England's women should be given a pay rise irrespective of the result of their bid to complete the World Champion double at Lord's today. That is the plea of assistant coach Jack Birkenshaw on the eve of England women's appearance in the World Twenty20 final. . . The ex-England spinner believes the women's game is now a 'mirror image' of the men's

team and that the shift in profile should be reflected in the award of ECB central contracts. . . Birkenshaw said 'the women's game has kicked on a lot. . . but we must make it rewarding if we want more women to play' (*Mail on Sunday*, 21/06/09: 70).

Birkenshaw is a former England cricketer and coach. He states that women and men in cricket play at the same level for England and argues that the women's team deserve similar benefits as the men. This is an unusual occurrence. Rarely is a prominent sportsperson represented as saying that women and men play at the same standard and therefore deserve to earn the same. Explicitly addressing gender inequality, Birkenshaw takes a risk, as does the *Mail on Sunday*. The newspaper could be said to be supporting Birkenshaw's ideas by agreeing to publish the story without additional and possibly negative commentary, particularly because this is the one newspaper of the five under review which paid the most attention to sportswomen in terms of the quantity of articles about them.

In my data I found more articles about sportsmen, male politicians and commentators, than women, calling for greater gender equality for women in sport. These news items were considerably longer and more opinion-based than the stories about women calling for more gender equality. I came across only two examples of sportswomen rallying for more gender equality in sport. In 'Pendleton wins sexism fight', Brendan Gallagher reported,

Victoria Pendleton, who has been campaigning hard for equal opportunities for women cyclists at the Olympics, will be granted her wish for London 2012. . . The current ratio [of events] is 7-3 in favour of men (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 27/09/09: 1).

This is the most overt mention of unequal treatment of women in my data and the journalist did not offer his opinion on the matter. This could be because within the sports pages there are a certain number of factual reports and a certain number of opinion-based stories. Newspaper editors may privilege particular topics, especially in longer opinion-based articles. Therefore it is plausible to suggest that restricting articles which promote gender equality in sport to factual reports only, hampers their impact. The journalist's opinion notwithstanding, the newspaper still 'frames' sportswomen's demands for greater equality in sport and its reporting in a marginalised way.

The other example concerns a demand by Dame Kelly Holmes for more gender equality at the institutional level of sport. *The Sunday Times* reported: 'Dame Kelly Holmes Issues Rallying Call for Women's Sport: Olympic Hero Wants Change at the Top of Our Governing Bodies with More Women Holding Prominent Positions' (25/10/09: 15). Holmes states that there are ten national governing bodies (NGB) which do not have a single woman member, only one in five of the leading NGBs has a woman and 22% of national performance directors are women (15). The NGBs she refers to represent both typically 'male' and typically 'female' sports. Athletics is a more gender-neutral sport. However, in 2011 the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) was exposed as having an all-male executive board. It is at the fifth level of the council where the first female member appears; the upper echelons of the organisation are all-male. It was not surprising then that in September 2011 the IAAF announced that the all-male board had decided to alter the official women's marathon world record time because Paula Radcliffe's time set in 2003 was deemed to have been aided by male pacemakers. Her time of two hours and 15 minutes, set in London in 2003, was reclassified as a 'world best' because she ran it in a mixed race. A media furore took place after this news with many journalists and commentators expressing shock at the new ruling, particularly when the record was set eight years ago ('Paula Radcliffe's World Record. . .'). This reinforces Kelly Holmes' claim that decisions in sport are made by all-male executive boards which are not inclusive of women or their needs. Furthermore, it could be said that they often actively seek to deter sportswomen's progress in order to defend the traditionally male domain of sport.

By raising these issues, the newspaper creates greater awareness of the need to change the decision-making processes in sports institutions. Hardin (2005) explains how the dominance of men in the media boardroom at management and editing level affects the favouring of certain stories and sports over others. After gender, the majority/minority sports dichotomy is one of the most divisive in sports reporting. In order to create a fairer sport media, eradicating such divisions needs to be one of the primary issues that is addressed by all media institutions.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the four ways in which sexism and gender inequality in sport and sports reporting manifest themselves. The first one focused on reporting on sportswomen as 'failing'. This is an indirect way of criticising

sportswomen and questioning their place in professional sport. The second category was the opposite, in style rather than substance, of the previous one and showed how women are represented as 'raising the bar' in sport. Despite the celebration of sportswomen in this category, the newspapers also maintain a sexist stance by invariably comparing sportswomen to men. The third category showed how gender inequality in sports reporting is the norm. This category displayed the subtle media reporting styles which promoted sexist coverage of sportswomen carefully masked so the discrimination was not obvious. The fourth category referred to the direct way sexism manifests itself and is reported on. The final category demonstrated that journalists report the existence of sexism in sport and occasionally are willing to expose this as well as sexist media tendencies.

As can be seen in this chapter, the number of articles in the categories increased throughout the four sections, starting with fewer in the category of sportswomen's 'failings'; the most news stories occurred in the overt discussion of sexism category. My analysis showed that there was little consistency in the five newspapers under investigation regarding the reporting of sexism and gender inequality. For example, in the *Mail on Sunday*, two negative news stories about women being allowed to box can be contrasted with the positive news stories about the England women's cricket team and how they should be paid on an equal par to men. This signifies, on the one hand, an acceptance of the women's cricket team thanks to their international successes in 2008 and 2009. On the other hand, the newspaper's disgust at women's entry into Olympic boxing suggests a deep-seated belief about gender roles (in some sports), particularly in terms of violence and what is acceptable for women. *The Sunday Telegraph* took a less confrontational, more neutral stance. It reported sexism in sport and wrote about sportswomen in a sexist manner both subtly and overtly, but did not take a particular position on the matter - apart from in typically 'male' sports such as cricket - which can be considered sexism by omission or simply factual reporting. *The Observer* hinted at sexism in sport, perhaps indicating its reluctance to overtly 'judge' sportswomen as inferior athletes. *The Sunday Times* seemed less inclined to make overt references to the existence of sexism in sport. The articles in this paper connected to sportswomen and the debate largely employed quotes from sportspeople and commentators, thus displacing the responsibility of direct authorship.

The explicit manifestation of sexism in sport and sports reporting takes several different forms. Most commonly newspapers and journalists report sportspeople and politicians calling for more gender equality. Infrequently journalists will articulate their own opinion on this. The media thus distance themselves from the discussion of gender inequality. It could be argued that this is a political stance taken by the newspapers which indicates their position; by quoting other people's opinion on the matter and not their own, the newspapers covertly support the sexist discrimination of sportswomen.

What is clear from this chapter is that sexism in sports reporting takes many different forms, from highlighting a woman in a male sport as token or the exception, and describing a sportswoman's success in one sentence, to ignoring women on important days in the sporting calendar and consistently rating men above women. Moreover the questioning of a sportsperson's sexuality or indeed their sex because of their perceived behaviour in 2008 and 2009 was directed at women only.

A handful of sports personalities called for a discussion on this matter and for increased gender equality. Meanwhile some journalists encouraged further sexism by demanding women do not participate in certain sports because of their gender. The gender inequality present in sports institutions and the reporting on sportswomen who are subject to discrimination on the basis of their gender sometimes makes it difficult to differentiate between a journalist being sexist and simple reporting on a sexist situation in sport. Nevertheless, the newspapers under scrutiny here do not engage in a discussion about this, nor do they generally recognise gender discrimination in sport or in sports reporting, bar a few exceptions. Gender inequality, consequently, continues to exist in sport partly because of the sexist image of sportswomen projected by sections of the media and the lack of journalists willing to fight it. The discrimination against sportswomen by institutions and the media affects their social and economic position in sport. The following chapter will consider the use of stereotypes in the media representation of sportswomen including: the social position of sportswomen according to their newspaper representation, how the media description of their social status and lives outside sport are privileged over information about their identities as professional sportspeople, and how this impacts on their sporting careers and ambitions.

## **Chapter Six: Stereotypical Representations of Sportswomen in British Middle-Brow Newspapers**

### **Introduction**

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines a stereotype as ‘a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing’ (2012). Perkins (in Lacey 2009) argues that minority and socially inferior groups, such as sportswomen, were more prone to stereotyping. This chapter will explore stereotypes of sportswomen as displayed in the British print media. In my own data I found that stereotypes occurred in relation to four themes: femininity, fashion, social position and aggressive language. First, I shall discuss a particular kind of femininity as embodied by some sportswomen and privileged by the media. This includes ideal body shapes, and a certain discourse of pain in the sports media. Second, I shall explore the representation of sportswomen and their interest in fashion, including heteronormative practices in clothing and the gendered divide in sports uniforms. Third, I shall dissect the ‘social position’ of women in sports media, meaning the way in which gender dictates their place in the social hierarchy of mediated sport. Further, this section will develop a discussion about the negotiation by sportswomen of femininity and how this is portrayed, particularly in terms of reconciling their careers as professional athletes with family life, and their lives post their sports careers. Fourth, I shall explore the representation of ‘angry’ women, linguistic violence, and feminised bad language. These four themes illuminate the use of stereotypes in the media representation of sportswomen. The most obvious consequence of these stereotypes is an overall marginalisation of women in sport; they emphasize a gender binary. Stereotypes also create a narrow and inflexible image of sportswomen – in other words, once a stereotype has been established, it is hard to break and alter. Moreover, as the OED definition states, stereotypes are oversimplified explanations of a person or group. Therefore, when the British print media promote a stereotype of, for example, sportswomen complying with hegemonic femininity, other types of femininity are constructed as alternative and become isolated from mainstream media coverage. Hence, I shall examine how the stereotypes which emerged from my data construct a particular understanding of sportswomen which restricts room for change or development.

## The Cult of Femininity

*There are subtler methods [of controlling women's bodies], such as initiating pressures on women to conform to a perfect body shape (Cashmore 1996: 135).*

In popular culture women are bombarded with images of 'feminine perfection' and the ways in which to achieve it (Bordo 2003). In sports reporting, the few photographs of sportswomen that *are* published adhere to certain standards of femininity. Stereotypical femininity, as presented by the print media, takes on a specific form, which amounts to an understanding of the majority of sportswomen as 'committed' to achieving a certain feminine ideal.

The cult of femininity in contemporary western culture, Bordo (2003) argues, is underpinned by the 'over presence' of images of thinness. Sportswomen, particularly in sports where women receive more news coverage such as tennis and athletics, tend to be slim and carry little excess weight, in comparison to sports in which sportswomen are under-represented and where they may have bulkier physiques such as in weightlifting and rugby. Although the lifestyles of professional athletes supposedly maintain healthy physiques, whether lean or with more muscle, newspapers have published stories which indicate that sportswomen struggle with similar 'body issues' as women who do not take part in professional sports (Dickson and Pollack 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009; Roussel et al 2010). In other words, in accordance with images of women in popular culture more generally, it is suggested that elite female athletes also worry about maintaining their bodies in certain, aesthetically pleasing ways, in line with the feminine ideal. For example, in 'Pulling Her Weight', *The Sunday Times* suggests that even sportswomen worry about their 'figures': 'Andi Pauli beat anorexia to take her place in Sunday's women's boat race' (16/03/08: 26). This heading privileges the news of Andi Pauli's slimness and her battle over anorexia. I would suggest this places this sportswoman in a position of fragility (and fragility is a key component of femininity, especially in the case of sportswomen), in that she has 'fought' against an illness which can be understood to be the result of wanting to be thin. In this way the audience receives the message that sportswomen, like most women outside sports, are preoccupied with their bodies. Sportswomen thus seem just as likely to be influenced by conventional notions of slimness as 'normal' women (Russell 2004; Jones et al 2005; Jeanes 2011; Steinfeldt et al 2011). It is interesting to compare this type of coverage to that of sportsmen; rarely are male athletes reported to be

'concerned' about their physiques in terms of aesthetics. It is assumed that at elite sports level, male athletes have bodies which physically 'do' what their sports require, and similarly embody masculinity by conforming to an idealised masculine muscular body shape. For sportswomen, however, a 'sporting' body in certain ways challenges femininity and thus their bodies are put under scrutiny by the media.

Grogan and Wainwright (1996) argue that girls as young as eight years old can identify and subsequently internalise dominant cultural imperatives to be thin. Thinness is understood and absorbed by *all* girls, regardless of their interest or lack thereof in sport. Sisjord and Kristiansen (2009) investigated the relationship female wrestlers had to their bodies with a particular focus on strength training and muscularity. They found that the more experienced and mature wrestlers accepted their bodies and felt comfortable in their more 'masculine' muscularity, whereas the younger women wrestlers rejected heavy strength training and preferred to maintain a more feminine 'private body'. The younger women wrestlers then, were tied to certain images of femininity and were not prepared to be seen to be 'masculine' simply for their sport. In other words, they privileged their feminine status over their athletic development, by avoiding heavy strength training. It could be said that this same privileging of the feminine over the athletic also prevails in the media; there is a negotiation, I would argue, by sportswomen, men and media institutions around views of femininity, masculinity and athleticism. The boundaries of female athletic ability have shifted over time, and one might even claim that sportswomen are closing the gap on sportsmen in physical ability (Tatem et al 2004; O'Reilly and Cahn 2007). As a result of this, the 'agents' involved in this negotiation are constantly readjusting their understanding of the gender binary in sport. In other words, as the gender gap in physical ability in sport decreases, the gender gap in appearance becomes more pronounced.

In tennis where femininity goes hand in hand with media success, women players are often under scrutiny by the media, more than perhaps in any other sport because of the amount of television and print media coverage of Wimbledon in the United Kingdom and the popularity of the sport. My data revealed that tennis is the sport in which women are most commonly discussed in relation to their feminine bodies. This is also linked to their fashion choices and social position. Serena Williams receives significant media coverage, but not all of it is related to her tennis abilities. She is almost an anomaly in tennis; since her entry into the



professional women's tour she has surprised the previously white-middle class world of professional tennis where most of the women players are white, slim, and well-behaved. Serena Williams is African-American, curvaceous, muscular and occasionally out-spoken and even aggressive on court. Her ruthless playing style has earned her 15 singles Grand Slam titles and the World No.1 ranking (she regained the top ranking in October 2009, 'Serena Williams Reclaims World No.1 Spot. . .'). Despite Williams' seemingly strong demeanour and physical capabilities, she is presented in a multitude of ways by the media. Articles on her weight loss (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 13/01/08) attach a particular kind of 'feminine fragility' to a powerful woman. By painting her as being subject to the same types of bodily worries as other women, her pedestal position of athletic superiority is reduced. She becomes 'just another woman' because of her supposed body worries for the sports reader.

Similarly, framing Williams as concerned by her weight, and subsequently successful in losing excess weight seemingly draws more respect from her fellow competitors, as the article in *The Sunday Telegraph* about a 'slimmer' Williams suggests:

The loss of nearly a stone since she was last here has done nothing to diminish the Australian press's fascination with the vital off-court statistics of Serena Williams - and everything to reinforce the respect of her rivals (13/01/08: 16).

This article frames Williams' fellow female competitors as superficial and prone to judging other female players by their bodies (the way in which the media present this type of 'bitching' will be discussed later in this chapter). This 'superficiality' is a stereotypical representation of women in the media and is extended to sportswomen, thus bringing them in line with other popular cultural understandings of Western beauty ideals and behaviours. Moreover, the focus on women's bodies as sites for displaying femininity promotes the image of sportswomen as women more than as athletes. Conversely sportsmen are depicted primarily as athletes and secondly as men by print media (Vincent et al 2002; Crolley and Teso 2007; Crossman et al 2007; Boyle and Haynes 2009).

The lengths that women go to in order to achieve slim bodies can perhaps be considered as painful, both emotionally and physically. The mediated discourse on sportswomen also sees them as concerned by their figures, even if it has

detrimental effects on their professional sports careers. I will now turn to a discussion on pain and injury in sport and the way in which particular 'pains' are feminised, while others are silenced.

### *No Pain, No Gain*

Pain, injury and sport are intrinsically interlinked and have been researched extensively within the bio-medical context. The entry of social science into this framework came significantly later in academia, but nonetheless, the investigation into how people, and specifically how athletes experience pain, has added important knowledge to the study of women and sport (Nixon 1996; Loland et al 2006; Thing 2006; Finley 2010). Here I will explore the representation of pain and injury in the sports media.

The discourse of pain was surprisingly absent from my data; there was a constant stream of 'injury news' relating to mainstream sportsmen, but rarely did the newspapers under review discuss sportswomen and injuries. I suggest that this finding is consistent with the gender binary in sports media; injuries and physical pain are presented as 'masculine' whereas 'feminine' pain (which can also be read as suffering), is presented as softer and more emotional. In other words, sportswomen's 'pain' includes heartache in the romantic sense, inner turmoil, being far away from family, and weight gain, whereas sportsmen's pain is presented as mostly physical, due to the supposed 'physicality' of their sport. The pain binary then, mirrors the wider media representation of women and men in sport. I will now analyse the principal facets of the mediated image of pain in sport.

Weight management, inner turmoil, emotional imbalance and femininity are interlinked characteristics attributed to women and particularly to sportswomen by the media. The stereotypical image of fragile sportswomen with weaker bodies, informed in part by Victorian-era ideologies of protecting women's reproductive capacities, contrasts sharply with the image of strong sportsmen who are socialised to withstand pain. Several studies have made evident the 'performing' of these gendered roles (Butler 2004; Davis-Delano 2009) and how they are culturally rather than biologically constructed. In 'Misogyny On and Off the Pitch: The Gendered World of Male Rugby Players', Schacht (1996) demonstrates the importance of maintaining the pain divide which mimics the gender divide in sport. The male players he interviewed said that playing rugby 'takes balls' and

that 'showing toughness' was just as important as physical skill and strength. He writes,

Injured players who continue to play are seen as exemplifying masculinity – they are 'a man's man'. . . Injuries are, in a sense, medals that attest to one's masculinity to be proudly discussed and embellished on in the future (557).

So what happens if women play and hurt themselves? Does it jeopardise the masculinity of sportsmen achieved through pain and injury? There are many scholarly analyses of masculinity, pain and sport: Boyle and Haynes (2000, 2009) discuss boxing as the ultimate expression of being a man, linked to its high pain threshold, but nowhere do they mention women's recent entry into the world of professional boxing and thus their ability to deal with pain. There is certainly a knowledge gap here that needs to be addressed. Perhaps it might be suggested that media institutions have little interest in hearing how women boxers deal with pain because of two key issues; firstly, the aversion to women boxing indicates a lack of engagement on any level by the media, except in instances where they abhor women's participation in what is described as 'naturally' and 'morally' wrong (*Mail on Sunday*, 24/05/09), and secondly, the way in which pain is a gendered feeling, I would argue, in that society protects women from physical pain, apart from during menstruation and childbirth. Men, on the other hand, are socialised to endure pain from a young age and the masculinisation of boys sees experiencing pain as an integral part of being a man, a rite of passage (Messner 1990; Nixon 1996; Boyle and Haynes 2000, 2009). Pain is also linked to domestic violence, a taboo subject, which the media do not fully engage with on the level of the pain endured by female victims. Perhaps for these reasons, there is a knowledge gap in the popular media about the ways in which women feel pain in sport.

One sport in which the demonstration of pain and injury is revered is in roller derby, a non-mainstream, competitive team sport which is often all-female. Thomas (2009) describes how players 'glorify or revel in their bruises' (26). She clarifies that they do not view bruises as major injuries, but that their attitudes towards injuries demonstrate a shift in gendered perceptions in sport about women and pain. One of Thomas' participants explained that the full-contact nature of the sport involves, 'getting over the psychological idea, because of course as women we are conditioned not to do, we are not supposed to do

violence' (28). In other words, roller derby provides a place in which sportswomen can invert ideas of hegemonic femininity and overcome the socialisation of girls' bodies as passive, weak and clean. It must be noted, however, that roller derby is not a mainstream sport in the UK and did not receive any print media coverage in my sample. Hence, while its potential ability to transform gender norms within the discourse of pain and injury is important, it is unlikely to affect the representation of sportswomen within mainstream sport.

Young and White (1995) found very little difference between sportswomen and men's attitudes to injury and pain. They found that both female and male athletes were willing to expose themselves to pain and would risk further injury in order to keep training or playing. They explain that feminist work, such as theirs, has 'begun to understand male tolerance of physical risk and injury as a constituting process that may enhance a particular brand of masculinisation' (45). Therefore by 'protecting', which can also be read as preventing, women from injury, and by extension a breach of masculinity, the status quo remains. In other words, men's place in sport remains unchallenged by women, and women remain in a position of 'natural' weakness. Moreover, by remaining outside the realm of the most physically demanding sports, which tend to be where more injuries occur, women are unable to challenge the idea that men are 'natural' athletes and therefore those who should receive more sports coverage for their 'increased' physical efforts.

Pain in sport can occur as an expression of two things: bodily injury and the effort and exhaustion, both mental and physical, which are part of professional sport. Injury management and the sociology of risk in sport are important for elite athletes and several studies (Young and White 1995; Roessler 2005; Thing 2006; Young 2011) have demonstrated the way in which injuries in sport can be career-ending without adequate treatment. However, the other type of pain, which can include physical exertion, momentary pain caused by lactic acid build-up in muscles during and after exercise and exhaustion, are regularly part of sport. One might question whether this type of pain is desirable and whether we should encourage it. I would argue that it is an integral part of elite sport and by pushing one's body to its limit, one exceeds previous boundaries as well as learning more about the body's ability to withstand pain. Pain is a complex concept and Bernardes et al (2008) describe the ways in which the perception of pain is difficult to assess because it cannot be 'measured' apart from subjectively as a perceived feeling by an individual. This explains why understanding pain in terms

of gender is even more complicated. However, the idea that hegemonic masculinity directly influences the expression of pain in the sporting arena, is widely understood. Bernardes et al (2008: 435) state that 'the incompatibility between being hegemonically masculine and being emotionally expressive in pain seems to be widely shared by people in different cultures, and in particular by men'.

It must be noted that there is an anomaly in the gendered pain dichotomy in sport. As previously stated, sportsmen are supposed to absorb pain and not complain about it in order to demonstrate their masculinity. This may be true in the majority of sports. However, football in the United Kingdom, and it could be argued globally, is uniquely different in that footballers often feign injury because of a tackle and 'play-act' for the referee in order to gain an advantage to penalise the opposing team (McNamee 2009). While this is not actually about 'pain' per se, the over-dramatisation of pain in football is an interesting phenomenon and one which must be considered in the discussion on sportsmen and pain. Few studies have researched this apparently football-specific behaviour. Morris and Lewis (2010) describe this behaviour as exaggerating the effect of a tackle or simulating pain by 'taking a dive' and attempting to deceive the referee into awarding their team a penalty or free kick (1). This behaviour contradicts the gendered pain dichotomy and places male football players in an interesting position on a social level in terms of the demonstration of their masculinity. Although this phenomenon is perhaps more aligned with celebrating the successful cheat, rather than contradicting or demonstrating masculinity; players take part in show-style behaviour which the referee either ignores or punishes, while the audience are left to watch and wait for the outcome of this behaviour, supporting or condemning it, depending on which team they support. Vincent et al (2010) discuss how Cristiano Ronaldo winked at his team's manager after being involved in an incident which resulted in his biggest rival, Wayne Rooney, being sent off during the 2006 World Cup when England played Portugal.

Avoiding injury and remaining distant from the brutal side of sport, particularly in sports such as rugby where 'cauliflower ears' are a sign of strength in men, but would not be accepted as such for women, sportswomen can be seen to guard their femininity by avoiding 'certain' types of injuries. This links back to normative ideals of female beauty where injury is not regarded as enhancing femininity but deflecting from it. The present focus on appearance is directly related to fashion in sport, to which I now turn.

## Dressing the Part: Stereotypes of Fashion

*Clothing does a good deal more than simply clad the body for warmth, modesty or comfort . . . Codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu (Craik 2003: 3).*

The last sentence above is particularly true for clothing in sport. Dickson and Pollack (2000) argue that sports clothing has a multitude of uses for athletes; sports clothing is like a uniform which identifies and links a sportsperson to their chosen sport, team and/or nation. It can enhance performance by being 'technically' advanced, it can give a psychological edge to an athlete who feels she is dressed appropriately for her sport. There is a lot more choice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for sportswomen, whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when women were prevented from taking part in sport *en masse*, sports clothing was equated not with functionality in terms of sport and the need for movement, but with maintaining demure femininity (Cahn 1994). Latterly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, sports clothing for women is more aligned with functionality and the way in which clothing can enhance sports performances. With the growth of women's participation in sport the accepted norms of clothes for sport have widened. In 2012, sports clothing is an enormously lucrative business and goes hand-in-hand with the promotion of televised sports for women and men.

However, sports clothing for women, while less restrictive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has not changed in terms of its gendering nature, insofar as the 'feminine' uniforms prevalent in many sports still exists. My data suggest that women in established individual 'feminine' sports such as tennis and gymnastics, are more likely to choose feminine clothing and individualised outfits as a form of display of femininity. Sportswomen in 'feminine' team sports, such as hockey and netball, are also more likely to wear feminine, women-specific kit. Conversely, sportswomen in more 'masculine' sports, whether they are individual or team sports, such as football and rugby, will try to assimilate to their chosen sport by conforming to the traditional male style of dress. Image 10 below shows the men's and women's England cricket teams wearing the same uniforms. At first glance it is not immediately obvious which team is which. There is little gender marking here and it is only the blonde ponytail which indicates the women's team. The photo of the England women's team, whose entry into professional cricket

has been recent and successful, frames them as serious athletes who do not 'perform' their gender through the clothing they wear.

Image 10. England men's and women's cricket teams in similar styles of uniform.



Source: Google images, accessed 04/12/11.

Using the same outfits as the men's team was discussed in an article about women's cricket where the national team's captain expressed relief when their uniforms were changed from skirts to 'proper' cricket uniforms, like the men wear:

The media profile has improved and we are now taken seriously. When I first represented England we still wore skirts on the field! Adidas has designed kit for us that reflects what we are – professional athletes (*The Sunday Times*, 22/02/09: 21).

Charlotte Edwards here equates being taken seriously with wearing the right kit, and in this case it is achieved through the duplication of the men's team kit. This reflects the way in which women in 'masculine' sports adopt the standards that are in place in order to be taken seriously. However, double standards are produced in established 'male' sports where women's entry is recent; often these masculine-style uniforms do little to alter the image of sportswomen in these sports as masculine themselves. Thus, they are required to justify their place in these sports with more feminine characteristics outside their sport (for example, a photo of Claire Taylor playing violin, former England cricket captain, *Mail on Sunday*, 22/03/09) which reiterate their precarious place in sport and emphasize the gendered divide in masculine sports. By contrast, within cricket, using the same clothes as men might indicate that women are taken more seriously because their gender identity is effectively hidden by 'serious', and perhaps more functional, sports uniforms.

Femininity has a great influence on the design of sports clothes in some sports, and thus one can argue that femininity as an organising principle is widely effective. The more feminine sportswomen appear, whether it is detrimental to their performance or not in terms of functionality, the more likely they are to be given media coverage. One way in which newspapers emphasize femininity is to photograph sportswomen in 'passive' or 'posed' shots, to hide movement and athleticism (Pederson 2002). I found that sportswomen were more often photographed in passive poses in ball gowns or cocktail dresses than in action poses in their sport-specific clothing in interviews, which also tended to focus on their lifestyles and lives outside sport rather than on their sporting activity. Sportsmen on the other hand were photographed mostly in active shots in their sports uniforms in similar reporting. My findings chime with other studies which recognise that women are more likely to be photographed in 'passive' poses, whereas men appear in 'active' shots (Bernstein 2002; Pederson 2002; Vincent et al 2002; Crolley and Teso 2007; Crossman et al 2007). An example of this is 'Creamer Pretty as Picture in Pink' (*The Sunday Times*, 20/07/08: 22). The article's by-line states: 'Top golfer Paula Creamer talks about fashion, George Bush and getting tips from her neighbour, Tiger Woods'. The adjoining photo of her wearing a pink outfit has the caption 'Image Conscious'. Creamer is a professional golfer, which is deemed to be a 'female-appropriate' sport and hence her 'uniform' reflects feminine qualities rather than typically 'male' golf clothing. Image 11 below shows the differences in the uniforms adopted by women golfers. The photos in Image 11 show Creamer and Gulbis both in active shots wearing white, tight shorts and a fitted pink t-shirt, and a short orange skirt and matching t-shirt respectively. The photos display lots of flesh as their legs are uncovered. Professional male golfers very rarely wear shorts, and their trousers and t-shirts tend to not be tightly fitted. Moreover, male golfers wear clothes with quite natural or primary colours.



Image 11. Photos of Paula Creamer and Natalie Gulbis.



Source: Google images, accessed 21/01/12.

The language and photograph in the article suggest a hyper-femininity. By mentioning her interest in fashion and politics, the journalist focuses on Creamer's supposed interests outside her sport. This presents her as defined by things *other* than sport. There is an interesting dichotomy in the three things mentioned; 'fashion' is a feminised activity which portrays Creamer as a typical woman, whereas 'George Bush and Tiger Woods' are iconic male figures in politics and sport, both male-dominated arenas. However, there is an apparent absence of equivalent female role models in this news story, which reflects a wider lack of representation of women icons in the media. This gender imbalance reinforces certain assumptions about the gendered division of labour and the dominance of males in particular roles in society.

One of the principal facets of contemporary western femininity is an interest in fashion and clothes shopping (Bordo 2003). Fashion is a lucrative business which yields a powerful influence over many women: 'the Western fashion system goes hand in hand with the exercise of power' (Craik 2003: preface). Hollows (2000) explains that fashion has become a major target for feminist critique because of its oppressive qualities. Fashion has been described as a sort of mask to disguise the real person or body behind it (Craik 2003). Fashion is one of the ways in which women can conform to certain standards of beauty and femininity. Craik (2003) argues:

Whereas techniques of femininity are acquired and displayed through clothes, looks and gestures, codes of masculinity are inscribed through

codes of action, especially through the codes of sport and competition (12).

Sportswomen are linked to their feminine status and judged by this in the media. Headlines such as: 'The Fashion Rebirth of Venus Williams' (07/06/08) and 'Maria Sharapova Turns Court Into Personal Fashion Catwalk' (25/06/08), both from *The Times*, support this. It is important to challenge such stereotypes, not least because they place those sportswomen who do not conform outside this mediated image. One of the central problems with the use of stereotypes is that they are, as Perkins (1997) suggests, predominantly evaluative. They provide an evaluation not only of sportswomen who do engage in 'fashion' but also of those women who do not as part of the femininity discourse. Thus, there is an isolating factor in stereotypes and one which could be argued is problematic when employed by national media institutions.

An equally problematic stereotype is that sportswomen are 'sexy', which is a relatively new phenomenon, and perhaps a diversionary tactic which detracts from their athleticism. Sport provides an arena for the display of sexualised bodies (as discussed in Chapter Four), and I would argue sports clothing, or the lack thereof, emphasizes this. The normalisation of bare midriffs, bikini-style running shorts and skin-tight leotards adds to an imbalance in gender relations in certain sports. What effect does it have when sportswomen display a sexualised body and sportsmen an athletic body? Choi (2000) discussed the uncomfortable garments worn by long-distance women runners. One marathon runner described how, by the end of a race, she felt as though she had worn a thong to run in instead of the running knickers she had set off wearing which suggests they are not necessarily functional, but are flesh-baring. The photographs in Image 12 below demonstrate the sports uniforms used by 4x100m women and men sprinters in 2012.

Image 12. Photos of the women's and men's winners of the 4x100m final at the 2012 London Olympic Games, displaying the different styles of clothing used by women and men in athletics.



Source: Google images, accessed 13/09/12.

The women wear tight crop tops and briefs, whereas the men wear thigh-length shorts and sleeveless, fairly loose-fitting t-shirts. The abdomens of the male sprinters are never shown, whereas the female sprinters' bottoms and stomachs are almost always on display. It is interesting to contrast the sports uniforms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with those from early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; protecting virtue and modesty dictated women's sports uniforms in the Victorian era, whereas it was more acceptable for men to not have their entire bodies clothed (Craik, 2005). In 2012, the attitudes towards sports uniforms and the display of flesh have changed dramatically; although it is not the norm to cover the body completely, it is much more usual that sportswomen reveal more skin than sportsmen. In fact, the example of Cathy Freeman at the 2000 Sydney Olympics when she wore a full-body suit, demonstrates how uncommon it is for a sportswoman to cover so much of her body (see Image 13 below).

Image 13. Cathy Freeman at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.



Source: Google images, accessed 22/01/12.

Although the discourse surrounding her choice to run in a full-body suit did not focus on her body as sexual, there was a certain amount of surprise from the media. However, it was the technical elements of the suit that were emphasized. Wensing and Bruce (2003: 392) discuss the way in which her uniform was described as an ‘aerodynamic. . . bullet suit’. This issue of flesh-baring sports uniforms is, of course, specific to sports in the Western world, where the display of flesh is not controversial or religiously offensive. The photos of the sprinters in Image 12 show how certain cultural assumptions about femininity and heterosexuality can arise from the difference in sports uniforms between women and men; the notion of women as object for the visual male gaze is particularly evident here. And thus a reappraisal of sports uniforms in order to make them less revealing and gendered, and more functional, especially for women, may be one way to change the current image of the ‘undressed’ female athlete.

In *Beauty and Misogyny* Jeffreys (2005: 88) argues that ‘the creation of sexual difference/deference in fashion is carried out in several ways. . . the requirement that women should display skin while men should not’. Jeffreys states that the fashion industry is overwhelmingly male dominated and that gay male fashion designers are partly to blame for revealing and uncomfortable women’s clothing. The same might be said for women’s clothing in some sports. This elicits questions about the real function of sports uniforms for women; they are not simply functional and technically-specific for a particular sport, but they also play a role in the normalisation and promotion of ‘sexualised femininity’. Any deviation

from this, such as Cathy Freeman's full-body skin suit (Image 13) is widely questioned by the media.

The focus on particular female body parts by the media and popular culture has been critiqued by feminism (Bordo 2003; Jeffreys 2007; Walter 2010). The commodified and packaged body that can be seen in mediated images of sportswomen entrap women into restrictive and oppressive discourses of the self.

The 'trickle down' culture of the sexualisation of women from strip clubs, to the sordid stories about sexualised bodies and sport, as described in Chapter Four: Representative Bodies?, is evident in the following news item about the Wimbledon tennis tournament in 2009. As one of the four major competitions in the tennis calendar, Wimbledon is the most traditional of the four Grand Slams where all competitors must play wearing only white clothing and men's shoulders should be covered by sleeves. In 'How to . . . Make an Impression at Wimbledon (Without Winning a Match)' *The Sunday Times* offered photographic descriptions which suggested female tennis players' clothing choices were breaking certain competition rules:

1. Get them talking about what you're wearing. . .

In 1949, the American Gertrude 'Gorgeous Gussie' Moran stepped on to Centre Court in a short tennis dress with ruffled, lace-trimmed knickers peeping out below the hem. Her tennis was soon forgotten but her dress sense caused a sensation.

2. . . . Or what you're revealing.

On to 1979 and the 18-year-old Linda Siegel is taking on Billie Jean King. The best advice is to leave everything on court, and that's exactly what she does; after two sets her micro-dress can barely contain her chest, and snappers rejoice when the inevitable finally happens.

3. There's obeying the rules. . .

The Wimbledon dress code requires 'almost entirely white', which the aptly named Anne White took to extremes in 1985 by turning up to play Pam Shriver in a cat-suit that left very little to the imagination.

4. . . . And obeying the rules.

Two years ago France's Tatiana Golovin evoked memories of Gussie Moran as she complied with the all-white requirement as far as her (impossibly short) skirt was concerned, but sported

bright red knickers beneath it. Her challenge ended in the second round but her challenge attracted a lot of attention (28/06/09: 19).

According to my research, articles of this nature, alongside stories and photographs of the glamour models and porn stars which I discussed in Chapter Four, tended to be printed on the last few pages of sports sections. In this case the story was printed on the penultimate page in *The Sunday Times*. These stories seem to be throw-away entertainment, easy reading with a pleasurable slant for a mainly male readership. I found that newspapers such as *The Observer* produce a steady output of similar stories about sportswomen and their sexed bodies.

The four photographs that adorned the 'How to . . .' story showed Moran's lace-trimmed knickers and the top of her thighs, Siegel's nipples, White's skin-tight cat suit and Golovin's bottom as she bent over wearing red knickers. On the day this article and photographs were published there were 39 articles on sportsmen and six on sportswomen. *The Sunday Times*, then, dedicated one of only six articles published on sportswomen on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2009 to photographs of their body parts and the tennis players' ability to gain attention for things aside from sporting activities. This type of reporting is not only blatantly sexist, but it also plays on the stereotypes of women as 'entertainment' for readers. Femininity and sexuality are highlighted while demeaning comments about their tennis performances mark them out as 'fashionable' women trying to make statements and not as athletes to be taken seriously.

The journalist responsible for this story, Mark Thomas, may have written this piece in jest, a way of 'making fun of' the fashion interest in Wimbledon and the way in which certain rules are bent by competitors. Nonetheless, Thomas plays with the idea of women as spectacle rather than athletes. That Thomas does not take women's tennis seriously is clear. Pronger (1990) states that this can be explained by the socially constructed 'myth of difference' where 'women are not the fellows of men' (in Wenner 2009: 122). Zoonen (1998), however, argues that it is capitalism, rather than sexism, which is at fault: 'Journalism as a whole, driven by market forces, is becoming more and more focused on human interest and personalised stories, pushing private life into the public eye' (113). There are two aspects of Zoonen's statement which relate to the 'How to . . .' article. Firstly, due to economic reasons, both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers resemble one another more and more as they

aim to take the majority share of the market. It seems to be understood that the way to increase sales is to focus on the personal and the sexual. This is the second point, in that 'personalised stories' and 'private lives' could also be read, in the context of this news story, as private body parts. The focus on female tennis players' bottoms and breasts exploits women's bodies. This is one of the central issues that feminists fought against in second wave feminism; the right to control their own bodies. These are subtle ways in which the media control the image of the female body and therefore exert power over it. Thus it is vital that this remains an issue for feminists to consider. A third point, which Zoonen does not address, is the influence that notions of hegemonic gender have on journalism. For example, the most important aspect to highlight in this news story is that sportsmen's bodies do not feature in the same way in newspapers; there was not a single example in my data where sportsmen were deemed to be attracting attention during competitions by revealing parts of their sexual bodies. This gender imbalance constructs sportswomen as visual objects and sportsmen as real athletes.

The attention by certain sections of the media on women's body parts should be seen as prejudicial, but instead the agency is placed on women's shoulders and the image of 'the liberated, sexy woman who actively chooses to display her body' is promoted. This simultaneously frames some sportswomen as sexy and willing to show their private bodies to the world, and extends the distance between these sportswomen and their athletic status.

Sometimes women play up to the feminised, fashion-conscious reputation and wear clothes which provoke a reaction. For example, Serena Williams wore a t-shirt at the press conference after she won her 11<sup>th</sup> Grand Slam title at Wimbledon, with the slogan 'Are you looking at my titles?' emblazoned across her chest (Image 14).

Image 14. Photo of Serena Williams after winning Wimbledon in 2009.



Source: Google images, accessed 18/12/11.

The photograph was published in many newspapers, not least *The Sunday Telegraph* and the *Mail on Sunday* (05/07/09). The play on words on the t-shirt caught the media's attention and confirmed Williams' interest in fashion, self-promotion and teasing the audience. Third-wave feminists would argue that sportswomen expressing themselves and having fun with fashion is a demonstration of the liberated woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Levy 2005). It also communicates the prevalence of the feminine sportswoman who takes an active interest in fashion, working on her appearance and pleasing others, according to her mediated representation. This type of stereotypical representation isolates sportswomen who do not engage in a particular kind of femininity, thus creating a social hierarchy where feminine sportswomen are at the top, and those who are not interested, are placed at the bottom.

It is important to recognise the role sponsors have in the clothing choices sportspeople make as Boyle and Haynes (2000) demonstrate. For example, in the 1990s Nike paid approximately \$400 million over ten years for the sponsorship of the Brazilian national football team. As part of their contract, Nike required the Brazilian national team to play five exhibition matches every year and it later emerged that the sports brand could handpick the opponents, in order to ensure successful exposure of their client. Boyle and Haynes argue that this is one example of the symbolic blurring of the 'balance between sporting and commercial interests. . . in the media-centred world of professional football' (47). It is probable that sportspeople's sponsorship deals tie them contractually to particular types of clothes; it would therefore be remiss to assume that sportswomen have a completely free choice over which clothes they wear during and outside sports.

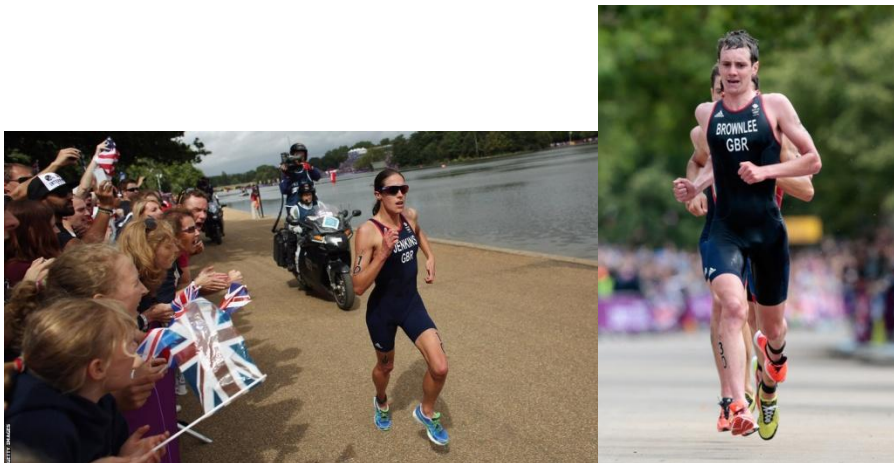


In 2011, the Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA) suggested that women should wear skirts in boxing competitions. They presented female competitors with skirts to be trialled during the 2011 European Boxing Championships. The AIBA reasoned that it 'would allow spectators to distinguish them from men' ('Women's Boxing Split. . .'). Several women complained that they wanted to wear shorts just like the men. This is interesting in two ways. Firstly, the AIBA encourages women to differentiate themselves from men, not vice versa, in order to create a clearly gendered distinction. The consequences of such a rule are unclear, but one could assume that it may relate to the audience reception of women boxers, in that as they dress more in accordance with a particular concept of femininity, they may be more accepted by spectators who recognise them as women. However, I argue that this would create a complex dichotomy whereby femininity of appearance contrasts with the violence displayed in boxing. Could this be an attempt by the AIBA to trivialise women's boxing by bringing together femininity and violence, and revealing them as titillating when conjoined? After all, as has been discussed in previous chapters, women's boxing has elicited wide criticism from the media and by male boxers. Secondly, the women who were keen to 'look like the men' reproduce ideas about conforming to typically male sports and their rules, as well as aiming towards male standards in sport. This seems to be typical of women who participate in traditionally male sports, especially ones which have a long history of exclusively male participation and a recent entry of women competing in them. In sports such as football, rugby, cricket and basketball which constitute predominantly male team sports globally, women have fought to wear the same uniforms as men as a way of conforming to established customs, perhaps in order to not 'rock the boat' and be taken seriously as athletes. The contrast to this is sport which is more typically 'feminine' where women's roles are not as precarious and therefore they have more liberty for self-expression through clothing in terms of appearing distinctly different from men. Another interpretation of sportswomen wanting to dress in the same uniforms as men could be that the 'traditionally male' kit is the best option to compete in, for example that the baggy shorts and t-shirts worn by football players are comfortable and practical for the sport's requirements. Moreover, with football's long tradition, it could be argued that the men's kit is technically better than female versions due to years of improving it to ensure it is the most functional for players. Boyle and Haynes (2000: 47) discuss a triangular relationship between sport, sponsors and television 'that has come to dominate the economic structure of modern sport'.

They explain that professional sport is reliant on commercial sponsorship, which in turn requires media exposure of their brand. Therefore, I would argue that it is partly the capitalist system of profit, and partly a gendered ideology which determine the clothing choices for female athletes, and subsequently affect their media representation.

However, I would suggest that professional athletes' clothing needs to be determined primarily by the constraints of their sport and the need to provide adequate technical attire in order to train and compete in the best way possible. I do not accept that women and men should wear different styles of clothing in competitions where they represent their countries. For example, in triathlon sportswomen and men wear the same style of tri suits (see Image 15 below) which do not mark their sexes. The photo shows two prominent British athletes, Helen Jenkins and Alistair Brownlee, who were both World ITU (International Triathlon Union) Triathlon Champions in 2011. They both wear the British 'trisuit' which is genderless in that it does not appear to be designed specifically for women or men, but for both. In this way the photos present a more equal picture of the athletes

Image 15. Helen Jenkins and Alistair Brownlee wearing the British triathlon kit at the 2012 London Olympic Games.



Source: Google images, accessed 25/08/12.

The similarity in dress of sportswomen and men in triathlon promotes greater equality. As it is a relatively new sport for both genders there are few sexist practices as in other sports with longer traditions of male dominance. In the vast majority of more established sports, sportswomen are encouraged to adopt

certain stereotypical personality traits which mark their genders; in other words, a particular kind of femininity. Stone and Horne (1995) explain how women skiers must display their femininity in order receive better treatment from competition organisers. They state that television companies and ski resorts,

Do not fall over each other to organise ladies' competitions. . . Lady skiers must learn to promote themselves, make themselves available for happy, uncritical and positive TV interviews. They must show themselves. . . play on their youth and pretty faces (95).

Although this quote is from 1995 my research in 2012 and other recent studies support the argument that sportswomen should emphasize a particular kind of femininity which would aid them in the promotion of their sport, which is ultimately their responsibility (Jones et al 1999; Harris and Clayton 2002; Sisjord and Kristiansen 2009; Sailors et al 2012).

The framing of sportswomen as displaying a particular kind of femininity linked to 'ladylike' behaviour can be seen frequently in the British print media. In the following example, the journalist inverts the athletic and ambitious characters of the Williams sisters in favour of feminine timidity during the Australian Open in 2009.

The only time Serena Williams has looked befuddled during this year's Australian Open came when a half-naked man. . . suddenly leapt on to court when she was playing doubles with her older sister Venus. The stalker performed a couple of dance moves for the Californian girls and then ran off. Serena and Venus looked all coy, averting their eyes as if they were a couple of young girls in a Jane Austen book, who, on an afternoon stroll, had stumbled across men from the village bathing in the stream (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 25/01/09).

There are many comments which can be made about this article. Firstly, the infantilising of the Williams sisters by journalist Mark Hodgkinson sets up an almost perverted situation; he refers to the 'girls' and their reaction to an adult stalker, and yet by 'averting their eyes' they are presented as clearly demonstrating that they understand what to look away from, which might not be the case if they actually *were* girls instead of adult women. Moreover, the journalist then returns to the idea of them being 'young girls' who come across

'men' in an Austen-style setting. By setting up this binary of youthful femininity and adult masculinity, a gender structure is created and prevails over the women and men involved in this incident. Secondly, the framing of the Williams sisters as not only much younger than their years, but also 'coy' which suggests a certain innocence, adds to an image of them as passive and inferior to the active and bold streaker. The Williams sisters are often described as aggressive and powerful tennis players which contrasts sharply with this Austen-referenced description of them. Perhaps the very fact that they are known in the media as strong women contributed to this version of events, which dilutes somewhat their powerful personas and places them almost in a position of danger. Another explanation of why they averted their eyes could be to continue their focus on the competition rather than be distracted by an intruder.

'Ladylike' appears to be the ultimate media compliment for sportswomen, and stereotypes a particular type of woman whom the media praise. Women who compete in typically masculine sports such as javelin are rarely referred to as ladylike; in my data I found very little news coverage of women in these types of sports. The articles which are published tend to focus on their feminine side. Goldie Sayers is a good example of a sportswoman who has received more coverage than she typically would if it were not for her femininity, in that she acts and appears more feminine than her fellow female competitors and she is presented in such a way too. Sayers competes for Great Britain in the javelin which is not a sport which traditionally garners many column inches. This applies even less to Sayers' peers who are often muscular and large. Sayers is an unusually small javelin thrower who also conforms to certain 'femininity' standards. For example, in 'Spear of Destiny' *The Sunday Times* reported that,

With her girlish grin and blonde ponytail, Sayers - who, at 5ft 7in, is small by javelin-throwing standards - doesn't quite fit the javelin-thrower stereotype. Last year she even posed as a Playboy bunny for the UK Athletics calendar (24/08/08).

*The Observer*, along similar lines, said of Goldie Sayers that, 'It seems that having a girl's touch may not be such a bad thing these days' (*The Observer*, 27/07/08: 9). These types of media comment reiterate the need for sportswomen to frame themselves and be framed by the media as feminine, particularly in masculine sports. I term this type of commentary as 'accessorising femininity', in other words, attaching feminine adjectives and characteristics to the reporting on

sportswomen in order to adjust their media image to fit the hegemonic feminine ideal. Without comments such as 'girlish grin', 'blond ponytail' and 'a girl's touch', Sayers might not be constructed as sufficiently feminine since she is an athlete who throws javelins.

Femininity goes hand-in-hand with domesticity. The stereotype of the sportswoman as 'domestic goddess' arguably offsets her athleticism and therefore increases her cultural capital. A news story about a young female cyclist who was a double world junior champion in 2009 and won a silver medal at the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010 for the senior track cycling team, focused solely on her love of baking:

Since moving from Wales to Manchester to train with the Great Britain cycling team, I have become a massive fan of baking. I think it has a little to do with boredom. We sit around with a lot of spare time between training and if you don't want to go shopping and spend money, what could be better than making cakes?

When I was 15, I used to work in a coffee shop in Abergavenny called 'For the Love of Cake'. I was always inspired by their cakes, which looked amazing and tasted better. My mum has always baked, so it runs in our family.

I bake about four times a week and am always looking at cooking magazines or books for inspiration. Cupcakes are my speciality, especially the ones with a gooey centre. As soon as I started, I couldn't stop.

As an athlete, I have to watch the calories, but I don't really make cakes for me to eat. I just enjoy making them for others. I'm always taking a batch in to our mechanics for their feedback and I sent a friend off to university last month with a massive pile of cupcakes (*The Sunday Times*, 05/11/11).

This story frames a prominent British female cyclist in the domestic sphere; the entire news item focuses on her love of baking. One of the facets of traditional femininity and the ideal housewife is doing things for others and being a 'giver'. James describes how she does not make cakes for herself, but for others.

This sets up an interesting binary between the selfless woman and the selfish athlete which is more nuanced than first appears in that women who are athletes, might also be expected to be the 'selfless' homemaker, but what happens when they are simply athletes and not the latter? It is commonly reported in the media that successful athletes need to be wholly focused on themselves, their training and their requirements. The need of a 'support network', in the shape of family, partners, children, coaches and sports institutions, is often cited as important. This is the antithesis of normative and traditional femininity, in that a 'selfish' sportswoman, particularly someone who is married and has children, is often derided for her commitment to activities outside the domestic sphere. Burton Nelson (1994) discusses the way in which running, whether at elite level or otherwise, 'gives meaning to the phrase "free time" for women' (31) because when they run they become the person who needs care, and who needs to give herself something, away from family duties. Moreover, she argues that women who engage in sport challenge the traditional domestic role of women and 'raise[s] the possibility that mothers will leave fathers at home to wash dishes and put kids to bed' (29). Frohlick (2006) in 'Wanting the Children and Wanting K2' discusses the term 'sacrificial motherhood' in relation to women climbers' mediated image as bad mothers. Frohlick argues that women are situated between two narratives, of motherhood and of climbing, which are incompatible. In my own data, there were four mentions of motherhood in articles on Paula Radcliffe. It seems that when a woman decides to spend time away from her family and domestic duties she is criticised for the impact this may have on her family, whereas the 'duty' of a father is rarely mentioned in the same context. In 2010, a billboard placed around London stating 'Career Women Make Bad Mothers' was quickly covered up because of heavy criticism from women and mothers ('Career Women Make Bad Mothers' Billboards Pulled'). Women argued that it was irresponsible and demonised women. One of the debates which arose from this campaign centred on men and fathers not being the objects of similarly damaging statements. Of course this links to the idea that women's central focus in life should be their reproductive role. Sportswomen challenge this concept, simply by becoming elite athletes who are focused on their bodies not as reproductive entities, but as capable of athletic feats. Negotiating career and femininity are thus constructed as a different process for sportswomen.

## The Categorisation of Women in Sports Media: Negotiating Stereotypical Femininity

*'What happens when a woman becomes an athlete? Everything' (Burton Nelson, 1994: 3).*

Gender is used in the sports media as a social stratification tool to promote a binary division in the way that women and men are viewed. In other words, the gender of a sportsperson dictates either a superior or inferior 'social position' within a mediated context. I will begin by demonstrating how stereotypical femininity, while standing in the shadow of dominant masculinity, emphasizes a lower social positioning of sportswomen in the media. Professional sportswomen, due to the requirements of their jobs as elite athletes, fit into a specific group of women, characterised by their age range, body consciousness, sexualised by popular culture, heteronormativity, fashion and a display of flesh. These elements, which affect women outside sport in the same age range just like the majority of sportswomen, contribute to a continuous battle for sportswomen in the negotiation they experience of femininity, and by extension their place in the social hierarchy. In order to be taken seriously as athletes at the same time as being 'accepted' by sports media, sportswomen must accommodate these elements of stereotypical femininity into their public personas.

Femininity is highly valued by media institutions when assessing a woman's function and relevance in society; her commercial appeal is inextricably linked to her femininity and adherence to accepted norms of femininity. The 'feminine capital' of women in the entertainment business appears to be more highly valued than that of female athletes, because of the more overt displays of femininity in entertainment. An example of this is an inadvertent comparison made between a sportswoman and pop singers in *The Sunday Times*. The news of Hannah Miley breaking a European swimming record, just four months before she would represent Great Britain at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, was placed next to a photo of the Sugababes, an all-female singing group (*The Sunday Times*, 06/04/08: 12). The photo of the singers was the same size as the news of the new European swimming record. Their importance, both the swimmer's and the singers', thus visually equalised. Miley's image does not engage in the same type of femininity that the Sugababes do, particularly as a successful athlete in a sport where femininity is not readily on display because of

the way that bodies are almost entirely covered.<sup>38</sup> The important point is that whereas Miley's image is unlikely to appear outside the sports pages, photos of the Sugababes may be published in a number of contexts, including as in this instance, on the sports pages. This highlights their greater marketability, possibly because they are ultimately marketable as a certain form of desirable femininity. In other words, they have more 'feminine' capital than Miley does.

Considering the under-representation of sportswomen in the British print media in 2008 and 2009, printing photographs of singers, instead of giving more media space to sportswomen, distracts attention from women in sport. In fact, the promotion of women not connected to sport *in* the sports news is detrimental to sportswomen and their media representation. It suggests that the sports media privilege women whose display of femininity is prominent. By seemingly assigning a higher level of importance to women who display a more pronounced form of femininity, the media question the role of sportswomen, particularly where femininity is restricted by the nature of their sports (for example, in the case of Miley, she wears a swim cap, goggles and full-length costume which covers most of her 'feminine' body, see Image 16).

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<sup>38</sup> During my research period, professional swimmers tended to wear full-body suits for competitions. In January 2010 all high-tech, non-textile swimsuits were banned from competitions by world swimming governing body FINA. They were deemed to unfairly aid swimmers who had access to them, especially the model from Italian manufacturer Jaked. The new rules also stated that full body suits were prohibited; suits must now not extend below the knee or over the shoulder strap ('Fina Bans Hi-tech Swimsuits. . .').



Image 16. Hannah Miley, British swimmer and silver medallist in 400m Individual Medley at the 2011 World Championships.



Source: Google images, accessed 27/01/12.

The media may reason that using women from the entertainment industry in order to boost sales is common in sports reporting. This is consistent with my findings: Katie Price (aka Jordan) was featured in photographic format on the front cover and inside *The Sunday Times* after the 2009 London marathon. She is not a professional runner, but a glamour model and business woman. There were several female professional British marathon runners who took part in the 2009 event, none of whom were mentioned on the front cover or inside *The Sunday Times*. This demonstrates three things about the representation of women in the British sports media, firstly, the prevalence of privileging 'attractive' women from entertainment industries over 'skilled' women from elite sport. Professional sportswomen who possess sporting ability, similar to sportsmen, are perhaps not considered as 'interesting' as a glamour model, who is more visually attractive. Secondly, women's sport is not taken seriously; the gender order in marathon races is reflected in the way in which the men's race is viewed as the 'real' race and the women's is simply a side show. This dilutes the value of the women's race, which is mirrored in the media coverage of the event. Thirdly, on a more practical level, the promotion of Katie Price as a female representative of the marathon in 2009 highlights issues of access to sport; her image displaces sportswomen from sport and its media coverage.

Katie Price may possess a powerful status in the entertainment industry, which is sufficient to use her as advertising material in the sports pages. One woman with institutional power in sport is Karen Brady. She is an outspoken woman who works in one of the most male-dominated sports, football. As chairwoman of West Ham football club, she represents one of the only examples of women who work in the upper echelons of football. Nonetheless, a news item about her published in *The Sunday Times* displayed photographs of her in sexy outfits, including silk lingerie-style tops (27/12/09). Due to this sexualised representation, her 'social position' in sport was automatically altered and her authority weakened by framing her as 'sexy' rather than 'powerful'. There were no examples of chairmen photographed in the same way. I suggest that this type of reporting sustains the prevalent gender order in sports where women are decorative, not authoritative. It might be useful to employ Cashmore's (1996) interpretation that, 'if women's bodies were controlled effectively then they would be controlled' (135). In other words, controlling women's bodies by presenting them in derogatory ways equates to the social control of women.

The idea of socially controlling women through their mediated image is particularly relevant to a story which appeared in *The Observer* stating: 'Emma Ania, a former lingerie model, is using the savings from her modelling career to fund her ambition to run in London 2012' (22/06/08: 20). There are two ways in which Ania is controlled by the sports media. Firstly, by publicizing the information that the sportswoman was a lingerie model, a certain stereotype of her is displayed. Further, this information indicates that she does not receive enough money from her athletics career to support herself, and by extension that she is not good enough as an athlete. Secondly, her positioning in this story structures the public's perception of her and perpetuates the image of women as 'not natural athletes'; her 'double' career seems to indicate that she has not dedicated herself enough to being an athlete, unlike most male athletes. She is in fact negotiating two careers in order to have access to athletic opportunities. Ania is framed as possessing a certain kind of femininity by publicizing her career as a lingerie model, even though she is not the agent of this promotion. In other words it is the media who are responsible for this representation, which subtly suggests that Ania is keen to promote her previous career. Boyle and Haynes (2000: 62) state that 'only the sponsored survive' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where sponsorship, sport and the media links produce lucrative deals for a successful minority, while the majority struggle to survive as professional athletes without major

sponsorship deals. Here it is important to point out that different sports have different systems of sponsorship. For example, on the one hand Premiership football players compete mostly for their clubs which are sponsored by a number of companies. Sponsorship deals in football, due to the extensive television coverage of matches, involves large sums of money. On the other hand, runners mostly compete on an international stage representing their countries and these events do not garner as much live coverage compared to football, which equates to less lucrative deals. In fact, the majority of athletes in England who compete predominantly for their country receive modest salaries from lottery funds ('Britain's Golden Medal Haul. . .'). In this way the promotion of Ania's previous career as a lingerie model, can be seen as self-sponsorship and the media show her as using a particular kind of femininity to promote herself.

The idea of a double career for women is prevalent in sports reporting which commonly suggests that women have 'other' things in life outside of their sports careers. Serena Williams was reported to have achieved her ultimate goal in life, not in tennis, her chosen career, but in Africa. In 'Serena Finds Her True Calling in African Adventure' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 21/06/09: 7) Mark Hodgkinson deflects attention away from her successes in tennis and onto a much more humanitarian and caring role in international development. Framing her in this way suggests that despite her success in tennis, her 'true calling' is an humanitarian one and can be found in a place where there are no opportunities for her to demonstrate her tennis ability. Moreover, it implies that her identity as professional tennis player is not adequate enough to fulfil her. The reportedly 'innate' caring nature of women is often cited when discussing gender differences. By framing a strong, athletic woman as tender and caring, the media create a stereotyped feminized persona for Williams. After all, a female athletic body can be seen as a symbol of empowerment which escapes traditional images of femininity and domesticity. It appears that sections of the media attempt to redress this image and restore the view that sportswomen are primarily feminine and domestic creatures, and secondly, take part in sport.

The negotiation required of women in most professions between their careers and their families is equally present in sport. Until women are no longer predominately the primary childcare providers in families, this negotiation will continue to occur. Men, on the other hand, do not experience the same 'negotiation'. Although there is a growing debate about fathers as primary care-givers and redefining men's roles in families (Gregory and Milner 2011),

sportsmen seem to be inured from this. It would be interesting then to analyse the representation of sportsmen who are fathers and husbands, such as David Beckham. One element of parenthood and sportspeople that warrants attention here is the effect which having children has on elite athletes and their post-career opportunities. When sportswomen have children, there is a major impact on their sports careers which require them to be physically fit and capable of training. Pregnancy and the post-partum period are not easily reconciled with the demands of elite sport and thus for many sportswomen postponing pregnancy until their athletic careers finish is preferable. The privileging of the female body for sport rather than reproduction can produce ambivalent reflections in the media (Choi 2000), whereas for sportsmen, having children has little impact on their careers. Often the role of sportsmen as fathers is not judged by the same criteria as women, especially when sports events clash with family priorities, including the birth of sportsmen's children. The significance of becoming a parent is lower for men in sport. However, it is often shown as a way of reinforcing a sportsman's masculinity by contrasting their muscular physiques with the fragility of their newborn babies. The *Hello!* magazine style 'at home' photo spreads after a birth emphasize the feminine/masculine dichotomy in the media, and are more commonly undertaken by sportsmen than sportswomen.

When sportspeople end their careers as elite athletes there are a variety of opportunities open to them. Few studies have been conducted on post-sports careers and they focus primarily on identity formation (Stier 2007; Mwaniki 2012). In spite of this I would argue that there is a gendered binary in the paths available to athletes upon retirement. Sportsmen, particularly in mainstream sports such as football, cricket and rugby, have several options including coaching, commentary, television presenting, and public and charity roles. Elite athletes who have made a ready transition to a second career include Sebastian Coe, Mark Foster, Greg Rusedski, Matthew Pinsent, Martin Johnson, Steve Redgrave, Jonathon Edwards, Gary Linekar and David Coulthard. There are a number of women, such as Kelly Holmes, Sue Barker, Sharon Davies and Claire Taylor, who have secured post-sports careers in the public domain. However, their options are not as numerous. Access to sport and opportunities within sports for women are unequal compared to those of men during and after a professional sports career. It is important to recognise that the options for professional sportswomen upon retirement are reflected in their social positioning by the media during and after their careers as athletes; the feminine, attractive and domesticated woman is

privileged in accordance with the most common media representation of sportswomen. However, by not taking female athletes seriously, the media image of sportswomen twinned with societal expectations of gender roles beyond a certain age has an impact on the opportunities available for women post-sports career.

As mentioned previously the image of women as 'domesticated homemakers' is one of the most privileged in popular media and widely disseminated in society. The socialisation of girls and women occurs principally in the domestic sphere and through mediated images of femininity, whereas the socialisation of boys and men takes place mostly outside the home (Yelland 1998; Holloway and Valentine 2000). Wenner (2009) discusses the pub as the 'third space' for men after work and home. He also identified the sports stadium as the place where boys learn to be men. I would agree that both pub culture, despite its decline in recent years, and the sports stadium, are predominantly male arenas in which male socialisation and the embedding of sport as a vehicle for male bonding occurs. The sports sections of newspapers can be seen as an extension of this; male bonding over sports occurs within them and the newspapers act as a forum for the socialisation of boys and men into masculine behaviours and attitudes linked to sport. This ignores women in sport.

The ultimate exclusion sometimes occurs in the sports news in an unadulterated, explicit manner, and I would argue in an almost pub-style conversational manner. In 'Five Best Sporting Achievements of the Decade', Paul Hayward discusses the gender difference in sports achievements,

BBC Radio Five Live stoked a merry to-and-fro this week in their search for the top-10 accomplishments. Kelly Holmes winning two golds at the Athens Olympics showed how parochialism taints these lists. The No.1, assuming he is clean, must be Usain Bolt demolishing the World 100m and 200m records (*The Observer*, 27/12/09: 16).

The privileging of male achievements over female ones is presented as though it is the only 'natural' conclusion. This mimics the naturalised discourse prevalent in sports reporting on the differing athletic abilities of women and men.

A more balanced reporting on sportswomen in terms of amount and quality of reporting is the most important adjustment that needs to be made in order to

improve their media representation. Before collecting my data I had assumed that sportsmen would be more regularly cast in the role of aggressive players than sportswomen, informed by the view that masculinity, violence and sport are commonly interlinked. However, this was not the case. In fact, I was surprised to find a wealth of material on 'angry' sportswomen. Although the reporting of angry or aggressive sportswomen is still quite unusual and certainly puts into question hegemonic femininity, it was not exclusively a male phenomenon and occurred in sports not considered 'aggressive' such as tennis. I will now turn to the reporting on sportswomen and aggressive language.

### 'What's so Funny?': Insulting Language and Stereotypical Linguistic Violence

The position of sportswomen in the British print media is precarious in that the diverse representations of women amount to a confusing and sometimes contradictory image, as well as the privileging of a certain kind of sportswomen. As was seen in previous chapters, there have been requests in the media for sportswomen to be taken more seriously as athletes. The opposite of this, mocking or making fun of sportswomen, is evident in numerous formats – some overtly sexist in nature and others less so. For example, *The Sunday Times* published a story about Novak Djokovic (World No.3 male tennis player in 2008) doing impressions of Maria Sharapova (World no.1 female tennis players in 2008) on court at major tennis competitions (15/06/08). While he did impressions of other players, he became well known for his mimicking and poking fun at Sharapova's on-court behaviour. Djokovic's joking behaviour was not aimed exclusively at Sharapova; in 2007 he became renowned for imitating several professional tennis players including Nadal, Roddick and Federer. The notable difference is that Sharapova was the only woman tennis player who was part of Djokovic's repertoire, and the only player, of either gender, which *The Sunday Times* focused on in this story. The paper thus manipulated the context in which the imitations occurred, ultimately isolating the sportswoman as the only target of the imitations. While Sharapova was reported to find them funny, do the imitations, through their media display, serve to remind audiences and readers that in sport sportswomen are laughable, decorative, replicable and visually pleasurable before they are seen as real athletes?

Throughout 2008 and 2009 *The Sunday Times* employed different images of sportswomen, including ones that were maternal, feminine, jealous and ambitious – all ways of concreting the idea of sportswomen as something *other* than natural

athletes. I will focus now on the paper's representation of angry women in its sports coverage. For example, the newspaper published popular presentations of women as 'bitchy'. One such article discussed the way in which women love to hate one another (24/05/09). It is interesting that very little scholarship has focused on the mediated 'bitchiness' in a sports context. However, popular media images of women regularly focus on stereotypes of an almost 'aggressive femininity' with a competitive edge, particularly in relation to dating, boyfriends and extra-marital affairs.

In the wake of the Tiger Woods scandal in 2009 when it was made public that he had had several extra-marital affairs *The Sunday Times* inverted this scandal and looked at examples of 'scorned spouses' (16/12/09). Similar to the events which were speculated to have taken place at the Woods' residence, the newspaper described five 'wives' who attacked their sporting partners. The angle that the newspaper took is an interesting one in that many publications at the time of the Woods scandal criticised him for his behaviour. Several factors must be taken into consideration when reviewing this story. Firstly, the Woods scandal began in November 2009 and one month later he was named Athlete of the Decade by the Associated Press ('Woods, Despite Everything, is Voted Athlete of the Decade'). Secondly, on the same day *The Sunday Times* published the news items about wives who attack their sports husbands, *The Sunday Telegraph* printed the news that Woods' wife Elin Nordegren had decided to divorce the golfing icon ('Tiger Woods: Wife Elin Nordegren "Has Decided to Divorce Him"'). The context is important in reading this news story about scorned wives because it provides a background to what the press were discussing at the time. The demonization of women in this story inverts previous depictions of adultery and focuses instead on the victims (most commonly the wives of sportsmen) and their violent actions when faced with stories of cheating husbands. It could be argued that this type of reporting supports the instigators of the affairs, in this case Woods, and frames women as stereotypically 'crazy' for their aggressive reactions. This is a particular discourse which focuses, not on the infidelity in question, but on the 'angry' women.

The same publication, *The Sunday Times*, published another article, one month before the scorned wives piece, on sportswomen who 'lost the plot' (15/11/09). The focus on angry women is quite common in sports reporting, but the question is, why are women angry? And by extension, why are they sometimes presented as angry? Some examples of the mediated image of 'angry women' include:

1. Serena Williams was presented as 'dangerously' angry at the 2009 and 2011 US Open. The tennis player reacted with anger at a linesperson and an umpire's decisions during the semi-final and final respectively. Williams expressed her anger verbally, with occasionally veiled threats at women officials. She was subsequently fined several thousand dollars as punishment.
2. In 2009 and 2010 the Associated Press (AP) Female Athlete of the Year voted Zenyatta, a horse, to second place. This angered many sportswomen who felt that human female athletes had been left off the list of contenders in place of an animal. It was pointed out that all the nominees on the list of Male Athlete of the Year were humans, not animals.
3. In 2011, Paula Radcliffe was reported to be angry at the decision by the IAAF to declassify her marathon World Record set in London 2005 because there were male pacemakers present in the race. The athletics association deemed this to be an unfair advantage to women and thus altered the women's marathon record. *The Guardian* argued that this was sexism in its simplest form in that 'Paula Radcliffe Has Committed the Twin Sins of Being Good and a Woman' (25/09/11). Two months after this rule-change and after much debate and protest within the sports community, the IAAF revoked their decision.
4. In 2007 the England women's football team were said to be 'angry' at the £40 daily wage they would receive during the football World Cup. They argued that it was a dismal salary for an athlete representing their country, regardless of gender. The media, at the time, seemed sceptical regarding the women's plight.
5. Victoria Pendleton was presented as angry after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games that there was not gender parity in the events open to athletes in track cycling. She argued that it was blatant sexism that there were twice as many opportunities for male athletes to compete as for female ones. Subsequently the International Olympic Committee (IOC) changed the number of events in track cycling so that there is gender parity in 2012.

It is interesting that several of these stories of 'angry' women were related to gender inequalities in sport. In some of these cases, positive changes in institutional systems were created, in other words, these sportswomen's anger and their campaigns actually improved the situation of women in sport. However,



in the Zenyatta example, despite fervent opposition to the horse's nomination in 2009, the Associated Press continued to categorise the horse as part of the women's athlete of the year competition.

Where sports are established and male dominance in those sports is the norm, it is often the case that women must take the initiative to highlight inequalities and demand institutional change. The sexual scripts which have marked clear divisions in the expected abilities and behaviours of women and men in sport, then, are only challenged when women become the agents of change. It seems that sportswomen must take on the task of underlining sexism in sport, including in the media, which only serves to emphasize the gendered division in sport and media.

In the case of Serena Williams, little has changed in the mediated representation of her as a stereotypical angry woman. An article on [feministing.com](http://feministing.com) argued that this is a race issue and that Williams is in fact presented as an angry *black* woman ('Serena Williams. . .'). There are several stereotypes of race in sports media discourse. Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004) found that participants equated black athletes with having bigger muscles and, as a consequence, more power. Some of the sports in which black athletes are most dominant are sprinting and boxing. The 'pumped up' image of athletes in these sports is viewed by some as attached to a naturalised aggression. However, despite the more frequent representation of black athletes as violent, both physically and verbally, I would argue that Williams' mediated representation as 'angry and aggressive' is more likely to be associated with a deviation from traditional femininity. Since the 1980s John McEnroe, Andre Agassi and Andy Murray have been some of the tennis players who have been fined significant sums of money for bad language and behaviour on court at major tennis championships ('Swearing at Wimbledon'). However, few male tennis players have been fined on the scale of Williams.

Angry women represent danger to sport in that they have the potential to alter gender relations. Angry WAGs are conceivably even more volatile, compared to sportswomen or celebrities, since they do not 'need' the media and sports institutions in the same way that athletes do (to ensure publicity for themselves and exposure for their sponsors). Stereotypes of angry WAGs represent an inversion of power relations – unwilling to be typecast as passive and accepting of their spouse's actions. Their sporting spouses hold more media power in the

newspaper context and thus they are left in a more precarious position. Because their function in the media is not sport-related, but for 'entertainment' purposes, the impact of the injustices they experience is diminished and they are framed as unjustly 'crazy'. This replicates, to a certain extent, the position of 'angry' sportswomen who campaign to change sports rules and norms. Both sets of women challenge existing gender orders and demand a different treatment of women.

Do newspapers endorse any of the campaigns to support sportswomen who are 'angry' because of gender inequalities in sport? There was an interesting example of how newspapers deal with lobbies such as those to defend the rights of women in sport: a media storm in 2011 took place after the publication of the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year (SPOTY) nominee list, which was bereft of women. In previous years there have usually been two or three women nominated on the list of ten sportspeople. In the competition's history, only 12 women have won the award, but rarely in the past decade has there been an entirely male nomination list. The media reacted to this news with both supporters and detractors demonstrating their opinions on gender relations in sport. For three or so days in December 2011 the SPOTY competition, and as a consequence several sportswomen, received more press coverage than they routinely would. However, when the media storm blew over and the smoke rose, the average newspaper coverage for women in sport returned to its low levels (my data showed the average coverage for sportswomen in December 2008 and 2009 in all the newspapers under investigation was 2.5%). Thus, I argue that newspapers often fail to reflect on their gender policies; in other words, those publications who spoke out against the lack of women on the SPOTY list continued to support women only minimally. Their theoretical views on women's place in sport need to be put into practice by publishing news stories on women more regularly.

Of the 2.5% of all coverage on sportswomen in December, which is symptomatic of the coverage throughout the calendar year in British newspapers, there is a surprising amount of coverage which focuses on insulting language. I found that the reporting of 'bad mouthing' and the use of swear words in sport has an unusual association with women - I had not anticipated this result - which I will now address.

Language used to insult often refers to animals or the female anatomy. Levy (2005) describes the multiple insults which play on women and their bodies, and the lack of equivalent male terms. The feminisation of the insult creates a power divide and links women to insulting language and by extension, behaviour too. In 'Glory Boys Leader', it was reported that Horacio Usandizaga, President of Argentine soccer club Rosario Central reacted furiously to the salaries of top sportsmen including Lewis Hamilton, Andy Murray and Roger Federer. He said that, 'they are the sons of a thousand bitches' (*The Observer*, 19/10/08: 7). The insult was aimed at the sportsmen in question; nevertheless, by using a feminised insult, the focus of blame shifts onto the 'thousand bitches'. In other words, women become the vehicle for the insulting language and are thus victims through linguistic discrimination.

The fury expressed by the executive in the news item mentioned in *The Observer* was not subsequently withdrawn or excused by a commentator. However, such remarks appear to be easily forgiven by having been said in the heat of the moment. This does not remove the original insult. Also in *The Observer*, a news item suggested that an earlier insult was perhaps taken out of context and not meant as an insult proper: 'Schalke director Andreas Muller says captain Marcelo Borden's claim that referee Lutz Wagner was a "bad whore" was just high jinx' (21/09/08: 15). The term 'whore' is normally used exclusively for females and as a more colloquial reference to a prostitute. Its connotations are negative and in the context of this story imply significantly more for gender relations than the 'light' way in which *The Observer* deals with the news. It is surprising that there is not more commentary from the newspaper regarding the use of this insult; this is indicative of the 'bad behaviour' which footballers engage in and get away with, without consequence. However, in the case of a racial slur in the football context, the British print media tend to quickly respond and denounce the existence of racism in the sport ('Racism in Football Needs to Be Addressed – Jason Roberts'). The use of gender as an insult is clearly less of a priority for the media than racism, which further confirms the gender imbalance in sports reporting.

The interlinking of sports and linguistic violence is not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, while sport has changed on many levels, insulting comments and behaviour continue to exist, particularly in men's sport. The almost war-like behaviour and language employed off the 'pitch' in sports commentary supports similar behaviour and language on the 'pitch'. In 'Misogyny On and Off the "Pitch": The Gendered World of Male Rugby Players' Schacht (1996) explores

the way in which coaches assert their authority over players by threatening to treat players as though they have a woman's subordinate status. Schacht found that coaches regularly referred to players who were not performing well as 'girls' or 'ladies'. He explores players' interactions with women whilst training, competing or in social situations. Linguistic sexual harassment is used to reinforce the gender hierarchy. Schacht argues that, 'such a relational order is consistent with a larger culture that defines superiority to contrast [with] what is seen as deviant and as infraction rather than enactment' (558). In other words, players relationally establish what masculinity *is not*, i.e. feminine, in order to understand what masculinity *is*. The two news stories above utilise this way of understanding masculinity by defining femininity, and depict feminised comments to insult sportsmen in order to align them with a feminine identity which is widely associated with weakness and inferiority.

Tagg (2008) investigated masculinities in sport in New Zealand with a particular focus on netball. He exposes the way in which a traditionally 'feminine' sport can inspire feminised insults by other sportsmen or commentators when men play the game. He described the way in which sportsmen from other, more masculine sports such as rugby, would refer to men playing netball as 'girls' who 'get the ball and prance around with it' (20). Chimot and Louveau (2010) examine the coping strategies of boys who practice rhythmic gymnastics; they discuss the pressure exerted on them from their families and peers to conform to 'masculine' behaviours in order to counter their involvement in a 'feminine' sport.

There are also sportswomen who employ insults to describe themselves or other women. The words are decidedly less insulting and less sexual, but nonetheless they still attack sportswomen, not sportsmen. In the same publication, next to a picture of Bambi, one can assume the photo was published in order to exaggerate the point, a news title claims, 'Sharapova. . . No Longer Considers Herself to be "Like a Cow on Ice" When Playing on Clay, "More Like Bambi" She Says' (*The Observer*, 04/05/08: 15). Sharapova plays with self-deprecation here despite her image as a model-like tennis player. The way she frames herself as an animal is consistent with the inferiorising discourse of sportsmen using feminised insults. Here, the tennis player refers to herself using animal vocabulary to describe her ability to play tennis on clay. The downplaying of one's ability appears to be a female trait more than a male one, and in this case surprising since Sharapova won the French Open in 2012 which is played on clay. However, male commentators and journalists underplay women's sporting

abilities in an attempt to defend the traditionally male preserve of sport. In my data there were no parallel examples of sportsmen 'putting themselves down' in the way that Sharapova does. Pelak (2008) discussed the correlation between sexist naming and language in sport and the restriction of athletic opportunities for women. When sportswomen are pigeon-holed into a singular heterosexual and inferior category by media institutions, a hierarchical gender order is created and perpetuated. And with an inferior status sportswomen are less likely to be taken seriously by the sports media and its readers.

Oswald (2008) looked at gender stereotypes and women's ability in traditionally masculine and feminine occupations. She suggests that 'masculine gender stereotypes are associated with being successful in masculine occupations. In contrast, feminine gender stereotypes are associated with success in feminine occupations' (197). Research has begun to identify how stereotypes can influence individuals' own behaviours (Oswald 2008). The self-stereotyping theory can be applied to sportspeople and the producers of the sports print media; it proposes that certain people self-stereotype by assimilating and seeming to possess characteristics and behaviours 'associated with the in-group' (197). In other words, sportswomen and journalists may adopt certain stereotypes relevant to their professional and social status in order to be more accepted within their respective groups. For example, in the case of sportswomen, the stereotypes which arose from my data included an interest in fashion, a passion for being a maternal homemaker and an adherence to a particular kind of femininity. The media representation of sportswomen would seem to suggest that some female athletes 'play up to' this stereotype as a way of assuaging the media. Steele (1997) proposed the stereotype-threat theory which posits that when an individual feels stigmatized they are likely to underperform when aware of stereotypes relevant to themselves, for example men engaging in nurturing behaviour are more likely to underperform in this role when conscious of the stereotype of men as uncaring. Negative stereotypes can potentially result in detrimentally affecting performance, Oswald (2008) argues. Further, gender stereotypes have 'pernicious, negative effect on women' (197) in sports performance, for example, when the stereotype exists of women as passive and physically weak. It is possible to see how newspapers utilise this idea of stereotype-threat theory in order to maintain particular notions of gender in sport; sportswomen are less likely to out-perform men if the stereotype of female athletes is one of 'natural' inferiority.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have described four facets of stereotypical representations of sportswomen in the media: femininity, fashion, the hierarchy and negotiation of femininity, and aggressive language. The stereotype of women and their interest in fashion reiterates the restrictions that are produced by promoting a particular kind of femininity. I have demonstrated how fashion interplays with sport in its media representation and enhances sportswomen's femininity, in some sports. In others, sports uniforms identify women as adhering to particular male standards, especially in established male-dominated sports. Further, there is a tendency in the sports media to normalize the connection between women and an interest in fashion. This emphasizes their gender and highlights an important aspect of hegemonic femininity, women's appearance. Moreover, constructing sportswomen as fashionable canvases on which to pin cultural constructions of femininity, imbues sportswomen with restrictive feminine connotations and detracts from their athletic identities.

In the majority of the newspapers under investigation a particularly narrow view of sportswomen is promoted. Their hierarchical order of women in sport is judged in relation to the stereotypical, hegemonic femininity attached to most sportswomen's mediated image. That position is also tenuous because of the naturalised dichotomy prevalent in sport which states that men are strong and women are weak. Moreover, the media commonly display the 'outside' sport interests of women in order to pigeon-hole them as having identities away from sport. These outside interests include keeping up appearances in the form of maintaining their femininity, and their family responsibilities. The negotiation that athletes endure regarding parenthood and post-sports career decisions are significantly gendered. The media privilege information about sportswomen's families more than for men, and the opportunities open for sportsmen upon retirement greatly outweighed those for women.

The presentation of women in the sports media as angry takes two distinct formats; the promotion of the 'angry WAG' image and the angry or linguistically violent sportswoman. Angry sportswomen were deemed to step away from hegemonic femininity, particularly because their aggressive language often stems from gender inequalities which some of them campaign against. The media do not frame these 'angry' women in a favourable light which indicates a particularly rigid view of how women should behave. The gendered dichotomy in sport

restricts the presentation of women as anything other than white, slim, middle-class, non-threatening, athletic but not muscled, heterosexual, attractive, sexy, calm, neat and well behaved. The surprising incidence of 'feminised bad language' in my data did little to change the stereotypical view of women as inferior to men and emphasized their unequal treatment in the media, since 'masculinised' bad language is not portrayed in the same way.

Burton Nelson (1994) argues that the coverage of sportswomen in relation to anger and linguistic violence is linked to their physical rivalry with men. She states that because women are closing the gender gap in sports they are often portrayed as insane in stories about drugs, gender testing etc. She highlights that according to the dominant discourse in sports reporting, real women can 'naturally' only achieve a certain level of athletic success and hence when women begin to go beyond certain boundaries, the media pull them back through negative stereotypical coverage.

Serena Williams has been used as an example in all four sections which is interesting in that she is an excellent case study of how the media representation of women in sport is not clear cut and definitive, but ambiguous and contradictory at times. However, there are particular stereotypes, as I have outlined, which display one singular, homogenous image of female bodies, sexiness, beauty and ultimately fit into hegemonic femininity (Gill 2009). The question to ask then is what about alternative femininities? What would they look like? Instead of the media projecting just one type of 'sportswoman', what if they presented a range of female identities, consistent with 'real' women and their experiences? Or even more radical, how would mediated images of sportswomen appear if they were not judged in relation to femininity? There is certainly room in current scholarship for answers to be sought to these questions. Such a narrow stereotype of sportswomen also makes certain assumptions about *who* conducts sport, privileging a homogenized body image and thereby sidelining all sports involving other kinds of bodies including those performing in the Paralympics, for example.

My own view is that by stepping away from the feminine/masculine binary present in sports reporting, a new appraisal of both women and men in sport can be undertaken with an aim to review and perhaps even 'renew' how sports media discuss athletes, regardless of their gender. However, the possibility of realizing such a vision is questionable – can things really change? Stereotypes, as this chapter has demonstrated, establish clear differences between women and men

in how they act, what they wear and who they are. Perhaps changes in media representations are held back by what Bourdieu (1984) would describe as durable predispositions. Bourdieu would interpret stereotypes of sportswomen in the media as a derivative of an unequal distribution of cultural knowledge and cultural capital, which reinforce boundaries between social classes. In *Distinction* Bourdieu details how social class defines a person's likes and interests. He explains that we are all predisposed with particular likes and dislikes, because of our social class, and they are instilled in us at an early age. Because such predispositions are learned and internalized, they are extremely difficult to change, marking people permanently, thus preventing social mobility. If we employ Bourdieu's thinking to analyse the persistence of the stereotypes of sportswomen in the media, we can see how certain assumptions which prevail are attached to particularly rigid ways of thinking.

The question then is, how can this type of thinking sit within the framework of feminist methodology? Skeggs (1997, 2004) suggests that we must believe in hope as feminists, otherwise feminism is pointless. But education may bring about awareness and empowerment of subjects to become agents of change themselves.

Dyer (1993) understood stereotypical representations in the media as 'an ordering process', a 'short cut', a 'way of referring to the world' and an 'expression of 'our' values and beliefs' (in Lacey 2009: 153). The four functions of stereotypes, according to Dyer as mentioned above, perhaps indicate lethargy and professional laziness on the part of journalists; Hardin (2005) highlights the lack of interest many male sports journalists have in reporting on women's sport. Using stereotypes may be one way of 'making life easier' for the male journalist who does not want to invest time researching and understanding women's sport, and thus reiterates stereotypes of women in sport. This version of understanding why the sports media employ stereotypes is consistent with Skeggs' (1997, 2004) statement about hope; if the widespread use of stereotypes and sportswomen is due to journalistic lethargy, there is hope for gender equality in the future of sports reporting.



## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

As I finish writing my dissertation during the 2012 London Olympic Games it is apt to note that the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Jacques Rogge, presented these as the 'gender games' in the Opening Ceremony on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2012. Why were they described as the 'gender games'? For the first time in the history of the Olympics in the modern era, every nation competing had at least one woman in its team, including countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar where cultural and religious restrictions discriminate against female empowerment ('Saudi Arabia's Women-only Cities. . .'). Sixteen years ago in Atlanta 26 nations had all-male Olympic teams. Further, women's boxing was introduced for the first time in 2012 in London. There is still not complete gender parity in the number of events open to women within each discipline. However, the introduction of women's boxing was a big step towards what I consider to be the ultimate goal.

Team GB performed above and beyond expectations. They finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the overall medal table behind the USA and China. Most of the British Olympic Association's (BOA) goals were achieved and many surpassed. Moreover, the media overwhelmingly deemed the 2012 London Games to be a success in terms of smooth functioning, record numbers of spectators, outstanding performances and the way the British public supported the event. The extent of what had been achieved generated a debate about sport and representation. For example, many newspapers discussed the 'honesty' of Olympic athletes compared to overpaid Premiership footballers, 'the Olympics is making professional footballers look like nasty, egotistical bankers of sport, for here instead are glowing people full of dreams and spirit' (Suzanne Moore, *The Guardian*, 09/08/12: 5). The dominance of football was questioned, its status in sport queried.

The biggest debate centred on women. Female athletes were celebrated across all sports for their performance, more than their appearance. Discussion ensued around these women and their previously unknown existence – where had they been? Why did the public not know their names? Figures and percentages about media coverage of women's sport were revealed. Sue Tibballs, Chief Executive of the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) talked about the importance of getting more women into senior positions within sports institutions. She heralded the success of women Olympians at London 2012 as a 'stepping stone for women's sport' ('The Game Changers', *The Guardian*, 14/08/12: 12).

And journalists wrote: 'these hardworking, focused, muscled super heroines are being hailed as the role models we need in the Age of the Kardashian'<sup>39</sup> ('Emine Saner, 'The Game Changers', *The Guardian*, 14/08/12: 12).

London 2012 had more women Olympians than ever before, female athletes represented all nations, there was more success for British sportswomen, better media coverage and a recognition that previous media treatment of women in sport needs to change. These achievements might create a landslide in terms of the mediascape in sport and posed pertinent questions such as: will sportswomen be accorded more media coverage in the future? Will more girls be inspired to get involved in sport? Will the visibility of British women Olympians such as Jessica Ennis change the public's perceptions of the fit, muscled sportswoman? Such a shift will take time to occur and even longer to assess.

There were rays of hope in terms of some change in how sports media report. However, it is difficult to evaluate the longevity of this. During the last Olympics in Beijing 2008, the British team finished fourth in the medals table, which was a surprise to many, including the BOA. However, despite the excitement arising from this success, it did not harness public awareness enough to create a shift in the media representation of women in sport. My thesis shows how the success of British sportspeople at the 2008 Games did not affect the subsequent media coverage of women in any sustained way.

How people and the media will respond to the 2012 London Games is an intriguing prospect. Perhaps the status quo in sports media reporting will be altered because the Games took place in the United Kingdom and were supported by large sections of British society. Or perhaps the collective memory of a successful Games will fade and support my theory that the Olympics are a unique event in which average reporting parameters do not apply, but once finished, sportswomen return to a place of anonymity and obscurity, under-represented by the British print media, until the subsequent Olympics begin four years later. I found that the five newspapers under review focused on average only 3.6% of their total sports coverage in the period of January 2008-December

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<sup>39</sup> The Kardashians are a family from the United States who are famous for their numerous reality television programmes. The female members of the family would appear to be surgically enhanced, regularly pose semi-nude for men's magazines and adhere to notions of normative femininity in their style of dress and behaviour ('Kardashian Craze. . .').

2009 on female athletes. In the rest of this chapter I will situate my findings within the field of sport, gender and media, highlighting my contributions to it. I shall then review my main findings, showing how the content of the newspapers operated to articulate my analysis of gender imbalances. I shall discuss what I expected and what surprised me in my data and provide some suggestions for future research in the field.

### My Contribution to the Field of Sport, Gender and Media

My research is distinctive in five ways. First, I investigate the hitherto unexplored issue of representative bodies. Second, I explore the manifestation of sexism in sports reporting. Third, I produce a more nuanced discussion of the stereotyping of sportswomen. Fourth, my sample of newspapers, number of data and timeframe are significantly more extensive than in previous research and cover a very different sample. Fifthly, I provide new methodological contribution to the field by combining textual and contextual analysis and in my overall contribution to women's studies. My most important contribution to the field of sport, gender and media is my analysis of how newspapers represent sportswomen in particular ways. My work produces three key findings to do with the depiction of the body, sexism and stereotyping. The first of these shows how newspapers produce articles on 'irrelevant bodies', in other words, women not engaged in any kind of sport. *The Observer* was particularly prominent in this type of reporting and regularly featured glamour models and porn stars. This is an especially distinctive finding because it has not appeared in previous research nor did I expect to find it in *The Observer*, as the supposedly most left-leaning newspaper in my sample. The other four publications under review also featured women not involved in sport such as dancers, WAGs and models. The space newspapers allocate to women is thus, in part, dedicated to women who are not involved in sport and thus solely decorative. This reveals how newspapers use certain women, often in place of real sportswomen in their reporting on sports news, to function as objects of entertainment, thereby marginalizing sportswomen as professionals in sexist ways.

Secondly, my analysis of how sexism operates led to new findings in the field of sport, gender and media. The forms that sexism in sports reporting takes had previously not been categorised by scholars; I developed four categories of sexism from my data including 'raising the bar'. This category refers to articles which initially seem to celebrate women's achievements in sport, but upon closer inspection reveal more subtle forms of gender discrimination. By comparing

women to male standards, such articles demonstrate how newspapers create a 'false celebration' of women in sport, particularly prevalent in male-dominated sports. This form of sexism was a distinctive finding and provides a platform for further research into how sexism manifests itself in seemingly pro-women sports coverage.

Thirdly, the consistent use of stereotyping of sportswomen in print media contributes new understandings of how the media treat women in sport. The most distinctive feature of stereotyping was connected to particular ideas of normative femininity and sportswomen's engagement with it. I found that a narrow understanding of the stereotypical feminine sportswoman was promoted as the ideal, whereas the unfeminine or angry sportswoman who did not conform to normative femininity was seen as deviant. By employing stereotypical images of sportswomen as feminine, or otherwise, newspapers present a restricted notion of women in sport. This point is particularly damaging to sportswomen when we consider that many sports do not necessarily foster the kinds of bodies that are sought after for this coverage, and that sportswomen who do not conform, may find themselves utterly marginalized, unable to obtain sponsorship,<sup>40</sup> and under-resourced in their sport.

Fourthly, my timeframe of every Sunday newspaper of five national publications (520 editions in total) from 2008-2009 incorporated coverage of both weekly and cyclical major sporting events. Not focusing solely on one specific event as a number of studies do (e.g. Jones et al 1999; Vincent et al 2002; Wensing and Bruce 2003; Crolley and Teso 2007; Angelini and Billings 2010; Biscomb and Griggs 2012; Davis and Tuggle 2012) also gave me the freedom to see how coverage changes over the course of annual sports cycles. My timeframe was original in that its semi-longitudinal dimension was different from other studies which either focus on one championship over a three to six-week period (Crossman et al 2007) or cover decades of reporting of one event (King 2007).

I collected a more extensive amount of data than previous studies. This provided me with a much stronger platform for analysing the material and demonstrating the 'gap' in knowledge of this type of reporting. In total, I reviewed 22,954 articles and 25,717 photographs. To put this into context, Crossman et al (2007) reviewed 127 articles and 151 photographs of tennis players across three

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<sup>40</sup> It has been reported that women receive only 0.5% of all sports sponsorship in the United Kingdom ('The Game Changers', *The Guardian*, 14/08/12: 12).

newspapers during the 2004 Wimbledon Championships. King (2007) examined 478 articles and 361 photographs in a longitudinal study of the Olympic Games from 1948 to 2004 in two newspapers. Biscomb and Griggs (2012) examined 29 articles across seven newspapers during 16 days of reporting. These studies highlight the significant quantitative difference in data covered by my study compared to previous ones.

My investigation is also distinctive because of the sample of Sunday newspapers I chose. The majority of studies on the representation of sportspeople in the media using newspapers select broadsheet and tabloid weekday editions. I chose five British Sunday newspapers because, as a distinct form of media, newsprint is particularly accessible to large sections of society, especially at the weekend when people are likely to have more leisure time. Moreover, Sunday newspapers have longer sports sections than weekday editions, thus providing more space to analyse the media coverage of sportswomen. In this way, my investigation contributes new data on weekend newspaper representations of sportswomen.

Finally, by employing both textual and contextual analyses of the media representation of sportswomen, my investigation produces an original methodological contribution to this type of project. No other investigation has combined these methods in this way. My findings also contribute significant new knowledge to Women's Studies; not only in terms of the need to re-focus on one of the principal facets of second-wave feminism, in other words the representation of women, but also by generating new findings through identifying diverse modes of representation of the body. These distinctive features provide a methodological and theoretical 'tool kit' for future investigations on the representation of sportswomen in the media.

These five elements constitute the original dimensions of my investigation and contribute new material to the field of sport, gender and media. I now turn to review my principal quantitative findings.

#### Differences *Between* the Newspapers: Quantitative Findings

The first major finding of this investigation was consistent with previous studies (Vincent et al 2002; Crossman et al 2007) in that sportswomen are under-represented in the British print media. Of the 22,954 articles I reviewed, only 3.6% were written on women in sport. Although the evidence of this disparity between what sportswomen and men receive in media attention is not

groundbreaking (Bernstein 2002), its sheer size is a new finding and, furthermore, it was extremely surprising that these percentages were so significant in the period 2008-2009, considering the success of British female athletes during this timeframe and specifically at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Even with that, over the two-year period, I found no increase in the newspaper coverage of sportswomen. The five newspapers under review tended to show similar patterns of coverage, for example, the number of articles increased during British summer months and declined over the winter months. However, there were distinct differences between the publications in both quantity and quality of coverage. The *Mail on Sunday* published the highest number of articles on sportswomen (236 articles in 2008-2009) and *The Sunday Telegraph* the lowest (77 articles). Moreover the sports in which women were most likely to be given media attention were, in descending order, tennis, athletics, swimming, cycling, horse riding and hockey. This signifies firstly that newspapers produce news on different 'ranges' of sport for women and men; women are most frequently reported on in the six sports listed above, whereas men are mostly seen in football, rugby and cricket.<sup>41</sup> This means that the mediated image of the *types* of sports women and men participate in are distinctly different. Further, newspapers thus do not represent the full range of sports in which they compete but serve to create a highly gendered view of which sports are participated in by which sex (Davis and Tuggle 2012). Secondly, the six sports above are significant in that they are all considered to be 'feminine-appropriate' sports (Matteo 1986) and thus this demonstrates that the newspapers under review have a particular notion of sportswomen which is in line with a certain hegemonic femininity. Moreover, such media coverage implicitly discriminates against sportswomen who compete in other, more 'masculine' sports.

In terms of photographic media coverage, *The Sunday Times* published 761 photos of women, the *Mail on Sunday* 396, *The Observer* 282, *The Sunday Telegraph* 198 and the *Sunday Express* 143. More significant, however, was the number of these photos which were in the 'Non-sports related' category. In other words, significant numbers of photos were of women who have no relation to sport. Such images tended to be of 'decorative' women – dancers, female fans, WAGs, and glamour and fashion models. The overall percentages of non-sports

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<sup>41</sup> These were the most dominant sports in my data in relation to men. However, sportsmen also appeared in a wide variety of other sports.

related photos of women were: *The Sunday Times* 31%, the *Mail on Sunday* 21%, *The Observer* 16%, the *Sunday Express* 9% and *The Sunday Telegraph* 8%. These figures are important because they provide a better understanding of how gender discrimination takes place in British print media. Although *The Sunday Times* might promote the fact that they publish the highest amount of photographic coverage of women in sport, nearly one third of these photos display women not related to sports and thus they emphasize a particular kind of femininity. This in turn impacts on the way in which women's sport is promoted; the role of women in sports media is seen as both athletic and decorative, but always focusing on certain kinds of hegemonic femininity. The reader is thus reminded that a sportswoman is a woman first, but also that a woman's role is to be decorative.

#### Other Differences Between The Newspapers

There were several noteworthy differences between the newspapers in terms of qualitative material which I will now detail. *The Observer* was the publication with the most unexpected coverage during 2008-2009; almost every Sunday edition published a gossip-style story which focused on female glamour models' and porn stars' sexual antics with male football players and managers. As the most left-wing newspaper in my sample, salacious stories of night-time activities seemed out of place and more befitting to a certain sort of tabloid paper. This data revealed prejudiced reporting towards women because they were framed as the agents in such stories. It demonstrated how particular kinds of discrimination against women in sport are widespread in print media, in that even the most left-wing newspaper produced very explicit gender unequal reporting.

*The Observer* and *The Sunday Telegraph* demonstrated a tendency to quote others, from players to journalists, in effect displacing the responsibility for negative and often discriminatory reporting of women. This trend in two of the broadsheets enabled them to engage in tabloid-style reporting without constructing themselves as producing such reporting directly. This type of coverage in a sense allowed journalists to 'get away with more' because they seemingly were not producing it.

Reporting on sportswomen included only a limited range of sports. Women in sports categorised as 'female-inappropriate' (Matteo 1986) were less frequently reported on. One of these sports, boxing, provoked a strong reaction by the *Mail on Sunday*, which produced a number of articles opposed to women boxing. This

finding was interesting in that it was not replicated in other publications and suggests a particular gender ideology in the *Mail* regarding women's involvement in violent, 'masculine' sports. The reactionary nature of such stories contrasts with the quantity of articles produced on women's sport (the *Mail on Sunday* produced the highest number of articles on women from my sample). In other words, it would seem that the paper was supportive of women in *particular* sports, especially those not displaying masculine characteristics such as boxing, and therefore protecting gender roles. The limited range of sports in which women appeared restricts the representation of women in sport, as they are only shown in *particular* sports. This type of reporting is especially discriminatory against or women in 'masculine' sports.

The *Sunday Express* was the publication which showed significant differences in its style of reporting compared to the other newspapers under review as it produced very few articles, but the most factual coverage of sportswomen comparatively. There were few photos of sportswomen and the paper did not engage in discussions of sexism in sport. The *Sunday Express* produced a very narrow standard range of sports in which women compete. But it also published the highest number of articles on women's hockey, which was not echoed in other papers. It is not certain why this paper reported hockey news so frequently but it may be because one of their journalists is involved in women's hockey – understanding journalistic and editorial motives could be the basis of an interesting future investigation. This newspaper did not explicitly position itself as anti-women; however, the lack of reporting on sportswomen in a range of sports, length of articles and photographs, suggests a disinterest to publish news of women in certain sports.

The most significant difference in *The Sunday Times* compared to the other publications was its sexualised photographic coverage of women in sport. They published the most photos of nude or nearly nude women. Furthermore, they produced the highest number of non-sports related photos. Their image of women thus tended to emphasize a particular form of femininity, often not in line with professional sportswomen. This restricted view, as I have highlighted here, was evident in all the publications in different ways, but ultimately led to similar messages about women in sport: you are a woman first. I do not suggest there was deliberate collusion between the papers. Instead I think that a particular, and one might argue rather antiquated gender ideology, was dominant in these reporting practices. I now turn to the main qualitative findings.



### Qualitative Findings: Misrepresentation

My principal finding, beyond the consistent under-representation of sportswomen, is that sportswomen are consistently *mis*represented by contemporary British middle-brow newspapers. This occurs in three distinct ways: presenting bodies in seven non-representative ways, through a sexist discourse, and by employing stereotypes of women in sport. The misrepresentation of sportswomen thus limits readers' understanding of what professional female athletes do and displays a highly specific vision of sportswomen, consistent with notions of a particular form of normative femininity. This type of normative femininity centres on youthful, attractive, sexual, slim, heterosexual, able-bodied bodies. Women's bodies in sports media are intended to represent a feminised, 'sexed' object, available for visual consumption. Although the sexualised representation of sportswomen is part of an overall sexualisation of British culture, it is nonetheless damaging to sportswomen. Moreover, there is no extended male equivalent of sexualised sportsmen in the sports pages of the print media.

The image of sportswomen in the five newspapers under review could really be said to be the image of *women* rather than *sportswomen* since they were portrayed in a way that negated athleticism and promoted normative femininity. This type of representation was asymmetrical in terms of gender as it contrasts sharply with that of sportsmen who are lauded for putting their sports careers before anything else in their lives. Sport evidently reinforces masculinity, whereas it detracts from femininity and thus newspapers often frame women in particular ways which privilege their status as women over that of athlete, as I shall summarize below.

### Representative Bodies

In the first qualitative analysis chapter 'Representative Bodies?' I posed the question of how the bodies of sportswomen are represented in newspapers. I found that the bodies promoted in the five publications under review were often framed as anything other than athletic in terms of body type. Their bodies were constructed as sexual, trivial, secondary, ambitious, commercial, feminine and disposable.

The sexualised body has been discussed before in relation to sportswomen (Lenskyj 1998; Choi 2000; Harris and Clayton 2002; Sailors et al 2012). However, to my knowledge no study has identified the subcategories that I found in my data. The sexualised body appeared in three distinct categories: sportswomen,

WAGs and glamour models/porn stars. Sportswomen were frequently promoted as sexualised or sexy by newspapers, particularly in photographs. Headlines and by-lines supported such a sexualised representation. This finding indicates a return to the idea of sex rather than athletics. There is a question about sportswomen's agency in this process; since they actively took part in the production of 'sexy' photos, can we say that they are self-sexualising? I would argue that the media culture in which sportswomen exist encourages a particular 'acceptance' and commitment of women to a sexualised image. Thus sportswomen are complicit, to an extent, at times ironically, at other times not, in their sexualisation by the media. However, if they reject it, they are not as likely to receive 'positive' media coverage.

In *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*, Heywood and Dworkin (2003) discuss how sportswomen must conform to the acceptable contours of women's bodies in mediated images. While they recognise that there is objectification present in sexualised images, they claim that women use the images as much as the images make use of the women, in terms of the visibility they accord women. I discussed sportswomen's agency in 'sexy' or nude photographs. Whether fully complicit or not in such representation, the problem for sportswomen occurs when this is the *only* way in which the media give them any coverage. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter Six on stereotypes, the privileging of one type of media representation of women creates a hierarchy of acceptability, or as Vincent et al (2011) calls it 'emphasized femininity'. A future project might seek to interview sportswomen who appear in nude photos in order to test this hypothesis about agency and the hierarchy of femininity.

The lack of focus on the sports performance of sportswomen who are sexualised and the absence of equivalent male nude photos highlight the function of such a representation; sexualising sportswomen's bodies reinforces the gender binary in sport and focuses the reader's attention on their femininity and heteronormativity.

One of the most striking body representations was the 'irrelevant' one. This category was a surprise finding and occurred in particular in *The Observer* in almost every edition I reviewed. The irrelevant bodies were those of women not connected to sports. Such women were mostly reported to be sexually or romantically linked to sportsmen, most commonly footballers. The gender binary in sports was never more prominent than in this type of reporting. This newspaper makes the assumption that their sports readership is mostly male and this type of 'news' provides a light and pleasurable side order to the 'real' sports

news involving men only. It is interesting that this type of reporting has never previously been identified in research; perhaps the longer than usual timeframe of this study and my focus on Sunday editions partly explains this. Future work might consider a more detailed analysis of why *The Observer* reports salacious news of glamour models and porn stars, highlighting women's sexualised bodies, particularly as it is the most left-wing paper in my sample and the only title to produce such news.

As the commercial body, sportswomen were portrayed in two versions; those with commercial capital and those not commercially viable. The first type of presentation requires sportswomen to conform to specific notions of femininity and sex appeal. This mediated, homogenised and commercialised body presentation rejects any deviation. If women are not complicit in this image-making, they are rejected and either ignored or abused by the media. The second type of commercial body centres on sportswomen's de-commercialised bodies; sportswomen in female-appropriate sports were promoted as possessing little commercial value, in golf and netball particularly. This was especially relevant in women-only competitions which might indicate that the British print media alter their reporting of women's sports depending on how much of a 'threat' the athletes are to the male institution of sport. For example, a women's netball team on one occasion was framed as non-commercial because it is a non-mainstream elite sport played exclusively by women whose kit was reportedly not attractive; in other words, the media did not deem netball to be a commercial sport, perhaps because of its lack of sex appeal. However, the 'sexy new kits' for a successful women's football team (female-inappropriate sport) were regarded as having commercial value, perhaps because women in football are portrayed as being significantly inferior to men. Moreover, the media ensure that women in football do not become a threat by publicising the hyper-sexy and feminised bodies of the team, which diverts attention from their football performances.

The homogenising of sportswomen into a narrow definition is part of a bigger media agenda to regulate women's bodies. The regulation of women's bodies in sport is linked to wider controlling techniques, undertaken by the media and popular culture which provide a blueprint for women more generally on how their bodies should be. We can see this in the British sports print media where the transgressive body – homosexual, muscular, not openly sexualised – is rejected. A sportswoman who gains weight, such as Serena Williams, is criticised for

'letting herself go' and attracts much media attention and praise for 'looking after herself' when slimming down. Bordo (2003) suggests that women in the west are judged by how successful they are at achieving a certain idealised femininity. It would be remiss not to connect the doll-like images of women we see adorning the majority of men's and women's lifestyle magazines in the United Kingdom with the feminine ideal promoted as the benchmark for sportswomen in the British print media. This conflation creates an impossible bind for sportswomen who are encouraged to be feminine but need to be athletic.

The newspapers' focus on the female body reflects the notion that it is 'owned' and 'controlled' to an extent by society. The female body is culturally imprinted, possessing capital. It can be manipulated and improved in the quest for female perfection. The newspaper representation of sportswomen's bodies as sexualised, trivialised, secondary, ambitious, commercial, feminine and disposable, presents both a concrete and ambiguous understanding of the female body. In one way, all the categories of bodily representation homogenise sportswomen and their bodies in line with heteronormative femininity; it is always the woman who is promoted, as her athletic characteristics are relegated. In another way, the seven different media representations of the female body suggest a somewhat confusing picture of how the media deal with sportswomen. This notion of the female body 'controlled' by the media is relevant here in that newspapers depict sportswomen in particular ways, often *misrepresenting* them in ways which detract from an aesthetically 'athletic' body.

### Gender Equality – Off the Radar?

The second qualitative analysis chapter examined the way in which sexism and gender (in)equality operate in British print sports media. Manifestations of overt and subtle sexism were explored, as well as the manner in which sportswomen are simultaneously criticised and praised, albeit in a sometimes covert way, by newspapers. It was clear that in 2008-2009 there were significant displays of sexism in sports reporting and particularly a strong disapproval by some publications of the increase in gender equality in elite sports competitions (for example the introduction of women's boxing as an Olympic sport, and increasing the number of races available for female athletes in track cycling). It was also evident that only a few articles in the two-year period were published about sportspeople and journalists discussing the existence of sexism in sports and its reporting. These 'calls for equality' were in short supply and were often issued by women in sport or commentators, retired sportsmen and politicians. Very few

professional sportsmen or male journalists were reported as openly discussing the unequal situation of women in sport. This is due to the normalised view that biologically women and men are polar opposites in terms of physical strength and ability, often the lack of acknowledgment by men in sport and media that sexism exists in sport is because they are socialised into the notion that men are natural sportsmen and women are not. Women's inclusion in Olympic boxing is a good example where the biological argument is masked by gesturing towards a 'moral' obligation attached to 'being a woman' and not harming others; the *Mail on Sunday* was particularly vocal about the notion that women *should* not box. Their argument was underpinned by biological reasoning which is part of the gendered views which some journalists articulate.

My findings and analysis of how gender (in)equality and sexism operate constitute new knowledge in the study of gender in sports media. Other research has demonstrated the lack of equality in sports reporting (Bernstein 2002; Harris and Clayton 2002; Crolley and Teso 2007; Angelini and Billings 2010; Biscomb and Griggs 2012). I found that there is also a discourse within newspapers about issues of equality between women and men. Such articles demonstrate a positive shift in sports reporting since such discussions are important. However, the lack of sportsmen willing to discuss these issues must be addressed. Their silence on this matter reveals either a lack of understanding, or an unwillingness to engage in the topic. Gaining equal media coverage for women and men, as well as better treatment by sports institutions will not occur quickly, but the more actors are involved in the debate the more effective it will be.

The analysis chapter on sexism discussed four categories of how gender (in)equality and sexism operate: 'failings', 'raising the bar', the subtle, and the overt manifestation of sexism. These categories demonstrate the breadth of 'techniques' used by print media to disguise or overtly display negative reporting of sportswomen. The impact of all these mechanisms is the reinforcement of difference. In other words, sexist reporting suggests that women inhabit an inferior position in the gender hierarchy in sport. The unequivocal notion that men are 'better' than sportswomen was particularly relevant in the 'raising the bar' themed articles in which sportswomen were initially praised for their achievements and subsequently reminded that they fall short of the male standard. The mediated male sporting ideal then reminded sportswomen and readers that women are always second best. The representation of sportswomen in this way seeks to put up barriers to women's improvement and development.

The 'subtle sexism' category showed how newspapers did not value women as part of creating sports history through outstanding performances. Nor were they judged to be on lists of 'best athlete of the decade'. In this way sportswomen are written *out* of sporting history and thus current and future female athletes and women have no claim or reference point to past success. This type of reporting, when there is no reference to gender in the title of the article even though the list is entirely male, highlights instances where sports media make the claim that the term 'athlete' is universally understood to be male. Thus sportswomen's position is constructed in relation to men and the media's production of sexist representation of who is classed as authentic, and who is ignored.

The question of *who* produces the news emerges from my analysis of how sexism operates in print media. My findings might make a statement about sports journalists as almost exclusively male. A future project could investigate how sports journalists approach issues of sexism in British print media (Hardin 2005; Mastro et al 2012). The 'calls for equality' that were present in the final category of how sexism operates in sports media were infrequent and mostly without comment from the journalists who produced them. In other words they were simply reports rather than opinion pieces. Nonetheless, such expressions of protest against sexism, from whatever source, provide a glimmer of hope for the future of sports reporting on women (Bernstein 2002; Crossman et al 2007).

### Stereotypes

The third qualitative analysis chapter focused on the use of stereotypes in newspaper sports coverage. I showed that sportswomen are stereotyped in four ways by the media; as feminine, as fashionable, as holding a particular 'social position', and as 'angry' women. Stereotyping promotes particular mediated notions of sportswomen which can be difficult to alter and thus become the norm.

Sports media produce an 'over presence' (Bordo 2003) of stereotypes of sportswomen. The widespread stereotype of the feminine sportswoman, for example, promotes the idea that all sportswomen want to be thin and seek to 'improve' their bodies in terms of aesthetics, rather than athleticism. This is consistent with the idea of sportswomen as second-class athletes. The discontent associated with the female body is distinctly different from the pride attached to the bodies of male athletes both in terms of aesthetics and athleticism. For example, the news of Michael Phelps' daily 'diet' during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games ('Food For Fuel. . .') reinforced his masculine and athletic status. A similar

story of a sportswoman would not have the same reception. Whilst sportsmen are constructed as physically beyond the average man, the mediated body concerns of sportswomen suggest that they are *just like* 'normal' women. Thus what their bodies achieve in sport is sidelined.

The stereotype of the de-professionalized feminine sportswomen was the most common. Newspapers reinforce the idea that all sportswomen - like normal women - love shopping and dressing up. The media promotes news of sportswomen 'accessorizing' their femininity by conforming to typically female activities. Such stereotypes allow lifestyle reporting and for things to be said 'in jest'. Apart from misleading readers by promoting a narrow representation of sportswomen, the use of such stereotypes legitimizes a particular discourse of feminine sportswomen who are more interested in fashion, families, relationships and shopping, than 'serious' sport. This type of reporting may also imply that women readers are not interested in sport but in consumption and lifestyle issues. The persistence of stereotyping in sports media is problematic in that once established, it is difficult to 'undo' the cultural meanings attached to particular groups of people. Stereotypes which reinforce the notion that 'competitively participating in sports is inconsistent with society's prescribed female role' (Knight and Giuliano 2001: 219) are almost impossible for sportswomen and readers to dissociate from when consuming sports media.

I found that stereotyping occurred in a certain structure: between men and women, and amongst women. Firstly, biological arguments, primarily employed to restrict women's access and participation in sport, were used to reinforce stereotypes about men as naturally stronger and faster than women in sport. Such arguments also 'legitimate' the under-representation of sportswomen in the media and the over-promotion of sportsmen. A division thus occurs between women and men in sport where male superiority is widely accepted. Consequently and connected to Matteo's (1986) sex-typing of sports, particular disciplines are promoted as 'suitable' for women or men. For example, sports requiring strength, speed and aggression such as rugby, weightlifting and boxing are regarded as 'male' sports. Equally sports are labelled as 'female' if they necessitate elegance, poise and control, such as gymnastics, synchronised swimming and the horse riding discipline of dressage.

Similarly, by identifying sportswomen in terms of an invisible 'hierarchy of femininity', newspapers create an ideal type of the stereotyped feminine woman, which is both at odds with athleticism and requires copious amounts of time

maintaining such an ideal. In the third qualitative analysis chapter, I examined the stereotypes of this hierarchy in which sportswomen negotiate femininity. My data established that the more normatively feminine a sportswoman makes herself, the more media coverage she is awarded. I was surprised at the creation of a hierarchy of femininity and had not anticipated this finding. This was one of several aspects of media representations of women in sport which were noteworthy because it contributes new knowledge to the field of sport, gender and media.

### Conclusion

This chapter has centred on my main findings of how sportswomen are represented in the British print media. My timeframe 2008-2009, the quantity of data collected, the particular sample of newspapers, and the themes on bodies, sexism and stereotypes I investigated constitute a departure from recent literature. I discussed how the under-representation and the misrepresentation of sportswomen in print media discriminate against women in sport and create an ambiguous position for female athletes. By examining my main quantitative and qualitative findings, I have explained how, although recent literature suggests that over time the media representation of sportswomen has improved (King 2007), my data refutes this idea. I had anticipated that my data would demonstrate a positive shift towards better sports coverage of female athletes because of the longitudinal element of my study. However, this was not the case. I shall now turn to providing four solutions to what my data has revealed regarding the representation of sportswomen in the British print media.

Firstly, and most radically perhaps, I propose the need to break down the gender binary present in sport and its media coverage. Women and men currently do not train or compete side by side in the vast majority of sports (there are some exceptions such as triathlon and korfbal). By playing sports together, both at a young age in school and at elite level, the perception of the weak woman and the strong man will be tested and disproved. Moreover, by participating in sport on the same level we can expect to see improved relations between the sexes. I have argued that the gender socialisation of girls into a position of inferiority manifests itself in their physical and mental abilities in later life. By placing girls and boys, and women and men into the same category and expecting similar outcomes from both sexes, it is possible that over generations women may grow stronger and be on equal terms with men in their physicality.



A potential outcome of this could be that media outlets would have more reason to give equitable representation to sportswomen if they play and train alongside men. Moreover, in mixed-gender team sports there may be less 'gendering' of players if they are forced to work together and all possess similar skills and talents. A further benefit of playing together would be the abolishment of gender marking in sport; instead of announcing the commencement of the 'women's 100m', it would simply be the '100m event'. The de-gendering debate is mostly absent from appraisals of sports media and representations of gender. I propose the idea that by de-gendering sport, in other words removing gender as a category of differentiation, there would be the 'space' in sport and media institutions to treat women and men more equally.

Secondly, I propose the need to move away from the 'big three' in British print media; the sports coverage during 2008 and 2009 can be identified as football-rugby-and-cricket-centric. It is no coincidence that these are male-dominated sports and considered 'female-inappropriate'. Sports media at national level need to incorporate a wider variety of sports in their repertoire, not only for the good of athletes in other sports, but also to enhance readers' awareness and interest in more sports. Reporting on more sports also includes covering 'masculine' sports in which women participate, for example rugby, boxing and weightlifting. By showing images of women who do not fit into the narrow definition of femininity more frequently, readers and society become more accustomed to and possibly less adverse to diverse constructions of sportswomen.

Bernstein (2002) asked, 'Is It Time For a Victory Lap?' and Crossman et al (2007) professed 'The Times They Are A-Changin'. My findings show that this is absolutely not the case and we must be careful not to assume that small steps in gender equality (such as equal prize money at Wimbledon) will equate to full equality in the future. One of the principal aims of this investigation was to privilege the study of sportswomen in the British print media and thus highlight their lack of visibility. My data demonstrates that newspapers have not changed over a two-year period and in fact embody certain antiquated notions of gender which feminism has sought to alter since its inception.

Thirdly, one of the most important areas to focus on in the quest to improve the media representation of women in sport is the mediated notions of femininity and masculinity. Butler (1990) argued that gender is not a given, it is something we perform, not something we have inscribed upon us. She suggested that the gendered body is something we continually *do* and work on daily without

conscious thought. Roth and Basow (2004) claim that Butler's idea about gender can be related to strength differences,

which liberal feminist sometimes accept as natural and which radicals see as being used ideologically to maintain male dominance. . . according to Butler's view of bodies as constructed, strength differences are constructed as bodies *do* femininity and masculinity. That is, *doing* masculinity builds strength, whereas *doing* femininity builds weakness (246).

In other words, the feminine sportswoman builds on gender difference daily as she *does* femininity, while the sportsman enhances the gendered hierarchy by *doing* masculinity. The representation of femininity and masculinity in the media reinforces this gender binary. Further, unlike Butler's idea that gender is not something inscribed on us, newspaper discourse inscribes gender upon the already gendered athletes, thus reinforcing the representation of performed gender in sport.

Finally, it appears then that there are two principal elements which must be addressed most urgently. Firstly the treatment by the British print media of sportswomen, including improving the number of sports reported on, the quantity of coverage given to women in sport and how they are represented. And while the world of sports journalism catches up with other areas of social life in terms of gender equality policies, the second area to alter is that of sportswomen and their self-representation. Sportswomen must empower themselves not to engage in practices of hegemonic femininity for fear of rebuttal and instead demonstrate their athleticism and muscularity in order to dispel myths about women and frailty. This is of course not easy and must go hand in hand with more equitable media coverage. Roth and Basow (2004) propose a feminist theory of physical liberation which discusses the idea that through physical strength and activity, women will feel empowered and break down some gender inequalities which exist because of supposed physical power differences between women and men. This may be where feminists can begin to create changes; by becoming physically stronger and rejecting the femininity-as-weakness notion, the understanding of what 'woman' means will be challenged.

My main research question was 'How Are Sportswomen Represented in Contemporary, Middle-brow, British Sunday Newspapers 2008-2009?' I have analysed how much coverage sportswomen receive and the type of coverage

they appear in. In this thesis I have demonstrated that sportswomen are significantly underrepresented in British print media. The limited coverage they have is highly gendered and frames them in accordance with a particular understanding of normative femininity.

Stereotypes, body image and the discourse on gender equality/inequality, provide a blueprint for women in sport and sports fans for how to behave in the male-dominated arena of sport; be passive, no complaints, fit into the feminine and sexy image of the 'majority'. The limited space sportswomen are given by newspapers has to be 'shared' with glamour models – women who are not connected to sport in any way. Even when sportswomen achieve great sporting feats there are certain discriminatory mechanisms in place which act as detractors from their performances. Moreover, the narrow representation of sport in newspapers is highly gendered and the limited range of sports in which women appear creates a blinkered view of sportswomen. Since the most left-wing newspaper in my sample, *The Observer*, produced the most sexist sports coverage of women, my findings demonstrate that we are a very long way from achieving gender equality in British newspaper sports reporting.

## APPENDIX A

### Sample Data sheet from the *Mail on Sunday* (October 2009)

	Categories of Data	04/10/2009	11/10/2009	18/10/2009	25/10/2009	Total
	<b>No. of total pages</b>	12	16	16	13	57
	<b>No. of articles in total</b>	36	39	45	34	154
	<b>No. on female athletes</b>	3	0	5	2	10
	<b>No. on male athletes</b>	32	36	39	31	138
	<b>No. of mixed/gender neutral</b>	1 neutral	3 mixed	1 mixed	1	6
Size of female and mixed gender articles	<b>Front page articles</b>	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Full page</b>	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>1/2 page</b>	0	0	1	1	2
	<b>1/4 page</b>	1	1	1	0	3
	<b>1/8 page</b>	1	2	3	2	8
	<b>Small</b>	2	0	1	0	3
Theme of female and mixed gender articles	<b>Category: Success</b>	2	1	1	2	6
	<b>Category: Failure</b>	0	0	1	1	2
	<b>Category: Injury</b>	0	0	motivation, SCD, recession impact, 4 potential	0	0
	<b>Category: Sponsorship</b>	gender debate, 2 London 2012	takeover bid, 2 London 2012		0	0
	<b>Category: Other</b>				0	8
	<b>No. of total photos</b>	36	44	50	34	164
	<b>No. of male photos</b>	32	42	42	32	148
	<b>No. of female photos</b>	4	2	8	2	16
Size of female and mixed gender photos	<b>Size of photo: Full page</b>	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Size of photo: 1/2 page</b>	0	0	1	0	1
	<b>Size of photo: 1/4 page</b>	0	0	0	1	1
	<b>Size of photo: 1/8</b>	3	0	2 (1xWAG)	0	5
	<b>Size of photo: Small</b>	1 WAG	2 (1xagent)	5 (1xsinger)	1	9
<b>Sports in which female athletes appeared</b>		Triathlon	Badminton	Gymnastics	Athletics	
		Tennis	Gymnastics	Golf	Track cycling	
				Snowboarding	Skiing	
				Bobsleigh		
				Rowing		

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Selected Comments from *The Sunday Telegraph* (2008-2009)**

19th October 2008

p.7 Sport in Brief

'England's Vicky Botwright, perhaps more famous for posing in a thong at the British Open in 2001, will play her last ever match before retirement.'

14th December 2008

p.11 Wie regains her pulling power

'The 'Big Wiesy' could turn up at your local golf club and go round in 66 in a cocktail dress...'

(Photo of her wearing short dress playing golf)

25th January 2009

p.12 (Mark Hodgkinson)

'The only time Serena Williams has looked befuddled during this year's Australian Open came when a half-naked man...suddenly leapt on to her court when she was playing doubles with her older sister Venus. The streaker performed a couple of dance moves for the Californian girls and then ran off court. Serena and Venus looked all coy, averting their eyes as if they were a couple of young girls in a Jane Austen book, who, on an afternoon stroll, had stumbled across men from the village bathing in the stream.'

8th February 2009

P.11 Women are waking up to reality

'It is wonderful to see women's golf finally starting to scratch the surface of its potential...The women's game is waking up to the fact that excellence equates with talent and an awful lots of hard, sweaty work.'

12th April 2009

p.11 And another thing... (Steve James)

'Claire Taylor should not have been made a Wisden Cricketer of the Year. True, she and her colleagues have enjoyed a stunning year. She deserves plenty of garlands, and should have become Wisden's first woman Cricketer of the Year.'

But Wisden has now attempted impossible comparisons. Physically the 2 games are poles apart. They should remain separate. Many in the game I have spoken to agree.'

19th April 2009

p.7 News in Brief

'Cricket: Former England cricket captain Clare Connor has been invited to become the first female member of the IOC Cricket Committee as a representative of the women's game.'

21st June 2009

p.11 Composed England on the brink of making history (Scyld Berry)

'If England women defeat New Zealand at Lord's today they will become the first international team of either gender to be world champions in all 3 formats simultaneously...If women can acquire – through training benefits brought by professionalism – more of the physical prowess of the men's game, to blend with the mental strength of Taylor, the future of women's cricket as a spectator sport is assured' (An eighth of page in bottom corner under a full page of men's average cricket)

5th July 2009

p.2 Serena flaunts her assets

19th July 2009

p.9 Forget the wife, hang on to the remote (Jasper Gerard)

'It's TV heaven as the second Ashes Test and the Open near their finales'

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