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## The Gendered World of Sports Reporting in the Australian Print Media

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## Abstract

The mainstream news media have long been charged by feminist and critical media scholars of largely excluding women from its sports coverage, and concomitantly highlighting the ongoing relative absence of female sports reporters. With the 2012 London Olympic Games just past, it is timely to reflect on two areas of sports journalism that receive sparse scholarly interest from the majority of Australian journalism academics, as technology issues and the future of journalism debates take precedence. The Olympics typically generate more media exposure for female athletes than usual, nevertheless, it remains that there are particular types of 'gender appropriate' events that attract mainstream news media attention during the Games, and other sporting events in general. This paper analyses a month of pre-Olympic sports coverage and general sports coverage in two major Australian newspapers, finding that while pre-Olympic coverage includes more women's sport than in general sport, sportsmen and men's sport remains highly privileged in both areas. The fact that horseracing receives three times more media coverage than women's sports in this study clearly identifies sportswomen's marginalised status. The paper also maps the number of female sports reporters at these two newspapers, and concludes with some insights into a newsroom culture that typically rejects women as athletes and as sports reporters.

## Contributor Note

Dr Louise North is Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the School of Applied Media and Social Sciences, Monash University, Australia. Her first book *The Gendered Newsroom* was published by Hampton Press in the United States in 2009. She has been published in national and international journals including *Journalism Studies*; *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*; *Feminist Media Studies*; and *Media International Australia*. Previously, Louise was a print news journalist for 19 years. She is currently working on the largest ever survey of female journalists in Australia.



Sports news and sports reporting is highly gendered around the globe, and Australia, with its strong sporting identification, is no exception. Various studies, typically using content analysis, have found that women's sports are under-represented in the sports media and largely framed as less exciting and less newsworthy than men's sports (Duncan and Messner 1998; Kinkema and Harris 1998; Jones 2006). Sociologists of sport have strongly argued that 'contemporary sporting practices' (including media coverage) 'perpetuate beliefs about male superiority and female inferiority' (Lensky 1998:19) because sporting achievement is largely based on speed, strength and endurance. Sport, defined in this way, typically advantages male sports and sportsmen, while at the same time male bodies and performances have become 'the yardstick for measuring all human endeavours' (Lensky 1998:19). Sports news content has largely ignored women's achievements - although it has been noted that there is minimal coverage to sports deemed 'gender appropriate', and the Olympic Games typically generate more reporting of female events (Lumby et al. 2010; Jones 2006; Markula et al. 2010). Meanwhile, female sports reporters are still few in number (Romano 2010) with fewer in key

editorial decision making positions (North 2012). In 1995, John Henningham's seminal study of Australian sport journalists found sports reporting ranks 'overwhelmingly male and Caucasian' (1995:13), and this paper demonstrates that little has changed. Newspaper editors have often argued that female reporters do not have the interest in, or required skills for reporting sports (Strong 2007), but research has variously indicated that there is a clear lack of opportunity for women (North 2009), or some opportunity but a general lack of appeal in working in a male dominated environment (Strong 2007; Hardin, Shain and Shultz-Poniatowski 2008).

This paper has a dual purpose: It is concerned with providing a current assessment of a segment of the mainstream print news media's coverage of male and female sports in Australia, comparing and contrasting pre-Olympic sport stories (i.e. those stories published about upcoming Olympic events the month before the 2012 London Summer Games) with general sport stories (sports stories found in the sports section only of the newspaper and not about Olympic sports). Secondly, it summarises the extent of women's roles in reporting sports. The paper analyses a month of

pre-Olympic sports coverage in the national broadsheet *The Australian* and the country's largest selling newspaper, the Victorian-based *Herald Sun*. What it finds is that media coverage of women's sport is almost non-existent compared to men's sport, that horseracing receives more than three times the coverage of women's sport (as well as almost double the number of images), and although there is an increase in coverage of women's sports in pre-Olympic stories, men and men's sport remain the dominant media interest in all sports content. Images of women athletes are few in relation to images of sportsmen and are typically of those sports considered 'gender appropriate'. It also finds that there are just a handful of established female sports reporters at the two most significant newspapers in the Australia media landscape, and even though most of them report regularly, or specifically, on the dominant football codes which are allocated the largest share of sports coverage by far, they almost never secure the much sort-after backpage 'splash'- or lead story.

A continuing critical analysis of the representation of women in sports in the Australian print media, and those who report sport is important, and goes well beyond the principles of equity (Toohey

1997), and currency of data from which to inform government policy. The media –and sport – provide 'two powerful socialising influences in Australian society' (Menzies 1989) and today with its reach extended by digital technology the media is *the* socialising agent of our times. It represents the world to us, shapes our knowledge and histories, and influences our values and attitudes. Consequently, the reporting of sport provides a 'lens for understanding dominant narratives about masculinity and femininity, sexuality and race among others' (Capel et al. 2011). The secondary status of women's sport in the media, therefore, sends a not-so-subtle message to society that women's sport is less important than men's sport and unworthy of much attention (Toohey 1997; Menzies 1989).

In a country like Australia, where sport *is* so important, and where the media *do* decide attitudes, the value of women's sport winning a place in the media can't be over emphasised. (Menzies 1989:221, emphasis in original)

The ongoing low numbers of female sports reporters also speaks to occupational discrimination. No doubt gender representation in sports coverage

is closely linked to commercial imperatives: money drives professional male sport which secures massive advertising and sponsorship deals, enabled by all mainstream media formats which secure huge audiences. Concomitantly, this commodification and professionalisation and mediatisation of male sport marginalises women's sport coverage, reinforcing and legitimising 'the patriarchal male sport model as hegemonic' (Toohey 1997:21). I argue, however, that is it not just money, or the lack of it, that marginalises women's sport, but rather a newsroom culture that has - and continues to - privilege male sport over women's sport and male reporters over female reporters.

In Australia, watching and playing sport is akin to a national religion, and they are the most popular cultural activities (Bennett et al. 1999) with men's cricket in summer and men's Australian Rules Football (AFL), rugby league and rugby union played in winter gaining the lion's share of media coverage (Lumby et al. 2010; Romano 2010). Yet, in general sports participation terms, both men and women are on a level playing field. In 2009/10, 63 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men in Australia participated in sport or physical recreation at least once in the previous 12 months. Women,

however, participate more regularly (more than twice a week) than men (31 per cent for women and 29 per cent for men) (ABS 2011). In the highest participation sports, more than 429,000 men participate in the three football codes (227,000 in AFL, 110,000 rugby league and 92,000 rugby union), while the dominant sport for women, netball, gathers 411,000 participants (ABS 2010:13). Both men and women play sports at almost the same rate, but men's sports, especially the three football codes, are privileged in all commercial and public media formats in Australia. Netball is not televised by any of the commercial television stations, although the public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) does. In winter, for example, the ABC televises one national women's netball game a week, and in summer one replayed (i.e. not live) national women's basketball game a week. It has also recently begun to broadcast national women's soccer matches, and a handful of international women's cricket matches. Indeed, as Lumby et al. (2010:v) note, the ABC broadcast more women's sport than any other media outlet, and increasingly covers women's sport in its nightly news bulletins. AFL, rugby league and union matches are given prime time commercial television coverage

whenever they are played. When men's sport is not being played, it is being dissected and analysed each day in all media formats. It is well known that female athletes need to win to receive media coverage, whereas male athletes are discussed regardless of their successes (Romano 2010; Lumby et al. 2010:vi), and many male sports stars secure media coverage 'simply for turning up to practice' (Romano 2010: 5). This is the case in general sports reporting and Olympic coverage. Because Australia's national identity is so closely aligned with sport, politicians line up to be associated with the stars (generally male) and sporting clubs: 'politicians and business leaders compete to associate themselves with sporting heroes and popular codes to leverage their powerful symbolic resonance' (Capel et al. 2011:138). This resonance is not specific to men in power, as recently Australia's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard was photographed in the Oval Office of the White House with US President Barack Obama handballing an AFL football (Kenny and Hosking 2011). An astute politician, male or female, in Australia well knows the power of being seen at popular (male) sporting events: it connects them to the masses.

With such fervour for male sport it is perhaps not surprising that sports journalism is the single largest speciality cohort in Australian journalism (Lange et al. 2007). The sports desk is almost a single-sexed space where male reporters bond over the telling and writing of stories predominantly about men, as much as those who play the sports bond during the physical game. The dominance of men in sports sections is not restricted to Australian journalism, with feminist media and critical scholars around the globe documenting that the sports journalism cohort is stubbornly male and white (see Hardin and Shain 2005; Hardin, Shain and Shultz-Poniatowski 2008).

### **The representation of female athletes in the media**

In 1996 an Australian government-commissioned report found that the newspaper reportage of women's sport had more than doubled in four years to

**Table 1.1 Newspaper coverage of women's sports – 1980-2010**

Year	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2010
Percentage	2%	1.3%	2.5%	4.5%	10.7%	9%

Source: Menzies 1989; Gordon 1989; Stoddart 1994; Phillips 1996; Lumby et al. 2010.

10.7% of sports coverage, while also showing a 500% increase from the first survey in 1980 (Phillips 1996) (see Table 1.1). It is unclear why the surveys reveal such a dramatic rise, but Menzies (1989) has noted an increase in the number of female sports reporters from virtually none in the 1980 survey to 17 female sports reporters at 13 newspapers surveyed in 1988.

In 2010 another government-commissioned report was published demonstrating that little has changed in relation to gender bias in sports reporting (Lumby et al.). The report, *Towards a Level Playing Field*, focused on the coverage of women's sports and female athletes in radio, television and print media relative to the coverage of male sport, male athletes and mixed sport. The extensive study found that despite the ongoing successes and strong participation levels, female sports teams and individual women received

starkly disproportionate amounts of coverage across the three media platforms in comparison to male sports and individual male athletes. Across radio, television and print media just 9% of sports stories were about female sportswomen or teams during the analysis period of 1 January to 31 December 2008 (Lumby et al. 2010:76). In this report, newspaper coverage of female athletes and female sports dipped to just 9% of sports stories published, while broadcasting now overtook the press in its coverage of women's sport with television, 13%, and radio, 12% (Lumby et al. 2010:76-77). Television news reports on female sport, however, had the lowest average duration of all the types of sport analysed, with reports on male sport having an average duration of 30 seconds longer than reports on female sport. To put this into context, horseracing received more air time than women's sport in Australian television news (Lumby et al. 2010:v).

In a major shift, and challenging a host of previous research on this issue, the report noted that gender stereotyping in press and television coverage of female athletes was minimal, with reporting mainly focussed on the performances and results rather than women's looks or sexuality. 'They [female athletes] were very rarely portrayed in a sexual way and most frequently portrayed as competitive and successful (Lumby et al. 2010:v). In 1996, Phillips had found that women were often described in ways that stressed weakness, passivity and insignificance, and that this deflected attention from their athleticism. Women were frequently portrayed as 'girls', no matter what their age. Readers were informed of their physical traits such as the 'perky blonde' or 'powder puff, or focused on their emotional state. Phillips (1996) also noted that researchers frequently found phrases such as 'dissolving into tears', but when men confronted stressful situations, they were applauded for their 'toughness'. Nevertheless, Lumby et al. did find that in the television coverage of the Beijing Olympic Games "the visual content of television coverage of the Olympics more frequently showed women emoting ('happy' or 'crying' with joy), while male athletes were more likely to be shown in less emotive footage ('focused', 'serious'

or 'enthusiastic')' (2010:62). Also, the 2008 Olympic coverage showed an increased use of 'diminutive noun phrases' to refer to the athletes (like 'girls' or 'boys'). 'Girls', however, was more frequently used to describe women compared to men suggesting that, 'consciously or otherwise, women in sport are not presented by the media as seriously as men in [Olympic] sport' (2010:62). Australian researcher Angela Romano suggests that while stories rarely blatantly stereotype men or women, when stereotypes do appear, they do so 'subtly, through stories than offered a limited view of both masculinity and femininity' (2010:17). Overt sexism may not be the norm in contemporary sports reporting, but when an influential male sports reporter writes publically (and seriously) of his disdain for women's sport, it warrants remembering that sexism sits just under the skin for some. Senior sports writer for the Fairfax Media-owned Victorian broadsheet *The Age* Greg Baum, penned an opinion piece in 2006 in which he said: 'If women insist on playing sport at all, it should be beach volleyball' (Baum 2006). Baum went on to write that women's sport is a 'joke', 'second best', and 'can't be taken seriously' (Baum 2006).

## **'Gender appropriate' sports**

The physicality and aesthetics of sporting bodies and what those bodies do is linked to the concept of 'gender appropriate' sports. Sports which emphasise power, physical strength and contact are considered 'male-appropriate' sports, since they require active, aggressive and autonomous behaviour. Female-appropriate sports are said to emphasise aesthetics and beauty and discourage physicality (Jones, Murrell and Jackson 1999:1–2 in Lumby et al. 2010) and include sports like gymnastics, swimming, tennis, golf and diving. Privileging gender appropriate sport is evident in media coverage of the 1992 and 1996 Olympic Games. Women who most featured competed in the physically attractive sports of diving, swimming and gymnastics, rather than hard contact sports and sports involving strength and power (Higgs and Weiller 1994:235; Tuggle and Owen 199:5; see also Kinnick 1998 and Daddario 1998). Yet, even when the sport being broadcast is 'gender-appropriate', some media commentators find it necessary to reinforce the femaleness of players, even when the players could be considered hyper-feminine in appearance. For

example, in the 2012 Australian Open Tennis final between Russian Maria Sharapova and Victoria Azaranka of Belarus, Channel 7 commentator Todd Woodbridge (a former top-ranked Australian doubles player), asked the viewing audience: 'Who wins in the fashion stakes? The shorts and headband of Azaranka or the dress and sun visor of Sharapova?' At the same tournament, the first question asked at a press conference to Romanian player Sorana Cirstea (who had beaten US Open champion Samantha Stoser) was 'Were you disturbed by your hair? You have beautiful long hair. Sometimes this caused a little problem or not?' (in Hanlon 2012).

## **Images of sports women**

While the early literature about images of female athletes in the media notes the rarity of photographic representation (Kachgal 2001), leading to an assessment of 'symbolic annihilation' (Tuchman, 1978), some US research on newspaper coverage of general sport found that women received a higher percentage of images than of text (Duncan et al. 1991; Eastman and Billings 2000; Shifflett and Revelle 1994; Wann et al. 1998). Nevertheless, Eastman

and Billings importantly concluded that women's relatively larger photographic coverage showed 'a lingering tendency to use women athletes for their glamour or sex appeal without serious treatment of their activities' (2000:204). Markula et al. (2010) also suggest that 'photographs, while more numerous than textual coverage, may be used to trivialise sportswomen'. On this point, most researchers have agreed that when women are represented they are more often photographed in off field and passive poses rather than in active sporting situations (relative to men) (Duncan 1990; Jones 2006) and in sexually suggestive poses or emotional (Duncan, 1990), in relationships, or as models (Phillips 1996). Men, on the other hand, are more often shown in active poses, less in relationships and never as models (Phillips 1996). These socially constructed images lead to a gender hierarchy in which women's sport is not taken as seriously as men's (Phillips 1996). It is the Olympic coverage that challenges these stereotypes found in general sports stories, according to Hardin et al.'s 2000 Olympic study (2002), while the increased number of women competing at the Olympic Games (Jones 2006) has led to an increase in the number of images of sportswomen. Australian researcher

Diane Jones (2006) also notes an increase in the number of images on the *ABC News Online* website of female athletes at the 2004 Games compared to the 2000 Games. She cautions, however, that more coverage does not necessarily lead to a fairer deal for women when: 'women were more often depicted as losers than men, [and] a focus on one athlete boosted the number of female athletes by 20 per cent (2006:124). Jones also found that the 2004 Olympic coverage showed an increase in sportswomen depicted as passive subjects rather than active competitors.

### **Female sports reporters**

There is no accurate known total or verified list of the number of female sports journalists in Australia, although there have been attempts to map them since the early 1980s (see Menzies 1989). While there are a handful of well-known female sports reporters in Australia, sports journalism remains almost exclusively the domain of male reporters (Romano 2010:9). The most recent analysis of Australian sports journalists shows that women's role in

sports reporting has decreased slightly during the past 20 years (Nicholson et al. 2011). Henningham's (1995) study notes that 11 per cent of his sports reporter survey was female, and Strong and Hannis's (2007) byline survey of metropolitan newspapers in Australia also found 11% of sports articles were written by women. Nicholson et al. (2011) show a slight decrease to 10.2% 'indicating that, despite a much larger number of high profile female sports journalists, sports journalism remains a male domain' (2011:88). As far as can be ascertained, there are no females in the influential role of sports editor at any of the major metropolitan newspapers in Australia. This is the case, even though there has been an influx of female journalists into Australian newsrooms over the past three decades, as well as female dominated university journalism courses (North 2009; North forthcoming; Pearson 2009). Despite the influx into general reporting, 'Sports journalism is a key area where male dominance is not only highly visible but arguably explicitly determines the nature and scope of coverage' (Capel et al. 2011:138).

## Method

In the lead up to the 2012 London Olympic Games, which took place between July 27 and August 12, every hard copy edition of *The Australian* and *Herald Sun* newspapers' sports sections was analysed in the month of May. The study was restricted to one media platform (and excluded the Paralympic Games) because of the short time frame in which the material was due to be published after the Olympics. It is however, noted that more sports events are typically reported in newspapers than broadcast platforms, ensuring a useful analysis framework. The aim was to ascertain the type of sports stories published in general sport and pre-Olympic-specific sport (i.e. the type of sport covered and the gender of the athletes in the stories), and the gender of the sports reporters. *The Australian* newspaper was selected for analysis as it is the only general national (as opposed to state) newspaper in the country, and the *Herald Sun* was also chosen as it is the country's top selling newspaper (based in Melbourne, Victoria) (Dyer 2011). Both newspapers are owned by News Limited (a part of the global conglomerate News Corporation) which dominates the newspaper media landscape in Australia. In the data collection process, if the gender of the reporter was unclear, a web search was

conducted, and in all cases this verified the authors' gender. If a reporter had written, for example, three stories in the one edition, each byline was counted in the gender of reporters section. If a story had a double byline, the gender of each author was counted. Most pre-Olympic stories were easily identifiable, as both newspapers used an Olympic logo to accompany the major stories. Stories counted were in the sports pages only and included individual headlined stories and briefs ranging in length. Images counted included those found in 'editorial pointers' which are used to direct readers to stories located in other sports pages. Reporter's picture bylines were not included in the image count. For a story to be considered 'mixed' it had to contain more than one or two sentences about either gender. For example, a pre-Olympic story about men's hockey in the *Herald Sun* on May 4 contained 12 paragraphs, of which just

two paragraphs (or 27 words) were dedicated to the women's game, so it was listed under men's sport. If an image contained a horse and rider, the image was listed under 'horse', even though most of those images were of men with horses. Images were tagged 'other' if they were neither women, nor men, or horses, including close-up images of an injured body part, or an inanimate object like a car.

### Findings – reporters

The data reveals a vast contrast in the gender of the reporters writing pre-Olympic stories at the two newspapers under consideration. The *Herald Sun* had exclusively male reporters writing its bylined stories about Olympic sports during the data collection period, while *The Australian* had a larger proportion of stories with female bylines compared to

**Table 2.1 Byline by gender - Pre-Olympic only sports, May 2012**

Newspaper	Total stories	Female byline	Male byline	No byline/wire service
<i>Australian</i>	43*	29	7	14
<i>Herald Sun</i>	55*	0	38	18
Total	98	29	45	32

\*includes multiply authored bylines

male bylines. Overall, however, male reporters dominated the reporting of pre-Olympic stories (45 to 29) (Table 2.1). In the reporting of general sports stories, female reporters were almost invisible,

football codes - Margie McDonald (*The Australian*), Eliza Sewell and Rebecca Williams (*Herald Sun*), yet only twice were their stories given prominence on the prestigious back page (as lead story).

**Table 2.2 Bylines by gender – general sport, May 2012**

Newspaper	Total stories	Female byline	Male byline	No byline/wire service
<i>Australian</i>	625*	44	468	127
<i>Herald Sun</i>	1183*	67	808	332
Total	1808*	111	1276	459

\*includes multiple authored bylines

relegated to just 6% of published sports stories at both newspapers (Table 2.2). In total, male bylines contributed 92% of the bylined general sports stories of the two newspapers. Of the 1387 stories with a male or female byline, women wrote just 111 or 8% of the stories.

Eight female sports reporters contributed to the 111 stories with female bylines published across both newspapers. Of those, one is a freelance tennis writer who in May reported specifically on the French Open event for *The Australian*, and one female reporter contributed a single regional story for the *Herald Sun*. Three female sports reporters reported primarily on the prestigious national

### Findings – story content

In line with previous research, female athletes were accorded far more coverage in pre-Olympic sports stories, than in general sport. Male athletes and male sport, however, still dominated with 52% of pre-Olympic sports stories published in the data collection period

received more than 3.5 times more coverage than women's sport (182 compared to 50 stories). Coverage of AFL far outweighed any other sport in terms of the number of stories published with 40.8% (738 stories) of all published sports stories. Of the general women's sports stories published, the majority of

**Table 3.1 Content by gender – Pre-Olympic only sports coverage, May 2012**

Newspaper	Stories	Men	Women	Mixed
<i>Australian</i>	49	25	16	8
<i>Herald Sun</i>	55	29	16	10
Total	104	54	32	18

(Table 3.1). In general sports content, men's sport secured the lion's share of stories published with 86% (1556 stories) of all press coverage. Women's sport was allocated 2.7% (or 50 stories) of all sport stories published in both newspapers,

stories were about the 'gender-appropriate' sports of netball and tennis. Of the pre-Olympic women's sports stories published, the majority were about athletics, swimming, and also cycling.

**Table 3.2 Story type - general sport, May 2012**

Newspaper	Stories	AFL	Rugby codes	Soccer	Horses	Cycling	Cricket	Mixed	Women	Other
<i>Australian</i>	625	151	265	62	59	4	20	9	6	53
<i>Herald Sun</i>	1183	587	98	5	123	24	28	11	44	73

and mixed sport stories 1.1% (or 20 stories) (Table 3.2). To reiterate Lumby et al.'s (2010) findings of horseracing on television, in this print study, horseracing

## Findings – images

A similar pattern of gender bias emerged in the images published of pre-Olympic sport and general sport. There were more images of male sport and male athletes than female sport and female athletes in pre-Olympic stories but the extent of the bias was far less than in general sports images. There were 24 images of men and men's sport in pre-Olympic coverage at both newspapers compared with 17 of women (Table 4.1). In general sport, the relative absence of women in comparison to their participation in sports steadfastly

remains. Just 3.4% (or 41) images of sportswomen were counted during the month-long collection period compared to 86% (or 1055) images of male athletes across the two newspapers (Table 4.2).

Again, in line with story content, images of horses (6.3%) exceeded images of female athletes and female sports (77 horses to 41 women). The images of women in general sports coverage were most likely to be of the gender-appropriate sports of tennis and netball or non-sporting celebrities (e.g. Australian actress Delta Goodrem, an Indian Bollywood actress, golfer Tiger Woods'

**Table 4.1 Images by gender – Pre-Olympic only sports coverage, May 2012**

Newspaper	Images	Men	Women	Mixed
<i>Australian</i>	21	13	8	0
<i>Herald Sun</i>	21	11	9	1
Total	42	24	17	1

**Table 4.2 Images - General sport, May 2012**

Newspaper	Total	Men	Horses	Women	Other	Mixed
<i>Australian</i>	343	298	23	16	4	2
<i>Herald Sun</i>	872	757	54	25	21	15
Total	1215	1055	77	41	25	17

niece). Pre-Olympic images of women were typically in athletics and swimming, followed by rowing, cycling, diving and waterpolo. Notably, there was one image of a female boxer, and one of a female BMX rider, which fall into the non gender-appropriate sports category. Images in the 'mixed gender' category generally were of celebrity women with male footballers.

## Conclusion

What are we to take away from such staggering privilege accorded to male athletes and male sports in general sports stories and images and to a lesser extent pre-Olympic coverage in these two key Australian newspapers? And what are we to make of the stagnant low number of women in sports reporting ranks? Pre-Olympic coverage indicates much more attention to female sport than at any other time, almost to parity with men in stories published, but, as noted by other studies, this is a fleeting occurrence a little before and during a two-week event staged every four years. Even in the build up to the Olympics, the gender bias lives on in the general sports pages. Reasons put forth for the lack of women's sports coverage in the media have ranged from women not being as

good as men, not as successful, and/or that the audience wants to read/hear only about the best (Senate Report 2006:100). The 2006 Senate Report makes clear that Australian sportswomen are as successful as sportsmen: they have won just as many individual sporting events as have men in tennis, golf and swimming (2006:101). The inquiry was told fans were probably attracted to male sport because of media coverage; however, there was evidence that performance was not necessarily related to media coverage.

There are some sports that only women play at the elite level, and others that only men play. Even in these cases, the sports dominated by men get far more media coverage. If the argument were valid, then those sports where only women play at the elite level and are therefore by definition 'the best' would get media attention. Yet in general they do not. Only women play elite netball in Australia, but the media coverage of that competition is dwarfed by the coverage of any of half a dozen male team sports (Senate Report 2006:100).

The two most recent government reports by Phillips (1996) and Lumby et al. (2010)

demonstrate how steadfastly all media organisations across all platforms cling to the notion of sport as *male sport*. This small analysis of pre-Olympic and general sports coverage only reaffirms that there is a continuing absence of stories about female sports and female athletes and that when women are included in stories and images they are typically in the 'gender-appropriate' categories that continue to subtly stereotype sportswomen.

Some radical Australian ideas to balance the ledger have included tax incentives for media, and legislative requirements for media groups, to satisfy a quota of space or broadcast time to women's sport - a 30% minimum of all sports coverage devoted to women's sport (Senate Report 2006). Those ideas, however, garnered little support, and much media criticism (see Baum 2006). After a lengthy Senate Committee inquiry, the key recommendation was that another report be commissioned - the result of which was Lumby et al.'s 2010 report *Towards a Level Playing Field*. No doubt reports are essential for mapping change, guiding government policy and understanding the sporting and media landscapes. Both reports are

important and have revealed the extent and ongoing nature of gender bias in sports content but for effective change, the media must look at itself.

A hegemonic masculine or 'blokey' newsroom culture is still the major impediment to women progressing into senior editing roles (North 2009), or even the lowest rungs of sports reporting. I am reminded of the gatekeeping that often takes place at entry levels of sports reporting, leaving potentially interested and keen female sports reporters disenchanted or disaffected. In the mid 2000s I conducted research with male and female press journalists in Australia, and of the many revealing interviews, one, with a senior male sports editor, has stayed with me. The interviewee outlined strategies that his sports editor employed to stymie women's opportunities in sports reporting, that included placing female applicants' CVs in the garbage bin and only giving male applicants a chance at an interview. It was a single disheartening, but revelatory, insight into overtly discriminatory processes and also a sexist, masculine newsroom culture that the industry surely needs to counter.

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