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## Women Reporting Sport: Still a Man's Game?

### **Abstract**

While it is generally known that sports journalism is an area of gender disparity, no major academic study has established the proportion of women sports writers in the UK press. Although female sports broadcasters have increased their visibility in the UK, the same is not true in the print media. This research first examines the current visibility of women sports journalists in the national UK press, by counting by-lines, by gender. Secondly, a study explores if the 2012 London Olympic Games had any effect on the proportion of female sports writers in the UK press, by comparing sports by-lines in a sample six months before and after the games. Furthermore, these results are compared to a decade earlier to see if the situation has improved. The findings indicate that the proportion of female sports writers in the UK press is lower than in comparable countries, with little improvement over time.

### **Key words**

Equality, female, gender, national newspapers, sports journalism, sports writers, women

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# Women Reporting Sport: Still a Man's Game?

## Introduction

Across the globe, sport has come to have great significance in the culture of nations, receiving increasing media attention (Coakley, 2004). As such, its link to media, which has a profound effect in shaping culture, has only grown closer (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). The extent to which sport is part of contemporary culture was previously inconceivable and today so-called 'media sport', any sport 'not experienced in the space where it happens but represented through media', is everywhere (Bruce, 2013:126; Toney, 2013).

Already during the Edwardian era the press was highly successful when 'tapping into the nation's captivation with sport', and the number of stories devoted to sports and sport culture in both traditional mainstream media and new internet-based options such as blogs and tweets have since steadily increased (Bruce, 2013; Boyle and Haynes, 2009: 23-24).

Sport is today the fastest growing sector in the media in Britain, as well as in most other English-speaking countries (Andrews, 2005). Sports coverage, which was previously often confined to the latter two or three pages of newspapers or the weekend afternoons on radio and television, has now become vitally important to the success of both print and broadcast media (Toney 2013; Andrews, 2005).

With the ever-growing interest in sport, sportsmen and women have become among the most well-known and best-paid people, not only in the UK, but all over the world, and consequently the world is also interested in coverage about them (Andrews, 2005). Thus, sports coverage has for over a century had an essential function in attracting and retaining audiences, and sport has become 'the heart of the battle for newspaper circulation' (Toney, 2013: 2; Chambers *et al*, 2004). Increasingly, this competition is centred on the sport section of a newspaper, and not surprisingly it has led those mass-media organisations who vie for circulation in the British newspaper market, one of the most competitive markets in the world, to value their sports pages (Andrews, 2005).

However, even though more space is being devoted to sport in newspapers throughout the developed world and more people are joining the ranks of sports journalists (Andrews, 2005), many researchers have found that sports journalism has remained an area of gender disparity. Sports journalism has traditionally been seen as a male domain, and researchers suggest that this tradition has not changed (Strong, 2007). Sports reporters in the United Kingdom remain predominantly male, and despite increasingly more women having entered sports journalism since the women's movement of the 1970s, the number of women sports writers remains relatively low (Strong, 2007; Chambers *et al*, 2004). While some progress regarding the visibility of women has been made in broadcast sports journalism, there are still relatively few women sports writers in the newspaper industry, and sports journalism is still a largely male-dominated area in countries all over the world (Schoch 2013; Chambers *et al*, 2004). However, in the UK at least, there is little academic research on the actual proportion of women working as sports writers in the national press.

This research seeks to look at the visibility of women sports journalists in the sports section of UK national newspapers, employing a quantitative content analysis through a count of by-lines to examine the prevalence of female sports writers in the main newspapers. In the second part of this research, a semi-longitudinal study is carried out to see if the 2012 London Olympic Games had any effect on the proportion of female sports writers in the UK press, by comparing sports by-lines in a sample six months before the Olympics and six months after. Furthermore, these results are compared to a decade earlier to see if the situation has improved over a longer period of time.

## **Literature Review**

### *Women in Journalism*

During the late 19th and early 20th century, women were not seen as the producers of news, rather they were regarded consumers of media. Some women were able to enter newspaper journalism from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was not until advertising revenue became increasingly imperative for a

newspaper's success or mere survival that women started to enter journalism in higher numbers. But rather than becoming part of journalism as a whole, women were confined to cover mainly fashion and society news, which formed a new kind of women's journalism. The purpose of the female journalists was merely to write stories which would appeal to and attract women readers, and other topics remained covered by and targeted to men only. After the turn of the century, the numbers of women joining the ranks of journalists started to grow. However, they remained a minority and were still confined to covering 'lighter' topics, such as fashion, domestic issues and society gossip (Franks, 2013).

Even though women make up the majority of graduates from journalism schools, they remain a minority in top managerial positions within media organisations, and have not, according to Chambers *et al*, achieved parity in serious fields of news, including politics. Instead female journalists are more likely to be clustered in what is considered 'soft' news, such as human interest stories and features (2004).

Many researchers have focused on the number or proportion of female journalists in newsrooms when doing statistical surveys, but this, Strong and Hannis (2007) argue, does not measure their actual visibility. Such raw data is unlikely to inform readers, listeners and viewers, that is the consumers of mass media, of the gender balance in different roles in newsrooms, the effects on the media product, and whether there are any women in senior positions (2007). Rather, these media consumers can only deduce the 'relative involvement' of female journalists by their 'relative visibility', according to Strong and Hannis (2007: 2). Consequently, some researchers have attempted to measure the extent to which mass media consumers can actually see the presence of women in the media.

Building on a study by the Global Media Monitoring Project from 2005, Strong and Hannis conducted a count of by-lines in the major Australasian newspapers. The initial study, an analysis of the incidence of female and male by-lines around the world, found that newspapers were behind news media in general. It was discovered that 29 per cent of news stories in newspapers were written by women, whereas the global average in media overall was 37 per cent. Most equal was New Zealand, which had female by-lines on more than half (56 per cent) of news items. The project's work only focused on news items and front pages, while Strong and Hannis chose to look at all the different sections in different newspapers in Australia and New Zealand. They found that the percentage of

female by-lines was 34 per cent and 36 per cent respectively, and across both countries male journalists outnumbered female journalists at a ratio of almost 2:1. The researchers also found that the proportion of women varied for the different sections in the newspapers; in some publications more than half of the front page and hard news stories had female by-lines whereas the sports sections and opinion pieces saw a significant majority of male by-lines (Strong and Hannis, 2007). They concluded that 'more must be done to create a working environment that encourages women to stay in the journalism industry long term, move into traditionally male areas of journalism, and rise to senior positions' (2007: 115).

Similar results were found in an analysis of national newspapers in the United Kingdom. A Women in Journalism survey in 2011 (WIJ 2011) revealed in an analysis of male and female by-lines in seven national UK newspapers that 78 per cent of the articles in a typical month were written by men. The by-line count took place over a four-week period, and an average of the daily percentages for each newspaper showed that a disproportionate number of the by-lines were male. The *Daily Mail* was closest to parity with 32 per cent female by-lines, and the *Guardian* came in second with 28 per cent. The *Independent* was found to be the only newspaper where the percentage of female by-lines was not in the 20s; the publication had a mere 16 per cent female by-lines. (WIJ, 2011).

More evidence of this trend of disproportion was found in another Women in Journalism (WIJ) study a year later, which focused solely upon stories featured on the front page. Through a collection of front pages from all the major national daily UK newspapers over a four-week period it was found that 78 per cent of all by-lines on the front page were male and 22 per cent female. Furthermore, the WIJ researchers found that the gender balance varied between newspapers; there were 50 per cent female by-lines on the front pages of the *Daily Express*, but only 9 per cent in those of the *Independent*. The gender balance also varied depending on the subject covered, with some areas being fairly balanced and others, including sports, having almost no female by-lines (Bawdon, 2012).

## *Women reporting sport*

Sports journalism has traditionally been a male stronghold in many countries. Women started joining the ranks of sports journalists in the 1920s, and while most English-speaking countries have a few high-profile women sports journalists, the sports departments in the majority of newsrooms remain a male-specific environment (Strong, 2007). This gender imbalance was not highlighted until the women's movement of the 1970s (Strong, 2007; Chambers *et al*, 2004). Still, while other areas of reporting saw a subsequent shift to an improved gender balance, sports did not. The number of women entering sports journalism did increase, but even by the mid-1990s there had not been a significant shift in the number of female sports journalists. Furthermore, this paucity has stretched into the new millennium (Strong, 2007). The number of women who enter into sports journalism is still relatively low, and this particular area of reporting remains a predominantly male-dominated speciality all over the world (Schoch, 2013a; Horky and Nieland, 2011; Hardin and Shain, 2005; Claringbould *et al*, 2004; ).

Not only does so-called 'media sport', that is sport represented through media rather than where it happens, produce coverage by men, but it is also produced 'for men and about men' (Bruce, 2013: 128). Chambers *et al* agree, arguing that sports news 'is home to one of the most intense and most historically enduring gender divisions in journalism, in terms of who is permitted to cover which sports as journalists, how athletes are covered, as well as in terms of which genders are served as audiences' (2004: 98).

Evidence of this gender division can be found in a number of studies across the world. The 2011 International Sports Press Survey, which looked at 80 newspapers across 22 countries, recorded the gender of those who wrote sports articles and discovered that out of more than 11,000 sports articles carrying a by-line, only 8 per cent were written by women (Horky and Nieland, 2011).

Some of the best studies on female sports journalists have tended to come from the United States, which is partly explained by the fact that, for various cultural and institutional reasons, women have had bigger impact on sports journalism there than in Britain. Still, female sports journalists in the US have faced prejudice and hostility, but the country at least has a history of prominent women in sports journalism who have acted as role models for aspiring female journalists (Boyle, 2006).



In a study of US newspaper sports departments, Hardin and Shain (2006) discovered that papers that were in the top 200 when it came to circulation only had around 11 per cent female journalists writing about sports. This stood in contrast to the percentage of female journalists in the newsroom as a whole, where the gender divide was found to be more equal; the top 200 newspapers had on average 39 per cent female journalists overall. Newspapers with a circulation above 250,000 were found to have sport departments that included more women, about 13 per cent. However, among the papers with a circulation in the top 200 the percentage of women saw a steep decrease as circulation increased. Hardin and Shain stated that most US papers generally only have a few or no women sports journalists and there are very few female sports editors (2006).

A 2007 study of Australian metropolitan newspapers found that only 11 per cent of the sports articles were written by women, and figures from neighbouring New Zealand mirrored this trend (Strong and Hannis, 2007). The latter is generally considered more gender-balanced than other countries, as seen, for example, in a 2005 survey of 76 countries conducted by the Global Media Monitoring Project, which found that men still outnumber women in newsrooms everywhere but New Zealand. However, while women and men might be equally represented in New Zealand newsrooms overall (in some news outlets women are even the majority in the ranks of journalists), this equality does not seem to extend to specific areas. This includes, in particular, management, daily newspapers and some sections of reporting, including sport (Strong and Hannis, 2007).

In her study of main New Zealand newspapers, Catherine Strong found that the sport section accounted for 21 per cent of the articles, proving that the section is an important part of newspapers (2007). Nevertheless, it was discovered that only 7 per cent of the sport stories were written by female journalists. In two of the newspapers the percentage of articles written by women was even less – a mere 5 per cent (Strong, 2007).

Schoch found the situation was similar in Switzerland, noting how women's entry into sports journalism has taken its time (2013a). It was only in the early 2000s that the number of female sports journalists significantly increased, and the female journalist workforce saw a growth from 17 per cent at the beginning of the 1980s to 36 per cent in 2008. However, in a study of the general daily newspapers

in Francophone Switzerland, Schoch found that only 13 per cent of the sports staff of the general daily newspapers in Francophone Switzerland were female. Furthermore, six of the eleven newspapers had exclusively male sports sections in the autumn of 2010. She concluded that sport 'clearly remains the most masculine journalistic speciality' (Schoch, 2013a: 98).

### **Sports journalism in the UK**

In the UK, there is generally a perception among the public that sports journalism is now much more open to women, but this perception is probably due to progress in broadcasting rather than newspapers. For years, former tennis player Sue Barker was one of the few female faces associated with sports broadcasting. Thanks largely to the rise of high-profile female sports broadcasters such as Gabby Logan, who presents football's Match of the Day among other programmes, and Clare Balding, who won Sports Broadcaster of the Year 2012 and who were both prominent in presenting the 2012 Olympics, the visibility of women in sports journalism appears to have increased. Other female broadcasters include Jacqui Oatley, the first female commentator on Match of the Day in 2007, and on radio Alison Mitchell reports on sports for BBC Radio 4 and Radio Five Live. On the editorial side, the Director of BBC Sport is Barbara Slater. However, it is interesting that these high-profile and successful women work in public service broadcasting; Sky Sports makes a point of using young women alongside male sports 'experts', though Gabby Logan has been publicly critical. 'Asked by *Radio Times* if the Sky Sports women were being used as "window dressing", Mrs Logan replied: "The girls are basically wearing a leotard while the bloke's in a suit and a tie. It's fine if they're given a career path, but there have never been any big breakthrough women on Sky. We all have to go to other places.'" (Sherwin, *Independent*, 23 July 2013). So even with progress in broadcasting, career opportunities for women are still limited. In addition, the evenness of progress in all sectors of the media, such as print, is open to question. The greater visibility of women in broadcasting could be masking the true picture in a different medium. While it is known that there are far fewer women writing about sports than men in the UK, the current situation has not been researched, nor are there any major studies from the past by which to measure progress, except for the small 2005 survey carried out by Boyle (2006:149). This survey was very limited, taking a snapshot on a day or two in August 2005 of just over 400 by-lines from dailies and Sundays. In planning this study, we

ascertained the need to examine the hitherto overlooked area of newspaper sports writing in the UK, and to obtain a fuller, contemporary picture, using substantially more data obtained over a longer period of time, and at different times of the year, which, in turn, could establish a baseline figure by which further progress might be measured by future researchers.

### **This study**

Therefore we asked, to what extent are female sports journalists visible today in major national newspapers in the United Kingdom? This study defines visibility of female sports journalists as the extent to which readers can see them, or rather their by-lines, in the newspapers. We also wanted to know if there were any notable differences in the visibility and proportion of women sports journalists in different newspapers. The timing of this study meant that some sample periods occurred before and after the 2012 London Olympics. There was substantial public interest in the Olympics (according to the *Independent* newspaper, 90 per cent of the British public saw some of the events, so women were very much engaged with the event) and women athletes were very successful (36 per cent of Team GB's medals were won by women and women were successful in non-traditional sports such as boxing). This provided an opportunity to see if the London hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games had any subsequent effect on the gendered production of sports news. Finally, we wished to see if, historically, there had been any improvement in the visibility of female sports writers from a decade before the 2012 Olympics.

### *Research questions*

#### 1. Part A

What is the routine visibility (from gendered recorded by-lines) of female sports writers in the UK national press in 2012?

#### 2. Part B

- a. What is their routine visibility six months before and six months after the 2012 London Olympics?
- b. Did the Olympics make any difference to the proportion of women's sports writers?

- c. How does this compare to the same period in the same newspapers a decade earlier?
3. What is the *overall* visibility of female sports writers in the UK national press using samples from 2012/2013 (Part A and Part B)?

It was hypothesised that there would be an increase after the Olympics and from 2002 to 2012/2013.

It should be noted that this study, through surveying the gender by-lines of sports stories, only attempts to investigate the visibility and proportion of female sports journalists on national UK newspapers, and does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis of the potential reasons behind this supposed lack of representation, though this is briefly discussed.

### **Methodology**

To answer the research questions, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on a selection of national UK newspapers, and this analysis was carried out in two parts (A and B) in order to get a wide sampling period at different times of the year. We were also interested in recording women writers who 'routinely' wrote about sports, and since coverage of big events such as the Olympics or Wimbledon could skew the results, we also aimed to avoid major sporting events.

In Part A, the quantitative content analysis in this study focused on the proportion of female and male sports writers in six national newspapers. Since the focus was on the visibility of female sports writers, the by-lines on sports stories from the six papers over seven days during two separate weeks in the autumn of 2012 were recorded; period 1 ran from the 1 October to the 7 October and period 2 from the 26 November to the 2 December. These periods were chosen as they were outside the times of the main summer sporting fixtures which might have distorted the figures and two periods were surveyed in order to confirm that the results were consistent. The survey sought to examine routine periods and analyse the everyday gendered production of sports reporting. Three quality papers and three mid-market or popular newspapers (tabloids) were chosen for the analysis, with the purpose of retrieving results to answer the main research question.

The study selected newspapers serving a range of markets: quality newspapers are those at the top end of the market targeting better educated people with reasonable levels of income as a result of their jobs. The sales of the qualities in general tend to be relatively low (Andrews, 2005). The quality newspapers chosen for the analysis in Part A were the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent* and the *Times*, which, according to ABC figures from October 2012 had an average circulation of approximately 560,471, 80,001 and 403,770. In contrast to quality papers, mid-market papers and popular papers (red-tops) target readers in the middle to lower socio-economic structure and working class respectively, and the latter is often aimed at a younger audience. As the majority of the population fall into one of these categories, these kinds of newspapers therefore generally have bigger sales (Andrews, 2005). The mid-market newspaper chosen for the analysis was the *Daily Mail*, a morning paper with an average net circulation of approximately 1,866,701, and the two morning popular red-top newspapers, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sun*. The latter two had an average ABC circulation of about 1,064,292 and 2,384,895 respectively for October 2012.

The analysis also included a count of by-lines on sport stories from the accompanying Sunday publications; the *Sunday Times* (ABC figure for circulation for October 2012 was 903,728), the *Independent on Sunday* (119,822), the *Sunday Telegraph* (445,229), the *Mail on Sunday* (1,750,408), the *Sunday Mirror* (1,064,388) and the *Sun on Sunday* (2,037,515). In addition, by-lines in any magazine supplements and pull out sections, such as *Goal* and the like, were also counted and the results were included in the overall count for the associated publication.

Five out of six publications were analysed in their actual print form, while sports stories during the selected period from the sixth, the *Daily Mirror*, were retrieved by the database Nexis UK. The terms used to search within the results were 'sport', which was used to narrow the search, and 'national edition' and 'edition 1' which excluded any second or other editions and thus also any article duplicates.

The quantitative content analysis in both parts of the study consisted of a count of by-lines conducted to determine the proportion of male versus female journalists responsible for the sports coverage. Any stories relating to sport, including match reports, which had been marked with a named by-line were included in the analysis. Articles without by-lines were disregarded in the analysis as there

was no indication of the sex of the journalist. Articles involving athletes or other sports personalities that focussed on other topics, such as their lifestyle and sexual partners, were not included in the analysis as these were found to focus on gossip and celebrity status rather than sport. Thus, a number of stories were omitted from the study, including an article about David Beckham modelling underwear for clothing company H&M ('Becks caught with his pants, er, on', *Daily Mirror*, 4 October 2012).

The by-line count involved coding each by-line as either male or female. In cases where by-lines included gender-neutral names or nicknames, or names unknown to the author, a public profile was retrieved online so as to determine the sex of the journalist. By-lines split between two or more journalists were counted once for each contributing journalist. After the count of the by-lines for the sports coverage in every publication had been performed all the results were compiled. Subsequently, the visibility of female sports journalists in the newspapers was analysed and the proportion of male and female by-lines in the broadsheets was compared to the same proportion in the tabloids.

A similar method was used in the Part B semi-longitudinal phase of this study. The aim was to ascertain whether the London Olympics had led to any change in the proportion of women writing about sports in the national press, and whether there had been any improvement on the number of women writing about sports over a 10-year period. Therefore this part of the study focussed on periods before the Olympics (in 2012) and after (in 2013), as well as in 2002. Original copies of the newspapers were used for 2013 and 2012, while microfilm copies from the British Newspaper Library were used for the 2002 samples. The research question at this stage was to see if there had been any change in the number of female sports writers in the sports sections of national newspapers before and after the Olympics. Again, all stories that were by-lined were noted and coded for gender, including those from sports supplements.

In this part of the study, slightly different newspapers were examined at a different time of the year to ensure a broad sample range overall. The mid-market *Daily Express* (with a circulation of 558,513 in March 2012 according to ABC) and *Sunday Express* (503,985 in March 2012) was added to the newspapers being examined and the *Guardian* (with a circulation of 217,190 in March 2012) and its Sunday equivalent the *Observer* (251,074 in March 2012) were used instead of the *Independent* and

*Independent on Sunday*. So the seven national newspapers, and their Sunday equivalents, that were used in this section of the study were: the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Guardian* and *Observer*, and the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, representing the quality press, with the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, along with the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* representing mid-market titles, and the *Sun* and *Sun on Sunday* and the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror* representing the red-tops.

This analysis in Part B compared the number of female by-lines a year apart, during a week six months before the London Olympics (22-28 February 2012), with the same period six months after the London Olympics (20-26 February 2013). Furthermore, a week's worth of the same papers were examined in the same way from 20-26 February 2002 (substituting the *News of the World* for the *Sun on Sunday*, which was not published then) to see if there had been much change over the previous decade in women's sports coverage.

## **Analysis**

### *Part A: Visibility of female sports writers in 2012*

The hypothesis was that the visibility of women in sports journalism in the national newspapers covered in this study would be limited and thus the proportion of women would be low. This hypothesis was supported in the results of the by-line count.

Part A found across the six newspapers covered in the study, there was a low proportion of female by-lines. In total, counting all the sport articles carrying by-lines over the two seven-day periods analysed, only 2.3 per cent had a female by-line. Percentages were rounded to one decimal place. There was a total of 2572 articles carrying by-lines, 2514 of which had a male by-line and 58 of which had a female by-line (see Appendix). Thus, the visibility of male journalists outnumbered that of female journalists at a ratio of just over 43:1.

The number of female by-lines was not spread out evenly; 45 out of the 84 issues covered over both periods *did not have a single woman journalist* with a by-line. The highest number of female by-

lines in one issue did not exceed 3, found once in the *Times* (Saturday 6 October) and in the *Daily Mirror* (Monday 1 October).

The highest percentage of female by-lines, 10.5 per cent, was found in the *Daily Mail* (Tuesday, 27 November). That day, the *Mail* had only 19 sport articles carrying by-lines, two of which were female. By contrast, in the rest of period 2, the *Mail* had 0 per cent female by-lines every day excluding Monday (see Appendix).

When looking at the two seven-day periods separately, the results were not much different ; in period 1 there were 2.4 per cent female by-lines, and in period 2 there were 2.1 per cent female by-lines. The ratio of male to female by-lines during the two periods was thus 40:1 and 46:1 respectively. Excluding the Sunday publications did not alter the results markedly; in period 1 female by-lines made up 2.2 per cent of the total percentage and in period 2, 2.0 per cent.

#### **[Table 1 here]**

However, while the results supported the hypothesis that the percentage of female by-lines would be low, they were not found to be in accordance with results found in other research. It was discovered that the proportion of female by-lines in these six national newspapers did not match the gender proportion suggested in research of newspapers from other countries, rather it was significantly lower. In the ISPS from 2011, Horky and Nieland found that 8 per cent of 11,000 by-lined sports articles across newspapers from 80 countries were written by women (Horky and Nieland). In 2007, Strong and Hannis established that 11 per cent of by-lined sports articles in Australian newspapers were written by women, and the former's research on New Zealand newspapers in the same year found 7 per cent female by-lines (Strong and Hannis, 2007). A similar figure (7 per cent) was quoted for female sports reporters in the Netherlands (Claringbould *et al*, 2004) and a more recent 2013 study on French language Swiss papers put the figure at 13 per cent (Schoch).

#### *Differences Between Newspapers*



While the first phase of the study (Part A) did not find any differences of note between broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, it did find significant differences between individual newspapers. The differences were found not to be related to the publication's position at the top or the lower end of the market.

Over both periods, the *Daily Mail* had the highest percentage of female by-lines (3.3 per cent), and the *Daily Telegraph* the lowest (1.2 per cent). The *Sun* and the *Times* shared the second place with 2.7 per cent, while the *Independent* and the *Daily Mirror* came fourth and fifth with 1.8 and 1.6 per cent respectively (see Appendix). Since the broadsheet and tabloids were spread out, the publication's position on the market thus did not matter.

When looking at period 1 and 2 separately, it became apparent that some of the publications were inconsistent regarding the percentage of female by-lines from one period to another. The *Daily Mirror*, for example, went from second to last place from one period to the other. Similarly, the *Sun* went from second to last to first place. Other publications were found to be more consistent; the *Daily Mail* and the *Times* were, in contrast, in the top 3 in both periods. Likewise, the *Telegraph* and the *Independent* were also more consistent as they were found to always be in the bottom 3 (see Appendix).

The highest percentage of female by-lines in one period, 4.2 per cent, was found in the *Daily Mail* (period 1) and the lowest, 0.7 per cent, in the *Daily Mirror* (period 2). As mentioned above, the *Mail* also had the highest percentage of female by-lines (10.5 per cent) in one issue.

The inconsistency in the percentage of female by-lines could not only be seen from one period to another but also from one day to another. All of the newspapers had 14 issues total over the two periods, and not one of them had fewer than 5 issues without a single female by-line. The *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Telegraph*, who placed fifth and sixth overall, both had nine issues without a female by-line. In addition, the *Daily Mail* had the highest percentage of female by-lines, 10.5 per cent, in one issue (Tuesday 27 November), and the next day the percentage was 0. In contrast, the *Sun* was found to be very consistent, in period 2 at least, during which it only had one issue (Tuesday, 27 November) with 0 per cent female by-lines.

#### *Part B: Semi-longitudinal study*

The second part of this study was also a gender by-line survey of newspaper sports coverage. It focused in particular on whether there was any change in the percentage of female sports by-line in the UK press before and after the London Olympics. Has there been any change in the number of female by-lines over the last decade, which led up to the 2012 London games? The hypothesis was that there would be a slight increase after the Olympics, and an increase from 2002 to 2012.

In total, 4,576 articles before and after the Olympics were recorded; rising to 7,107 when articles from February 2002 were included. Since in this phase of the study we were interested in the trend, rather than detailed analysis of individual newspapers (though this is briefly discussed), the overall percentage of female by-lines for each year's sample was calculated and recorded to one decimal place and they are presented below for ease of comparison.

**[Table 2 here]**

While Andrews states that there are now more female sports writers and presenters (2005: 78), this study suggests that this is not true of sports journalists in the press, since the figure has hardly changed between 2002 and 2013. The situation and opportunities for female sports writers remains extremely disappointing, with an average of 1.5 per cent female by-lines in 2013. Just two newspaper groups – the *Guardian/Observer* and the *Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday*- increased their female sports journalists from 2002 to 2013.

The inconsistencies found in Part A of this study, whereby the proportion of female by-lines varied from week to week and in some cases, day by day, continued to be seen in Part B. While in Part A some red-tops seemed to have more female by-lines, the situation seems to be reversed in Part B, with some of the quality papers using more female writers than the red-tops. This can possibly be explained by the fact that the *Guardian* and *Observer* were not used in the first part of the research, and these proved to top the league tables for female by-lines. In addition, a different time of year was covered, and this will affect sporting fixtures, and possibly who covers these fixtures. Nevertheless, it is clear that the percentage of female by-lines is very low in both parts of this study, and significantly lower than figures found in other comparable countries such as Australia, New Zealand (Strong and Hannis,

2007) and the USA (Hardin and Shain, 2006). In addition, the overall *trend* in this semi-longitudinal study – little change on average over the years - makes interesting, if dispiriting, findings.

### *Differences between newspapers*

The *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* remain near the top of the league (3.5 per cent female by-lines in 2013), offering slightly better opportunities for female sports writers. Currently the *Daily Mail* employs Laura Williamson, while the *Mail on Sunday* employs Martha Kelner and in 2013 appointed Alison Kervin as its *first* female sports editor – also, extraordinary as it might seem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the first on a national newspaper in the UK (Greenslade, the *Guardian*, 20 March 2013).

But our Part B analysis shows that the newspapers that offer the best opportunities for female sports writers are the *Guardian* and *Observer* at 4.5 per cent female by-lines by 2013. Louise Taylor regularly covers football on the *Guardian* and *Observer*, while Sarah Mockford occasionally covers Rugby for the *Guardian* and *Observer*. *Guardian* columnist Marina Hyde also contributes to the sports pages.

Astonishingly, no women sports journalists were discernible in *any* editions of the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* from any year sampled in Part B. There were also no by-lines by women in any editions of the *Daily Mirror* over the periods looked at. The *Sunday Mirror* did have two articles on football by Lindsay Sutton in February 2012 but none a year later. Contributions by women went down over the years in the *Sun* or its Sunday equivalent so that there appeared to be no regular female journalists by 2013, except for a regular column on football by football director and TV (non-sports) presenter Karren Brady, though previously in 2012 it had contributions from Vicki Orvice on athletics and in 2002 there were six articles about football by Janine Self.

The *Times* also had more female contributions in 2002 than 2012 and 2013 (it currently just uses Aisling O'Connor regularly), while the *Telegraph* hovered around the 1-2 per cent mark with stories by Jacqueline Magnay and Sarah Crompton (there were no female by-lines in any edition of the *Sunday Telegraph*). Interestingly, in 2002 Sue Mott, one of the pioneers of sports reporting and only the second

woman to cover sports on a national newspaper, covered football for the *Telegraph* and Lewine Mair regularly contributed articles on golf – the first ever female golf correspondent on a national paper (and this meant that women’s golf was also regularly covered then, but not now) – but she was let go in 2008. The *Telegraph* has actually gone down over the sampled periods.

### **Summary of findings**

Both parts of this study found a general trend of invisibility of female sports journalists in the national UK papers covered in the analysis. The overall percentage of female sports writers’ by-lines averaged 2.3 per cent in the first part of this study for a week in October and a week in November 2012. Using slightly different national papers and looking at a different time of the year, it was just 1 per cent for a week in February 2012, rising to 1.5 per cent for a similar week after the London Olympics. Therefore the Olympics, at least in the short term, had little effect on the number of female by-lines. Moreover the situation does not seem to have improved over a decade, with female by-lines also at 1 per cent in a similar week in February 2002.

There was no clear significant difference between the red-tops, mid-market or quality papers as sectors. Rather, the differences between individual newspapers were greater, and there were also differences between periods and issues. One newspaper could be placed in the top over one period and in the bottom the next. Why such variations exist is not entirely clear – the types of sporting fixtures at different times of the year may have a bearing - but clearly further research is needed.

Taking all these findings together, coding for gender on nearly 10,000 sports stories in most of the UK national press, across different periods of the same year and over different years, it is safe to conclude that less than a mere 2 per cent of sports stories (1.8 per cent) are written by women, and that there has been little significant improvement in the last 10 years. This paints a far bleaker picture than the very small survey cited by Boyle (2006), which also included some Scottish titles and averaged around 6 per cent, and substantiates Chambers *et al*’s view that sports journalism is one of the ‘most historically enduring gender divisions in journalism’ (2004: 98). These results are also much lower than

comparable global studies in the Netherlands, USA, Australia and New Zealand, and Switzerland (Claringbould *et al*, 2004, Hardin and Shain, 2006; Strong and Hannis, 2007; Schoch, 2013). Nor does the UK, at less than 2 per cent, compare favourably with the average of 8 per cent of 11,000 by-lined sports articles written by women across newspapers from 80 countries (Horky and Nieland, 2011).

Attending the 2012 British Sports Journalism Awards, former broadcaster Alice Arnold noted in the *Telegraph*, 'There are thousands of women football fans who could write an in-depth analysis of any Premier League match. It's not rocket science; it's a game with a ball on a piece of grass. But these women do not break into sports journalism and after attending this week's awards, this is no surprise. British sports journalism is still a world absolutely dominated by men.' (27 March 2013).

### **Why are there so few women sports writers?**

Some researchers argue that a reason for this paucity of female sports journalists is the low profile of women's sport in the media which is a subject that has been given some attention by other researchers, for example (King 2007). Certainly, in both the UK and the US, the research demonstrates that there is little exposure of women's sport in mainstream media sport coverage (Boyle, 2006; O'Neill and Mulready, forthcoming). In 2003, the Women's Sport Foundation in the United Kingdom estimated that only 5 per cent of media sports coverage was dedicated to women's sport. The proportion of women's sport in newspaper coverage was even lower, with a mere 2.65 per cent of the coverage devoted to women's sport, compared to 2.3 per cent in 2000. The figure was higher for the quality press, 7.1 per cent, but coverage of women's sport in the tabloid press was almost non-existent (Women's Sports Foundation, 2003), which accounts for the overall low average. Three years later, the figure for media coverage of women's sport still stood at 5% (WSF, 2006, see summary in Peacock, *Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 2012). More recent research focussing on just print media (O'Neill and Mulready, forthcoming) has found the figure to average around 4 per cent coverage in national newspapers, while a study of UK Sunday papers in 2008 and 2009 found an average of just 3.6 per cent (Godoy-Pressland, 2014). The 2011 International Sports Press Survey, which looked at 80 newspapers across 22 countries, discovered sportswomen were only the main focus in 9 per cent of articles (Horky and Nieland, 2011). Whether this

stubbornly low coverage accounts for the low numbers of female sports journalists, or whether the scarcity of female sports writers accounts for low press coverage remains to be seen, but the relative mirroring of the figures for both suggests a causal relationship. Research into the inter-connectedness of accepted meanings and the representation of certain groups working in an organisation led Gist (1993) to conclude that media output cannot achieve objectivity without broad representation of staff at all levels. Therefore the low visibility of women's sports in newspapers is an outcome not wholly unrelated to the even lower number of women currently producing sports journalism in the UK press.

Others suggest the lack of women covering sports is due to a macho culture found in sport departments and some male journalists' belief that women do not have adequate knowledge to cover certain sports, such as football (Boyle, 2006). Nevertheless, Boyle also found from interviews with sports writers that most claimed to have experienced 'little significant discrimination' within sports newsrooms (Boyle, 2006: 158). Adrienne Blue, one of the few female sports journalists on a UK national newspaper in the 1980s and 1990s, says that her experience echoes these views (Blue, 2012). And journalists interviewed for a study on the career-related decisions of female newspaper sports journalists in the USA acknowledged some negative gender-related experiences, but tended to minimize these experiences (Hardin and Whiteside, 2009). But as Hardin and Shain point out, female journalists may 'normalize' masculine news culture and refuse to acknowledge the difficulties and disadvantages that women confront (2006:324), particularly when faced with the dominant and resistant male hegemony found in sports (Hargreaves, 1994 in Hardin and Shain, 2006).

However, there is unlikely to be only one reason as to why there is such a dearth of female sports journalists; a myriad of interlinked factors will be at play, from wider cultural and societal expectations that limit women's aspirations or pigeonholes them in a narrow range of stereotypes, to active choices by women to avoid working in male dominated workplaces; male preserves can put women off trying to break in. But perhaps also the lack of role models means it does not occur to some women to consider sports writing as a career option or encourages them to believe it would be too hard to succeed. In a study of student newspapers in the USA, Schmidt (2013) found that, while both women and men considered sports reporting to be of similar importance, female reporters only wrote about 21 per cent of

sports stories. Some universities offer specialised sports journalism programmes, but, in the UK at least, the percentage of women on these courses tends to mirror the workplace representation we have found here, so imaginative ways of recruiting women to such courses is an important consideration if a new generation of female sports journalists are to come through.

In interviews with female sports journalists about exclusionary practices, one of the issues raised was the compatibility of the profession with raising children (Claringbould *et al*, 2004), and this may be an influential factor in whether women remain in the job beyond a certain age, or whether they are considered for promotion. It is evident from research in the USA (Hardin and Whiteside, 2009) that there is frequently a revolving door for women working in sports reporting, as they struggle to balance priorities at work and home. Nevertheless this would apply to many other spheres of journalism that also involve unsocial hours or irregular scheduling and frequent travel, so it is unclear why this particular problem should affect sports writing more than other areas. (Geary Pate, 2014; Williams, 2010).

## Conclusion

In the immediate future it will probably remain difficult to change the proportion of women reporting sports - whether they are at the stage of choosing a specialised journalism course, or graduating and looking for their first post - when the damning conclusion of this research is that opportunities for women to write about sports in the UK are severely restricted; moreover (as confirmed in this study), with female by-lines standing below 2 per cent compared with a global average of 8%, these opportunities remain significantly limited in the UK press . In addition, they show little sign of having improved over the last decade or as a result of hosting one of the most prestigious world sporting events, the 2012 Olympics.

The long-awaited appointment of the first female sports editor on a UK national newspaper is a welcome step, as is Martha Kelner of the *Mail on Sunday* winning Young Sports Writer of the Year in 2012. However, it would be premature to view this as a sea-change. The fact that this study shows that more women were writing about football or golf on certain newspapers in 2002 than presently (for instance, on the Telegraph) demonstrates that progress cannot be taken for granted. As Franks makes clear, the history of women's progress in journalism has never been one of one-directional growth, often being a 'case of two steps forward followed by one or more steps back' (Franks 2013: 1). Clearly, this is

an issue that requires monitoring, using the substantial empirical data in this study from which to measure future changes.

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TABLES

**Table 1: Total percentage of male and female by-lines in the individual newspapers.**

	Percentage		Period 1		Period 2		Average of Period 1+2	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Daily Mail</b>	95.8	4.2	96.9	3.1	96.7	3.3		
<b>The Sun</b>	98.1	1.9	96.6	3.4	97.3	2.7		
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	97.4	2.6	99.3	0.7	98.4	1.6		
<b>Independent</b>	97.6	2.4	98.7	1.3	98.2	1.8		
<b>Times</b>	97.5	2.5	97.2	2.8	97.3	2.7		
<b>Telegraph</b>	99.0	1.0	98.6	1.4	98.8	1.2		

**Table 2: Percentage of female by-lines in 2002, and before and after the 2012 London Olympics**

Newspaper	2002 % by-lines by women	2012 (before Olympics) % by-lines by women	2013 (after Olympics) % by-lines by women
<i>Sun and News of the World/Sun on Sunday</i>	1.5%	1%	Under 0.25%
<i>Daily and Sunday Mirror</i>	0	0.5%	0
<i>Daily and Sunday Express</i>	0	0	0
<i>Mail and Mail on Sunday</i>	0.5%	1%	3.5%
<i>Daily and Sunday Telegraph</i>	1.5%	2%	1%
<i>Guardian/Observer</i>	1.5%	2.5%	4.5%
<i>Times and Sunday Times</i>	2.5%	0.25%	Less than 1%
Average Total	Just over 1%	Just over 1%	Just under 1.5%

## Appendix

Count of male (M) and female (F) by-lines in period 1, running from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.

By-lines	M 1/10		T 2/10		W 3/10		T 4/10		F 5/10		S 6/10		S 7/10		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Tabloids																
<b>Daily Mail</b>	27	1	16	1	20	2	22	1	22	0	22	0	29	2	158	7
<b>Sun</b>	39	1	16	0	28	0	19	0	16	0	44	2	46	1	208	4
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	38	3	28	0	33	0	30	2	26	0	42	0	62	2	259	7
Broadsheets																
<b>Independent</b>	20	1	18	0	21	0	21	0	20	0	26	1	36	2	162	4
<b>Times</b>	49	0	25	0	30	0	25	1	29	2	31	3	43	0	232	6
<b>Telegraph</b>	30	0	29	0	31	1	27	0	24	0	21	0	30	1	192	2

Count of male and female by-lines in period 2, running from 26<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2012.

By-lines	M 26/11		T 27/11		W 28/11		T 29/11		F 30/11		S 1/12		S 2/12		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Tabloids																
<b>Daily Mail</b>	24	2	17	2	19	0	22	0	21	0	22	0	32	1	157	5
<b>Sun</b>	43	1	23	0	38	1	22	1	25	2	52	2	51	2	254	9
<b>Daily Mirror</b>	48	1	32	0	36	0	28	0	31	0	46	0	59	1	280	2
Broadsheets																
<b>Independent</b>	30	1	23	0	17	0	22	0	15	0	24	0	26	1	157	2
<b>Times</b>	41	1	25	2	41	0	34	0	39	1	27	2	38	1	245	7
<b>Telegraph</b>	38	0	28	0	24	2	27	0	25	0	33	1	35	0	210	3